



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان  
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

# Message of Religious Fanaticism: **Gateway to Terrorism**

Prepared by: Nisreen Hasban

Edited by: Sherif Abdel Hamid



## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>First: Phenomenon of Extremism/Religious Fanaticism</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Second: From Extremism to Terrorism</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Third: Addressing Problem of Religious Fanaticism Leading to Terrorism</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Fourth: Role of International Community in Combating Religious Fanaticism</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism .....	7
International Day to Combat Islamophobia .....	7
General Assembly resolution on "Promoting Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and Tolerance in Face of Hate Speech." .....	8
International Conference on Combating Violent Extremism.....	8
<b>Fifth: Role of Civil Society in Combating Religious Intolerance</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>9</b>

## Introduction

"Terrorism is an assault on humanity. It targets people of all ages, cultures, religions, and nationalities. It undermines the values that unite us and threatens collective efforts to promote peace and security, protect human rights, provide humanitarian assistance, and advance sustainable development. We must be more vigilant than ever before. This requires prevention and addressing the underlying conditions that give rise to terrorism, promoting inclusion to ensure that counter-terrorism strategies incorporate diverse voices, especially minorities, women, and youth, and placing human rights at the core of all counter-terrorism policies. Let us work together, today and every day, to build more peaceful, inclusive, and stable societies where terrorism and violent extremism have no place."

**Speech by UN Secretary-General  
on the occasion of the  
International Day for the  
Prevention of Violent Extremism.**

**February 12, 2023**

Terrorism has shattered the foundations of humanity worldwide, jeopardizing global security and peace. The world has been forced to coexist with various forms and approaches of terrorist organizations. The underlying causes of terrorism, which has permeated every corner of the globe, have become clear to us. It is primarily driven by ideological deviations that weave the threads of violent extremism. There is an urgent need for the world to address these underlying factors and develop an effective strategy to eliminate terrorist cells and eradicate terrorism at its roots.

Consequently, the United Nations has focused on raising awareness about these root causes, how to prevent them, and the threats they pose. The General Assembly, through resolution 243/77, declared February 12th of each year as the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism. In doing so, it emphasized the primary responsibility of Member States and their national institutions in combating terrorism. It also highlighted the crucial role of intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academia, religious leaders, and the media in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism. The General Assembly called upon the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in collaboration with other relevant entities participating in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Agreement, to facilitate the observance of this international day.

Maat aims to participate in this international event by issuing a study on religious fanaticism as one of the primary entry points to terrorism. This is particularly significant because religious fanaticism is the loophole that most heavily influences individuals and can draw them into the cycle of terrorism. Maat will shed light on the roles played by the international community and civil society in combating this phenomenon, which has divided societies and caused destruction due to extremist ideas that ultimately manifest as violent acts.

### **First: Phenomenon of Extremism/Religious Fanaticism**

Defining extremism proves multifaceted. On one hand, it describes "an inclination towards the far right or far left regarding a position or issue, deviating from the norm, logic, and rationality." Alternatively, it refers to "going beyond moderation and abandoning the middle ground. It is, in general, an excessive belief that involves aggression against others, whether in thought or action."<sup>1</sup>

These definitions conclude that religious extremism is the intensification, excessiveness, rigidity, and unyielding adherence to beliefs, either in thought, behavior, or both. This closed-minded approach rejects any differing beliefs, shows no tolerance for dissent, and even advocates for forceful imposition of its views.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> السياق التاريخي للتطرف، التحالف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب، أكتوبر ٢٠٢٠. <http://tinyurl.com/4kjzdpdp>

<sup>2</sup> التطرف الديني المعاصر: تعريفه، وأسبابه، ومظاهره ومناهج علاجه، مجلة كلية الدراسات الإسلامية بالإسكندرية، <http://tinyurl.com/mtsw896w>

While ethnic, political, and social factors contribute to extremism, a significant contributor known as the misunderstanding of religions came into play. We cannot blame "religion" for this misconception, but the act of interpreting religious texts with meanings far removed from their intended purpose, misusing religiously charged words.

