



New partnership between Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Religions for Peace to harness the role of religious leaders in addressing sexual violence

Press Release: For Immediate Release

New York/Geneva, 17 June 2022: On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, Under-Secretary-General Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC), and Professor Azza Karam, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace* International, signed a Framework of Cooperation Agreement (The Framework).

The Framework aims to promote and facilitate the engagement of religious leaders and multi-religious collaborative efforts in addressing conflict-related sexual violence and countering the stigmatization of survivors. Areas of cooperation shall include, *inter alia*: strengthening the capacity of religious leaders on the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence and the promotion of gender equality; ensuring that faith communities are safe environments for the delivery of, or referral to, specialized services; raising awareness of the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence, as well as the plight and rights of survivors and their children born of rape; advocating for comprehensive laws and policies to address sexual violence; and, supporting survivors, their families and communities, including children born of rape, with a particular focus on combatting stigma, ostracization, and discrimination.

Conflict-related sexual violence continues to be used as a cruel tactic of war, torture, terrorism, and political repression. The signing of this Framework takes place against the backdrop of several unfolding crises and military takeovers in which women's rights and physical security are in peril. Religious leaders have the potential to mobilize all sectors of society, in order to enhance the protection of civilians, particularly women and girls, from sexual violence during and in the wake of war. As trusted actors with broad networks and deep roots in communities, religious leaders and faith-based organizations can build bridges. Religious authorities have often played a role in countering incitement to violence by spreading messages of tolerance, and by urging restraint on the part of arms bearers. They have provided sanctuary to vulnerable civilians in places of worship, and they have promoted reconciliation as part of the consolidation of peace.

“Preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence is one of the great moral challenges of our time. I am therefore working to expand the circle of allies united in common cause to translate political promises into tangible progress that will have a direct impact on the lives of women and girls. Religious diplomacy can help to counter extremism, hate speech, stigma, and harmful social norms,” added Under-Secretary-General Pramila Patten.

Professor Azza Karam said, “I am honored to sign this Framework of Cooperation to expand our work in addressing conflict-related sexual violence. *Religions for Peace* has extensively worked for the promotion of peaceful, just and inclusive societies and gender equality. This new alliance



with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict is a natural extension of this work and will help us to intensify our efforts in involving religious leaders in this task, through our Interreligious Councils, which are now operational in six regions and more than 90 countries around the world. Religious leaders from all faiths can use their reach and influence to work together to replace horror with healing and hope.”

“In the work of my mandate, I am continually reminded that we are only as strong as our partnerships. Religious leaders can help to break down the walls of silence that surround sexual and gender-based crimes – walls that are built with bricks of stigma, shame, and victim-blame – that imprison survivors for life, while perpetrators walk free. The signing of this Framework will allow both organizations to join forces to help silence the guns and amplify the voices of survivors,” concluded Under-Secretary-General Pramila Patten.

For media inquiries, please contact:

*Ms. Géraldine Boezio, Public Information Officer,
Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict
Tel: +1 917 367 3306 Email: geraldine.boezio@un.org
Follow us on social media: @endrapeinwar*

*Ms. Sohaa Khan, Media and Communication Specialist, Religions for Peace
Tel: +1 732 789 4864 Email: skhan@rfp.org
Follow us on social media: @religions4peace*