



Engaging Religious Leaders in Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Policy Brief



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Introduction

In recent years, the Arab region has witnessed an acceleration in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This has included intensifying efforts to design and implement dedicated National Action Plans (NAPs), strengthen institutional mandates and capacities and increase collaboration among a wide spectrum of partners and stakeholders. The intensification of efforts has advanced discussions on what the WPS agenda is, what key issues and priorities the agenda addresses and what contributions are expected from different partners and stakeholders, including the potential roles of religious leaders, which is the focus of the present policy brief.

The present policy brief examines practices and opportunities in engaging religious leaders to advance the WPS agenda. It intends to serve as a primer on this topic for policymakers involved in the WPS agenda across the region, such as those designing and implementing WPS NAPs. The first section of the brief is a discussion of why engaging religious leaders is vital to advancing the WPS agenda, particularly in the Arab region. The second part provides insights on how religious leaders may be able to contribute to the four pillars of the WPS agenda. The last section provides a roadmap and forward-looking recommendations for policymakers and National Women's Machinerys (NWMs) for strengthening such engagements and contributions to the WPS agenda.

The brief will build on existing literature and previous work as relevant to advancing the WPS agenda. For the purposes of this brief, religious leaders are understood as individuals, men and women, who have a strong potential to formally and/or informally influence the lives and behaviour of those who follow their faith and share their beliefs.¹ They can be government-appointed religious figures or preachers with congregations and followers. They can be leaders or members of a broad spectrum of State and non-State organizations with faith-based values and/or a mandate to deliver faith-related services, such as religious courts, faith-driven civil society organizations or community collectives that work to advance a variety of faith-based principles.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and its accompanying nine Security Council resolutions² form the basis of the WPS agenda, the purpose of which is to recognize the disproportionate and different impact of conflict and crises on women and girls and ensure gender-sensitive responses and women's participation in all matters relevant to peace and security. A working definition of the WPS agenda is: a series of actions intended to

¹ United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (2017), *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes*, p. 6.

² SCRs: 1820 (2008); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009); 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015); 2467 (2019); 2493 (2019).

advance gender equality and peace and security in tandem, ultimately striving to build a more equitable and sustainable peace. The resolutions that comprise the WPS agenda are grounded in international human rights law, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its Recommendation 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.³ The various resolutions refer to other relevant internationally agreed frameworks, such as the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, among others.⁴ The WPS agenda is centred around four basic pillars: participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery. These pillars first emerged in 2004, from the work of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and the agreed conclusions of the Committee on the Status of Women in its forty-eighth session.⁵

At the regional level, in 2015 the League of Arab States (LAS) prepared the Regional Strategy and Plan of Action “Protection of Arab Women: Peace and Security” to adapt the international WPS Agenda regionally and serve as the regional umbrella for Arab Countries to design their National Action Plans (NAPs).

Also in 2015, the League of Arab States adopted the “Cairo Declaration and the Strategic Plan for Women Empowerment in the Arab Region – 2030 Development Agenda”. The document dedicates a pillar on “Women and Combating Terrorism” in which it calls for national frameworks to combat terrorist activities and violence and stresses the importance of providing an environment that protects women and girls from harm (humanitarian security). It also defines an indicator to evaluate legal and procedural frameworks to protect women and girls from terrorist activities.

³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2013), *General Recommendation No. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*, CEDAW/C/GC/30.

⁴ United Nations Secretary General (2015), *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, A/70/357–S/2015/682.

⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Council (2004), *Committee on the Status of Women, Forty-Eighth Session*, E/2004/INF/2/Add.2.

1. Why engage religious leaders in the WPS Agenda?

Religion plays an integral role in shaping the actions of any society, being inherently woven into public and private spaces, social and cultural dynamics, institutions and identity politics.⁶ According to the Pew Research Center's 2012 global study, 84 per cent of the world's population is affiliated with a religion.⁷ The significance of religion to so many people and societies around the world necessitates an examination of how religious leaders may help in advancing human development, including in supporting the WPS agenda. The United Nations Development Programme has issued guidelines that cite benefits from engaging religious leaders and faith-based organizations.⁸ Many of these benefits are also highly applicable to the WPS agenda and its four pillars: protection, prevention, participation and relief and recovery.

Religion has noteworthy influence and offers ethical frameworks at the State, community and individual levels. The centrality of religion in the cultural and moral fabric of society enables religious leaders to shift social norms and reinforce positive values, such as those relating to tolerance, gender equality and many of the

core principles of the WPS agenda. Religious leaders can also condemn violent extremism, perpetrators of which have manipulated religious narratives to support radicalization. The promotion of gender equality, peacebuilding, tolerance and other WPS values, alongside the denunciation of violent extremism, support the prevention pillar of the WPS agenda, helping address root causes of conflict and stave off a potential decline towards conflict. Religious leaders can also address harmful stigmas and cultural practices, such as those related to gender-based violence, as a means of supporting the protection pillar.

A religious framing of the goals of the WPS agenda provides an intimate, localized approach that may appeal to communities who would otherwise not be exposed to, or convinced by, the agenda. Using religion as a narrative for gender equality provides a unique form of legitimacy to the messaging. Given religious leaders' expertise on their own communities, they have a greater understanding of how best to present the WPS agenda and its values to their constituents. We have already seen religion play a significant role in promoting

⁶ Amr Darrag (2016), "Politics or Piety? Why the Muslim Brotherhood Engages in Social Service Provision", *Rethinking Political Islam Series*, Brookings Institution. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/politics-or-piety-why-the-muslim-brotherhood-engages-in-social-service-provision-a-conversation/>.

⁷ Pew Research Center (2012), *The Global Religious Landscape*. Available at <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>.

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (2014), *Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations and Religious Leaders*, pp. 7-8. Available at http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/2014_UNDP_Guidelines-on-Engaging-with-FBOs-and-Religious-Leaders_EN.pdf.

peace and human rights in contexts such as the civil rights movement in the United States, with leaders such as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., and in the Church's role in the People's Power movement against the Marcos regime in the Philippines.

