



G20 Interfaith Forum

Bringing Faith and Policy Together

G20i Regional Recommendations Europe

The European Consultation process was launched with an Introductory Plenary on June 29th 2020 which was followed by working group meetings throughout July 2020. Recommendations for each working group were compiled and finalised with support from key experts and discussed in a webinar on July 14th 2020. A concluding session took place on September 23rd 2020 to present the final discussion papers.

The process gathered **104 people** from **25 countries** representing **6 religions** in the plenary and engaged more than 50 people in the subsequent meetings and working groups.

The following documents reflect the work of groups of individuals selected for their expertise both in the relevant subjects and in interfaith work, who generously volunteered to contribute their thoughts and experience.

The G20 Interfaith Forum annually gathers religious leaders, communities, and faith-based organizations to consider questions on the global political agenda and raise issues of concern, reflecting that religious identities and affiliations can influence the ways in which people design, implement and respond to global policies. In 2020, the organizing partners- the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), the G20 Interfaith Forum Association, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), and the National Committee for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (NCIID)- organized six regional consultations as a precursor to the global G20 Interfaith Forum in October. Their work comes alongside a series of continuing working groups that focus on priority issues

on the G20 agendas. The European Regional Online Consultation included around 100 participants in a month-long consultation process during June and July 2020. Three working groups, consisting of about a dozen individuals chosen for their expertise and ability to represent a diverse range of perspectives, met for in-depth discussions that were led and summarized by Key Experts.

The outputs of the European regional consultation were submitted to the Organizing Committee of the G20 Interfaith Forum on 30th July 2020. They are intended to provide a source of analysis and inspiration for global recommendations to be explored at the October G20 Interfaith Forum. The Forum partners will then distil the proposals into a final document to be presented to the G20 Leaders as they prepare for their Summit in November.

The recommendations focus on the following themes:

1) Empowering People; Fostering Gender Equality

- a. Education on religious and cultural diversity
- b. Structural inequality and gender inequality
- c. Refugees, migrants, trafficking
- d. The role of religion in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation

2) Safeguarding the Planet

- a. Practical partnerships to address climate change and its consequences
- b. Recycling and reducing use of plastics: faith in environmental change and policy
- c. Circular economy, Food Waste, Water

3) Frontiers at the Intersection of Governance, Faith, and Technology

- a. The rule of law, rights and freedom of religion or belief: discord or harmony?
- b. Sharing benefits of innovation and technological advancement to counter hate speech
- c. Protection of sacred sites

Empowering People; Fostering Gender Equality

Introduction

Acknowledgement: As a society, we are facing unprecedented challenges, including a worldwide pandemic and consequent economic impact. Known structural inequalities were exacerbated by the prevailing situation. These emerging challenges call for action on the part of our leaders towards the empowerment of people and the closing of gaps between different sectors of society, aiming to erase structural inequalities.

European context: Europe is committed to fostering gender equality through several conventions, strategies and policies. However, studies have shown that domestic violence has been rising since the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown. Refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking, found their vulnerable position hardened by the fight against COVID-19. Several countries stopped their reception and hosting in dignified conditions, resulting in overcrowded refugee camps or even informal settlements, with no physical distancing or sanitary measures that prevent outbreaks of COVID-19.

Rationale for interfaith cooperation: There is increasing evidence that multi-faith cooperation can provide very specific benefits as a part of a holistic integration strategy. With the tensions and conflicts that we face in the present-day, and their potential to deteriorate, the role of religious leaders and communities in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation is essential. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that unexpected pressures and crises can serve to worsen existing divisions and tensions within societies. Interreligious initiatives and networks have helped to reinforce resilience within communities overcoming conflicts around religious and ethnic identities. There is a need to reinforce these dialogues and cooperation, as their failure leaves societies vulnerable to religious intolerance, discrimination and conflict. Religion has also played a positive role in supporting the integration of migrants into societies and communities, through religious institutions but also through Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs).

Recommendations

1.

Education on religious and cultural diversity

The role of education in facing these challenges is crucial. We understand that education has a prominent role in society. It embodies moral commitment and contributes to the future. It is through the sharing of knowledge, dialogue and encounter that we are better equipped to understand the Other.

