

# WHITE PAPER

## For Interreligious Collaboration & Policy Making in Addressing Radicalization & Violent Extremism

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, international efforts to deal with violent extremism have expanded to encompass not just the countering of violent extremism (CVE), in a security context, but also the prevention of violent extremism (PVE).

Religious communities and religious leaders have been identified by the UN as playing a crucial role in PVE. Key tasks identified in this context include: providing a platform for intra and inter-religious dialogue; promoting mutual understanding between religions; vocally rejecting violence doctrines while espousing peaceful and humanitarian values; preserving the heritage of cultural and religious diversity; guarding against religious-based discrimination or intolerance and sharing good practice.

This paper is based on an integrative approach involving experts, community actors and grassroots leaders and activists from the international scene.

The aim is to build resilience in the face of terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS) and Boko Haram as well as other types of violent extremism including Neo-Nazis groups. The frame here is the phenomenon of radicalization leading to violent extremism and the role religion(s) can have in helping to address the issue.

An inter-religious or multi-religious approach to PVE can ensure greater effectiveness in countering extremism because it removes stigma or blame, and facilitates a more open, beneficial discussion about the issues faced. Such a collaborative, integrative approach is also a deliberate counter to the extremist agenda of discrimination, isolation, destruction and hate.

This white paper aims to encourage and generate discussions needed for policies and initiatives to make strategic collaboration a

reality. It is an open, proactive process to be continuously enriched and updated based on evolving experience and expertise.

The paper comprises three sections:

- The first looks at the concept of extremism and the radicalization process.
- The second explores the relationship between religion and extremism.
- The third identifies four priority areas for interreligious collaboration in addressing radicalization and extremism, while highlighting existing good practices and initiatives that could be amplified and built upon.

**Priority Area 1:**

Strengthening social cohesion through the promotion of Religious Social Responsibility within each community.

**Priority Area 2:**

Fostering literacy about religions and promoting education on citizenship inclusive of cultural and religious diversity.

**Priority Area 3:**

Promoting an existential narrative rather than an essentialist one in response to extremism, especially through the media.

**Priority Area 4:**

Reforming and developing the existing interreligious platforms for dialogue and common civic engagement for shared public life values and for interfaith compassion and solidarity, especially among the youth.

# White Paper For Interreligious Collaboration & Policy Making in Addressing Radicalization & Violent Extremism

## PRELUDE

- 1) Over the past two decades, the international community and governments focused on addressing violent extremism primarily within the context of security-based counter-terrorism measures, known as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Countering Terrorism (CT). Over time, actors and decision makers have concluded that a comprehensive approach should encompass not only essential security-based measures, but also systematic preventive steps (PVE: Preventing Violent Extremism) to address the factors that make individuals join violent extremist groups.
- 2) In his 2015 **Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism Report**<sup>1</sup> (A/70/674 - 24 December 2015), the Secretary-General of the UN explicitly highlights the crucial role of communities and religious leaders in PVE, and recommends:

### Under Key area 1. Dialogue and Conflict Prevention:

- 1.5. To engage religious leaders **to provide a platform for intra- and interfaith dialogue** and discussions through which **to promote tolerance and understanding** between communities, and **voice their rejection of violent doctrines by emphasizing the peaceful and humanitarian values** inherent in their theologies.

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, 24 December 2015, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism Report: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/70674/](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70674/);  
See also the Recommendations: [https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/plan\\_action.pdf](https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/plan_action.pdf)

Religious leaders also have a responsibility to themselves seek such understanding. Tolerance is not passive: it demands the active choice to reach out on a basis of mutual understanding and respect, especially where disagreement exists;


- 1.6. **To preserve the heritage of cultural and religious diversity** against attempts by violent extremists to destroy manuscripts, objects and sites that are symbols of pluralism and tolerance;

### **Under Key area 2. Strengthening Good Governance, Human Rights and the Rule of Law:**

- 2.10. To prevent the subversion of the work of educational, cultural and religious institutions by terrorists and their supporters, as highlighted in Security Council resolution 1624 (2005); **take appropriate measures against all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief**, as exhibited in particular **in the curricula** of formal and non-formal educational institutions, and **textbooks** and **teaching methods**;

### **Under the Key area 3. Engaging Communities:**

- 3.6. To support **the establishment of regional and global networks** for civil society, youth, women's organizations and religious leaders to enable them **to share good practices** and experience so as to improve work in their respective communities and **promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue**;



3) Moreover, the Report engages religious leaders and communities, as they are part of **civil society** or in view of their **role in educational sectors** and their responsibility in fostering **participation of youth and women**. It calls, in its recommendations for Education, for inviting the private sector and other civil society actors to contribute to **post-conflict reconciliation** and reconstruction efforts (Key area 6/ Recommendation 6). Likewise, in the area of Strategic Communications, the Internet and **Social Media**, the report calls for "the promotion of grass-roots efforts to advance the values of tolerance, pluralism and understanding" (Key area 7/ Recommendation 3).


