

FINAL CO CHAIRS SUMMARY REPORT – THE OSLO CONSULTATIONS ON COMBATTING RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

The Government of Norway, in partnership with the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights of the University of Oslo and the Essex Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, co-hosted the international expert consultation on combatting religious intolerance in Oslo, 13 – 14 January 2026.

Over 60 participants from more than 20 countries attended the closed consultation, including a broad spectrum of constituencies and stakeholders, from national equality bodies, National Human Rights Institutes, parliamentarians, government officials, municipal actors, civil society organizations, faith-based groups, intergovernmental bodies, monitors of online hate speech and offline violence, and academia. The public event was attended by more than 160 persons, including more than 30 representatives from the diplomatic corps, in addition to local civil society actors.

COMBATTING RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

In countries across the globe religious intolerance is a challenge. It affects Muslims, Christians, Jews, Bahai, Ahmadiyya, in addition to many other religious or belief groups. That reality is deeply disturbing. We have a joint responsibility to contribute to trust and tolerance in our societies. As underlined during the Oslo Consultation, many countries have taken this very seriously and have developed comprehensive strategies and action plans to combat intolerance based on religion. Confronting and combatting religious intolerance requires strong national measures and close international cooperation.

Fostering religious freedom for all and combatting religious intolerance is clearly rooted in the 16/18 resolution from the UN Human Rights Council in 2011, as well as in the corresponding annual resolution on “Freedom of Religion or Belief”.

The groundbreaking 16/18 resolution in the HRC and its embedded action plan represented a historic achievement in balancing respect for free speech and equality, while maintaining an international consensus rooted in human rights.

The Istanbul Process, established in 2011 to support the implementation of the resolution and its action plan, provides a valuable platform for shared learning through the exchange of knowledge and best practices. Additionally, implementation efforts help facilitate impactful two-way communication between governments and members of communities affected by religious intolerance.

One important insight gained from the nine meetings of the Istanbul Process held so far is the significance of learning from civil society actors who both contribute to and benefit from government efforts to counter hate and foster social cohesion. The Oslo Consultation makes a unique contribution by offering a platform to develop a people-centric and whole-of-society approach aimed at enhancing intergovernmental efforts to implement the resolution. It marks the first occasion when practitioners from municipal, national, transnational, and intergovernmental bodies come together along with civil society to focus on implementation of the 16/18 resolution.

In preparing the Oslo Consultation, contributions from the previous eight Istanbul Process meetings have been drawn upon. We have also learned lessons from last year's Essex Human

Rights 30 Forum in Tirana, which highlighted the value of a multi-stakeholder format for combatting intolerance and hate.

The increased geopolitical anxiety, protracted armed conflicts, violence in the Middle East and other parts of the world, along with polarizing identity politics, have heightened tensions and unfortunately led to a sharper tone in the public debate. Hateful expressions have become more common. This is noticeable in the street, at events and demonstrations, and online, on social media and in comment fields. We all have a responsibility to work against growing polarization and to contribute to reducing tensions in our society. We all need to speak out against racism and discrimination – against both antisemitism and Islamophobia, and other forms of religious intolerance.

Sharing lessons learned and good experiences from around the world on combatting hatred is important in taking us forward. To reduce hate which transcends borders, we need more international collaboration, not less. We all need to be engaged in international debates on freedom of religion or belief, where the intersectionality with free speech and equality is respected, and maintain the international consensus rooted in human rights. The discussions at the Oslo Consultation have offered a platform for developing a people-centric approach aimed at enhancing intergovernmental efforts to implement the 16/18 resolution.

The 16/18 resolution remains as relevant today as it was over a decade ago, but its effective implementation requires significant adaptation to the contemporary landscape. The current trajectory, characterized by ad hoc initiatives, fragmented coordination, and reactive measures, is insufficient to address the scale and complexity of modern challenges. To close the implementation gap, a renewed focus on operational rigor is essential. This includes developing robust national action plans, improving data collection and reporting mechanisms, and leveraging the Istanbul Process as a space for technical cooperation rather than political disputes. States must address the structural barriers that prevent local-level implementation and invest in strategies to counteract the digital and social drivers of intolerance. By transforming the 16/18 resolution from a static diplomatic agreement into a dynamic and actionable framework, the international community can better protect human dignity and foster inclusivity, in an increasingly polarized world. Only through sustained commitment, collaboration, and innovation can the promise of the 16/18 resolution be fully realized.

CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 16/18 RESOLUTION

Over a decade after its adoption, the 16/18 resolution remains a cornerstone of global efforts to combat religious intolerance and promote mutual respect. Despite its robust framework, and the diplomatic consensus it achieved, a considerable gap persists between its aspirational commitments and tangible implementation. The resolution's promise has been undercut by operational inefficiencies, political divisions, and rapidly evolving socio-cultural dynamics. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, coordinated response, yet progress remains uneven. One of the primary obstacles to the effective implementation of the 16/18 resolution is the lack of clarity and consistency in operationalizing its framework at the national level. While many states endorse the resolution's action plan in principle, integrating these commitments into domestic policies and practices has for some proven difficult. Some of the challenges and steps to address them include:

- **IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION:** Addressing the data deficit through the collection of reliable and disaggregated data is a foundational imperative. It requires more than just better software; it demands structural reform in how law enforcement interacts with

vulnerable communities to build the trust necessary for reporting. States must invest in comprehensive monitoring mechanisms that align with international standards, such as those developed by the UN and OSCE/ODIHR. Furthermore, international cooperation is essential to standardize data collection methodologies, allowing for cross-border analysis and the sharing of best practices. Until these "blind spots" are illuminated through rigorous data collection, the full promise of the 16/18 resolution—to protect individuals from the scourge of intolerance—will remain difficult to achieve.

- **ENHANCE COORDINATION:** Ultimately, a whole-of-government approach is essential to align national commitments with local realities. Combatting religious intolerance cannot be the sole responsibility of foreign ministries or federal agencies. It requires a vertically integrated strategy that empowers every level of governance to play its part. Without this cohesive structure, the ambitious principles of the 16/18 resolution will remain out of reach to the communities that stand to benefit most from their application.
- **ADOPTING A WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH:** Key domestic actors, including parliamentarians, national human rights institutions (NHRIs) or specific domestic human rights monitoring mechanisms, and mayors and municipal authorities need to be closely involved in monitoring hate speech and religious intolerance and take the necessary steps to prevent and adequately address such instances as they arise. Where such efforts are being made by NHRIs, there is an urgent need to ensure their mandates are made fit for purpose and they have access to requisite resources.
- **STRENGTHEN MONITORING MECHANISMS:** Overcoming the monitoring challenge requires using a standardized implementation assessment framework with clear benchmarks. By creating a more transparent and enforceable accountability system, the international community can ensure that commitments made in Geneva are translated into real, lasting change for communities on the ground. Without this, the resolution risks being celebrated for its intent while failing in its impact.
- **DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL ACTION PLANS:** Only a handful of countries have coordinated national strategies, and/or action plans, and those that have them need to allocate the necessary resources for them to succeed. For some countries, including for Norway, national action plans are tools for a systematic approach across sectors and lead to a higher degree of commitment from the coordinating as well as the implementing line ministries. As part of the EU action plan on combatting racism, common guiding principles for national action plans were developed including a monitoring checklist and reporting tool. A thorough evaluation of the results at the end of the strategy period needs to be conducted before a subsequent national strategy is adopted. Equally important are creating opportunities for shared learning within and across countries.
- **REGULATING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE TO ADDRESS HATE SPEECH:** Mitigating the digital spread of intolerance requires a robust, transparent, and collaborative approach. This includes demanding greater accountability from technology companies, fostering international cooperation on regulatory standards, and investing in digital literacy programs that build public resilience to disinformation. States should develop a concerted effort to address the architectural drivers of online hate in line with international human rights law. Without this, the digital world will continue to serve as a powerful amplifier for the very intolerance that the 16/18 resolution seeks to combat.

The implementation of the 16/18 resolution is consistently undermined by a deep and persistent trust deficit among its key stakeholders. Overcoming these deep-seated political challenges

requires a deliberate and sustained investment in trust-building. This cannot be achieved through rhetoric alone. It requires consistent policy application, with domestic actions aligned with international commitments. It calls for a renewed focus on practical, people-centric, and collaborative engagement, shifting the emphasis from ideological disputes to active listening and solving shared problems. By demonstrating the tangible benefits of cooperation—through peer learning, technical support, and shared benchmarks, stakeholders can begin to rebuild the confidence needed to bridge divides. Without a concerted effort to restore trust, the 16/18 resolution risks remaining a symbolic compromise rather than a powerful, unified force for change. Some of the challenges and steps to address them include:

- **REVITALIZING THE ISTANBUL PROCESS:** Realizing the original promise of the Istanbul Process requires a recalibration. It demands renewed commitment from all stakeholders to prioritize people-centred actionable outcomes over ideological grievances. Trust-building measures are essential, as is a disciplined focus on the practical aspects of the resolution's action plan. Bottom-up approaches that are grounded on social justice, and sharing lessons learned at the domestic level can enable the international community to reclaim this platform to support genuine technical cooperation and strengthen the needed political will to turn the 16/18 resolution into a practical reality. Hence, a permanent and independent platform to curate good practices and facilitate networking and capacity-building amongst practitioners would be a valuable step forward to sustain a people-centric focus on the implementation of the 16/18 resolution.
- **GOING BEYOND PERCEPTIONS OF DOUBLE STANDARDS:** A significant political challenge undermining the implementation of the 16/18 resolution is the pervasive perception of double standards. Trust, the currency of multilateral cooperation, is deeply eroded when states advocate for human rights and tolerance abroad while enacting contradictory, restrictive measures at home. Rebuilding the trust necessary for effective implementation requires a commitment to consistency and transparency. All states must commit to uphold international law and to sustain these norms by avoiding double standards in their invocation and application. Further to this, states must align their domestic policies with their international commitments, ensuring that the principles they advocate on the world stage are reflected in their actions at home. Acknowledging domestic challenges and being open to scrutiny can be a powerful trust-building measure, signalling a commitment to principle over political expediency. Advancing the resolution's goals requires that all states lead by example, closing the gap between their international pronouncements and their domestic practices to foster an environment of genuine and reciprocal trust.
- **REVERSE THE SECURITIZATION OF IDENTITY:** To effectively implement the 16/18 resolution, it is imperative to actively challenge and reverse the securitization of identity. This requires a conscious effort to shift the public and political narrative back to one centred on human rights, shared values, and mutual respect. States and civil society must champion stories of inclusion, highlight the contributions of minority communities, and dismantle the false assumption between identity – including one's faith - and threat of violence. Only by moving the conversation from security to human rights can we hope to realize the resolution's vision of a world built on tolerance and understanding.
- **COUNTER GLOBAL POLARIZATION AND IMPORTED GRIEVANCES:** Ultimately, countering global polarization requires a multilevel, people-centric approach that integrates global diplomacy with grassroots initiatives. While diplomatic efforts work to resolve the root causes of international conflict, local governments and civil society

must build resilient communities capable of resisting the importation of hate. This involves creating spaces where diverse identities can coexist without being defined by foreign disputes. By aligning high-level conflict resolution with community-based trust-building, stakeholders can dismantle the transmission belts that bring global polarization to the local doorstep, thereby advancing the inclusive vision of the 16/18 resolution.

NEXT STEPS:

The Oslo Consultation highlighted the value of a multi-stakeholder format that includes actors that operate at multiple levels of the national governance architecture to enable a result-oriented and people-centric approach to combatting religious intolerance and hate speech.

It also highlighted the need to build on the valuable experiences learned from the previous eight meetings of the Istanbul Process, as well as the work of NHRIs, parliamentary networks, municipal actors, and civil society actors to enable an integrative and cumulative approach that enriches international deliberations and responses.

The Oslo Consultation has contributed to opening new horizons and to trust-building between stakeholders. We hope the lessons learned and the good practices shared by participants from around the world can facilitate taking forward the international discussion, towards a broader engagement and consensus on the urgent topic of combatting hate speech and religious intolerance, in ways that align with human rights commitments to both freedom of opinion and expression on the one-hand, and equality and non-discrimination on the other.

Discussion on combatting religious intolerance should look at challenges for religious minorities in all parts of the world where people are not able to exercise their right to religion or belief. Combatting religious intolerance also includes the full protection of the human dignity of every individual person on equal terms, ensuring their safety and security, and supporting their contribution to the society where they belong. It will also be important to bridge efforts by various stakeholders and facilitate networking, as well as opportunities to build solidarity in the fight against hate speech and religious intolerance.

Drawing on the positive experiences of various efforts since 2011 to implement the 16/18 resolution, we look forward to a sustained people-centric multistakeholder track that can serve on an ongoing basis to support networking of practitioners and their capacity-building through continuous shared learning.

The shared knowledge gained from the Oslo Consultation will hopefully provide useful input for the upcoming meetings of the Istanbul Process. We look forward to sharing the insights from this consultation with members of the UN Human Rights Council during its 61st session.

On behalf of the co-chairs:

- HE. Mr. Oystein Lyngroth, Norway's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Head of the delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.
- Prof Gentian Zyberi, Head of Department, Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo.
- Prof Ahmed Shaheed, Director, Religion and Equality Project, Essex Human Rights Centre.