Knowing, and being able to reasonably understand and critically observe, one's own cultural and religious tradition as well as other cultures, faiths and beliefs and to have an attitude of openness to others, is crucial for peaceful coexistence. The contribution of religion to this educational process has, historically, played an important role in developing educational institutions and pedagogy in many cultures and countries. These efforts are shown to help normalise diversity within society and contribute to social integration and cohesion whilst helping the prevention of social misrepresentations and radicalisation.

Therefore, we ask that:

- 1a.** Government and religious leaders highlight the need to recognise and accept the inherent dignity of every human being everywhere, as the [2018 Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity](#) underlines.
- 1b.** Government and religious leaders work together and put an end to racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination.
- 1c.** Governments, in collaboration with the relevant religious leaders and communities, promote openness to religious traditions in school curricula and incentivise the curiosity of students to expand their understanding of other cultures and religious traditions. Students should learn about, and from, different religions so that they can be enriched by their teachings. In this context, parental rights to educate their children by their religious or non-religious beliefs should also be respected. These efforts should also be aimed at preventing radicalisation, especially in scenarios that can reach youth and give students the tools to critique and challenge content that exploits religion for violent or hateful means.
- 1d.** Governments, religious actors and civil society are encouraged to create the necessary conditions for the free engagement of religious actors in interfaith and intra-religious dialogue, and in civic dialogue.

- 1e. Governments actively create opportunities and conditions for open and constructive dialogue between politicians, religious leaders and civil society. Especially about issues related to social cohesion and the well-being of all, to identify problems and create concerted solutions.

2.

Structural inequality and gender inequality

Structural inequalities that already existed have intensified during these times of emergency and made themselves self-evident. We need to take action to promote equality and dignity for all. During the COVID-19 quarantine, women, especially single mothers, were dealing with unbalanced responsibilities between work and family life and there was an increase in domestic violence. At the same time, the present economic crisis has led to measures being introduced to empower the most vulnerable communities.

Therefore, we ask that:

- 2a. Governments implement policies to abolish discrimination against working mothers and fathers regarding access to work, including abolishing the gender pay gap after the first child.
- 2b. Governments implement policies to improve the balance between work and private and family life, especially for single parents.
- 2c. Governments work with religious leaders and communities and civil society in addressing gender misrepresentations, discrimination and violence.
- 2d. Governments encourage religious leaders to interpret their religion in such a way that it does not pave the way for a possible justification of any violence against women and girls (including inhuman or degrading treatment; the so-called “forced marriage” that entails forced conversion; and other crimes such as abduction, rape and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); or the use of any type of sexual violence as a method of war).
- 2e. Governments are encouraged to work closely with religious leaders and communities in advocating for health workers and other essential workers’ fair salaries and working conditions.
- 2f. Religious institutions and FBOs are encouraged to implement gender equality strategies, while respecting the principle of autonomy of religious institutions and FBOs, and their ethos.

- 2g.** Governments promote and implement policies that enable companies to employ young people, people with disabilities, people of different ethnic or national origins, and people over 50, who might struggle to find work in a post-pandemic economic recession.

3.

Refugees, migrants and trafficking

Migrants and minorities, who are frequently on the fringe of society, were in an even more vulnerable situation during this pandemic. Many of them were carrying out essential activities for society, with little social acknowledgement and lack of fair working conditions. In parallel, people in vulnerable situations were targeted by increasing online hate. Modern-day slavery and human trafficking are serious problems that have been deepened by this sanitary crisis. We must not let the invisible be forgotten.

The collaboration between governments and faith-based institutions and organizations should be incentivised, and religious actors ought to be recognised as legitimate actors in the integration processes.