4) **Adyan Foundation**, in collaboration with the **Institute of Education - University College London**, took the initiative to gather an **international multidisciplinary and multifaith group of 14 experts** in two seminars<sup>2</sup>, sharing their diverse and complementary expertise that resulted in this white paper. The current document also benefited from the comments and feedback of **29 young leaders from 15 countries** engaged in the Adyan's CEIA (Counter Extremism Interreligious Alliance) program. Adyan Foundation intends by this paper to respond to the growing need for identifying and clarifying the specific contribution of religious communities and actors in taking initiatives in addressing radicalization and violent extremism. The paper therefore represents an **integrative approach** combining the voice

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<sup>2</sup> First experts meeting, 24-25 November, 2015 at Institute Of Education - UCL- London (UK); Second experts meeting, 30-31 January 2016, at Hedayah - Abu Dhabi (UAE).

of the **experts**, that of the **community actors** and that of **grassroots leaders** and activists.

- 5) In recent years, terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS) and Boko Haram have shaped our image of violent extremism and the debate on how to address it. These groups' message of intolerance has had drastic consequences in many regions of the world and created an **unprecedented humanitarian crisis**. Taking hold of territory and using social media for the global and real-time communication of their ideas and exploits, they constitute a direct **threat to global security, peace and human dignity**. Not to forget other types of violent extremism including Neo-Nazis groups, Ku Klux Klan, and other forms of political and social radicalization.
- 6) Therefore, this paper is not exclusively concerned with one type or group of violent extremism, or with what is communally called "**religious extremism**" or "**religiously expressed extremism**", but by the **phenomenon of radicalization leading to violent extremism** in general, as a threat to peace, security and social cohesion, and the contribution that religions can make, jointly or separately, to help in addressing this issue.
- 7) Since, in different historical contexts, doctrines of all main religions have been used to legitimize violence, an **interreligious collaboration to counter-extremism** is needed to build a comprehensive approach to delegitimize



any argument based on intra and inter-religious diversity as a pretended cause for conflict. On the contrary, faith-based and interfaith approaches in this area make religions authentically concerned with peace and the good of mankind, as part of their **“Religious Social Responsibility”** (RSR). This assumption calls for sustainable interreligious collaboration, far beyond the common symbolic reaction from religious leaders after violent extremist acts.


- 8) An interreligious collaboration also delegitimizes positions that seek to blame extremism on one religion. The Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectorial Approach to Countering Violent Extremism of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) reads: “Any CVE program should avoid the identification of violent extremism with any religion, culture, ethnic group, nationality or race”. It argues that **“any ethnocentric approach to violent extremism will limit the visions of those who are responsible for developing CVE strategies”**, adding that: “Associating a CVE program with a particular religion, culture, ethnic group, nationality or race could alienate those very members of the community whose cooperation is important for the program to succeed.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Al-Azhar Communiqué against Extremism and Terrorism promulgated in December 2014 following the Azhar Conference on Counter Extremism that was attended by Muslim religious leaders and representatives of Eastern

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<sup>3</sup> Ankara Memorandum on Good Practices for a Multi-Sectorial Approach to Countering Violent Extremism (2013), Good Practice 3: [https://www.thegctf.org/documents/1016213/72352/Sep19\\_Ankara+Memorandum.pdf](https://www.thegctf.org/documents/1016213/72352/Sep19_Ankara+Memorandum.pdf)

Churches, reads in article 2: “We confirm that Muslims and Christians of the East are brothers, have the same nation and civilization, have lived together for centuries and are determined to continue being together in national free sovereign countries that equate between all citizens and respect freedoms.” Article 10 reads: “The conference affirms that Muslims and Christians of the East equally take responsibility for confronting terrorism and extremism, whatever their sources and purposes are.”

- 9) An interreligious collaboration and acknowledgment of shared responsibility nevertheless brings the challenge of being courageous in acknowledging that respective beliefs, cultures and societies, may not be perfect. Facing the same threat together helps communities identify where they are challenged and recognize their difficulties in this process, instead of engaging in mutual accusations and polemics. It allows for a **genuine dialogue** to take place, for interreligious collaboration, based not only on **shared convictions**, but also on dealing with **internal vulnerabilities** and generating **spiritual solidarities**.
- 10) Therefore, the approach in this paper has the advantage of liberating each religion from an **apologetic position**, as if it was accused by others, as well as from the **victimization narrative** that risks becoming internalized, hence weakening a **sense of responsibility** and the capacity **to participate in public and social life**. Since extremists have a strategy for discrimination, isolation, destruction and hate, we need a comprehensive strategy




for **solidarity, meaningful integration, collaboration** and **peaceful interreligious and intercultural relations**.

- 11) This white paper for interreligious collaboration and policy-making in addressing radicalization and violent extremism **aims to encourage and generate discussions needed for policies and initiatives** that make such strategic collaboration closer to reality. It is meant to be **an open process** of proactive and shared reflection that has **to be continuously enriched** and updated based on evolving experience and expertise in this domain, **and adapted** to different religious or geopolitical contexts.
  
- 12) In the following three sections, the paper presents first some clarifications related to the concept of extremism itself and its semantic field. This conceptual framework includes the structural and contextual elements of the radicalization process. However, the paper doesn't pretend to offer a common or conventional definition, or an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. It only aims to clarify the meaning of concepts and the language as meant by this paper. Secondly the paper focuses on the complex relation between religion and extremism, presenting it in a critical and transparent way. Finally, the third part of the paper identifies priority areas for interreligious collaboration in addressing radicalization and extremism. Selected samples of initiatives illustrate the fact that this reflection is rooted in tangible realities and acknowledge the existing efforts in this area that requires development and optimization.

## 1. UNDERSTANDING EXTREMISM

- 13) There is no one agreed definition of extremism, nor a definite answer to the question of why individuals or groups become radicalized. Yet, it is important to differentiate between **extremism as ideology** and **violent extremism as action**, since there is not always a link or causal relation between extremist thinking and violent behaviour. It is also important to differentiate between **radical thoughts**, which are a rational and natural element in a society of differences and diverse views, sometimes pushed to their extreme interpretive potentials, and **intolerant thoughts**, which hold hate and discrimination against others. A form of violence, though symbolic or moral, can be present in intolerant narratives and ideologies.
- 14) **Fundamental freedoms**, such as freedoms of conscience, thought and expression, guarantee the right to adopt radical thoughts as far as they don't incite to violence. Moreover, in some situations, **established realities or systems morally require challenging**: for example, in the opposition of Muhammad Ali to the Vietnam War, or the struggle of Martin Luther King JR for freedom and equality for African Americans. "The question, Martin Luther King JR noted, is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be..."



The nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.<sup>4</sup>

- 15) Therefore, the central feature of extremism may be related to both the beliefs that are held and the manner in which they are held. Archbishop Desmond Tutu defined extremism as: “when you do not allow a different point of view, when you hold your own view as being quite exclusive, when you do not allow for possibility of difference.<sup>5</sup>” Hence this paper differentiates between **fundamentalism** or **radical thoughts** on the one hand, that represent the strict adherence to a set of irreducible beliefs and religious behaviour, and intolerant thoughts and **violent extremism** on the other hand, the latter referring to, according to a recent UNESCO definition, “**the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically-motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political views.**”<sup>6</sup> **Radicalization towards violent extremism** is then considered as the individual or collective process, whereby a person or a group come to adopt undemocratic methods or violent means to achieve social change.


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<sup>4</sup> In: Peter T. Coleman, and Andrea Bartoli: Addressing Extremism. The International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution - Columbia University (ICCCR) and the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) - George Mason University. [http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/document/9386\\_WhitePaper\\_2\\_Extremism\\_030809.pdf](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/i/a/document/9386_WhitePaper_2_Extremism_030809.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> In: Davies, L. 2008. Education Against Extremism, Stoke on Trent and Sterling. Trentham Books: <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cld/UserFiles/File/DAVIESeducationagainstextremism.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO: A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism, 2016, 11: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024244676/002446/e.pdf>

- 16) However, violent extremism does not arise in a vacuum. It expresses a conflict developing within a society, and can be viewed as one of the **strategies in a game over power**. Moreover, some claims held by extremists can reflect fair views and true realities of injustice. Therefore extremism's **drivers and geopolitical context** are of crucial importance and must be taken into consideration. These push factors differ from one place to another, and from one society to another. Nevertheless, there are common or shared drivers that, if present, would create in a cumulative way a fertile ground for extremism.
- 17) A persisting **combination of social conditions of discrimination and exclusion** with a **weak citizenship culture and lack of peaceful means for political and economic participation**, and **particular forms of ideology** to interpret those conditions, prepare the ground for extremist ideas and attitudes. Besides that, political strategies that promote polarization rather than unity and social cohesion have coincided with the rise of identity politics and have become, for some people, a source of extremism. In most cases, a religious ideology is used to encapsulate the political, societal and economic drivers of extremism.
- 18) The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism presents the **conditions conducive to and the structural context of violent extremism** in five points:
- Lack of economic opportunities
  - Marginalization and Discrimination

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- Poor Governance, Violations of Human Rights and the Rule of Law
  - Prolonged and unresolved Conflict
  - Radicalization in Prisons

With these conducive conditions, **the processes of radicalization** combine, in multiple ways, many elements, as:

- Individual backgrounds and motivations
- Collective grievances and victimization narrative
- Hate speech based on political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences
- Usage of religion and beliefs for legitimization of violence
- Leadership and Social Networks

**19)** The challenge for a **preventive strategy** to counter violent extremism is that it has to tackle the drivers and contextual factors that constitute **the fertile ground for radicalization**. Action has to be taken before violence takes place, addressing the drivers that may lead to it.


**20)** Indeed the role of **faith-based actors** is limited to the personal and social context where they can **foster resilience** towards this threat. For its efficiency and credibility, this role needs to be clearly **distinguished from any security-based approach**. Thus, since PVE is concerned with the complex process of radicalization leading to violence rather than by violent extremism itself, the adopted and recommended approach in this paper is to deal with extremism in a **contextual, descriptive and non-essentialist way**.

## 2. RELIGION AND EXTREMISM

- 21) This paper acknowledges that religion can be both a great **resource to counter-extremism and foster social resilience** as well as used as an **ideology to legitimize violent extremism**. This phenomenon is neither new nor exclusive to any religion or system of belief.
- 22) Instead of denying any connection between religion and extremism and putting it in a mere defensive attitude, or suspecting an intrinsic relation between religion and extremism that cannot be justified, it might be better to talk about the **“ambivalence of the sacred”** and recognize how **religious militancy** can take on both peaceful and violent forms given different cultural, historical and political circumstances. In this framework, religion is approached as a socio-historic reality, where, in accounting for **religious violence** as well as **religious peacebuilding, hermeneutics** is fundamental, contestation is inevitable, and struggle within and outside the enclave is the norm<sup>7</sup>.
- 23) Therefore the answer to **religiously expressed extremism** cannot be imposing an opposite and **authoritarian religious discourse**, which would disregard free thinking and the **legitimacy of diverse interpretations**. Access to divine word and to the divine will is fundamentally an act

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<sup>7</sup> See: R. Scott Appleby. “Religious Violence: The Strong, the Weak and the Pathological,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Peacemaking*, ed.s Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby and David Little. New York: Oxford University Press. 2015.



of interpretation. This brings us to larger questions that need to be taken into consideration as the legitimacy of interpretation, the need to acknowledge subjectivities, and how subjectivities affect groups.

