Dakar Plan of Action on the Role of Women in the Religious Sphere

Participants in the regional conference entitled "Role of women as guides and spiritual leaders in the prevention of violent extremism", debated in Dakar from 5 to 7 May 2026 the interaction between religion, violence, women and human rights.

Participants identified the following findings:

- Sacred books, in themselves, do not discriminate against women, in view of the link between text and context. Rather, it is certain human interpretations that reflect an instrumentalization of religion for political or economic ends or the perpetuation of a system of patriarchal domination. Correcting such historical drifts requires courage, lucidity and collective, interdisciplinary and rigorous work.
- Women and youth are central for preventing, detecting and combating violent extremism in their communities.
- Addressing the structural deficit in the place of women in the religious sphere is a prerequisite for addressing several interconnected challenges: the fight against violent extremism, gender-based discrimination, ideologically motivated challenges to the universality of human rights, as well as the restoration of the credibility of UN human rights mechanisms, through a concrete and measurable impact on the ground thanks to the action of women religious actors.
- Strengthening local action in favour of human rights requires a bottom-up approach, based on a detailed knowledge of family and community dynamics. In this regard, the role, legal status, funding and protection of the Mourchidates in Mauritania, the Badian Gokh in Senegal, and many women religious or community leaders, appears essential.
- The role of the competent UN human rights mechanisms is important to accompany and support in practical ways the demands and actions of women religious actors.
- The ethical and spiritual foundations of religions and beliefs can help to combat polarization and conflict, while promoting reconciliation. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, has emphasized, "there is an urgent need for religious leaders of all faiths to work together to promote the shared, universal principles of human dignity and compassion, and to transform them into acts of solidarity."[1]
- In her opening speech in Dakar, the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Senegal, Mrs. Aminata Maïga, expressed the hope that this conference would lead to a concrete commitment of religious leaders around the principles of "Faith for Rights", and that it would pave the way for strengthened regional cooperation, in the service of the Sustainable Development Goals, focused on peace, justice and the reduction of inequalities.[2]

[1] https://docs.un.org/fr/A/HRC/61/72, at para. 54; https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/02/religious-leaders-must-work-together-promote-shared-principles
[2] https://indico.un.org/event/1023654/attachments/25528/72954/RC-Senegal.pdf

Through this **Dakar Plan of Action on the Role of Women in the Religious Sphere**, the participants in the regional conference organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) intend to create a community of practice bringing together religious actors whose objectives are as follows:

1. Continue peer-to-peer learning exchanges, expanding the UN-led "Faith for Rights" community of practice, as well as the network of young religious actors established for the same purpose at the end of the first peer-to-peer learning session organized by the British University of Egypt in Cairo, from 1 to 5 February 2026, in collaboration with the Al-Azhar Observatory for Countering Extremism and the Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies, with the support of the European Union and OHCHR.
2. Develop, in collaboration with independent experts from UN human rights mechanisms, an interfaith commentary on the role and responsibilities of women in the religious sphere, including their status in religious institutions and fatwa bodies.
3. Through this commentary, to open a space for theological and intellectual discernment that makes it possible to distinguish the religious message itself from human interpretations and historically elaborated cultural constructions that have served to legitimize the marginalization of women in the religious sphere, in order to better deconstruct them.
4. Work on the narrative in order to rehabilitate female figures forgotten in educational and religious programs, as well as translate the #Faith4Rights toolkit and 18 Commitments on "Faith for Rights" into Arabic and local languages in order to facilitate their contextualization and use in peer-to-peer learning in West Africa.
5. To create an interfaith group of young women faith actors to coordinate follow-up activities on "Faith for Rights" in West Africa.
6. Organize regional capacity-building sessions in West Africa for young women faith actors, and share lessons learned at the annual meetings of the Faith for Rights Community of Practice.
7. Contribute to the Global Alliance for Human Rights,[3] which brings together a diversity of actors called upon to mobilize, each in their own sphere of influence, to defend, protect and promote human rights.

The participants gratefully commended the hospitality and commitment of the United Nations and all partners to promote an inclusive global dialogue.

Done in Dakar, 7 May 2026.

[3] https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/09/we-need-global-alliance-mobilize-influence-uphold-protect-and