

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY COMMEMORATING THE
VICTIMS OF ACTS OF VIOLENCE BASED ON RELIGION AND BELIEF**

22 August 2019

Over the past few months, we have seen increasing numbers of attacks against individuals and groups targeted simply because of their religion or belief. Jews have been murdered in synagogues, their gravestones defaced with swastikas; Muslims gunned down in mosques, their religious sites vandalized; Christians killed at prayer, their churches torched.

Many assaults, like those in New Zealand, Sri Lanka and the United States, have specifically targeted places of worship. And in many conflicts around the world, from Syria to the Central African Republic, entire communities have been attacked on the grounds of their faith.

All major world religions espouse tolerance and peaceful coexistence in a spirit of shared humanity. We must resist and reject those who falsely and maliciously invoke religion to build misconceptions, fuel division and spread fear and hatred. There is richness and strength in diversity; it is never a threat.

Today we observe the first ever International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion and Belief. On this Day, we reaffirm our unwavering support for the victims of violence based on religion and belief. And we demonstrate that support by doing all in our power to prevent such attacks and demanding that those responsible are held accountable.

The United Nations is stepping up action through two new initiatives – a first-of-its-kind UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech and a Plan of Action to safeguard religious sites. The best way to overcome the threat of violence based on religion and belief is by uniting our voices for good, countering messages of hate with messages of peace, embracing diversity and protecting human rights. The world must step up to stamp out anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred, the persecution of Christians and other religious groups, and all forms of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and incitement to violence. As members of the human family, we must nurture mutual understanding. We all have a responsibility to look out for each other, to respect differences and to promote peaceful coexistence.