The unparalleled access of religious leaders also makes them important partners. Religious leaders often develop trusting relationships with their local communities, cultivated through spiritual connections, a consistent presence and the provision of critical services. Their role in providing essential services is augmented where governance structures and State institutions are weak, such as in remote or conflict-affected areas.⁹ At the local level, they can amplify messaging on WPS within their places of worship, through essential community services such as education or via outreach activities in otherwise hard-to-reach areas. Given religious leaders' roles in family affairs and local justice systems, they also have the opportunity to practice and preach WPS principles in these forums. Moreover, religious leaders have access to broad networks of congregations, partners and affiliates that they can turn to for advocacy and resources, or to mobilize grassroots efforts.¹⁰ While international non-governmental organizations and their programmes may come and go with changes in funding priorities, religious leaders are a consistent community presence and therefore offer a more sustainable avenue for supporting the WPS agenda.

In addition to localized access and influence, religious leaders can exercise weighty authority on public policy at the State level, both through their relationships with

political elites and decision makers and by occupying positions of power themselves. Many States around the world have official religions, government ministries dedicated to religious affairs and official religious establishments that meld religion and the State. There is thus significant opportunity for religious leaders to champion the WPS agenda at the State level.

Religious intolerance has long been promoted to pursue political, territorial and other objectives, often resulting in targeted violence, systematic discrimination and segmentation of society along a variety of religious and sectarian lines. To address this legacy, the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance and subsequent resolutions outlined a number of human rights regarding freedom of religion, thereby creating a framework for action on religious intolerance. This Declaration calls on member States to rescind legislation contrary to the spirit of the Declaration and adopt legislation and other measures to promote religious tolerance. The General Assembly and the Human Rights Council follow up on these calls via the biannual reports of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Around the world, religious leaders have already demonstrated their capacity to undertake conflict resolution and peacebuilding through the promotion of tolerance and nonviolence, and frequently through interfaith efforts. Indeed, the current Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, acknowledges the role of religious leaders as change agents in combating intolerance based on religion or belief. The rapporteur recommends that civil society,

⁹ United Nations Development Programme (2014), *Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations and Religious Leaders*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

including faith-based actors, should strive to establish collaborative networks to foster mutual understanding and solidarity, promote dialogue and inspire constructive action. These efforts are also linked to the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. In 2015, the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, known as the “Fez Process”, examined how religious leaders can prevent incitement to violence, religious extremism and gender-based violence.¹¹

Heading South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Desmond Tutu, the former Archbishop of Cape Town, used Christian values to call for forgiveness as he mediated the country’s transition to democracy. Mahatma Gandhi promoted *ahimsa*, the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain tenet of nonviolence as he led India’s revolution against the British. In Colombia, the Ecumenical Women Peacebuilders Network, a nationally recognized group of Catholic and Protestant women church leaders, advocated locally for the 2016 peace accords. Maha Ghosananda, former supreme Buddhist patriarch, worked to bring solace and healing to Cambodians after the oppressive rule of the Pol Pot regime.

Notable interfaith examples of peacebuilding include Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa of Nigeria, former

adversaries who mediated a peace accord that brought a decade-long peace. The Liberian Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) brought Muslim and Christian women together in 2003; their fierce advocacy efforts, some of which were physical acts of resistance, helped drive the success of peace accords.¹²

More recently, religious leaders were engaged to help mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic and crisis. The World Health Organization has developed an advisory note¹³ to guide health officials and front-line workers on how to communicate the pandemic and mobilize faith leaders to accept and promote relevant public health directives. Similarly, the United Nation’s Children Fund (UNICEF) and other humanitarian agencies have mobilized their existing networks and partnerships in order to echo this messaging.

A. Why Engage Religious Leaders on the WPS Agenda in the Arab Region?

Religion is very important across the myriad cultures and societies in the Arab region. While Islam is undoubtedly the most followed religion, there is a rich array of religions across the region, including Christianity, Judaism, Bahá’í Faith, Druze, Yazidism, Zoroastrianism and others. According to a study from the BBC Arab Barometer in 2019, 87 per cent of people identified as religious. This represents a significant drop in religiosity from 92 per cent just 6 years prior.¹⁴ However, religion has

¹¹ United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (2015), *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes*.

¹² Franck Kuwonu (2018), “Women: Liberia’s Guardians of Peace”, *UN’s Africa Renewal*, April – July 2018. Available at <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2018-july-2018/women-liberia%E2%80%99s-guardians-peace>.

¹³ World Health Organization (2020), *Practical Considerations and Recommendations for Religious Leaders and Faith-based Communities in the Context of COVID-19*, April.

¹⁴ British Broadcasting Corporation (2019), “The Arab World in Seven Charts: Are Arabs Turning their Backs on Religion?”, *Arab Barometer*, 27 June. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48703377>.

expanded to a much more integrated role in society than just offering a system of faith and worship. Religion is a core aspect of many people's identities in the Arab region, defining socioeconomic classes and leading to the rise of identity politics.¹⁵

Religious traditions are both a private and a public matter across the Arab region, with religious practices, freedoms and boundaries often regulated by States based on political negotiation.¹⁶ Constitutions, laws and customs speak to the role of religion in society, either as a part of the governance structure through State and State-sanctioned institutions, or through societal institutions influencing and contributing to the national identity.¹⁷ Across many Arab states, Islam is the official religion, there are ministries of religious affairs and Sharia law influences personal status and criminal justice laws. As Dr. Nathan Brown describes, "Ministries of education write religious textbooks, ministries of religious affairs administer mosques, state muftis offer interpretations of religious law and courts of personal status guide husbands and wives as well as parents and children in how to conduct their interactions in an Islamic way".¹⁸ In fact, there is significant popular societal acceptance and support across Arab States for the role of religion in State affairs. Figure below illustrates the role of religion in some countries with predominantly Muslim population.