**24) Freedom of speech is a fundamental requirement for religious freedom.** Yet it comes with the risk of radical and exclusive religious discourse that can dehumanize the other. The word **“takfiri”**, meaning being exclusivist in religious belief and labelling others as “infidels” has become almost a synonym for “extremist”. This suggests that there is a need to unravel the **impact of theological exclusivism on extremism**. There is in fact a paradox between theological radicalism and respect for difference. **Hate speech** and **discrimination** towards others are the red lines in this field, whereas **pluralism** as a theological position and **interreligious relations** and collaboration are to be the positive facet of this reality.

**25)** The control and use of religious discourse by political authorities can hinder its **credibility** and diminish its inner capacity for **self-criticism**, which indicates a negative model for the wider community. Because of such **lack of credibility of traditional religious leadership**, young people may turn to other sources of knowledge about religion, especially through **social media networks**, without having the capacity to judge the authenticity of such information.

**26) “Religious literacy”** as an open and negotiable learning process is an urgent need to respond to the lack of

understanding over religion and the risk of manipulation of religious feelings. Religious literacy, accompanied with **critical thinking** capacities, enable people to contextualise and historicise different interpretations and prevent the spread of **sectarian** and **monolithic ideological narratives**.

- 27) **Faith-based and interreligious initiatives** are crucial in countering extremism as they can protect communities and believers from a **victimization narrative** and from the **polarization of discourses** on the one hand, and promote feelings of **shared responsibility** for justice, peace, and social cohesion on the other hand.
- 28) Fostering interreligious collaboration is crucial in addressing radicalization and violent extremism, since it helps in avoid the **labelling** of one community or religion as extremist, and provides opportunity to **strengthen alternative voices versus extremists**. Interreligious collaboration in this field puts all communities in a humble position with the capacity to **learn from each other's historic experiences** in relation to extremism, and **avoid cultural and religious misunderstandings** such as conflation between Christianity and the West, or Arab and Islamic.
- 29) Interreligious collaboration fosters the **values-based approach** in addressing extremism instead of developing a **sectarian response** to it. This approach constitutes a strong moral voice against all types of **discrimination** and extremist tendencies and an umbrella for the **protection of minorities and vulnerable groups**.



### 3. PRIORITY AREAS FOR INTERRELIGIOUS COLLABORATION

**30)** This white paper for policy making in addressing radicalization and violent extremism identified four major areas where **religious actors** are expected to specifically contribute to global efforts, and where **interreligious collaboration** can make a difference. Some **good practices** are briefly presented in relation to these areas to highlight the already existing positive dynamics and encourage similar initiatives.

## The Need for a Multireligious Approach to Violent Religious Extremism

[www.religionsforpeace.org](http://www.religionsforpeace.org)

Our religious communities can and must respond to all of the “drivers” of violent religious extremism. A multi-religious response is a concrete and effective religious demonstration against violent religious extremism. It shows clearly that diverse religious communities share common concerns and are ready to engage together, while respecting religious differences. Multi-religious approaches build solidarity around areas of shared concern and make clear that the religious “other” can be recognized as a moral ally, as opposed to an enemy. It also makes clear that an attack on any religion is—at root—an attack on all. The strength and power of our multi-religious responses are rooted in each believer’s fidelity to his or her respective religion and the shared commitment to collaborate in tackling violent religious extremism. We agree that Peace, which is far more than the absence of conflict, is “positive,” and that it calls each religious community to stand in solidarity with the dignity, vulnerability and well-being of the “other,” with the full force of their respective spiritual and moral teachings. Such teachings are specific to each religious tradition. They include: the frank recognition of mutually inflicted injuries, striving for justice, accepting self-sacrifice for the well-being of others, bearing innocent suffering, returning good for evil, seeking and extending forgiveness and reconciliation and expressing unrestricted compassion and love in action.

**Religions for Peace.** *The Abu Dhabi Statement: Rejecting Violent Religious Extremism and Advancing Shared Well-being, 13 December 2014.*

## A) RELIGIOUS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**31)** Depending on the different contextual situations, religious actors can diversely contribute to **strengthen social cohesion** and make **diversity** a source of **creative development** and **mutual enrichment** within their societies. This contribution nevertheless requires a comprehensive **enabling public framework** based on **inclusive and equal citizenship**. The Marrakesh Declaration, for example, calls upon “Muslim scholars and intellectuals around the world to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of «citizenship» which is inclusive of diverse groups. Such jurisprudence shall be rooted in Islamic tradition and principles and mindful of global changes.<sup>8</sup>”

**32)** Since countering extremism cannot be based on **sectarianism** or any form of **discrimination**, the concept of inclusive citizenship, as a public enabling framework for fruitful intercultural and interreligious collaboration, requires to be conceptually endorsed and practically implemented through public policies ensuring **justice and equity**. Mainstream religious leaders recently intensified their calls for the establishment of **“Civil States”** able to ensure such inclusivity<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Executive Summary of the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities, 25th-27th January 2016: <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/marrakesh-declaration.html>

<sup>9</sup> See Al Azhar Declaration on the Future of Egypt (2011), Al Azhar Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms (2012), Al Azhar Communiqué against Extremism and Terrorism (2014), Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedom (2015), Marrakesh Declaration on the rights of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim majority communities (2016).

