

## Interfaith Symposium in the UK

### Concept Note

#### Introduction/Background

In past decades, the world has witnessed several conflicts in which religion has been misused to justify violence. This has led to the emergence of a number of crises that challenge countries far away from these conflicts creating tensions in the fabric of diverse societies. Such tensions have only been further exasperated by terror attacks and acts of violence in the name of religion that have occurred in countries such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Spain the United Kingdom and the United States.

The United Kingdom in its very composition is a country of different ethnicities and religions, a diversity, which strengthens the nation itself. This diversity has recently been challenged with the rise of extremist groups who commit violence in the name of religion, in particular Da'esh in Iraq and Syria and its recruitment abroad, populist rhetoric against foreigners and Muslims – both British and from abroad, only to be worsened by the populist rhetoric leading up to and following the passing of the June 2017 referendum by focusing on the fear of “the other” and thus creating scapegoats of entire groups for the challenges in society. The subsequent result was a backlash, which as taken place in the form of discrimination, hate speech, and even hate crimes in various communities throughout the UK. It is quite apparent by peering at the cover pages lining newsstands and the Internet headlines that fear and hate are plaguing our society. In light of this fact and in the face of the serious challenge in our world and in the UK itself, there is an urgency to respond to the need to foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the need to promote a culture of respect for diversity, and establish rules of justice and peace among different groups of people.

Therefore KAICIID and the Islamic Cultural Centre of London are working together under the framework of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes seek to counter these acts – whether they be acts of discrimination, hate speech or even hate crimes – by organizing an interreligious symposium to discuss the role of religious leaders and institutions, as well as that of civil society in fostering dialogue as a way to address the drivers of discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes, and discuss ways to bridge these divides and foster social cohesion. As respected and trusted members of their communities, who are looked up to for guidance, religious leaders and their institutions have an essential role to play in this context and there is an urgency to respond to the need to foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the need to promote a culture of respect for diversity, and establish rules of justice and peace among different groups of people.

#### Background

Since its establishment in 2012, KAICIID has launched several programs and initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue, reconciliation and citizenship while fostering dialogue based on the principles of coexistence, mutual understanding, cooperation and common citizenship. Among these, KAICIID launched an initiative named "*United against Violence in the Name of Religion*"(UVNR), during a

conference organized in November 2014 in Vienna that resulted in the *'Vienna Declaration'* and a set of recommendations to promote religious dialogue and diversity. Under the umbrella of UVNR, KAICIID has developed several programmes aimed at countering discrimination and exclusion by fostering interreligious dialogue and education to promote diversity and social cohesion. Of these numerous programmes several are wide reaching on the regional or international scale such as the KAICIID Fellows Programme, the Scouts Programme, the Social Media as a Dialogue Programme, and KAICIID's close collaboration with the UN Office on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect (UNOtPG) on the development of [the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes \(the Action Plan\)](#).

This symposium has been developed as a way to promote interreligious dialogue and social cohesion, and as part of KAICIID's commitment to the implementation of the Action Plan, which was developed in response to an alarming spike in hate speech and incitement to violence in recent years against individuals or communities, on the basis of their identity. The Action Plan is the first document to focus on the role of religious leaders and actors in preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, and the first to develop context-specific regional strategies with that objective in mind<sup>1</sup>.

KAICIID in conjunction with the ICC aims to contribute to the prevention of discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes by sparking a dialogue with wider public in London, UK to foster and strengthen the long-present diversity and coexistence in the UK, which is being tested by today's challenges.

### **The Interreligious Symposium**

The symposium will comprise three panels of religious representatives from a broad range of faith-communities inside the United Kingdom who are working on fostering social cohesion within their local communities in the UK. The aim of the event is to bring a greater degree of awareness to the diverse city of London of the importance of the multitude of religious communities in strengthening social cohesion in the UK and to spark a broader dialogue within the UK on how to counter the recent rise in discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes. In each panel, the panelists will give their presentations first, followed by a response by an expert on the topic and then questions will be taken from the audience.

### **The Participants**

Representatives of religious communities including religious leaders as well as civil society actors or academics who are considered to be representatives by their communities.

Interreligious or interfaith organizations, which foster dialogue or work towards building social cohesion in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> the Plan of Action was developed over two years of global and regional consultations led by UNOtPG in conjunction with KAICIID, the World Council of Churches and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers