

# CICJ Steering Group Statement

## Hate speech and violence in the name of religion

8 April 2022

The Coalition for International Criminal Justice (CICJ) expresses its support for the innovative and timely international conference examining *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence*, organised by the Centre for International Law Research and Policy (CILRAP), in co-operation with CICJ and other academic and civil society actors.

Religion as a source of hate speech that both incites and justifies violence remains a serious and perplexing issue. At times, religion-based or -related hatred may be underestimated amongst the myriad of voices that seek to fuel fear and foster intolerance. For some, hateful expression motivated by religious beliefs provides the ultimate justification for marginalising those considered less than equal. Inevitably, such rhetoric has also legitimized the use of violence when advocated by religious leaders and others who have the power to shape social narratives, including those relating to national identity and security.

Religious actors engaged in promoting hate speech towards individuals, groups, organisations, or foreign states undoubtedly contribute to the polarisation of communities and nations and diminish the space for peaceful dialogue and communal connection. In this way, they lay the foundation for the perpetration of crimes, including those involving militarised violence, which target certain groups, including other religious communities.

In some situations, leaders of religious movements may operate as political ringleaders, by either enthusiastically endorsing policies and values in breach of international norms or by doing so at the behest of, or with the foreboding and intimidating expectations of, the political hierarchy. There are also temptations for religious institutions that receive financial or other benefits from the state to remain silent in the face of human rights violations and criminal activities or to offer their explicit or tacit support for such actions.

A current example is the public support of leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church for the political project ‘The Russian World’ (‘Russkiy Mir’), which has been applied to strengthen political power, also by military means. Leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church have failed to publicly distance themselves from this, they have [refused](#) to accept a separate Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and have endorsed separatists in Donbas.

– The politicization of a concept of unity among Russian-speaking adherents of Russian orthodoxy has been supported by leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church. This has contributed to the recent decision to use aggressive armed force against Ukraine, said Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal, Director of the CICJ. “In developments that remind us of the support by Serbian Orthodox leaders for the project to unite Serbs in a ‘Greater Serbia’, leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church risk complicity in violence and core international crimes.”

There are regrettably many examples of religious leaders advocating hatred and inciting violence. Certain Buddhist monks in Myanmar have been accused of inciting hatred against Muslims in the country whilst in turn a Muslim militia group is reported to have [targeted](#) certain Hindu communities on the suspicion that they were allied with Buddhists and the state. In India, hate speech by Hindu nationalists against Muslims has been [reported](#) by the New York Times as calls for ‘genocide of an entire group’. Similarly, in several Muslim countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, discrimination, hate speech and violence against Christians have been on the [rise](#) in recent years.

Conflicts between various Christian-affiliated faiths are well known, perhaps none more so than the civil conflict in Northern Ireland. And historically, religions, including Christian denominations, were vital to the success of colonial aspirations and played a significant role

in negating indigenous spirituality and in creating dehumanizing environments that enabled the dispossession, displacement, and genocide of local populations and first nations.

Against this historic and contemporary background, the CICJ supports [CILRAP](#)'s project and conference on *Religion, Hateful Expression and Violence* and its current interrogation of these issues. The CICJ calls on religious leaders to become allies and partners in creating equitable and cohesive communities and fostering peaceful dialogue within and between states and peoples.

“Perceived gains in a religion’s influence achieved by violations of human rights should not be accepted by political leaders or the world community. The prevalence of religious hate speech and violence is one important reason behind the launch of the CICJ on the occasion of the CILRAP conference”, said Ekeløve-Slydal

– Religious leaders bear the primary responsibility to prevent advocacy of hatred, violence, and war in the name of religion. But we also need strong international institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) to address the serious crimes that may result. We call on ICC Member States to find new and more effective ways to support the Court. And we call on other states to consider joining the Court and actively placing their moral and political strength behind international justice at a time when it is sorely needed, the CICJ Steering Group concluded.

### **Background on the CICJ**

The [CICJ](#) seeks to contribute to effective, fair, and [quality-controlled](#) criminal justice for core international crimes, whether through national or international jurisdictions. It will provide commentary and analysis on a range of international justice issues seeking to provide informed and constructive critiques for the promotion and success of international justice norms and mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court.

The Coalition is particularly concerned that European States and the European Union fulfil their obligations to ensure justice for core international crimes in the most effective way possible, and that their contributions generate optimal results and address the issue of double standards with respect to accountability and universality.

The CICJ is governed by a Steering Group consisting of:

- Morten Bergsmo, Director, Centre for International Law Research and Policy (CILRAP);
- Gregory S. Gordon, Professor of Law, The Chinese University of Hong Kong;
- Brigid Inder, advocate, peacebuilder and mediator, Co-founder and former Executive Director of Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice;
- Wolfgang Kaleck, General Secretary, the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR);
- Gunnar Ekeløve-Slydal, CICJ Director, Deputy Secretary General, Norwegian Helsinki Committee; and
- Antonio Angotti, CICJ Secretary, CILRAP Fellow, Attorney at the Bar Association of Florence.

The CICJ will contribute to and complement the broad range of existing civil society organisations, coalitions and networks, both local and global, engaged in international justice. It draws its inspiration from practice, scholarship and activism, including recent contributions to strengthen [integrity](#), professionalism, and [transparency](#) in international justice, as well as the [report](#) of the Group of International Experts.

The establishment of the CICJ is supported by the [Norwegian Helsinki Committee](#) and [CILRAP](#).

[www.cicj.eu](http://www.cicj.eu)