**G20 Interfaith Forum October 13-17, 2020**

**Religious Cultural Heritage, Human Dignity, and Sustainable Development (PD02)** October 13

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***Summary*:** This two-hour panel reflects a continuing focus of the G20 Interfaith Forum on the topic of religious cultural heritage. During 2020 (with Saudi Arabia as the G20 chair), the Forum’s partnership with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) gave the issue particular prominence. Professor Peter Petkoff guided a multi-part discussion with six panelists that focused on the ideas and modalities involved in broadening approaches to religious cultural heritage from the traditionally narrow focus on protecting sites to an understanding that links tangible and intangible culture and human rights in international law and conventions. The discussion centered on situating issues involving protection and preservation of religious cultural heritage within the broad global agenda reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Among leading topics were links between religious cultural heritage and peacebuilding and security agendas, including genocide prevention. Actions on religious cultural heritage can promote social cohesion or its opposite, if approaches are exclusive or divisive. Education and environmental protection are also involved (the latter primarily in relation to population displacement). Specific roles of religious cultural heritage within the broader framing of cultural heritage was a central theme, focusing both on intrinsic rights to protection of religious sites and the ties to peacebuilding and violence and fragility. International legal instruments and soft power instruments were explored, especially the 2019 United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites (that followed from the bombings of mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand). The topic was thus linked inter alia to the challenges of hate speech and interreligious tensions. Among approaches discussed (with positive and less positive potential) was the “museumification” of heritage. A common theme was the primary responsibilities of nation states as duty bearers, but also the importance of international legal instruments, soft power, and norms that both highlight the importance of the issues and reflect the transnational importance of both religious communities and religious cultural heritage. There were strong assertions (notably by Msgr. David Jaeger) of private property as the foundation for approaches and solutions. Education was highlighted repeatedly as a vital need and theme, with a prime example the “Faith for Rights” framework and its #Faith4Rights toolkit that highlights peer-to-peer learning. A focus on linking protection and preservation of religious cultural heritage is vital for peacebuilding as religious tangible sites and even intangible culture often become the first casualties of conflicts. Examples cited included New Zealand, Cyprus, Turkey, Oxford, and an unnamed country.

Ideas for future action focused on the need to address the topic with multi-stakeholder, inclusive approaches, to emphasize dialogue, and to avoid the common tendency to siloes, both within the United Nations system and at national levels. Formal international legal instruments can play important roles alongside less formal instruments and norms and “soft power.” The rights but also responsibilities of religious leaders and communities was emphasized alongside the primary responsibility of nation states. Monitoring and implementation are the central issues looking ahead. A central question is how to integrate heritage preservation into future development conversations, so governments both preserve cultural heritage while advancing development. Sustainable peace thus requires further investment and awareness of these broader dimension of culture and specifically religious culture.

***Panel Description (from program)*:** Religious cultural heritage is emerging as a new engagement point for reaching the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This adds an important dimension to ongoing work on protecting sacred sites. New thinking points to ways that protecting and cultivating religious cultural heritage can advance many SDGs. Sacred sites serve as a meeting point for development of dialogical civic spaces and as an area for exchange in the religious and cultural spheres. At the same time, work in this area has become more complex because shared and contested sites have been weaponised as focal points of acts of religious or ethnic hatred and of state-sponsored geopolitical agendas. This raises a number of challenges of how to manage complex custodianship relationships of religious associations and heritage authorities without infringing upon religious autonomy and freedom of religion or belief on the one hand, and wider civic and cultural expectations on the other. This session builds on the important work and leadership of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and other stakeholders to suggest important ways that the safeguarding of sacred sites and religious cultural heritage can help further broader initiatives to advance sustainable development goals.