Religious leaders engage with their congregations through a variety of platforms and services. These include religious services, social services, opinion and advisory services and spiritual guidance on a variety of faith-related matters. Spiritual development services are a traditional task for religious leaders that take different formats, such as organizing Qur'anic studies and classes for children, seminars and sessions on faith-related matters, missionary work and public preaching. Religious services are often broadly governed and regulated by national laws, which give religious leaders their mandates and authorities. For instance, in Lebanon, religious leaders are legally responsible for managing religious affairs and running hierarchies of clerics who administer places of worship, schools and personal-status courts that adjudicate social affairs such as marriage, divorce and inheritance.¹⁹

The most recent religious conflict to emerge in the Arab region was the religious radicalization and violent extremism of the Islamic State (ISIL), which manipulated Salafi and Wahhabi ideologies to promote mass violence and highly oppressive views on gender. While the Islamic State was declared defeated in 2019, there remains a pressing necessity for religious leaders of the Arab region to combat the rise of radical religious narratives in support of peaceful, equitable societies.

¹⁵ Rørbæk, Lasse L. (2019). Religion, Political Power, and the 'Sectarian Surge': Middle Eastern Identity Politics in Comparative Perspective. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Volume 19, Issue 1, Special Issue: Sectarianism and Regime Formation in a New Middle East.

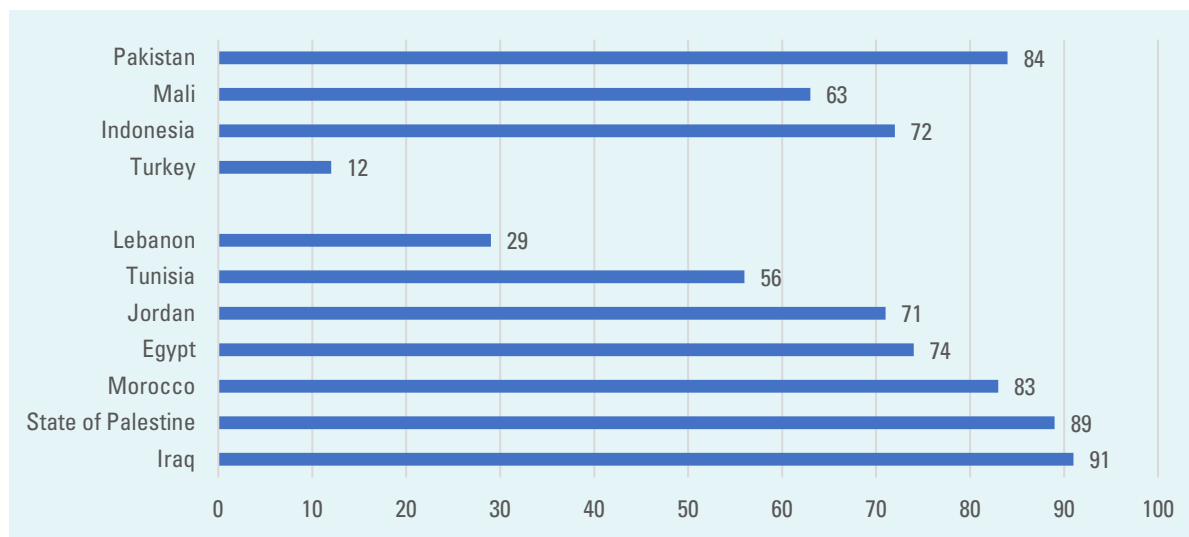
¹⁶ Such as negotiating religious interpretation into law.

¹⁷ State-building vs nation building.

¹⁸ Nathan Brown (2017), "Official Islam in the Arab World: The Contest for Religious Authority", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 11 May. Available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/11/official-islam-in-arab-world-contest-for-religious-authority-pub-69929#:~:text=Official%20Islam%20and%20Regime%20Islam,sometimes%20ways%20to%20avoid%20them>.

¹⁹ Alexander Henley (2016), "Religious Authority and Sectarianism in Lebanon" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 16. Available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/16/religious-authority-and-sectarianism-in-lebanon-pub-66487>.

Percentage of Muslims who favour making Sharia the official law in their country



Source: Pew Research Center Q79a, cited in: *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society* (2013) p. 15.

Overall, the number of independent religious scholars and preachers is difficult to ascertain given the lack of a clear framework for recognition and licensing across the region. However, a search for influential preachers on the social media platform Twitter demonstrates that many religious leaders have a significant following, reaching millions in some cases. For instance, three of the top five most followed Twitter personalities in Saudi Arabia are religious leaders, with the other two being a news service and a media personality. Dr. Mohamed Al-Arefee is the most followed religious leader in the region, with over 20 million followers.²⁰ It is worth noting that there are significant disparities among the opinions of these various preachers. For instance, while Al-Arefee is seen as more established and

conservative Salafi-leaning, Ali Al-Jifri, with six million followers on Twitter, is younger and has more progressive views.²¹ A 2014 survey of thought leaders in Libya identified 165 religious actors named as influential, 93 per cent of whom are local, indicating a rather decentralized religious leadership.²²

The spectrum of religious leaders presents a wide array of views on spiritual development, from the most conservative to most progressive. In recent years new thought leaders have emerged, including women preachers, religious and sectarian minority scholars and religious advocates among Arab diaspora communities. This variety presents opportunities to support the constructive and positive spiritual development of all citizens

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/MohamadAlarefe>.

²¹ الحبيب على الجفري: "غير صحيح أن كل من هو ليس مسلم لن يدخل الجنة".

²² United States Institute of Peace (2017), *Libya's Religious Sector and Peacebuilding Efforts*, p. 37. Available at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/03/libyas-religious-sector-and-peacebuilding-efforts>.

across the region, particularly young people who are susceptible to the influence of various preachers and scholars.

