



FOUNDATION FOR
**INTERCULTURAL &
INTERRELIGIOUS**
DIALOGUE INITIATIVES



**REPORT ON THE CELEBRATION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL DAY COMMEMORATING THE VICTIMS
OF ACTS OF VIOLENCE BASED ON RELIGION OR
BELIEF ON 22 AUGUST 2019**

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ABOUT THE DAY

On the 28th of May 2019, the United Nations General Assembly, by resolution A/RES/73/xx officially designated August 22 as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. The resolution, approved by consensus, hopes to help combat hate crimes and acts of violence related to religion or belief, and further strengthen inter-religious dialogue. Unfortunately, a vast majority of the states who have voted this day into existence are witnessing an alarming spike in hate speech and incitement to violence against individuals or communities, based on their identity (religion or belief). The resolution was approved in the months following attacks on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the targeting of Christians in Sri Lanka during Easter Sunday. These horrible tragedies serve as a reminder to leaders and citizens across the world that they must get involved as ambassadors for tolerance, acceptance and dialogue. 2019 marks the very first year August 22 is celebrated around the globe after it was officially designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief.

This Day is also a celebration of the efforts of many organizations and individuals who continue to contribute in different ways to mitigate (and one day end) religious violence in our communities around the world. The path to promoting religious tolerance in our communities is not an easy one but with commitment and perseverance we see hope in bringing communities together to live in dignity and in dialogue.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

There are continuing acts of intolerance and violence based on religion or belief against individuals, including against persons belonging to religious communities and religious minorities around the world. The number and intensity of such incidents, which are often of a criminal nature and may have international characteristics, are increasing. According to Pew Research Center, in 2018 more than a quarter of the world's countries experienced a high incidence of hostilities motivated by religious hatred, mob violence related to religion, terrorism, and harassment of women for violating religious codes. In the same vein, a 2018 Minority Rights Group report indicates that mass killings and other atrocities are increasing in war-torn and stable countries alike. Bloody encounters were recorded in over 50 countries across the globe. The reported deadly incidents involving minorities were concentrated in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, India, Myanmar, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a Foundation, we look forward to working with state and non-state actors to find attainable solutions to end such acts of violence in the communities we serve.



OUR COMMITMENT TO THE DAY

As a newly founded and registered charitable organization in Alberta (Canada), the Foundation for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Initiatives (FIIDI) remains committed at all levels, to promote intercultural and interreligious understanding and to empower communities in peacebuilding activities that contribute to living together in dignity and dialogue. This year, FIIDI provided small grants and technical support for activities to observe the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief in four (4) West African countries, namely: Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. This commitment amplifies our awareness (education) based approach to address and prevent religious and ethnic violence affecting the communities we serve in Canada and Africa.

NIGERIA

As Country Representative, Olushola Akande organized a community outreach event on behalf of FIIDI in Port Harcourt (Nigeria) on 22 August 2019. The aim of the community outreach was to observe the International Day by raising public awareness of the problem of religious violence in their communities. The event brought together 31 participants from civil society organizations, community leaders, religious leaders, young people and other members of society in the name of peace. As part of the activities



marking the event, FIIDI Country Representative, Mr. Olushola Akande presented FIIDI Community Peace Leadership Awards to some outstanding Community Leaders for their contribution in promoting tolerance, acceptance and peaceful coexistence in their respective communities over the years. The Nigerian constitution stipulates that neither the federal nor the state governments shall establish a state religion and prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Unfortunately, Nigeria is renowned for violence based on religion or belief and ethnic tensions are high. Nigeria is a large country both in terms of size, population, and importance on both a regional and global scale and few issues are as central to the national ethos as religion.

BURKINA FASO

In response to the invitation by the United Nations General Assembly to observe 22 August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, FIIDI funded L'Association pour la Solidarité et le Développement des Jeunes (ASDJ) to celebrate the Day by organizing a Press Conference in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) on Thursday 22 August 2019. According to the May 18, 2019 New York Times Report (Burkina Faso Wracked by Escalating Violence), it stated that on April 29, gunmen killed a Protestant Pastor and five Parishioners. On May 12, six Catholics were shot to death and their Church burned. The next day, four other Catholics were killed. These deadly tragedies prompted President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, to warn the public that the terrorists appear to have shifted their goals from stoking conflict between farmers and herders to inducing a similar divide between Muslims and Christians in Burkina Faso. The press conference attracted about 20 participants mainly from the print and electronic media.