***Moderator****:* **Prof. Peter Petkoff**, Director of the Religion, Law and International Relations Programme, Centre for Religion and Culture at Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

***Speakers:***

**H.R.H. Amb. Princess Haifa al-Mograin**, Permanent Delegate of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; Chair of the G20 Development Working Group

**Msgr. David-Maria A. Jaeger OFM**, Prelate Auditor of the Court of the Roman Rota (video recordings)

**Ms. Ana Jimenez**, Political Advisor at United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

**Prof. Paul Morris**, UNESCO Chair in Interreligious Understanding and Relations at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

**Dr. Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir**, Non-Resident Research Associate at Department of Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh, USA

**Dr. Michael Wiener**, Human Rights Officer at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

**Prof. Peter Petkoff’s** introduction (as moderator): No international legal instruments define religious cultural heritage per se, but interest in different dimensions of the topic is growing, in different parts of the world, in various settings. These dimensions include the roles of religious places of worship, human rights, rights to private property, weaponization of religion, national security, genocide prevention, religious exceptionalism, legacies of colonization, and environmental protection (note recent report by UN Rapporteur on Cultural Rights Karima Bennoune). These issues tie to different Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The first question before the panel is how preservation of religious cultural heritage might contribute to building dialogical and inclusive civic spaces and to the wider achievement of the SDGs.

**H.R.H. Amb. Princess Haifa al-Mograin.** There are strong linkages between cultural heritage

and sustainable development. Religious cultural heritage, tangible or intangible, is one aspect of cultural heritage: one out of five UNESCO sites has religious significance, giving more focus to religious dimensions. At issue is the involvement and responsibilities of state parties and their roles in international conventions, especially countries that hold religious cultural heritage. How do parties work to protect and preserve such sites and properties and advance the SDGs at the same time? It requires understanding and acting at a larger scale than the sites themselves. The SDGs are involved in different ways. SDG 11 relates directly to culture, but the key is interrelationships among SDGs; thus SDG 16 which emphasizes peace, justice and strong institutions is involved as well as goals for inclusivity and environmental protection as well as economic growth. Thus the SDGs are definitely involved, but the responsibility falls on states. The central question therefore is how to integrate heritage preservation into future development conversations, so governments both preserve cultural heritage while advancing development.

**Petkoff:** Bringing Paul Morris into the conversation, Petkoff asked him to focus especially on links between tangible and intangible cultural property, including issues related to indigenous peoples.

**Prof. Paul Morris**. Religious dimensions are increasingly and in ongoing ways prioritized in various settings. Religious heritage, both tangible and intangible, is not just a sub-category of cultural heritage but an important dimension in itself. The UNESCO and the broader international agendas are seeing an increasing appreciation for intercultural dimensions within national settings, including the need for dialogue, within, across, and between nations, but also recognition that a central part of intercultural experience and education relates to religious dimensions and thus the need for interreligious or intercultural dialogue and learning. The increasing appreciation of these broader notions of cultural heritage is not just a national agenda but one that involves minority communities including indigenous communities (first peoples); this has been slow in coming but it is arriving. It is not a separate SDG but is incorporated in different targets. Religion is embedded in people’s experience and this broadening out of understandings of cultural heritage from a rather narrow notion on physical preservation to a broader understanding of diverse historical experience and of the significance also of intangible heritage for identity is an important development. Religion plays a central and only recently acknowledged role, that has its own specificities, resonances, and contours. The opposite of harmonious relationships are relationships of conflict. Religious tangible sites and even intangible culture often become the first casualties of conflicts, and sustainable peace thus requires further investment and awareness of these broader dimension of culture and specifically religious culture. Religious cultural heritage is an integral and essential part of post-colonial understandings of cultural heritage.

**PP:** And the broadening also extends to the environment, though a different route, that links destruction of the environment to displacement of peoples. What is the role of weaponization of heritage? The role of museums for keeping the peace, broadening dialogical civic spaces?