Therefore, we ask that:

- 3a.** Governments continue their efforts to uphold the access to international protection, including asylum, taking into special account the vulnerable situation of unaccompanied minors, women and girls and victims of human trafficking and modern-day slavery.
- 3b.** Governments continue their efforts to respect the fundamental rights of migrants and families, including family unity.
- 3c.** Religious leaders and religious communities continue their work around the integration of migrants and on the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.
- 3d.** Governments, religious leaders and religious communities work together to create mechanisms aiming to abolish the practice of so-called “forced marriage”, to combat human trafficking and modern-day slavery.
- 3e.** Governments intensify the fight against sexual exploitation online, in particular of children. Specifically, through preventative measures addressed to families, parents and their children, and school communities. And to provide them with the skills to manage themselves properly in the digital environment.

4.

The role of religion in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation

Religious institutions and FBOs have been essential in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation. Evidence continues to grow that when religious actors are valued and engaged in a considered way, informed by effective analysis, they can be particularly effective partners for government and peacebuilding institutions and actors.

Therefore, we ask that:

- 4a.** Governments, religious leaders and civil society work together to create the conditions for respectful and fruitful dialogue that engages all communities and addresses the real challenges facing our societies.
- 4b.** Government and religious leaders build bridges among communities, and emphasise, in their processes, and by their example, the importance of peace and reconciliation, including committing to this as a way of life for religious communities and not just a response to current challenges.
- 4c.** Government and religious leaders acknowledge the importance of human rights and the need to teach them in the formal educational system and to promote a social knowledge and acceptance of human rights rooted in human dignity.
- 4d.** Religious leaders continue to foster capacity building in spiritual resilience, showing and promoting openness, respect, compassion and active engagement in dialogue, whilst holding on firmly to the core of human values promoted by religious traditions.
- 4e.** Governments and multinational institutions put more effort and resources into developing training for staff in engaging religious actors in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, considering the complex role of religious actors in the peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes.

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Safeguarding the Planet

Introduction

Acknowledgement: We acknowledge that humans are responsible for many aspects of the threats to the health of our planet. And that the choices of the governments of the world's powerful nations, as well as populations from the world's wealthiest countries, consciously or otherwise, are disproportionately exacerbating the problem. Conversely, these groups of people and countries, many of which lie in Europe, have the potential to make the greatest impact if they take corrective action.

European context: Europe has a long history in developing and implementing environmental policy. More recently it has sought to reflect the need to integrate environmental priorities across all policy and action. For example, the European institutions that have supported the United Nations 17 environmental, economic and social goals for 2030 as the overarching strategy for Europe. These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been built within the 6 Key Priorities 2019-2024 for Europe wide action and are reported on annually. One of these priorities is the European Green Deal which was launched in December 2019. This aims to transform the Union into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where climate and environmental challenges are addressed and turned into opportunities, while making the transition just and inclusive for all. It includes a roadmap with actions to move towards a circular economy, stop climate change, revert biodiversity loss and cut pollution. Moreover, it outlines investments needed and financing tools available.

Rationale for interfaith alliance action: Most of the Earth's population recognises the crucial value of the resources humans have at their disposal to secure our wellbeing. The majority of the world's population have a faith and will often describe our planet as God's creation and a gift given to humanity to look after wisely on behalf of everyone now and in the future. This is often called "stewardship". It follows that, for them, the task of safeguarding the planet and of equitably sharing its benefits- as well as being a scientific and social necessity -is also a divine duty, requiring dedication and sacrifice. That long-term perspective and mindset can powerfully compliment the efforts of secular or non-faith-based actors with similar goals, such as local and national governments and international partnerships.

The European Interfaith Forum consultation around the issues of climate change; the circular or restorative economy; and partnerships with faith groups has raised a number of policy ideas for consideration by Europe wide decision-makers and the forthcoming G20 summit.

Recommendations

1.

Promote the European approach in using the SDGs as the ultimate framework and indicator of success internationally

Faith groups are deeply uncomfortable with the current narrative around economic growth being the primary goal of human purpose, progress and international cooperation. They also recognise there is not yet a consensus around an alternative economic model. With developed nations needing to accept less, developing nations still requiring growth to lift millions out of poverty, and technology advances not being enough to achieve the levels of decoupling of pollution and growth required to achieve agreed international targets.