The policy of the terrorist organization "ISIS" reflects this clearly, with its uses of religious connotations in an indirect reference to Islam's battles in the past, such as "apostates" - "parties" - and "crusaders" in reference to Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Political purposes also played a key role in cultivating religious extremism. Political parties began to instrumentalize religion for political agendas. Religion was employed in political contexts that served certain interests over others. The "Holy War" terminology employed by George W. Bush during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the unspeakable actions of extremist groups in Israel -who use the Jewish religion, specifically the Talmud-against Palestinians stand as stark examples of this problematic practice.<sup>4</sup>

## Second: From Extremism to Terrorism

The transition from religious extremism to terrorism finds a chilling illustration in the rise of terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS). These groups operate like raging infernos, consuming the world with their flames, their leaders having once harbored mere extremist inclinations before escalating into systematic acts of terror.

Among the most notable consequences of this transition is the phenomenon of **Islamophobia**, a deep-seated hatred of Islam. This prejudice gained prominence in the West after the September 11th attacks, orchestrated by Al-Qaeda, where three commercial planes were used to strike the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon, leading to nearly 3,000 casualties.<sup>5</sup> The attack's devastating repercussions extended to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan when the United States, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, violated their sovereignty.<sup>6</sup>

An individual's religious and ideological extremism often transforms into terrorism when these ideas translate into violent actions. This can occur either through individual initiative or through recruitment by extremist organizations. These organizations focus on a **process of indoctrination** that feeds the individual's mind with ideas that draw them towards joining the organization. This may involve strategies such as enticing them with material or spiritual gains or appealing to their emotions by using religion as a central

<sup>3</sup> تسويق الخطاب الديني المتطرف لتنظيم الدولة الإسلامية داعش: مجلة دابق نموذجا، مجلة كلية الآداب جامعة بورسعيد، يوليو ٢٠٢١، ص ٢٤.

<http://tinyurl.com/3rmw8mft>

<sup>4</sup> قيل أن يكون "اللاعنف" .. كان "الدين"، إيلاف، ديسمبر ٢٠٢١. <http://tinyurl.com/2us5zeme>

<sup>5</sup> الإسلاموفوبيا و ١١ سبتمبر.. "نقطة تحول" غيرت وجه العالم، سكاى نيوز عربية، سبتمبر ٢٠١٩. <http://tinyurl.com/cr9w6etv>

<sup>6</sup> الإسلاموفوبيا.. معاناة المسلمين في ديمقراطيات الغرب، الجزيرة، أبريل ٢٠١٦. <http://tinyurl.com/26cvyv5>

theme in their agenda.<sup>7</sup> **The primary targets** are usually young people who lack sufficient religious awareness to resist the motivation to join such organizations. Moreover, these organizations use deception tactics that exploit the weak religious conscience of these individuals.<sup>8</sup>

**Transition from religious extremism to terrorism can be quite easy.** This is because religious extremists are ignorant of their religion and do not follow the principles of sound faith. Instead, they adopt irrational principles that are far removed from the foundations of understanding and interpreting the rulings of Islamic law. They do not seek the tolerant values of their religion, which are completely at odds with their beliefs. **Therefore, it is much easier to influence and convince them to narrow and restrict their thinking.** This does not require much time or effort, especially when combined with other factors such as fragile social conditions and psychological instability of individuals.<sup>9</sup>

**This extremist ideology has been the source of suffering for entire countries for many years,** as the ability to curb terrorism remains inadequate. From 2011 to 2021, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Syria, Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Myanmar, and Pakistan have been continuously subjected to these terrorist attacks.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> ظاهرة تجنيد الشباب في الجماعات الإرهابية من خلال استخدام شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي، كلية العلوم السياسية والعلاقات الدولية جامعة الجزائر، سبتمبر ٢٠١٨. <http://tinyurl.com/4ev6s78k>

<sup>8</sup> تجنيد الأشخاص في التنظيمات الإرهابية أساليبه وطرقه: القانون الإماراتي نموذجاً، كلية القانون جامعة الشارقة، ٢٠٢٣، ص ١٤.

<http://tinyurl.com/4th4rvud>

<sup>9</sup> التطرف الديني: أسبابه وانعكاساته، جامعة سيدي محمد بن عبدالله فاس، ٢٠١٦. <http://tinyurl.com/28sdvae8>

<sup>10</sup> مؤشر الإرهاب العالمي ٢٠٢٢ م - قياس تأثير الإرهاب، التحالف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب، مايو ٢٠٢٢. <http://tinyurl.com/2n24h4cr>

