

## *Religions for Peace* International Executive Committee: An Open Letter to United Nations Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres

22 SEPTEMBER 2020

As members of the International Executive Committee of *Religions for Peace*, representing the world's religious and spiritual institutions and traditions, we feel compelled to share with you our grave concern about multiple, repeated, and serious violations of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – freedom of thought, conscience and religion – committed by several Member States of the United Nations, against many religious communities. These violations occur to religious communities which are majorities in some countries but minorities in others. Most religious communities experience some form of oppression as a result of their belief, with variations in numbers and intensity. From mass camps to disputes over holy sites, to outright judicial incongruities.

Affording full citizenship for all communities, and guaranteeing freedom of thought, conscience and religion, are both moral as well as legal obligations of each Member State. We believe that these protections are necessary to prevent – and deal with – all forms of discrimination, xenophobia, violent extremism and atrocity crimes. The latter, unfortunately, are, as you have pointed out repeatedly your Excellency, all too prevalent in our day and age, including in this pandemic-ridden world.

Prevention has been one of your flagship commitments since the very beginning of your tenure. And we acknowledge, with respect and admiration, your efforts to steward the United Nations system as a whole, including several of the Secretariat-based offices and Special Rapporteurs, to ensure diligence of investigation, attention and resolution.

All our faith traditions call on us to respect, welcome and protect the most vulnerable among us. Throughout its 50-year history, *Religions for Peace* has spoken out in situations where religious communities (majority and/or minority ones) experienced and voiced pain and suffering. We have endeavored to discern, and to share, respective religious teachings which provide a basis for robust notions of citizenship for all communities; to strengthen informal and formal education on fundamental human rights and notions of inclusive citizenship within our religious communities; to work respectfully with relevant state authorities to help ensure that national legal codes for citizenship and human rights for all communities, are consistent with contemporary international standards; and to undertake concrete cooperative action among our leaders, institutions, and communities to protect and stand in solidarity with one another.

While fully committing to continuing to further consolidate our multi-religious efforts, it is also our solemn obligation to urge Member States of the United Nations not only to respect and honour all their religious minorities, but also to take extra precautions and clear measures to support, realise and uphold the rights of all communities of faith.



Excellency, we know you to be a man of profound faith. We respectfully seek your vocal leadership to endorse that of the world's religious communities, in clearly and systematically addressing the prevailing and escalating state-sponsored grave violations of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Respect for the 193 Member States of the United Nations, and the venerable institution which you lead with grace and diligence, demands a clarion call against all forms of abuse of this most basic set of rights.

Please be assured of our highest respect and consideration, and our combined prayers for you and the institution you serve, which serves the world.

**Signed by the Moderators on behalf of the Executive Committee of *Religions for Peace* International**

*The full statement is available in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#).*