**Dr. Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir**: Religious cultural heritage has multiple aspects and one is what can be referred to as a ‘museumification’ of religious heritage sites. This concept is a double-edged sword. It can involve a site essentially being sterilized of its sacred meaning, or it can be used as a tool to acknowledge multiple strands of heritage. A negative, worst case scenario of what not to do is the case of Hagia Sophia (Istanbul, Turkey). This ancient Orthodox structure, built in Byzantine times, after the conquest of Constantinople, became a mosque and served as a mosque for centuries, until it was museumified in 1934, when Turkey became a secular nation state. In this museum state, it had the potential to illustrate both its Christian and Muslim states, and it was a site of co-existence. Under a controversial decision by Erdogan, Hagia Sophia has reverted back to a mosque. It now highlights only one past, above the others, and the fact that the conversion was made with a “conquest” narrative accentuates the problem. The nation state has been a dominating force in this process, as the change was essentially managed as a symbol of conquest. This also redefines the nature of the nation state, which is no longer the custodian, the steward, protecting Hagia Sofia for posterity, but the dominating force. This undermines pluralism, as it creates a division within the people, a detrimental inequality, that undermines coexistence, and the sense of valuing the different backgrounds equally.

**PP**: This brings into focus the delicate balance between tangible and intangible culture. Should the state steer cultural heritage in a certain direction? How could we imagine religious sites?

**Msgr. David-Maria A. Jaeger OFM.**  We can all agree here that sacred sites are important, with their importance going beyond a sacred destination, serving as monuments, a place of meeting, even roles in peacemaking and dialogue. But we must never forget that essentially, overridingly their importance is as sacred sites and that must prevail over everything else. This is important to say because we call on the civil community to protect them first and foremost as sacred sites. With all other aspects – temporal, political, etc.--we must recognize the values that are about transcendence. Humankind has a vocation that goes beyond the temporal. This can only have expression in history, in time and space. That is the first claim on protection of holy sites. Even by politics in free countries, this must not be not subordinated to the secular. “I say this having worked on these topics all my life.” Sacred sites have many benefits, but their principle value is as sacred sites. They must be protected as such, as a sign that the world community respects their transcendental value. The importance of the sacred must have expression in history and culture.

**PP**: How do these issues connect to the SDGs? Why should the G20 focus on cultural heritage? How will it help advance action plans related to SDG achievement? Dialogic civil spaces are important in developing thriving communities.

**Dr. Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir**: The most crucial part of sustainable development is peacebuilding and keeping peace, and religious cultural heritage monuments have significant links to peacebuilding and reconciliation. There are different ways to engage practically, include two that are “outside the box”. The current framework of ‘preservation’ is based on the notion of nation states, and this can be a critical impediment for peacebuilding. A nation state which has sovereignty can do what it pleases, without involvement of different groups (the Hagia Sophia example). Such approaches can involve important blind spots. Those involved in religious cultural heritage share a belief in the goodness of humanity which can put blinkers on how we see the world, so we miss seeing conflict and contestation as we should. A key to peacebuilding and reconciliation is acknowledgment of the tragedy a particular community went through. Taking Turkey again, the example of the Armenian tragedy of 1915 needs to be taken into account, otherwise reconciliation is not possible. This requires thinking creatively about the roles of religious heritage. On Armenia, there are two examples to point to, one less positive—where a site is beautifully preserved, essentially a museum that Armenians can use once a year, the other in Western Turkey where restoration was done with the involvement of the Armenian community, acknowledging the hardships of different communities. It is important to go beyond the nation state as the sole decision maker and to consider the meaning of a site to various communities. Contributed to peacebuilding in the area.

**PP:** Bringing Michael Wiener into the conversation, he asks him to pursue how the issues of cultural religious heritage are linked to the SDGs.

**Dr. Michael Wiener**: Several specific SDGs and targets, individually and collectively, highlight the significance of religious cultural heritage and offer direct points of entry: target 16.1, which is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere, offers an obvious link to the peacebuilding component everywhere; SDG 11, which is to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is also involved and there is a direct reference to cultural heritage in target 11.4, which refers to efforts tostrengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage. Add to this Target 10.2, which refers to inclusion, “to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status”. Thus there are three direct entry points which make it obvious why religious cultural heritage is important for peacebuilding and in implementing the SDGs.

