

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY COMMEMORATING
THE VICTIMS OF ACTS OF VIOLENCE BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF
22 August 2021**

Today we honour and remember the victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief.

Across the world, we continue to witness a rise in hate speech, intolerance, and even physical violence and attacks on individuals, groups, and sites, purely because of their religious beliefs or significance.

This violence often goes hand-in-hand with the infringement of other fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of thought or conscience. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has fueled racism, stigma, and disinformation, often targeting ethnic and religious minorities, has further exacerbated this dangerous convergence.

Despite the risks, victims continue to speak out with great courage to defend their rights. I stand in full solidarity with them — and with the determined efforts of civil society actors, community and faith leaders, to mobilize against any act of violence or discrimination.

States have the primary responsibility to prohibit and deter discrimination and violence and to protect the human rights of religious minorities and ensure that perpetrators of these crimes are held accountable. At the same time, the international community must do more to support the victims of these heinous acts, as well as those who are working to address the root causes of intolerance and hate. I have made tackling this issue a priority, including through initiatives like the Call to Action for Human Rights, the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, and the UN Plan to Safeguard Religious Sites.

Freedom of religion or belief is a human right, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, this right is being tested.

Let us commit to turning the tide on this appalling trend, to building more inclusive and peaceful societies, where diversity is celebrated as a richness that strengthens us all.