- 33)** In conflict and post-conflict societies, interreligious collaboration can play a crucial role in **peacebuilding** and **reconciliation** initiatives. Communities can in this context be called to collaborate with public authorities and contribute in **rebuilding trust** in **democratic institutions** and **Human rights**.
- 34)** **Voicing together** their refusal of **“religious violence”** and any form of **discrimination**, and taking collaborative initiatives to protect those who are threatened by violence and injustice, especially **minorities** and **vulnerable groups**, are the testimonies expected from religious actors and their interreligious collaboration in addressing violent extremism.
- 35)** Collaboration can also be crucial in the **humanitarian** field in times of crisis, consolidating the universal dimension of **brotherhood and compassion**, lived from a faith-based perspective. In this framework, interreligious collaboration can offer campaigning and **volunteering opportunities**, especially for youth, for life alternatives in the **promotion of social justice and of solidarity with vulnerable populations**, and for dealing with grievances in a **proactive and productive** way. For interfaith collaboration the principle of **“inclusivity”** should be the equivalent of the principle of **“neutrality”** for secular humanitarian actors.



## KAIICID interfaith declaration, Vienna November 19, 2014

*[www.kaiciid.org](http://www.kaiciid.org)*

As leaders of various religious and faith traditions, we must oppose persecution inflicted on all the components of the social fabric especially Christians, Yazidis and other religious and ethnic groups such as Turkmen and Shabak in Iraq and Syria. Persecution of people, violating their sanctity as the case of Yazidi women and enslaving the people are ways contrary to every human conscience. Persecution and execution of people who exercise their basic human right to worship as they choose contradict noble religious ideals, as well as tear the fabric of civilization, nullifying past humanitarian gains.

## B) EDUCATION FOR INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP AND RELIGIOUS LITERACY

- 36)** Education has to be at the forefront of addressing radicalization by providing **cultural intelligence to youth**, especially those between 12 and 18 years old, who are more vulnerable than others to radicalization. The **SDG.4** (Sustainable Development Goal number four) requests inclusive and **equitable quality education**, including among other elements, the promotion of **a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship** and **appreciation of cultural diversity** and of culture's contribution to **sustainable development**.

**37)** According to the **UNESCO Teacher’s Guide** on the PVE, education in this field can:

- ▶ Help young people develop the **communication and interpersonal skills** they need to dialogue, face disagreement and learn peaceful approaches to change.
- ▶ Help learners develop their **critical thinking** to investigate claims, verify rumors and question the legitimacy and appeal of extremist beliefs.
- ▶ Help learners develop the **resilience** to resist extremist narratives and acquire the **social-emotional** skills they need to overcome their doubts and engage constructively in society without having to resort to violence.
- ▶ Foster critically informed citizens able to **constructively engage in peaceful collective action**.

**38)** This paper considers that faith-based organizations (FBO) can play a positive role in education through partnering with educational authorities to respond to the following **three major needs**: Religious literacy, Education for Inclusive Citizenship and shared public life values, and Education free from discriminatory content.

**39) Religious literacy**, by providing formal and non-formal education with adequate resources and programs about **religious diversity** presented as a positive reality and a **cultural richness**, helps **overcoming stereotypes and prejudices** in the minds of the students about each other’s religions and cultures, and contributes in preserving the diverse cultural and religious heritage on the national and global levels.

**40) Faculties of theology and religious studies**, especially where future **religious scholars and clergy** are trained, can essentially contribute to this effort by **reviewing their programs** and introducing more **existential and contextual teaching** about religious and socio-religious issues, in addition to the importance of offering an **objective knowledge about other religions**. The introduction of **social sciences topics and methods** helps students to be more aware about realities and builds their ability to use tools to measure social trends and understand them and their causes in an objective way. This task can be performed within an interreligious collaborative framework especially for the communities and institutions that are within the same context and facing the same challenges.

## **The Role of Education in Countering Violent Extremism Meeting Note**

*The Centre on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) and Hedayah - December 2013*

### **Promoting cultural initiatives**

Participants agreed that cultural learning is crucial for youth as it enhances their self-awareness and identity, while also opening their minds to different customs, practices, and traditions, and promotes comparative analysis. Participants suggested that another possible CVE intervention that promotes cultural learning would be to provide translations of critical texts, popular novels, and storybooks in students' mother tongue. For parochial schools, allowing students access to translated religious texts would help deepen the understanding of their religion and empower them to challenge extremist narratives that use religious rhetoric to justify violence.

*<http://www.hedayah.ae/pdf/role-of-education-in-countering-violent-extremism-meeting-report.pdf>*

**41)** Education plays a major role in building **inclusive citizenship, social cohesion** and **solidarity**. This entails the promotion and dissemination of a shared set of main public life values in both **secular and faith-based formal and non-formal education**<sup>10</sup>. It is in fact important to seek **cohesion** in the value system between these two educational dimensions. Hence, education can be the space for interreligious collaboration in developing **resources and teaching** youth about common public life values from faith-based and interfaith perspectives. This type of education must nurture **coherence and harmony** between citizenship and religious identities, and foster **common civic engagement** as a way to transform society and to contribute in making **inclusive citizenship a reality for all**.