Taking a concrete example as an illustration, these issues fall within the context of the mandate practice of the UN special rapporteurs, on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and on Cultural Rights, both of whom have dealt with related questions in their regular reports. Furthermore, the latest OHCHR report on the question of human rights in Cyprus has specific and concrete references to sustained interreligious dialogue and capacity building initiatives under the Faith for Rights framework, by the religious leaders and faith communities, and also refers in its conclusions to the ongoing revitalization of religious and cultural heritage sites. So here we see the importance and contribution not only by peace talks of the political leaders but also the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, which has done important work over the last decade, opening churches and mosques which had been closed for decades, for worship, with full cooperation by the religious communities involved, despite the political climate. The report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief refers to the extensive renovation of a church and monastery, and it recommended that they be used for religious purposes and be accessible to religious communities. The renovated places should be accessible to the community for worship, which is sometimes forgotten in restoration projects. The point is that cultural heritage, religion, and peacebuilding should not be seen in siloes, but they need to work in sync. We need to note the interdependencies among them.

**PP**: This also links tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

**Princess Haifa.**  I always prefer to look forward as we address issues, looking for ways to admire what is being done but also at ways to improve it. Multiple dimensions and actors need to be addressed, including under the UNESCO umbrella. We need to work together to protect and promote cultural heritage, including tangible and intangible heritage, including religious heritage. The multidimensional nature is important. State parties are important. Saudi Arabia is a member of different committees including the World Heritage Committee. Nation states have responsibilities for protecting sites with international value. The platform of international conventions can offer a good “playground” for working together, including raising awareness. It is not only the physical but also the human side; education is also important. NGOs have roles to play in informing people as do social media outlets. Media partners might explore their roles. Important things are being done, among them the UNAOC Plan of Action for Safeguarding Religious Sites. Goal 17 of the SDGs (partnerships) is important. We can strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. It is important to work together to mitigate the use of hate speech. In Saudi Arabia, there is a center for combatting extreme ideologies, online and offline. We have an exciting journey ahead. Many parties and elements are necessary to move forward, including political will.

**PP** asks Ana Jimenez how religious heritage plays roles in SDGs?

**Ms. Ana Jimenez:**  The Plan of Action is a United Nations Plan, though the UN Alliance of Civilizations has a responsibility for coordinating its implementation. Several goals and targets are indeed relevant (11 and 14). Education is extremely important, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Not working in silos is important, to bring in all stakeholders. The extensive consultation that was undertaken in preparing the Plan of Action highlighted the tendency to work in silos. Many have views about how to do things, but harmonization is less clear.

**PP:** asks Paul Morris for more detail on indigenous cultural heritage, including the urgency and dangers involved.

**Paul Morris**: Awareness is growing of the significance of religion as a discreet part of culture that is part of the decolonization of UNESCO and the UN. In my neck of the woods, a part of that decolonization is to recognize the limitations of the western categorizations of religious heritage. In parts of New Zealand, the understanding of connections between people and sacred sites is often done through understanding sites as persons, and so people speak of their ancestors as a mountain, a river, a place. The tendency for scholars of religion who have seen this as metaphors, symbolic forms of identity, has changed in the past decade and a half, as the view is narrow. A series of sites, an area of indigenous rainforest, a river, in New Zealand law have been granted the status of ongoing persons, different from people persons, but as legal personalities they are able to draw on legal and heritage resources for their own protection. Modern industrialization and agribusiness can do harm to religion and religious sensibilities, so this is a creative actuality on future possibility to broaden our understanding of religious cultural heritage and investigating and applying new modes of protection, of thinking, that broaden out our understanding of religious identity and connection, and how community and environment are linked in ways that have become European-based and detached. These reflections have allowed other religious communities to in turn rethink the categorization of their own links between sacred places and specific communities and the duration of the community in relation to specific sites. This also operates in relation to intangible cultural heritage in various ways. There are legal avenues for the protection of language, particular practices, concerns, ways of incorporating their preservation into contemporary legislation and mores and practices.

**PP:** Protection of private property should be central to giving communities access to the sites, independently from excessive state interference.