2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	الدول
1	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	3	3	3	أفغانستان
2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	العراق
3	3	3	3	3	5	8	7	7	7	5	الصومال
4	6	7	15	21	30	52	108	111	113	113	بوركينافاسو
5	5	6	8	7	7	6	5	4	4	20	سوريا
6	4	4	4	4	2	2	3	5	5	8	نيجيريا
7	7	8	9	10	13	16	21	19	23	41	مالي
8	12	14	19	18	19	20	34	44	57	49	النيجر
9	24	23	42	40	42	39	29	24	21	17	ميانمار (بورما)
10	States most affected by terrorism according to GTI in 2021										باكستان

أكثر عشر دول تأثراً بالإرهاب مرتبة حسب درجة مؤشر الإرهاب العالمي GTI لعام 2021م

### Third: Addressing Problem of Religious Fanaticism Leading to Terrorism

Addressing extremism in general relies on the foundation of sound social upbringing. However, in the case of religious extremism, we can also attribute it to several other factors besides upbringing. **After ensuring that individuals grow up in a healthy family environment free from disintegration and division**, we must focus on several other safeguards that may be counteracted by the main factor in planting the seeds of extremism within individuals, even if we ensure that the nurturing environment for the individual during their upbringing was sound and healthy.<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon can be addressed through:

- 1. Focusing on individual's primary education environment**, which instills in them the first values and principles they encounter in their lives. Curricula and correct teaching methods that cultivate in the individual the values of tolerance, good character, and sound religious teachings are essential factors in ensuring that the chances of individuals being inclined to extremist motives are reduced.
- 2. Working to restrict the spread of hate preachers, extremists, or those who distort religious texts to serve partisan agendas or any other interests within societies**, and removing them from religious platforms and controlling their curricula.

<sup>11</sup> كيف نعالج التطرف الديني؟، الاتحاد، سبتمبر ٢٠١٦. <http://tinyurl.com/h64rbhty>

3. **Developing religious discourse** to accommodate individuals' understanding of it correctly. This comes from religious leaders focusing on spreading compassionate and accepting human values and tolerance for others, and focusing on moderation and middle-ground approaches.
4. **Developing a methodology for monitoring excommunicating, inciting, and doubting fatwas and imposing penalties on those responsible.**

#### **Fourth: Role of International Community in Combating Religious Fanaticism**

In light of the growing phenomenon of religious extremism and increasing danger of terrorist groups day after day, the international community has been working to take new peaceful diplomatic steps to eliminate the sources of terrorism to complement the military steps taken by countries that address the phenomenon temporarily and partially. However, the new innovative steps came to suppress the roots of ideological extremism leading to terrorism, including:

##### **Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism<sup>12</sup>**

**On January 15, 2016, Secretary-General presented the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to the General Assembly.** This call for concerted action by the international community was the result of an intensive inter-agency process within the United Nations, and it drew on the outcomes of high-level meetings of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, interactive briefings by Member States, and the outcomes of international and regional meetings. **The Plan of Action** contains over 70 recommendations to Member States and the United Nations system to prevent the further spread of violent extremism. It calls for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond core security measures to address the root causes that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups.

**On February 12, 2016, General Assembly adopted a resolution that "welcomes the initiative of the Secretary-General and takes note of his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism."** General Assembly also decided to "continue to consider the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, starting with the review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in June 2016, as well as in other relevant forums."

##### **International Day to Combat Islamophobia<sup>13</sup>**

A resolution was adopted by the sixty member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in response to systematic campaigns of hatred against Islam and Muslims, commonly referred to as Islamophobia. On March 15, the General Assembly designated this day as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The resolution emphasizes

---

<sup>12</sup> خطة العمل لمنع التطرف العنيف، الأمم المتحدة، <http://tinyurl.com/5n7d6xs7>  
<sup>13</sup> اليوم الدولي لمكافحة كراهية الإسلام، الأمم المتحدة، <http://tinyurl.com/bdra7289>



that terrorism and violent extremism should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization, or ethnic group. It also calls for the promotion of global dialogue to foster a culture of tolerance and peace, based on respect for human rights and the diversity of religions and beliefs.

### **General Assembly resolution on "Promoting Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and Tolerance in Face of Hate Speech."<sup>14</sup>**

This resolution was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly on July 25, 2023. It shares the same wording as the resolution adopted during the 75th session of the General Assembly in 2021, with the addition of phrases related to "religious symbols" and "sacred books" in the third paragraph. The revised paragraph reads as follows: "Strongly condemns all acts of violence against individuals based on their religion or belief, as well as any acts against their religious symbols, holy books, homes, businesses, property, schools, cultural centers, places of worship, and all attacks on religious sites and landmarks that violate international law."