THE GAMBIA

Youth Power Network International (YPNI) was funded by FIIDI to join the world in observing the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. YPNI organized a community outreach event that brought together 17 participants from the print and electronic media, community youth leaders as well as religious leaders in Serekunda (The Gambia) on 22 August 2019. As one of the Speakers, the Imam of Latrikunda, Basiru Drammeh pointed out that the current state of cultural and religious intolerance in the community is due to lack of proper knowledge about other religions. He encouraged parents to teach their children on tolerance at home. He further stated that another cause of religious intolerance is mainly selective knowledge, in which a whole portion of information is hidden from the masses to suite one's perception of things. In the same vein, Pastor Papa Dacosta stressed the important role of community and religious leaders in addressing and preventing cultural and religious violence. He pointed out that leaders usually take the wrong perspective instead of serving the people. The Gambia is renowned for religious tolerance where Muslims and Christians collaborate and interact with each other peacefully. Even with the estimated 95.7% of the population being Muslim, 4.2% Christians and 1% of other beliefs; minority communities are rarely targeted because of their beliefs. However, much awareness about the problem of religious violence is needed for the citizens to continue to enjoy religious tolerance in The Gambia.

SIERRA LEONE

As one of FIIDI's small grants recipients, Conscience International Sierra Leone (CISL) held a press conference in Freetown (Sierra Leone) on 22 August 2019 marking the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. The Press Conference was attended by 12 media practitioners and presented the opportunity to raise awareness about the problem of religious violence. The constitutional provisions of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone has a number of human rights provisions that include freedom of religion or belief. Section 24, subsection 1, of the Constitution states that: "Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of conscience and for the purpose of this section the said freedom includes freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and both in public and in private to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance." Fortunately, Sierra Leone is another icon of religious tolerance where Muslims and Christians collaborate and interact with each other peacefully. Even during the 11 year Civil War (1991-2002) people were never targeted because of their religion. Although religious violence is very rare in Sierra Leone, there are growing divisions along ethnic as well as political lines.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As we progress with our mandate, FIIDI would like to acknowledge key organizations including the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), the World Council of Churches and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers for their commitment in promoting religious tolerance and global peace. We are encouraged to see these like-minded organizations actively taking an indispensable role in building peaceful and stable communities around the world. The efforts of these organizations are generating new strategies and recommendations such as the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders from Africa to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.

THE WAY FORWARD

In the coming years, the observation of the International Day is expected to grow and will include participation of more organizations around the world. Thus, FIIDI will continue to raise funds and mobilize the necessary resources to support organizations in Africa to observe the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. Our aim is to become a leader and reference organization in the fight against acts of violence based on religion or belief. So, let us stand up and applaud the achievements of others and commit ourselves today to promote peace, security and sustainable development for a better tomorrow.

ABOUT FIIDI

Arising out of a commitment to end religious and ethnic violence, the Foundation for Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue Initiatives (FIIDI) has taken an awareness (education) based approach to address and prevent religious and ethnic violence affecting the communities we serve in Canada and Africa. We believe that education, including education for tribal, ethnic, and religious leaders and actors, as well as youth, increases mutual respect; tolerance and understanding while diminishing the risk that individuals could be manipulated for political purposes. We don't give aid; we strive for dialogue and tolerance, empowering communities to stand up for peace.

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." Nelson Mandela (1918 - 2013). FIIDI's mandate and promotional activities stem from this quote. Our goal is to give meaning and actuality to Mandela's words.

Our Vision: To foster a strong community-centered platform grounded in a culture of peaceful coexistence among people from different backgrounds as a pillar for peace, stability, democracy and sustainable development.

Our Mission: To promote intercultural and interreligious understanding and to empower communities in peacebuilding activities that contributes to living together in dignity and dialogue.



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