

Declaration

“Protecting Worshippers and Houses of Worship”

The tragic accounts of the loss of life, the continued attacks on houses of worship, and the bloodshed of worshippers prompt us, as a group of religious leaders, scholars, and thinkers that share the ethical commitment and humanitarian obligation towards others, to call on individuals and organisations to carry out their human, ethical, and religious duty to denounce such painful tragedies and crimes.

We recognise that “the world is witnessing a steep rise in xenophobia, racism, and intolerance resorting to the distortion and abuse of religions and faith as a pretext for violence, exclusion, and discrimination.”¹

The targeting of archaeological sites and architectural heritage, including museums, libraries, and manuscripts, is tantamount to the obliteration of the civilisational memory of peoples and the uprooting of their material past.

These erasures go beyond the annihilation of human beings and the destruction of stone; there is, at the core of any such erasure, a fear of collective memory and a fear of both memory’s representations in conscience, feelings, ideas, and attitudes and its manifestations in books, cultural property, and moral effects.

The attacks on houses of worship, when people are praying in them, are the pinnacle of such barbaric acts. Is it not time to consider the question of freedom of worship as an integral part of the right to life and the value of human heritage in relation to culture and identity?

According to the United Nations, “gross violations of cultural rights have been among the root causes of conflicts, and failure to address systematic discrimination and inequities in the enjoyment of these rights can undermine the recovery from conflict.”²

¹ World Conference Outcome Declaration: “Moving Towards Greater Spiritual Convergence Worldwide in Support of Equal Citizenship Rights” (Geneva, 2018)

² United Nations. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2008). *Frequently Asked Questions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (No. 33). Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In addition, the “Global Call to Action for Safe Worship to Foster Solidarity and Protect Religious Sites and Worshippers” celebrates the universality of religious sites as symbols of our shared humanity, history, and traditions of people worldwide³.

In the histories of wars and conflicts, the targeting of the cultural heritage sites and libraries of the Levant and of the other sites and centres representative of the Arab and Islamic civilisations is not new. The Library of the Dar al-Hikma in Baghdad — described as the greatest library on Earth of its time — was destroyed in 1258 AD.

Despite the cultural and national peculiarities associated with heritage, the deeper meaning of heritage lies in the ability to discover its various contributions to the formation of a common human civilisation. Let us respect our history and heritage by working to respect others, remembering that with no history we cannot survive the future and that history and heritage are only a pillar of the present which we seek to build, a present of prosperity, excellence, and creativity.

We underline that Humanity cannot face the challenges sweeping our planet without cooperation and solidarity, and this calls for strengthening the concept of shared human values. Contrary to what some may think, "shared human values," in the deep sense of the concept, do not "weaken the sense of privacy inherent in religious beliefs" nor "contradict cultural or national identities." Yet, no matter how different nations and peoples are in belief and culture, they share in one humanity.

The Holy Quran reaffirms that the fundamental task of religion is to complement the rewards of morality. This is clearly explained in the Qur'an's emphasis on the unity of moral values among people. The Qur'an prohibits abusing the soul: “Whoever takes a life — unless as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land — it will be as if they killed all of humanity; and whoever saves a life, it will be as if they saved all of humanity.” (Al-Ma'idah 5:32).

We call for a dialogue promoting consciousness, thought, and, human fraternity, a dialogue reviving universal cooperation to inspire a world consciousness that can address the protection of houses of worship and innocent worshippers.

³ <https://www.unaoc.org/2020/10/global-call-to-action-for-safe-worship/>

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