This significant role of religion in society warrants a closer examination of the influence of religious leaders on public life. It is crucial to examine, for example, how religious leaders can be mobilized to translate international frameworks and commitments to the local level, or actively work to limit contrarian positions and negative stereotypes on matters relating to gender equality and the role of women. Indeed, Arab States recognize this opportunity and have repeatedly engaged religious leaders on a variety of social and developmental causes. Examples of this engagement include cooperation on countering child marriage, hate speech and violence against religious minorities, as well as promoting reproductive health, social solidarity and peacebuilding. For example, the Iraqi Government announced an Islamic day to end violence against women as a result of intensive lobbying by women leaders with the support of religious leaders, scholars and governmental officials to raise awareness of women's rights from a religious perspective. In the early 2000s, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the HIV/AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States Project, which mobilized a wide array of religious leaders in the Arab region to counter discrimination against people with HIV and protect women and children with HIV.²³ A civil society organization in Lebanon, ABAAD, produced a 'We Believe' campaign with top Lebanese

religious clerics using religious texts to denounce gender-based violence.²⁴

Religious leaders in the Arab region have already taken action towards peacebuilding efforts. In 2019, the Muslim World League gathered over 1,000 Muslim religious leaders for a "Centrism and Moderation" conference. This conference culminated in the Mecca Document, a declaration of Islamic commitment to principles of nonviolence, based on Qur'anic verses and Sunnah. Another key framework in this regard is the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence; the plan includes specific provisions on the roles and responsibilities of religious leaders. Additionally, in 2019, Pope Francis and Grand Imam el Tayeb signed the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, which calls for coexistence, peace and women's rights.

Arab States have adopted a range of measures to engage religious leaders on the WPS agenda. In May 2015, the Government of Iraq endorsed its Emergency Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to accompany the military campaign against the Islamic State. The Emergency Action Plan included a specific plan for the Ministry of Religious Endowments to undertake dialogue with religious leaders from various denominations on the issue of reintegration of women survivors.²⁵ This plan sought to build on the role of religious leaders in the ongoing dialogue on the Islamic State's actions and use their influence to address the

²³ United Nations Development Programme (2014), "Guidelines on Engaging with Faith Based Organizations and Religious Leaders", p. 11.

²⁴ <https://www.abaadmena.org/documents/ebook.1487166563.pdf>.

²⁵ Iraq (2015), *Emergency Action Plan to Implement Resolution 1325*, Activity 1.4 under the prevention pillar. Available at <http://www.iraqnap1325.org/images/PDFfiles/masterplans/emergencyplan/EmergencyPlanEnglish.pdf>.

ramifications of women survivors of trafficking and sexual violence and women and girls returning from captivity.²⁶ In fact, the Iraqi Ministry of Interior facilitated the participation of religious leaders in various activities associated with the reduction of community violence and gender-based violence.²⁷

Similarly, the WPS NAPs of Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon and others refer to engaging religious leaders in a variety of areas, including in consultations; operationalizing them in prevention activities, including preventing violent extremism; and countering gender-based violence, among other roles. For instance, Lebanon's NAP includes a specific activity to increase the awareness of the judiciary, including judges in religious courts, to promote gender-sensitive attitudes,²⁸ while Jordan's NAP refers to rectifying "incorrect religion-related concepts" and empowering religious leaders, including women preachers, in support of social cohesion and solidarity.²⁹

B. Challenges of Engaging Religious Leaders in the Arab Region

There are a number of challenges that can arise when engaging with religious leaders on topics such as gender equality and the WPS

agenda. Inclusion and equality are core values of the WPS agenda. However, due to the widespread patriarchal interpretations of monotheistic scriptures (largely by men), negative gender stereotypes and roles and gender-based violence are rife around the world, and markedly in the Arab region. Based on varying interpretations, there is ongoing debate between religious leaders on issues such as child marriage, inheritance rights, domestic violence, the status of women in the family and more. Some extremist religious leaders may also stigmatize and ostracize marginalized communities or religious communities other than their own. A disregard for fundamental human and women's rights directly contradicts the goals of the WPS agenda. Moreover, contrary to the participation pillar of the WPS Agenda, positions of religious leadership in the Arab region are dominated by men, which requires an examination of the risk of exclusion when engaging religious leaders.

Among such a diversity of religious leaders and scholars throughout the region, a similar disparity is also evident on issues relating to peace and security. For instance, while the vast majority of religious leaders have condemned the Islamic State's radical calls and unprecedented levels of violence, some clerics

²⁶ U.S. Institute of Peace (2019), "Engaging the post-ISIS Iraqi Religious Landscape for Peace and Reconciliation" *Peaceworks Issue 145* (November), p. 14. Available at <https://www.usip.org/index.php/publications/2019/11/engaging-post-isis-iraqi-religious-landscape-peace-and-reconciliation>.

²⁷ Iraq, Cross-Sector Task Force 1325 (2019), *Report on the Implementation of Iraq's National Action Plan on SCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security*, p. 20. Available at <http://www.iraqnap1325.org/images/PDFfiles/masterplans/Implementation-Iraq-NAP-1325-English.pdf>.

²⁸ National Commission for Lebanese Women (2019), *Lebanon National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, Activity 1.2.2, p. 47. Available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2019/10/lebanon-nap-1325-unscr-wps-summary.pdf?la=en&vs=2403>.

²⁹ Jordanian National Commission for Women (2018), *Jordanian National Action Plan to Operationalize SCR1325*, p. 13. Available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20jordan/images/publications/2018/jonap%202018-2021%20unscr%201325.pdf?la=en&vs=5624>.

have offered justifications for its brutality.³⁰ Indeed, this remains a central cause for alarm across the Arab region, particularly in relation to countering radical narratives and preventing violent extremism. This is a global concern as the drivers of violent extremism continue to increase, particularly among young people.³¹

In giving religious leaders platforms to amplify their messages, religious leaders may take advantage of these opportunities to proselytize, which would detract from the universal nature of the WPS agenda. Additionally, engaging religious leaders in propagating the WPS agenda or state-sanctioned messages may lead some followers to seek out alternate sources of religious leadership, such as more radical online communities or self-styled preachers.

All of these challenges and risks reaffirm that engaging with religion and religious leaders

requires robust religious literacy to understand the complex roles of religion in different contexts. Most importantly, States' engagement with religious leaders should delicately balance amplifying the voices of religious leaders while protecting the State's constitution and laws and ensuring that all institutions and individuals are governed by the law. This would mitigate shifting the power balance between the State and religious leaders. It is particularly important to use a "Do No Harm" conflict sensitivity approach, ensuring that the context is understood, the implications of an intervention in a particular context are understood and tangible actions are taken based on that analysis to avoid negative consequences and reinforce positive results.³² In the Arab region, this entails paying close attention to the power asymmetries among religious groups, the views and histories of religious leaders and the target audiences.