**Msgr. David Jaeger.** For me, the protections that we, as religious communities, ask are not extravagant. They always start, in my work (writing, in the field) with the protection of private property, which is fundamental, the best there is. Unless there is respect for the right of private property of sacred places, it is useless to build a second floor when the foundations of the first floor are lacking. The rights of private property, for the religious community concerned should be the normal situation. It is in practice their property, not anyone else’s. If we build on my premise, it is prevailingly, overridingly a sacred site. Nobody else has any business being the owner. Even where we have habitually opened the sacred places to visitors, after all, we want visitors, outside hours of worship reserved to members of the same religion quite properly, we all see them as witnesses to who we are, as a way to introduce ourselves, to commend our own beliefs to others. Good will towards ourselves, or for some religions which have a universal reach, in order to invite them to consider joining us. It is in our interest essentially to have visitors, but by opening them, even as we keep them open we must make the point that visitors are there on sufferance, by license, with our permission. And I have consistently recommended this approach to any who have asked or not. Takes the example of Christ Church, Oxford, or Christ Church Meadow, which is regularly open to visitors and draws from a world wide community of aficionados to look at the marvels there. But there is a sign that says “this is CCM, a private property, you are here by their permission alone.” Thus religious leaders have the right to shut down sites; it is their site.

**PP**: Turns to look more closely at recent projects spearheaded by UNAOC, focusing on new policy approaches to protection of places of worship. The project was originally driven by security concerns but it goes beyond.

**Ana Jimenez.** The [Plan of Action](https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/12-09-2019-UNAOC-PoA-Religious-Sites.pdf)[[1]](#footnote-1), in its origins, was very much linked to the security issue and specifically to the terrorist attacks against mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019. The Plan of Action was prepared after an extensive and expansive consultation process, reflecting an effort to bring together different aspects. It was never intended to be an academic exercise but a framework for action. It includes recommendations on prevention, preparedness, and response. Thus it involves a broader approach than security. In prevention, key areas include education and hate speech. The Christchurch call for action, has now 51 signatories. Nation states are to work with civil society. Religious leaders are to work with their own communities to build spaces for dialogue and become more savvy on online education tools: to be proactive, not reactive. The approach is primarily preventive and aims to bring together many stakeholders with a focus on education. The second part focuses on preparedness, including response to attacks, risk assessment, and national plans for protection of sites. Building trust is encouraged. A global communications campaign was launched in UNAOC event at the end of September. To reinforce relationships between personal links to religious sites: how to get the special connection to religious sites, can be part of community. Inviting global youth and religious actors to submit multi-media stories to build support, enhance solidarity, stress the universality of religious sites and their links to the social fabric of societies. UNAOC is looking at possible United Nations support and continuing dialogue with religious leaders, with implementation in mind. Avoid a siloed approach.

**Paul Morris** brought a perspective from New Zealand, since the Plan of Action responded to the events in Christchurch. The security aspects should not be minimized: the attacks brought a recognition of the vulnerability of places of worship. They are not safe and secure sanctuaries. If those aspects are not understood, the preservation of physical sites and intangible heritage is problematic. There have been discussions about hate speech including legislation and positive ways of combatting it. Promising things are a comprehensive mapping of religious sites, and recognition that religious diversity is a fact for all nation state actors. The preservation of particular sites can be both inclusive or exclusive consequences. It promises creating a space for religious voices including grass roots, to be part of the discussion. The real test will be when detailed plans are developed and promise of grass roots involvement. This is promising, sanctioned at the highest levels, and could play significant role in bringing religious cultural heritage to the SDGs.

**PP**: Asks how the Plan of Action is seen from Paris and Geneva (UNESCO, UN in Geneva):

**Princess Haifa**: The Plan of Action can play an important role, depending of course on implementation. How applicable are preventive and preparedness aspects? We can be cornered into being reactive, so the challenge is to be proactive. Planning has been impressive. Much political will is needed. The recommendations are tangible and concrete. Stakeholders can identify and adopt actions. Admire the way they highlight roles of education, capacity building, media.