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<sup>10</sup> See: The Declaration of the EU Education Ministers on "Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education", 17 March 2015: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf)



## **Interfaith Education on Intercultural Citizenship Program - Lebanon**

*Adyan Foundation - [www.adyanfoundation.org](http://www.adyanfoundation.org)*

The program promotes inclusive citizenship through an interfaith collaboration highlighting common grounds between religions in what concerns public life values, by giving these values a faith-based referential to be included in religious (Christian and Muslim) education classes and predications on the following topics:

- Human Dignity
- Accepting diversity
- Trustworthiness
- Respect of laws and covenants
- Justice
- Solidarity
- Forgiveness
- Common Good

The project is implemented in collaboration with the main official religious institutions in Lebanon - Lebanese Islamic Dar el Fatwa, High Shiite Islamic Council, Druze Council, Middle East Council of Churches, representing the different churches in Lebanon – in collaboration with Danmission and with the support of the Danish Arab Partnership program.

- 42) Counter extremism efforts have to include the revision of existing educational policies and curricula to be **free from discriminatory content**. This should start with eliminating discriminatory content based on **sectarian ideas from curricula**, from whichever topic it may currently exist - language, literature, history, philosophy, civic education, religion, etc. and making **religious textbooks** more inclusive to diversity. Moreover, **fostering the teaching of philosophy and humanities** helps in building **critical thinking** capacities among children and in having a **more inclusive and humanistic approach to ethics** and public issues. The development of **teacher training** on methods and values of diversity and inclusivity is also crucial to meet such objectives.

**Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of  
Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim  
Majority Communities - 27th January 2016**

*[www.marrakeshdeclaration.org](http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org)*

We hereby:

Urge Muslim educational institutions and authorities to conduct a courageous review of educational curricula that instigates aggression and extremism, leads to war and chaos, and results in the destruction of our shared societies;

Call upon representatives of the various religions, sects and denominations to confront all forms of religious bigotry, vilification, and denigration of what people hold sacred, as well as all speech that promote hatred and bigotry.



## **Beirut Declaration on Educational Reform for Preventing Violent Extremism in Arab Countries (September 2016)**

*Adyan Foundation and Arab Thought Forum*

### **Recommendations**

1. Work on establishing an educational system that promotes the values of citizenship that is inclusive of all forms of diversity and that affirms the principles of non-discrimination and acceptance of difference.
2. Endeavor to steer the educational system towards building human beings with free, independent personalities, who are able to express themselves using critical thinking tools and communication and dialogue skills.
7. Work on freeing curricula from stereotypes, hate speech and all kinds of discrimination against any cultural, religious, ethnic or gender component of society.
9. Include philosophy as a core subject matter throughout the different cycles of school education in order to develop the learners' critical skills.
10. Make sure to include the variety of the cultural heritage of society in history subject matters, which should encompass social history and the history of peoples.
11. Pay particular attention to religious education, focus on its role in terms of education to the common values of public life, and beware of the selective approach to and ideological exploitation of religious texts.
12. Stress the urgent need to review the religious heritage and adopt a renewed rhetoric that would consolidate the values of citizenship and living together.

<http://www.adyanonline.net/course/view.php?id=103>

## C) MEDIA AND THE EXISTENTIAL NARRATIVE

- 43) Extremists look for legitimacy through their interpretation of religion and religious texts. They also widely disseminate their narrative about **religiously legitimized violent extremism** through **social media** platforms. Thus, the narratives that bring to the fore each **religion's respect for human dignity** and rejection of violent extremism and other forms of cultural violence, must be highlighted by all possible means.
- 44) Yet, the **mainstream religious narrative** should not be transformed into a **"reactive" discourse** answering the topics that the extremists select and use in a dangerous way. Instead of developing a **"counter-narrative"**, or responding to the extremist narrative in an essentialist way fixing the interpretation of texts in **one and exclusive orthodox narrative**, communities are called to develop **an existential religious narrative**. This approach is value-based and takes into consideration the changing realities and challenges of different historic or geopolitical contexts and brings open answers to the social problems.
- 45) To foster resilience towards extremist messaging, this paper calls for the development of an existential religious narrative, in a preventive strategy, ensuring a **positive alternative** to the extremist one, and filling the gap that can sometimes exist in adapted religious teaching related to existential and contemporary

issues. This existential narrative is addressed to the whole community, while for those already under the influence of the extremist narrative, a counter-narrative can challenge these ideas and help in **de-radicalizing the extremists**.



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## Sawab Center

[www.facebook.com/sawabcenter](https://www.facebook.com/sawabcenter)

[www.twitter.com/sawabcenter](https://www.twitter.com/sawabcenter)

[www.instagram.com/sawabcenter](https://www.instagram.com/sawabcenter)

- 46)** The existential narrative is **diverse, open for discussion** and in continuous development, and has the advantage of encompassing concrete example of believers as **role models** for promoted values and solutions. “The best way of preventing terrorist violence is to widen the range of opinions that can be freely expressed, not to restrict it.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, instead of having one orthodox counter-narrative issued by the formal religious authority, the existential narrative **stimulates reflection within communities** and engages theologians, preachers and believers in an **open reflection process**, to offer adequate answers to identified challenges in coherence with human rights and values.

## Taadudiya

[www.taadudiya.com](http://www.taadudiya.com)

[www.facebook.com/taadudiya](https://www.facebook.com/taadudiya)

[www.twitter.com/taadudiya](https://www.twitter.com/taadudiya)

[www.instagram.com/taadudiya](https://www.instagram.com/taadudiya)

- 47)** The existential narrative takes into consideration **individual interpretations based on life experiences** and highlights **the richness of diversity within each religious tradition**, and the role of each believer in enriching his/her religious heritage. It runs contrary to the essentialist narratives that show religion as one unchanging phenomenon from the moment it started, and refuses diversity of schools and interpretations.

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<sup>11</sup> Arun Kundnani: A decade lost: Rethinking Radicalization and Extremism. Calystone, 2015, 7.

**48) Religious authorities** are expected to publicly proclaim their teaching related to controversial issues used by extremist groups in a **clear and unambiguous way**. In some cases this task becomes an **opportunity for a review and an update of religious teaching**, especially in subjects related to public life. They are expected to disseminate through the media their positions and teaching that promote a renewed understanding of the religious position towards matters related to public life.

### **Baghdad Declaration (2016) To counter Hate Speech in Iraq and the Middle-East**

*Masarat Foundation for Cultural and Media Development  
[www.masaratiraq.org](http://www.masaratiraq.org)*

- ▶ To face Hate Speech by boycotting preachers of hate and refraining from providing them communication platforms.
- ▶ To promote through media multiple sources and voices from different communities providing information on religious diversity in Iraqi society, and contribute to the elimination of stereotypes and prejudices against religious minorities.
- ▶ Launching a wide campaign to put pressure on Media organizations to have a «binding Charter», in cooperation with the relevant committees in the House of Representatives and Civil Society organizations, prevent from disseminating any information that calls for hatred or encourage racism in all its forms, and ensure respect for the identity of ethnic minorities in the media discourse.


## **Al Azhar Communiqué on confronting Extremism and Terrorism**

*Cairo 4/12/2014*

### **Article 6**

A number of the youth of the Community (umma) have been and still are subject to brainwashing through a dissemination of wrong explanations of the Qur'an, of the Prophet's praxis (sunna) and of the analysis of scholars (ijtihad), leading to terrorism. This puts the responsibility on the religious scholars and the intellectuals to take the hand of those misguided youth and lead them through guidance programs and awareness sessions, to the correct understanding of these texts and concepts so that they do not remain a prey to those who call for violence and for excommunication and labeling others as infidels (takfir). [...]

Among these concepts is the concept of justly guided rule (khilafa) at the time of the Prophet's companions. The purpose of Khilafa was to organize the common interest of the people, protect religion, guide life, and implement justice and equity between people. Rule in Islam is based on the values of justice and equity, and on the protection of the rights of citizenship to all the sons and daughters of the country without discrimination on the basis of color, gender or belief. Any political system that fulfills these primordial human values is a system that receives legitimacy from the sources of Islam.



49) Special **training programs** targeting young leaders, religious actors and social media activists are recommended to be organized, and should include not only training on the **technical competences** related to the strategic usage of **media and social media**, but also the work of the content itself, especially for **topics related to religious diversity, religious freedom and religion in the public sphere**, to ensure its comprehensive and adapted aspect.

50) It is important to communicate the existential narratives through **positive messaging** and giving visibility to **role models** in the field of **interreligious solidarity**. **Inter-faith resources** to counter extremism are also to be considered important tools in this field, able to foster interreligious collaboration in facing radicalization.

## D) INTERRELIGIOUS PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE & COMMON ACTION

51) A **safe and inclusive space for dialogue** between various stakeholders (civil society, religious actors, former extremists, migrants and refugees, young people, experts and policy makers) is needed to foster the **social cohesion** and **resilience** towards extremism based on **shared public life values**.

52) Different forms of interreligious dialogue initiatives were developed during the last decades, aiming for **mutual understanding** and **building interfaith solidarity**. Nevertheless, in the current context with the rise of “religiously expressed extremism”, **interfaith dialogue needs to renew its agenda** and review its structures, to be able to respond to the new challenges in a creative way.

- 53)** New forms of **interreligious platforms for civic engagement**, combining training, creative encounters and shared experiences in **promoting social justice, integration, reconciliation** and **peace-building** can attract youth from various religions and belief systems and offer them a **proactive role** in this field.

### **The Interfaith Peace Platform in the Central African Republic (CAR)**

*<http://www.c-r.org/news-and-views/news/interfaith-peace-platform-wins-un-peace-prize>*

The Interfaith Peace Platform has won an international peace award for its work to reconcile Muslims and Christians in the hope of restoring lasting peace in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The Sergio Vieira de Mello Award was presented to the Catholic Archbishop of Bangui, Mgr. Dieudonné Nzapalainga, the President of the Islamic Council, Imam Oumar Kobine Layama and the President of the Evangelical Alliance, Pastor Nicolas Guérékoyaméné-Gbangou on 19 August 2015 at a ceremony in Geneva.

The Interfaith Peace Platform was established in 2013 by representatives of the three most important religious groups in the country to promote dialogue as a preventive measure against religious violence.

***“The Interfaith Peace Platform serves as a model much needed in other countries in conflict and shows that prevention and dialogue are the key for solving refugee and displacement crises.”***

- 54) Building **platforms for youth** where they can interact with each other, build **intercultural relations**, widen their knowledge about religions and cultures and look to the social issues from a **wider and diverse perspective**, and collaborate together for the **common good** and for the service of the marginalized in their societies, contributes to preventing drives towards **nihilism, extremism** and **social indifference**.