³⁰ Hassan Hassan (2016), "The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Paper 253, p. 17. Available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/13/sectarianism-of-islamic-state-ideological-roots-and-political-context-pub-63746>.

³¹ Baffa and others (2019), "Defining and Understanding the next generation of Salafi-Jihadis", *Rand Corporation*, Perspective: Expert Insights on a Timely Policy Issue (August), pp. 3-7. Available at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE341.html>.

³² CDA Collaborative (2018), Do No Harm: A Brief Introduction from CDA. Available at <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Do-No-Harm-A-Brief-Introduction-from-CDA.pdf/>.

2. The four pillars of the WPS Agenda and the potential role of religious leaders

Each of the mandates under UNSCR 1325 is related to the four pillars of the WPS agenda: protection, prevention, participation and relief and recovery. This section uses these four pillars to guide an examination of the potential opportunities and challenges in engaging religious leaders to support the critical components of the WPS agenda.

A. Prevention

The prevention pillar requires intervention to prevent violence against women (VAW). The WPS agenda calls for the enactment and enforcement of legislation and policies designed to prevent VAW through deterrence; addressing the root causes of both violence in general, and violence against women in particular; and mainstreaming gender in early warning systems and associated preventative measures. Religious leaders in the Arab region have an important part to play in the prevention of violence against women through advocacy on tolerance and gender equality, countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts and addressing systemic gender inequalities through the legal and justice systems at both the local and State levels.

Given the influence of religious leaders, particularly over communities that may be hard

to reach, there is a noteworthy opportunity for religious leaders to use their messaging as strategic communications in preventing VAW. Periods of conflict or instability generally result in higher levels of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls,³³ so an important aspect of the prevention pillar is for religious leaders to use their platforms to alleviate tensions or build bridges between communities. Significant efforts continue to be made by religious leaders and scholars in the Arab region to promote tolerance and coexistence as a means of conflict resolution or peacebuilding. Interfaith cooperation between religious leaders publicly has served as an example of tolerance to their congregations, and privately has provided meaningful negotiations towards peace and the promotion of human rights. Activism similar to that of Al-Azhar, as aforementioned, is seen across different parts of the Arab region at different levels, such as efforts by the Rabita Mohammedia of Morocco, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, headquartered in Saudi Arabia, and others. Examples of such roles in mediation are numerous across the region. One study on local actors' efforts for peace in Syria indicated that religious leaders are responsible for 20 per cent of reconciliations, compared to 12 per cent attributable to clan leaders and 5 per cent to business actors.³⁴ One example is Sister Carolin

³³ See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/PeaceAndSecurity.aspx>.

³⁴ Metwaly Abo Naser and others (2016), "Inside Syria: What Local Actors Are Doing For Peace", *Swiss Peace*, p. 7. Available at http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Mediation/Inside_Syria_en.pdf.

Tahhan Fachak who runs a nursery school in Damascus and received an award in 2017 for her work during the crisis.³⁵ However, the majority of such initiatives remain isolated and disjointed.

The engagement of religious leaders in peacebuilding is crucial given that there is a mix of indications that religious violence has seen a resurgence in recent years,³⁶ predominantly tied to hostilities associated with political, sectarian and individual perceptions of “justifiable violence”.³⁷ While people recruited into militant groups are often radicalized by issues such as economic inequalities, political discrimination and injustice, religion provides a means of addressing such grievances. Given the prominence of violent extremism in the Arab region in particular, engaging Arab religious leaders in gender-informed prevention of violent extremism efforts is critical. Using a gender-informed lens ensures a more effective response to violent extremism; it helps recognize the myriad roles women play in violent extremism and acknowledges extremist groups’ manipulation of social norms around gender. Preventing violent extremism efforts are particularly important to the WPS agenda and to the prevention pillar given the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence, both implemented and endorsed by extremist groups.

Moments of social upheaval and transition can also provide opportunities for examining and addressing root causes of inequality and gender-based violence. Messaging through

religious texts or in spiritual narratives that promote gender equality, women’s rights and healthy forms of masculinity that counter harmful stereotypes could provide meaningful changes to social norms in the home and community. Moreover, as authority figures, communities often look to religious leaders as resourceful persons who can adjudicate, provide opinion (*fatwa*) or mediate to address grievances or injustices. This role is more pronounced in underserved or conflict-affected parts of the region, where barriers to formal conflict resolution mechanisms exist, particularly to help resolve domestic disputes, inheritance issues or rights to common or collective resources. Islamic religious leaders may invoke *sulh* (settlement), *maslaha* (common good) or *musalaha* (reconciliation), among other tactics based in Islamic tradition.³⁸

Across the Arab region, legal frameworks that combine secular law with religiously rooted customary law allow religious leaders to serve the judicial needs of their communities, particularly in the fields of criminal justice and family law. This influence is an opportunity for religious leaders to advance societal well-being and protect the rights of citizens through providing justice and assisting in reforming harmful laws rooted in religious scripture. This is of vital importance in the Arab region on issues such as women’s rights, custody of children and inheritance. For instance, messages supporting good reproductive health have been adopted by many religious leaders, some of whom deliver such services.³⁹

³⁵ U.S. Department of State International Women of Courage Award 2017.

³⁶ Minority Rights Group International (2018), *Peoples Under Threat 2018*. Available at <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Peoples-under-Threat-briefing-2018.pdf>.

³⁷ Steve Clarke (2014), *The Justification of Religious Violence*, Wiley Publications. Available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/japp.12123>.

³⁸ George E. Irani (2000), “Islamic Mediation Techniques for Middle East Conflicts”, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2.

³⁹ United Nations Population Fund (2015), *Realizing the Faith Dividend: Religion, Gender, Peace and Security in Agenda 2030*. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/realizing-faith-dividend>.