### **International Conference on Combating Violent Extremism<sup>15</sup>**

The third session of the conference took place on November 14, 2023, spanning two days and featuring a series of working sessions, in-depth discussions, and the exchange of ideas. These sessions aimed to develop an innovative approach based on scientific knowledge to confront the global phenomenon of violent extremism. The conference also addressed the need to tackle both online and offline approaches aimed at recruiting children and youth. It drew attention to new forms of extremism and the exploitation of innocent individuals to form groups that pose a threat to legitimate regimes. A comprehensive report on the conference's outcomes was submitted to the Executive Committee for Combating Terrorism at the UN Security Council, containing a set of recommendations, including:

- Conducting a study to catalog completed university theses on violent extremism.
- Urging the international community to urgently and seriously address the unjustified violence, which destroyed health and humanitarian facilities, as well as causing harm to thousands of innocent people in the Gaza Strip. This violence threatens efforts to combat extremism.

<sup>14</sup> الجمعية العامة تتبنى قرارا لتعزيز الحوار بين الأديان ومواجهة خطاب الكراهية، الأمم المتحدة، يوليو ٢٠٢٣. <http://tinyurl.com/37jfzjj3>

<sup>15</sup> حزمة من التوصيات في ختام الدورة الثالثة للمؤتمر الدولي حول مكافحة التطرف العنيف، إيسيسكو، نوفمبر ٢٠٢٣. <http://tinyurl.com/mppaue29>

## Fifth: Role of Civil Society in Combating Religious Intolerance

Efforts to combat religious intolerance cannot succeed without the involvement of civil society. Civil society plays several crucial roles within the framework of strategies to combat extremism and religious intolerance. One of the most important roles is its ability to raise awareness and promote correct religious teachings that foster dialogue, tolerance, and the development of mature, cohesive societies.

Civil society also acts as an advocate, filling societal gaps and fostering participation and a sense of belonging. When these efforts are successful, individuals are encouraged to integrate with such organizations.

In recognition of the significant role played by civil society, the idea of establishing the first core network of civil society organizations engaged in combating hatred, religious intolerance, and racial discrimination emerged as one of the outcomes of a communication meeting organized by the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in collaboration with the European Academy for Development and Research in the city of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on September 14th and 15th, 2019. The network comprises ten civil society associations consisting of members from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds representing the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Britain, and Denmark, with the potential for other associations to join. The network's objectives are as follows:<sup>16</sup>

- Utilizing new media technologies, particularly social media networks, to facilitate consultation and coordination on best practices and practical initiatives aimed at combating religious intolerance. This includes the identification of forms of persecution, provocation, and profiling experienced by religious minorities, particularly Muslim minorities.
- Developing an operational program that addresses the media and human rights dimensions, capable of reducing incitement to hatred through the media. The program aims to promote dialogue, respect, and tolerance towards diverse opinions and beliefs, while upholding the values of cultural and religious diversity consistent with human rights principles and standards.
- Encouraging the establishment of networks to facilitate communication with civil society organizations dedicated to human rights and supportive of the issues concerning immigrants, refugees, and religious minorities in Europe.

### Recommendations:

<sup>16</sup> الإيسيسكو: إنشاء النواة الأولى لشبكة منظمات المجتمع المدني لمكافحة الكراهية والتعصب الديني، السفير، سبتمبر ٢٠١٩.

<http://tinyurl.com/bdz3bkj8>

In light of the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism, Maat presents a set of recommendations to mitigate the severity of religious extremism, which has become a significant concern in our current era:

1. Countries should develop comprehensive approaches and strategies to combat terrorism that do not solely rely on military plans. Attention should be given to intellectual methods, religious references, education, upbringing, and other non-violent means.
2. United Nations and its member states should collaborate to establish foundations for amending and enhancing religious educational curricula in schools. This would ensure that correct religious teachings reach individuals from an early age, thereby fostering new generations free from extremism and terrorism.
3. Civil society organizations should prioritize efforts to combat religious extremism. These organizations should work on developing programs and systems that effectively and efficiently shape the minds of young people, preventing them from falling into the trap of extremism.
4. Media plays a vital role in promoting moderation and balance. Therefore, media institutions should cooperate with religious counterparts to create partnership strategies and employ them to ensure that sound values reach all members of society.