Therefore, the European approach of recognising the 17 SDGs, of which only one is centred around economic growth, is welcomed as a useful framework to guide national and international progress and cooperation. This framework also helps to identify the interconnection of policies and outcomes, such as gender, young people, poverty and justice. It is also an arena to develop and test new narratives and approaches about “good growth”. For more information on this approach and progress to date within Europe on the 17 SDGs see: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/11011074/KS-02-20-202-EN-N.pdf/334a8cfe-636a-bb8a-294a-73a052882f7f>

Therefore, we ask that:

- 1a. The SDGs replace economic growth as the ultimate framework and indicator of success internationally** as the European Union has begun to demonstrate.
- 1b. A widespread, accurate and empowering spread of knowledge concerning the SDGs and the role of environmental protection become an educational priority** supported by the newfound public appreciation for the scientific community and approach of evidence gathering, dealing with risk, uncertainty, and the precautionary principle.
- 1c. Religious institutions be encouraged to train religious leaders and educators to integrate lessons about the SDGs and sustainable living into formal and informal religious education.** This includes drawing upon spiritual and philosophical values (e.g. prudence, self-discipline, equity and modesty) to help cultivate a mindset in which people can grieve for the destruction of our home, feel optimistic even in times of change, and be prepared to advocate and live sustainable lifestyles. Secular educational authorities should consider including ethical and faith-based perspectives when designing corresponding environmental modules, to heighten the relevance of lessons to people of faith.

2.

Accelerate action and consistency of the use of existing market-based mechanisms to deliver carbon reduction, resource efficiency and environmental protection

Until we can develop a better system, the current market based one is required to deliver urgent action. Faith groups are frustrated that the required urgency and consistency to tackle climate change is often not evident in the implementation of international agreements into national and local action. For example, there has been a varied response in how “green” the COVID-19 economic stimulus packages have been across governments in Europe. Globally early estimates are of only 0.2% of recovery spending on climate priorities, despite there being strong correlations between job and wealth creation through housing energy efficiency retrofits, electric vehicle infrastructure, low carbon energy generation, storage, research and innovation.

For more information about the different economic recovery packages see:

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/coronavirus-tracking-how-the-worlds-green-recovery-plans-aim-to-cut-emissions>

Therefore, we ask that:

- 2a. The overall impact of economy recovery plans be beneficial to climate goals, the environment, and to help in a fair transition** by ensuring that companies and firms which benefit from subsidies as part of the economic recovery after COVID-19 abide by principles of sustainability. And that sectors required for green growth or change are prioritised for support, such as those set out in the European Green Deal.
- 2b. Taxes, tariffs and subsidies** be adjusted to ensure that a product’s cost accurately reflects its positive or negative externalities in its production, use and disposal.
- 2c. Faith communities be encouraged to continue to model the right behaviour** through a review of their own investments and pension funds, and operations from buildings to transport and energy, food and waste. They can help educate their communities on how to be “conscious consumers” by aligning their values with their purchases, willingness to share, and how to campaign and put pressure on companies that are not changing fast enough.

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Frontiers at the Intersection of Governance, Faith, and Technology

Introduction

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has had an impact not only on the way that Europeans live their ordinary lives but also on the way they understand many of the aspects of their social structure. This also affects religion and religious freedom, especially the understanding of certain manifestations of religious freedom; some expressions of religion or belief in the public sphere; the interaction between religion, state and society; as well as the relationships between religion and science, between faith and reason.

Social cohesion and harmony; a culture of respect for other people's religious and moral choices; are permanent positive values. The COVID-19 crisis, however, has helped us to understand how necessary they are in our societies. Emergency situations reveal how much we esteem a society built on the solidarity of human beings who are able to see in each other not an enemy to beat but a fellow human being to help. Without these foundations, it is not possible to advance in sustainable development, which cannot be built exclusively from above and needs the contribution of the entire society.

The COVID-19 crisis has also demonstrated that responses to the pandemic have been more successful where channels of communication and cooperation between state/international organizations and religious/belief communities exist and have been properly relied on, and where governments have acted in consultation with religious as well as with other social and economic actors. And vice versa, where governments have fought the pandemic relying exclusively on their own resources, their reaction has been less effective and agile, to the detriment of their citizens.

In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic did not strictly raise new themes in governance, faith and technology, but has moved us to rethink old themes in new ways and in a new light.