B. Protection

Within the context of the WPS agenda, protection refers to active measures to protect the physical integrity, safety and well-being of women and girls in times of peace and conflict. The protection pillar has a specific focus on protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), particularly during periods of conflict. Through their local authority and capacity to frame SGBV interventions in religiously literate or community-appropriate ways, religious leaders can play an important role in addressing harmful social norms and denouncing stigma surrounding SGBV in households, communities and institutions. With change arising from the grassroots levels, it strengthens a sense of local ownership in combating SGBV. As the fabric of society unravels during conflict, moral guidance from trusted religious leaders may be able to sway the actions of potential perpetrators, or of survivors who need encouragement to seek help.

Religious leaders can also advocate for policy change to deter SGBV, particularly by addressing penal codes at the national level or customary law through local counselling and justice mechanisms. Sharia law influences the legal codes in most Islamic countries and many countries in the Arab region, giving religious leaders an important entry point for addressing harmful policies. Moreover, customary or religious laws may take precedence over secular law.⁴⁰ At varying levels across the Arab region, a number of legal codes condone or overlook

domestic violence and marital rape, child marriage, “honour crimes”, female genital mutilation and marry-your-rapist policies. Al-Azhar University and UNICEF partnered to develop a manual on the centrality of child protection to Islam, drawing on religious texts to provide guidance on children’s rights.⁴¹ Engaging religious leaders in the field of protection may not only require a shift in views, but also in the roles of religious leaders from spiritual guides to advocates of change.

When operating in fragile contexts or conflict zones, houses of worship may provide safe spaces or physical protection to women and girls. Moreover, religious leaders can serve as valuable allies for survivors of SGBV, providing spiritual healing or assisting with community reintegration. For example, following the Islamic State’s rampant perpetration of SGBV, Norwegian Church Aid worked closely with religious leaders from Yazidi communities to ensure survivors’ healing, reintegration and acceptance from the community. The intervention includes cleansing rituals for survivors at Yazidi sacred sites and acceptance from religious leaders, enabling the women to return without stigma or blame.⁴²

C. Participation

The participation pillar calls for increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making, including national, regional and international institutions. The participation pillar

⁴⁰ Patton and others (2016), The Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing, *The Lancet*, Vol. 387, No. 10036, pp. 2423-2478.

⁴¹ Julie Rialet (2017), “Can Religious Leaders be our Best Allies to End Child Marriage?” *Girls Not Brides*, 21 July. Available at <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/can-religious-leaders-best-allies-end-child-marriage/>.

⁴² Norwegian Church Aid, *Engaging Faith Actors on Gender-Based Violence: Best Practices from the NCA Global GBV programme 2016-2019*, p. 10. Available at http://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge_Center/2018-engaging-faith-actors-on-gender-based-violence.pdf.

of the WPS agenda is cross-cutting, necessitating women's meaningful participation and active engagement in all prevention, protection and relief and recovery efforts. A major focus of the participation pillar is that women be involved in peacebuilding efforts. While faith may act as a driver for many women to become active in peace work within their local communities, women are often marginalized in formal religious spaces. Patriarchal interpretations of many religions deny women leadership positions, particularly at national and international levels.

However, there is a prevailing assumption that all religious leaders are male, which overlooks the women religious leaders who are pioneers and authorities in their religions. In Islam, there is a rich history of *alimat*, or women Islamic scholars, who have also studied in respected religious institutions. The work of these scholars has influenced the WPS agenda and continues to do so. Moreover, a number of Arab States have put forth public policies to increase the number of Muslim women religious leaders, particularly as a response to religious extremism. In Morocco, hundreds of women have trained as *morchidat*, Islamic preachers who teach Islamic education that is centred around values of tolerance and moderation. The *morchidat* programme leverages women's social and familial relationships to confront radicalization.⁴³ Additionally, Egypt's Ministry of Religious Endowments decided to introduce female preachers in mosques and schools, which is

the first time that women have been officially recognized as clergy in these spaces; the Ministry has trained 300 female preachers in public speaking and Qur'anic texts.⁴⁴ Where there is space to negotiate systemic changes, Arab States should continue to facilitate the integration of women into decision-making roles within religious institutions.

However, supporting the faith-based participation of women in the WPS agenda may require looking past traditional hierarchies within religious institutions in the Arab region. Maryann Cusimano Love asserts that it is necessary to look toward a broader religious community engagement, since women are frequently deeply involved in faith-based grassroots peacebuilding and reconciliation.⁴⁵ Women may hold power in framing religious interpretations in their local places of worship or in their families. Because women have been excluded from formal religious structures and therefore from acting as faith-based representatives in formal decision-making bodies, they have had to innovate new peacebuilding mechanisms and processes.⁴⁶ Women may have greater freedom for action without the restraints imposed by formal structures and hierarchies. WPS-related decision-making structures should expand the definition of what constitutes religious leadership, taking advantage of the knowledge, placement and creativity of women as informal or localized religious leaders. Moreover, religious leaders should work to carve out spaces for otherwise marginalized voices and support the advancement of women in religious institutions.

⁴³ Dina Temple-Raston (2018), "The Female Quran Experts Fighting Radical Islam in Morocco", *The Atlantic*, February 12. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/the-female-quran-experts-fighting-radical-islam-in-morocco/551996/>.

⁴⁴ Amer El Tohamy (2018), "Egypt fights Islamic extremism by allowing women leaders at mosques", *Religion News*, 20 June. Available at <https://religionnews.com/2018/06/20/egypt-women/>.

⁴⁵ United States Institute of Peace (2011), *Women in Religious Peacebuilding*, p. 13. Available at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/05/women-religious-peacebuilding>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

D. Relief and recovery

The relief and recovery pillar of the WPS agenda seeks to address the consequences of crises and conflict to build peaceful and prosperous societies based on gender equality and the empowerment of women. This pillar includes assessing the disproportionate risks faced by women during shocks and crises, humanitarian actions and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. Before, during and after conflicts and disasters, religious leaders are deeply embedded in their communities and congregations, giving them important insight on early warning indicators of conflict, as well as how members of their communities, and women in particular, are affected by shocks and conflict. This puts them in a valuable position to assist in the development of early warning systems, guide sustainable relief and recovery efforts and potentially offer relief and recovery assistance themselves.