## COEXISTER: Building Social Cohesion through Active Interfaith Coexistence

France - <http://english.coexister.fr/>

### A youth movement

“Coexister” is a neutral and nondenominational French youth movement that has been advocating Active Coexistence through a method of peer education aimed at 15-35 year-old people since 2009. Young people from all walks of faith and belief, believers and non-believers alike, are members of our organization. Youth is both the fuel and the engine of our movement, providing opportunities for those who want to act now and not wait to become an adult.

### Active coexistence and social cohesion

Our message? To live the diversity of religions and beliefs, and to use it as a lever for unity and social cohesion. This Active Coexistence is based on the respect for identity and dissimilarity. Thus, different actions are made daily by our members: a dialogue to better know each other and to interact without taboos, solidarity to act together with a common objective and to raise young people’s awareness to dismantle prejudice in schools and universities.

### An entrepreneurial and associative spirit

“Coexister” is a social start-up that uses economic efficiency to raise funds to train people within its local groups. But it is also a non-profit association based on participatory democracy in which everyone can express their ideas, their opinions and their projects. “Coexister” is also a great network: InterFaith Tour (around the world), Festiv’All Together (for culture), Convivencia Consulting (for companies), etc.

## EXPERTS (By alphabetical order)

- Mr. Jonathan Birdwell** Head of Policy and Research, Institute for Strategic Dialogue.  
*United Kingdom*
- Ms. Huma A. Chughtai** Chief Coordinator of Pakistan's first parliamentary women's convention on The Role of Women Parliamentarians in Peace and Reconciliation. Legal advisor to the government's Ministry of Women Development and the Women's Parliamentary Caucus.  
*Pakistan*
- Rev. Prof. Fadi Daou** Chairperson and CEO of Adyan Foundation, Professor of Interreligious Dialogue and Geopolitics of Religion and Consultant on Middle-Eastern issues and Christian-Muslim relations.  
*Lebanon*
- Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi** Director, secretariat of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, Vice-President of the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission (IBC).  
*USA*
- Dr. Ussama Hassan** Senior Researcher in Islamic Studies and counter extremism, Quilliam Foundation.  
*United Kingdom*
- Rev. Msgr. Habib Jajou** Chaldean Catholic Bishop of Basra.  
*Iraq*
- Sayyid Jawad Khoui** Secretary General of The Al-Khoei International Foundation, and of Al Khoei Institute, Member of Iraqi interfaith council.  
*Iraq*
- Dr. Samir Morcos** Member of the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights. Previously assistant of the president for democratic transition (2012). Deputy Governor of Cairo for the Northern District (2011-2012). Associate Secretary General for the Middle East Council of Churches (1995-2001).  
*Egypt*



**Prof. Hassan Nadhem**

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Chair-holder, UNESCO chair for Interreligious Dialogue Studies in the Islamic World at the University of Kufa, Editor-in-Chief of Kufa Review. University Professor.

**Dr. Farid Panjwani**

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Senior Counter Extremism Researcher for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), Recent publications include: Till Martyrdom Do Us Part: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon.

**Ms. Rachel Shabi**

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Syndicated writer and journalist and Middle East analyst across international TVs. She received the Next Century Foundation's Cutting Edge media award in 2013 and the Anna Lindh journalism prize in 2011.

**Dr. Nayla Tabbara**

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Director of the Institute of Citizenship and Diversity Management at Adyan Foundation, PhD in Science of Religions, university professor in Religious and Islamic Studies.

**Dr. Abdalhadi al Ijla**

*Palestine/Sweden*

Expert in Religion and Public Affairs; Director of the Institute for Middle East Studies, Canada.

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**Wesam Amer**  
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**Ramy Atta**  
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**Said Bahajin**  
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**Ahlam Baoui**  
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**Meriem Ben Lamine**  
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## PARTNERS

### **Adyan Foundation**

*[www.adyanfoundation.org](http://www.adyanfoundation.org) - [www.adyanonline.net](http://www.adyanonline.net)*

Adyan is a Lebanese Foundation founded in 2006 with a mandate to uphold religious diversity and promote coexistence and diversity management, on the social, political, educational and spiritual levels.

The Foundation, through its “Rashad Center for Cultural Governance” focuses on Policy making including consultancies for public and private entities. It also works, especially through the "Institute of Citizenship and Diversity Management", on the production of resources for the management of religious diversity in the public sphere, and on building capacities of youth, educators, social and religious leaders on its three thematic areas: Citizenship, Diversity and Coexistence; Religion and Public Affairs; and Interreligious and Intercultural Relations.

### **University College London (UCL) - Institute of Education**

*[www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe)*

Founded in 1902, UCL the Institute of Education (IoE) is the education school of University College London (UCL). It specializes in postgraduate study and research in the field of education and social science and is one of UCL's 11 constituent faculties. Prior to merging with UCL in 2014, it was a constituent college of the University of London. The IoE is currently ranked first in the world for education in the QS World University Ranking, and is the largest education research body in the United Kingdom, with over 700 research students in the doctoral school.

The Centre for Research and Evaluation in Muslim Education (CREME) at IOE- UCL is the first research centre of its kind in a mainstream British university. Its aim is to produce, support and disseminate research on wide ranging issues pertaining to Muslim education, in the UK and beyond.