**Michael Wiener**:emphasized two prior points: that the real test comes with implementation, especially at the grassroots level, and that the Plan is a UN plan of action, without any siloes within the UN system. The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights is working closely with other offices, especially on hate speech and protection of sites. An example, launched earlier this year, is the “Faith for Rights” framework and toolkit which is mainstreamed with the UN Plans of Action. Various modules of the #Faith4Rights toolkit focus on constructive reading of religious texts, monitoring of hate speech, children and youth, as well as ethical and spiritual leverage. The toolkit emphasizes inclusive education, special forms of education, especially peer-to-peer learning, which has been piloted through a host of webinars, the most effective way of reaching a wide variety of people. The approach is to engage many, not with a top-down approach, or indoctrination, but sharing experiences, exercises, storytelling. The consistent pattern of killings, abductions, threats and intimidation of religious figures in Afghanistan was documented by UNAMA report on attacks on places of worship and worshipers. The UN office there explained the difficult overlap between international human rights law and international humanitarian law. These explicitly prohibit attacks on places of worship. The two legal regimes can help each other. UN special procedures and treaty bodies have explained this also, stressing that they are not mutually exclusive, but complementary. General comments of the Human Rights Committee, including the most recent general comment no. 37 adopted in July 2020, reiterates that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights applies in situations of armed conflict. International humanitarian law may be especially relevant for the interpretation of Covenant rights. No silos in UN. In that sense and spirit, protection and preservation of religious sites is our shared goal.

**PP:** Religious actors should see themselves as co-implementors. Next sequence, Jaeger, protection makes religious actors genuine agents.

**Msgr. David Jaeger**. A concrete example, in one country, I know well and follow closely, in the early oughts. The government at the time gave permission to build right next to one of the most important sacred sites a building, an institution meant to be directly aggressive against that sacred site. DJ was part of the Church response, but the protest fell on deaf ears. The Church there has a small minority, no political role whatsoever. Religious pluralism is important to that country; many people come to see shrines as sites that are important to them. Christians agreed to close doors to sacred sites in protest. That rattled those who were about to allow a provocation. That made a difference. At first public authorities said they could not do that, how dare they think they could shut the doors to visitors. The response: we don’t want to shut the doors, take delight that people from all over want to come to visit, to share with the rest of humanity, or the part that cares, the beauties of works of art and architecture. It’s free, don’t take any revenue, a service we render with culturally significant places, but we have the right to shut them down, and are doing that now, on an emergency basis, for extreme reasons. If take away have taken everything away.

**PP** religious actors have right to protect. International human rights mechanisms, discourse on protection of religious cultural heritage in the spectrum of human rights responsibilities. How stakeholders might be involved in implementing commitments.

**Michael Wiener**: Various human rights mechanisms at the United Nations level, including Treaty bodies and Special Rapporteurs, have come up over the last decades with a kind of case law on various questions related to religious heritage. Four categories are involved: First, construction and ownership of religious sites, including restrictions imposed by the State, competing claims over places of workshop, passing of ownership, and confiscation of property. Second: accessing and using religious sites. Third, protection of religious sites from attacks, including the role of states but often attacks come from non-state actors. Fourth, preservation of religious sites, which may involve practical problems. Underlying fundamental question: in international law, the main duty bearers are states, but non-state actors are also involved, with important and often negative impact. Special rapporteurs and treaty bodies have recognized the importance of actions by non-state actors, including armed groups, with or without effective control of territory. He refers to a 2001 letter by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to the Taliban leader following the destruction of Bamiyan Buddhist stature, which also triggered a UN General Assembly resolution in May 2001 on protection of religious sites. Thus there was a response by the international community to the incident. Furthermore, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reported about attacks by ISIS on places of worship, noting that ISIS had systematically denied basic human rights and freedoms. In the case of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, OHCHR reported about setting on fire of churches, which was qualified as human rights violations. The possible misuse of places of worship had already been discussed by the Sub-Commission’s Special Rapporteur Krishnaswami in 1960, who stressed that if subversive acts are committed from a place of worship by a cleric, “neither his robe nor his pulpit will be a defense”.