Through houses of worship and faith-based services, religious leaders play an important role in delivering spiritual and humanitarian relief in remote and conflict-affected areas, where the WPS agenda is of paramount importance. Religious leaders have repeatedly proven effective in mobilizing resources, organizing volunteers, facilitating crisis response activities and distributing emergency supplies through formal and informal faith-based organizations and groupings. They are posed to ensure that aid is inclusive and responsive to the needs of marginalized communities.

However, just because religious leaders may follow the humanitarian principle of humanity, i.e. addressing human suffering, they do not necessarily meet the other three essential humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.⁴⁷ To uphold the principle of neutrality, humanitarian actors cannot take sides in a conflict or engage in controversies, including around religion. Given how prominent identity politics is, particularly in the Arab region, it is not uncommon that political affiliation is directly tied to one's religion, making neutrality difficult to maintain. Religious leaders may also undermine the principle of impartiality by rewarding their congregations and using aid as a bargaining chip to proselytize and attract new followers. Finally, religious leaders may receive alms or *zakat* from political actors or elites, which compromises the principle of independence from political, military or economic objectives that an actor may hold in regard to where the humanitarian aid is being implemented.

As the Syrian refugee crisis was beginning in Lebanon, a small non-governmental organization called Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD) provided support to churches that were interested in responding to the needs of Syrian refugees. LSESD trained and mentored pastors and religious leaders on how to respond to the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees by setting up systems to identify beneficiaries, track aid and report on assistance provided. An important aspect of the training was the focus on impartiality and unconditionality when providing assistance.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, proclaimed in Vienna in 1965 by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

⁴⁸ Rupen Das (2016), "Humanitarianism in Highly Religious Contexts: Responding to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", *MEI*, 15 March, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/humanitarianism-highly-religious-contexts-responding-syrian-refugees-lebanon>.

3. Engaging religious leaders: a roadmap

As the previous sections highlight, there is significant opportunity for religious leaders to be meaningful partners in the WPS agenda, but the landscape for engaging religious leaders is complex and constantly changing, with significant diversity within and among the various structures. Furthermore, there are complex dynamics governing relationships among these leaders and organizations, with various State institutions and a mosaic of social groups. Given this complexity, there is a noteworthy risk that such engagements may exacerbate misunderstandings, contribute to competition and tensions and even have unintended negative consequences. Therefore, it is vital to understand and appreciate this complex landscape, and to also understand that the majority of policymakers and practitioners working on WPS issues are not trained in theological debates and religious studies.

With these limitations in mind, it is critical to be pragmatic regarding what can be achieved and how. This section draws on previous research and learning from prior global and regional experiences of relevance and presents a three-step approach for such engagement. These steps are conceptualized to be sequential and cumulative and require tailoring to the national context and the agreed goals.

A. Assessing the legal, social and political environment

The starting point is to perform an informed assessment of the legal, social and political environment for engaging religious leaders. The goal of this assessment is to understand

the religious context, examine the positioning and roles of religious actors, validate assumptions, make realistic expectations and confirm the prospects, in principle, for engagement towards achieving the intended goals. Some lines of inquiry should include:

- What are the predominant religions and spiritualities? What is the relationship between the religions and spiritualities? What are the power dynamics? Are there tensions?
- What role does religion play in the political, economic, social and cultural context? How could engaging with religious leaders affect these fields? What are potential indirect consequences?
- How does the law/legal framework recognize matters of faith, and does the State adopt a religion? To what extent is that adoption reflected in the various powers, authorities and mandates?
- What services or advocacy initiatives are religious leaders already undertaking in support of the WPS agenda? Does the country have a women, peace and security National Action Plan, and what role could religious leaders play in supporting it? What are the other initiatives supporting the WPS agenda and who is running them?
- Do religious leaders hold men and women as equal and is this reflected in the religion or spirituality they uphold? Is gender equality reflected in their practices?
- What is the influence of religious leaders at the local, national or international levels? What is their influence in families and with

marginalized communities? Are there faith-inspired media outlets? How visible are religious leaders on social media?

Such an assessment will prove critical in informing subsequent steps, defining who and how to engage, and providing important considerations for strategic and meaningful engagement. It will also help illuminate direct and indirect consequences and outcomes, as well as risks and shortfalls from such an engagement.

B. Mapping the religious landscape for engagement

Mapping the religious landscape entails mapping the individuals representing the visible institutional authorities on matters of faith. Generally, institutional religious leaders tend to be older males, either carrying officially recognized titles such as a grand Islamic jurist (*mufti/qadi*) or socially recognized individuals perceived to be influential based on their religious standing. However, to ensure that engagement efforts are inclusive, the mapping should also include influential, though maybe less visible, women and young religious leaders. Importantly, women and young religious leaders may appeal to demographics who are foregoing more traditional religious sects;⁴⁹ while 41 per cent of young Arabs surveyed in 2020 viewed religion as central to

their identity, 66 per cent believe that religious institutions need reforming.⁵⁰

Mapping socially recognized religious leaders will vary significantly according to the local or country context, legal basis for their role, perceptions towards their roles, their bases and methods of influence and their relationships among each other and within their respective groups. Mapping the role of religious leaders can also be inferred from the organizations and institutions they are affiliated with.

At the national level, this mapping can benefit from nationally adopted legal and institutional definitions regulating their work. Emphasis should be placed on the mandates of such organizations, especially those with dual roles, such as engaging in service delivery with faith-driven or religious motivations. A starting point would be mapping the broad array of State institutions with mandates based in religious affairs, including ministries of endowments (*awqaf*), departments overseeing religious opinions (*ifta*), judicial departments overseeing Sharia-based courts, religiously-based research centres, political faith-centric entities and parties, etc. Additionally, there is a range of State and non-State entities with shared mandates, such as governorate councils and municipalities which provide services and upkeep of faith-related facilities (e.g. Islamic cemeteries) or civil society organizations with faith-driven philanthropic work.⁵¹

⁴⁹ British Broadcasting Corporation (2019), "The Arab world in seven charts: Are Arabs turning their backs on religion?", 27 June. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48703377>.