The recommendations that follow focus on the relationship between religion, state and society in the context of human rights. We consider these recommendations valid not only for times of health emergency or crisis. The significance of the issues that are dealt with in this document may appear with more clarity under the current circumstances, but they are far-reaching and touch the very substance of societies that aspire to be founded on the recognition of and respect for human dignity and to pursue sustainable development in all areas.

Recommendations

1. In order to create a **political and legal framework favourable to the protection of human dignity** and the free, healthy and balanced development of every person's identity, measures must be taken to **reinforce the protection of human rights, democracy, the separation and reciprocal control of powers, the rule of law and good governance**. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the huge social costs of inequality and corruption and exacerbated new vulnerabilities in sectors such as health, big pharma, public procurement or the use of relief funds. Consequently, it is recommended to:
 - 1a. Encourage states to adopt measures for the restructuring of their national legal and political systems that are capable of preventing and combating corruption in the political, administrative and electoral sectors, privileging values such as justice, transparency, responsibility, accountability, impartiality, integrity and independence.
 - 1b. Prevent and combat corruption through education (at all levels—primary, secondary and tertiary), adopting educational policies that, in an integrated manner, promote ethical and integrity values and actively combat the emergence of the so-called “cultures of corruption”, building a solid and genuine culture of legality and respect for human rights and freedoms.
 - 1c. Implement and deepen international policies and programmes of assistance for the integral development of the most disadvantaged countries, with special emphasis on the so-called fragile states (i.e., those which are in a situation of post-conflict or recent democratisation), preventing the surge of phenomena of systemic corruption and state capture.
 - 1d. Deepen global legal cooperation policies and measures essentially aimed at preventing cross-border corruption, the investigation of multi-localised corrupt acts and the appropriate punishment of its agents.
 - 1e. Acknowledge the role that religious communities and religious leaders may have in combatting corruption when they are faithful to the true values of their respective traditions and refuse to cooperate, even indirectly, with corrupt regimes or practices in the public or the private sector.
 - 1f. Promote and support interdisciplinary and interreligious research and dialogue projects that, on an international scale, seek to address and understand the phenomenon of corruption in the public and private sectors and certain recent epiphenomena, such as corruption in the political, religious, justice, financial, health, pharmaceutical, scientific or sports sectors, promoting a culture of legality and integrity.

2. In order to **foster a culture of social cohesion and harmony based on the notion of human dignity**, it is necessary to promote in contemporary societies an **inclusive approach to the relationship between the exercise of freedom of religion or belief and the exercise of other fundamental freedoms**, especially in cases of the so-called conflicts of rights. This implies, among other things:

2a. Understanding that religion or belief are often essential to the identity of many individuals, groups and institutions. This in turn implies being aware that some of the common contemporary solutions for claims of non-discrimination based on other identity characteristics may de facto result in discrimination on the ground of religious/belief identity.

2b. Recognising the specificity of freedom of religion or belief in its individual and collective dimensions, as well as its non-subordinate nature vis-à-vis other fundamental rights; and being aware that the freedom of conscience of individuals and the religious autonomy of institutions entail the right to behave in accordance with one's own religious and moral principles insofar as no superior legal or social interest is endangered.

2c. Trying to avoid an excessive judicialization of conflicts between fundamental rights, facilitating alternative ways of solving such conflicts that are not based on the alleged moral superiority of one view over another.

2d. Encouraging courts to provide balanced judgments that take into account the need to protect the rights of both parties as much as possible, instead of affirming the absolute dominance or superiority of one over the other, in a way that ensures practical concordance and maximum effectiveness of competing rights.

2e. Allowing meaningful hearings on issues involving competing rights, interests and concerns, which can foster understanding and inclusion and help legislators, administrators and judges to devise better workable solutions.