**PP**: Turns to Princess Haifa on religious cultural heritage protection: is it likely to achieve effectively SDGs? Are such initiatives likely to make religious actors more human rights/international law friendly?

**Princess Haifa**: There is much room for improvement. Human rights are a cornerstone of the SDGs. Article 18 of UDHR, freedom of religion. If we are going to achieve the SDGs, human rights are important. On religious leader roles, goes both ways, as rights holders and duty bearers. How to define the right spaces to communicate, ideas, fight hate speech, find the right legal mechanisms. Another dimension as duty bearers, religious leaders have great roles. Enhance understanding, remove negative stereotypes, more moderate understanding of religion. More research and technical dimensions need to be addressed; political will has always to be there. NGOs roles are important. She sees hope in the COVID crisis: go back to human nature, reconnect with ourselves spiritually and socially. Look forward to recommendations of this meeting.

**Ana Jimenez:** Comprehensive approaches are needed for Agenda 2030 that include human rights and attention to religious cultural heritage. The High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNAOC are working together, also with the Office on Genocide Prevention to implement the Plan of Action, promote the education component, using a human rights lens. It is important to look for interlinkages and work on issues in a very action, community-oriented manner. Local communities must feel that international organizations are working with them to protect their own religious sites better, partnerships. All levels are involved.

**Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir**: Case law is important, emerging from experience. A crucial point that makes her optimistic, is that understanding is the most important foundation for basic rights and freedoms for all. Article 18 but not limited to it. In discussing basic rights and freedoms, can use framework of law to protect religious sites and make them places of peacebuilding. Importance of the fundamental question of non-state actor involvement. Critically important for globally dispersed religious communities, no longer part of decision making for their heritage sites, no longer in state. Mechanisms to bring in non-state actors to this discussion. Balance involvement of nation states as primary actors, framework that defines our relationships with religious cultural heritage.

**Paul Morris**. Worry slightly about mirror of human rights regime, a cosmopolitan, cosmopious perspectives, dominated by our own human rights, the regime of the nation state, but always dependent on a broader international perspective beyond the nation state. In relation to cultural heritage and the current crisis, the fragility of institutions and of the international order is important. Our support for the international framework is at critical juncture, with opportunities for mobilization of transnational communities. To preserve religious cultural heritage but to call it out where communities are oppressed, physical sites are being destroyed as well as intangible assets are threatened by state policies. The International human rights regime should call for a broader, cosmopietist perspective, internationalize our concerns as a vertical approach that links to more local interests.

**PP** Important projects involve drafting conventions and other forms of soft law, to develop more sophisticated good practices that incorporate living communities with their own dynamics, individual and collective rights. Religious actors can become savvier on international legal tools. To protect rights. Social and political rights, traditional cultural expression, knowledge. Opportunity to bring this back into the conversation.

**Msgr. David Jaeger**. He is part of three international initiatives to put forward international norms, eventually by conventions. All of those groups focus on the rights of private property. Experience teaches that this is the fundamental right. Then proceed with federal law as in the US, which gives greater priority to sacred property. I can establish who, what, when, on what conditions people can be admitted, how they must behave there. If you recognize that, you don’t go about nationalizing or expropriating for national use, that is basic. If you want to add to that, God bless you. Then can work from there to make protection more effective. Put in national conventions, bodies to monitor. Monitoring is vital, not the same as enforcing. Ideally national conventions on all sorts of rights are in themselves a great good. A convention is always valuable as it creates its own dynamic. Used to scoff at Helsinki documents on human rights; the final protocol was not even a legally binding treaty, yet the Soviet Union signed on and it created a dynamic that no one could have foreseen, empowering enslaved populations of Central and Eastern Europe. A convention creates a new dynamic. If it has an enforcement mechanism that is best, with monitoring in the middle. Monitoring means that violations are made known, which is very important. No government that does not care about its public image. These can always be set up.

**PP**: Importance of international law and soft law tools. Winds up the conversation.

1. The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship (September 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)