⁵⁰ PSB Insights (2020), *ASDA' A BCW Arab Youth Survey*. Available at <https://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/findings.html>.

⁵¹ For further reading, see: Mohammed Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh (2012) "The Islamic Solution in Jordan: Islamists, the State, and the bets on Democracy and Security" published by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Center for Strategic Studies at Jordanian University.

C. Identifying opportunities for engagement

The assessment of the religious landscape and the identification of partners influences decisions such as which religious leaders to engage, the focus of the engagement, the level and breadth of engagement and its modalities. In determining strategic entry points, WPS actors should identify shared objectives or overlapping work with religious leaders that aligns with the WPS agenda and assess religious leaders' capacity and desire to engage. Attention must be given to the proportional engagement with women religious leaders, young people of faith or even secular women's organizations that have an interest and previous experience in such engagements. Actors seeking to partner with religious leaders need to be impartial, ideally working with a variety of faiths and spiritualities at once.

Ultimately, the decision to engage should be based on an analysis of the benefits and risks of a partnership. Meaningful partnerships are built on establishing understanding, collaboration, respect and trust. Cooperation has to be anchored within the relevant agreed priorities on WPS, particularly working with the appropriate levels and channels on relevant topics. A key element for successful engagement is having clear instruments to measure progress and a monitoring framework to keep abreast of changes in rhetoric, behaviour and actions. Indeed, the complexity and sensitivity of the religious landscape requires sustained investments and active

coordination towards achieving the intended results at different levels. Establishing flexible formal as well as informal networks and communications repeatedly proves to have a catalytic impact towards the common goals through a shared responsibility paradigm in line with the spirit of the WPS agenda.

There is a noteworthy body of global experiences in successful engagement of religious leaders on a range of key issues relevant to the WPS agenda. The annual report of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development⁵² provides a comprehensive view of such experiences in a variety of contexts and issues. UNICEF also developed detailed policy guidance to facilitate such engagements for children, including preventing the misuse of religion and distinguishing traditional cultural practices from religious obligations.⁵³ UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders⁵⁴ also provides direction in collaborating with religious leaders in sustainable development initiatives.

Furthermore, the Rabat Plan of Action provides a framework for engagement on this issue at the national level in several countries, such as Pakistan and Malaysia. Article 19, an international advocacy group, has created a guide⁵⁵ to identify hate speech and counter it, highlighting the potential roles and opportunities for engaging traditional and religious leaders. Other useful materials were developed by a wide range of United Nations, international and local organizations and think tanks.

⁵² United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development (2019), *Annual Report 2019*. Available at <http://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/handle/20.500.11822/32295>.

⁵³ United Nations Children's Fund (2012), *Partnering with Religious Communities for Children*, p. 47. Available at [https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children_\(UNICEF\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/files/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children_(UNICEF).pdf).

⁵⁴ United Nations Development Programme (2014), *UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organizations and Religious Leaders*.

⁵⁵ Article 19 (2015), 'Hate Speech' Explained: A Toolkit. Available at <https://www.article19.org/resources/hate-speech-explained-a-toolkit/>.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

This policy brief has highlighted the opportunities and challenges of engaging religious leaders in the Arab region as partners and allies in the WPS agenda, as well as the potential roles of religious leaders in supporting each of the four core pillars of the WPS agenda. Finally, the brief outlines a three-step approach to guide the engagement of religious leaders.

As the WPS agenda advances in the Arab region, there is significant potential for religious leaders to champion protection, prevention, participation and relief and recovery efforts. Religious leaders have unparalleled influence and access in the Arab region. They are able to work at the local level, translating the WPS agenda to their communities, as well as at the State level, systemically shaping faith-based policies. However, given the complexity of the religious landscape, a comprehensive context analysis is pivotal in informing any engagement with religious leaders, so as to ensure a robust understanding of the religious landscape and prevent negative outcomes arising from any interventions. ESCWA recommends the following policy actions to Arab States, international organizations and civil society organizations:

- *Invest* in further research on the engagement of religious leaders in the WPS agenda and the faith-based framing of the WPS agenda's goals. The research

should delve into developing a clear definition and means to identify who is considered a religious leader, their influence in their communities and proximity to State policies. In addition, the impact of the engagement of religious leaders should be further examined to mitigate any negative side effects of their involvement.

- *Examine* areas where a counter narrative is created that emphasizes the tolerant nature of religion and its respect for women's rights.
- *Confer with other States and organizations* on best practices and lessons learned regarding the engagement of religious leaders in the WPS agenda and the integration of religious leaders in National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325.
- *Conduct a robust context analysis:* This can include the implementation of ESCWA's three-step roadmap to identify potential partners: (a) Assessing the Legal, Social and Political Environment; (b) Mapping the Religious Landscape for Engagement; (c) Identifying Opportunities for Engagement; employ a Do No Harm⁵⁶ approach.
- *Bring civil society in* to the discussion with religious leaders on issues relating to gender equality and the WPS agenda to mitigate extremism and conservatism and ensure a dialogue among actors that respects freedom of expression and opinion and human rights.

⁵⁶ CDA Collaborative, *Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitivity Approach*. Available at <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/what-we-do/conflict-sensitivity/>.

- *Ensure an inclusive strategy* for the engagement of a diverse array of women and young religious leaders in supporting the WPS agenda and informing policy and programmatic interventions; expand the definition of religious leaders to include marginalized community members who are outside of traditional religious institutions and hierarchies; situate women in decision-making positions and emphasize local ownership and agency.
- *Identify and develop partnerships with allies* who are progressive, moderate or WPS-oriented religious leaders, to encourage the advancement of the WPS agenda in faith-based spaces and by other religious leaders.
- *Partner with, and provide capacity-building for, religious leaders:* Provide training on WPS agenda related concepts (SGBV, international law, early warning systems, etc.) and skill sets (advocacy, AGD analysis, etc.); assist religious leaders in producing contextual resources and tools; provide space for diverse faith-based discussions on the WPS agenda; and support the development of networks between religious leaders, as well as between religious leaders and secular civil society organizations.