3. **Education**, understood in its **broadest sense**, is key for a culture of social cohesion and harmony. Education naturally includes regular academic programmes, in public and private schools, and at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary). But it comprises also the training of public officials and judges, as well as professionals of communication; the use of the media and social networks; public speeches by members of governments and politicians, etc. A **positive approach** in this area would help prevent misconceptions and misperceptions of freedom of religion or belief as well as of religions or beliefs, their role in society and their essentiality for the identities of individuals and groups. With regard to the academic environment in particular:

3a. Academic programmes focused on teaching about religions and beliefs (their history, principles, values and contributions to society) can be a very helpful instrument to foster a culture of encounter, dialogue and mutual respect between citizens and groups with divergent beliefs, if they are designed and implemented in an appropriate manner and developed in accordance with recognised professional standards.

3b. Academic programmes (in private or public schools) focused on specific religions, run by the relevant religious communities, and aimed at transmitting their specific doctrines, can also be a useful instrument as far as they are permeated by an attitude of tolerance and respect for people holding different views and developed in accordance with recognised professional standards.

3c. Integrating theological or divinity studies in universities (private and public), either as stand-alone degrees or within the curricula of other degrees, can be efficient means to promote religious literacy, especially if this is done within an academic atmosphere characterised by intellectual freedom and integrity, as well as by the desire to perform objective and respectful analysis of religions, their doctrines and their history. An intellectual approach to religion, both on the secular and religious sides, without denying or undermining the faith element of religious beliefs, could facilitate a better mutual understanding between science and religion as much as an open-minded approach to science.

3d. Religious literacy comprises also an adequate education about freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental right, its significance and implications, within a conceptual framework of human rights as manifestations of respect for human dignity. Although such education is helpful in the entire academic setting, it is especially important in certain degrees such as law, political science, administration, governance, journalism and management.

4. The main **protagonists of social life have an enhanced responsibility in positively influencing or educating society** on the importance of respect for freedom of religion or belief in a broad sense, using means outside classic academic channels and institutions. In particular:

4a. Full compliance with the legal implications of the right to freedom of expression is compatible with finding ways, in contemporary societies, to stimulate a culture of respect among people's different choices in matters of religion or belief. Politicians, public officials, journalists, educators, and public figures and influencers in general, are especially responsible for the promotion and preservation of such culture, and they should shape their speech and messages accordingly.

4b. Religious leaders and representatives (of majority and minority religions) also have a very important role and responsibility when it comes to fostering a culture of

respect through their teaching on the basis of their own doctrines, in a way that makes clear that their commitment to freedom of religion or belief is aimed at the protection of the freedom of all and is not used simply as a cover for self-interest or for privileging one's own beliefs.

4c. Religious communities can make a significant contribution to educate the youth in ethical values shared in contemporary societies, many of which concern their responsibility in building a fairer and sustainable world. For instance: the equal dignity of all human beings; solidarity with particularly vulnerable persons; seeking that all people have the minimum material conditions necessary to live a truly human life; recognising that we are part of a complex natural system and committing to its protection; responsible use of new technologies; the positive and constructive use of social media, etc.

5. **Cooperation and dialogue between religions/beliefs, state, international organizations and society**, as well as **between religious/belief communities**, is of the utmost importance to making real progress in sustainable development, economic as well as social. Consequently, recommendations include:

5a. The establishment, design and proper functioning of institutional channels and platforms for mutual cooperation and dialogue between state/international organizations and religious/belief communities as part of ordinary dynamics of communication between public authorities and civil society. As the COVID-19 emergency has demonstrated, this aspect of the interaction between state and society is beneficial for all citizens.

5b. Ensuring that smaller religious groups are not left out of that process of dialogue and cooperation even if their size may not justify their inclusion in institutional channels. Other instruments, such as public hearings or informal consultations, could be used to that purpose.

5c. Positive dialogue and cooperation between religious communities themselves as a way to enhance social cohesion and harmony. With full respect to religious autonomy, state and international institutions could intervene as facilitators of such interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

6. The development of **plural societies** based on the mutual respect of different religions or worldviews requires an **adequate and coordinated protection of freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief** that takes into account the various competing interests. To that end, it is recommended that states:

6a. Carefully define hate speech, as a matter of media and social media regulation, in a way that prevents humiliation, dehumanisation, discrimination, persecution and aggression against individuals and groups. At the same time, this should never call into question the possibility of respectfully, seriously and critically assessing and discussing political and religious ideologies and doctrines in the public sphere.

