



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Jssor Youth Organization, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 June 2018]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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## Youth faith actor's role in implementing UNSCR2250

- *More than 80 percent of the world identifies as religious, and most of the world's most violent conflicts occur in countries with the most youthful populations.*
- *Youth are often the most vulnerable and affected by violent conflict globally, and yet tend to be excluded from peacebuilding efforts.*
- *Trust needs to be built between youth leaders and traditional and nontraditional religious leaders.*
- *In leveraging the legitimacy of youth and religious leaders to engage vulnerable communities, peacebuilding practitioners and the international community can more effectively support efforts to prevent violent conflict.*
- *By identifying allies within the religious and youth communities, peacebuilding practitioners gain access to otherwise inaccessible audiences, reaching the most vulnerable populations.*

In the context of UN, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security was adopted in December 2015, formalizing an international framework to address the critical role of youth in building and sustaining peace and preventing violent conflict. This historic resolution focused on five pillars of action to ensure that youth are included: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and reintegration.

Evidence shows that peace agreements that include women and civil society are 54 percent more likely to succeed.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the world's most violent conflicts are being fought in countries with the youngest populations.<sup>2</sup> Building on the adoption of Resolution 2250, the UN secretary general has mandated member states to collect evidence that proves engaging youth is an effective approach to peace and security efforts. Another essential but often overlooked element in promoting peace and security is religious actors—traditional and nontraditional religious leaders, institutions, and ideas influencing the religious space. Although peace and security experts increasingly recognize the critical need to partner with them as part of local peace efforts, religious actors—like women and youth—are often left out of policy discussions and the implementation of formal processes to create and build peace.<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing that the definitions of youth and religious actors vary from community to community, this report considers youth to be young men and women between the ages of 18 and 35. Religious actors include traditional religious leaders, at the cleric level, who are often elders or men but include lay religious people, women and youth among them, who help shape a community's religious attitudes and behaviors or play key roles in faith-based social service arms and organizations.

Our findings from the consultations we organised in Lebanon, Tunisia and Iraq suggest a mutual desire to build meaningful relationships between youth and religious actors around the shared priorities of peace and security. However, perceptions of differing values and priorities are barriers to effective partnerships. Trust needs to be built between youth leaders and traditional and nontraditional religious leaders.

The international community can support these collaborations to ensure more meaningful partnerships that contribute to the implementation of UNSCR 2250.

In terms of methods in building bridges:

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1 International Civil Society Action Network, "Better Peace Tool" ([www.icanpeacework.org/programs/better-peace-initiative/](http://www.icanpeacework.org/programs/better-peace-initiative/)).

2 . In the five countries—Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria—that suffered nearly 80 percent of recent deaths from violent extremism, half the population is younger than twenty-two, according to data from the 2015 Global Terrorism Index (<http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>).

3 Susan Hayward, "Religion and Peacebuilding: Reflections on Current Challenges and Future Prospects," Special Report no. 313 (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2012).

- 1) Partnerships, youth and religious actors each evince a desire to build deeper mutual relationships. In the survey, youth and religious actors reported feelings of different values and different priorities, despite often citing similar goals. Participants noted that youth and religious leaders are primarily interacting through formal conferences and meetings, which tend to be one-off engagements and thus less likely to facilitate longer-term, sustainable collaboration.  
When youth and religious leaders are brought together over longer periods and in more meaningful ways, such as co-developing and intrafaith programs, their shared values and priorities can be identified, facilitating trust and leading to stronger relationships and ultimately partnership. To implement Resolution 2250's goal of inclusive, sustainable partnerships, the international community should therefore invest in longer-term, more sustainable programming that allows relationships to develop between religious and youth actors, especially across generational divides.
  - 2) Prevention, religious youth—that is, youth who identify themselves as actively involved in religious communities—can serve as bridge-builders between religious leaders and youth, as several youth noted in during the consultations with the youth participants during our consultations in Lebanon, Tunisia and Iraq. Youth and religious leaders can work together to bring each other to the table, especially in local engagements. For example, senior religious leaders can bring youth leaders to policy discussions or they can make sure that clerical meetings are multigenerational and include young leaders as well as older ones. This collaboration will expand circles, combine spheres of influence, and foster meaningful participation.
  - 3) Participation, survey responses suggest that youth are still being excluded from peacebuilding dialogues and decision-making forums. When they are included, it is often through youth-only programming or the involvement of only a few privileged youth. Both youth and religious leaders also need to be included in these processes and forums
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