Over the last half-century, religious persecution in conflict has become increasingly commonplace\(^1\). In recent years, there have been incidences of violent persecution and incitement against religious/belief groups in armed-conflict. While religious persecution in conflict has existed across different regions, it has been particularly notable at the hands of terrorist actors in the Middle East. Security Council resolutions (e.g. 2331, 2379, 2388) recognise Daesh’s mass atrocities against the Yazidis and other religious groups as “driven on religious or ethnic grounds”. In this regard, such violence, as a hallmark of armed conflict, poses a clear threat to international peace and security.

Several conflicts on the Security Council’s agenda involve violence based on religion or belief, including to varying extents the situations in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. It is pertinent, therefore, to consider the protection of members of religious and belief groups in armed conflict and how best to pre-empt violence towards members of religious/belief groups in conflict, including early warning and prevention.

When considering the interlinkages between religion, belief and conflict, it is clear that religious actors can play a positive role in conflict resolution, particularly peace processes. Religious actors have a track record in peace processes, through interconnectivity with other faiths, community reach and access to hard-to-reach areas. As the Pope and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar agreed in their joint statement on *World Peace*, we must “reject deplorable violence” and promote a “culture of peace...[and] mutual cooperation...to bring an end to wars”. We have witnessed such sentiments in action through high and mid-level talks on Libya, facilitated by the religious community of Sant’Egidio, which in 2016 produced a humanitarian access agreement and a joint declaration supporting UN-led peace efforts.

The Arria format meeting will examine the situation in the Middle East, particularly how the inclusion of religious actors in peace processes can support conflict resolution efforts, while also ensuring sensitivity to gender and context.

By giving more consideration to religious/belief factors, the Security Council can enhance protection, while strengthening conflict resolution and prevention efforts.


Guiding Questions

1. What specific protections are necessary to protect members of religious and belief groups in conflict, and how can such measures help sustain peace?
2. What contribution can religious actors make to peace processes, and what role can they play in enhancing inclusivity and gender sensitivity in conflict resolution?
3. What further steps can the UN, including the Security Council, take to promote the role of religious actors in peace processes and by extension broader conflict resolution?

Briefers

- **UN:** to be confirmed.
- **The Rt. Hon. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury.** Member of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation.
- **Professor Azza Karam.** Secretary General of Religions for Peace.
- **Additional faith/civil society participant:** to be confirmed.

Format

Lord Ahmad, UK Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, will open and chair the virtual meeting. The meeting will take place on Friday 19 March 2021 at 10am (EST). Further technical details will follow.

The meeting will hear from the briefers and Security Council members. We request Security Council members limit their interventions to five minutes.

The meeting will take place in English without simultaneous interpretation, and will be broadcast on UNTV.

To submit the registration form, please contact: timothy.sylvester@fco.gov.uk