6b. Recognise the decisive role that the cooperation of religious communities may play in the active fight against hate speech, using new technologies as well as more traditional means such as sermons, teaching, public statements, etc. For instance: in disseminating adequate information about other religions; in conveying messages of respect for the beliefs and morals of others; in making joint public statements unambiguously condemning episodes of religious hatred or violence; in transmitting the proper doctrine of their own religion with regard to the need to avoid violence and to search for ways of peaceful and harmonic living together; in discrediting explicitly the position and messages of hate speakers; and/or in obtaining information about hate speakers.

6c. Distinguish hate speech (e.g. homophobic or xenophobic speech) from the explanation or teaching of religious moral doctrines regarding sexual relationships and practices, or especially binding moral obligations with regard to members of one's own religious community, as well as the teaching of religious dogmas concerning what are considered essential and ultimate truths in a particular religious tradition. It is equally important to differentiate between firmness in one's own beliefs and intolerance of the beliefs or practices of others.

7. In order to ensure that the benefits of technological innovation can be shared in a post-COVID-19 world, it is recommended that states:

7a. Create transnational institutional and digital platforms for public discussion on ethical, legal and social challenges arising from rapid innovation in areas such as artificial intelligence, genetics and nanotechnology; favouring a multi and interdisciplinary, transparent and participatory approach, with the strong involvement of civil society, including different religious communities.

7b. Make efforts to create and implement an internationally accepted and global legal regime on artificial intelligence, genetics and nanotechnology that protects the human person, stimulates scientific progress and meets the needs of the most vulnerable social groups.

7c. Promote international dialogue and cooperation in the development of effective, safe and sustainable technical and technological solutions, which can be realistically

accessed and implemented by countries with lower levels of economic and scientific development.

8. Specific attention must be paid to sacred sites and places of worship and meeting, as they are one of the essential manifestations of freedom of religion or belief in its collective dimension. In addition to the relevant religious communities, governments also have the responsibility to ensure that these sites contribute to the smooth functioning of society instead of becoming a problem for society. To that purpose it is recommended:

8a. To reflect carefully on which legitimate limitations can be imposed by governments on the use of places of worship and meeting in situations of health emergency. State action aimed at protecting public health needs to be reconciled, as much as possible, with the importance that worship, and collective prayer or meetings have for different religious communities. Governments should follow an adequate process of consultation with religious representatives before enacting rules imposing hygienic and safety conditions that restrict the use of the relevant religious places. In turn, religious communities must cooperate with governments and be flexible when it comes to adapting their rules and liturgy in the interests of public health.

8b. To consider that sacred sites are often part of the heritage of a country and hence an integral element of its history, culture and tradition; the same applies to religious symbols, ceremonies and other intangible heritage. The preservation of religious heritage constitutes a paramount interest not only of religious communities but also of the entire society, and it is therefore compatible with the state's religious neutrality. It entails economic investment and cooperation with the relevant religious communities. The conservation of religious heritage also has a significant educational function and requires recognising and respecting the religious origin, purpose and meaning of sacred sites, even in the cases where those sites have lost their original religious use. The state's action must be aimed not only at preserving the religious heritage that reflects the beliefs and tradition of the majority but also that of minority religions, to facilitate that they are properly integrated into and not excluded from social life.

8c. To remember that places of worship and meeting without particular value as historic heritage are also an important part of the culture in a different sense: they are manifestations of the spirituality of a society and expressions of the exercise of the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief.

8d. To keep in mind that states have the obligation to protect sacred sites (with or without value as historic heritage) against violence, vandalism and terrorist attacks.

Firmness in such protection and, when appropriate, prosecution of those acts are an effective way to combat hate crimes and to create a culture of respect.

8e. To deal carefully with traditional sacred sites whose history reflects the layers of various religious sensibilities. Universal homogeneous solutions are often inadequate in such situations, which require a case-by-case analysis that pays attention to the particular history and characteristics of each site. This is especially important in those cases where inappropriate treatment may lead to social tension, or even geopolitical or armed conflicts.

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