“Empower Talk: Standing Against Hate and Embracing Rights”

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Honorable Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Excellencies, UN Resident Coordinator, Colleagues, Ladies and gentlemen,

A **warm welcome** to this global human rights conference in Tirana, with a view to empower talk.

Peaceful dialogue and coexistence are increasingly hindered across the globe by discrimination, incitement to hatred and violence against persons based on religion or belief. Online hate speech may fuel real-life violence, as part of a wider pattern of attacks against Muslims, Jews, Christians and other religious or belief minorities.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights recently stressed that States, religious leaders, faith-based actors or other members of civil society should work together to promote **human dignity, social cohesion and respect**.

Last September, United Nations Member States decided in the **Pact for the Future** to counter religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. They also emphasised that to be effective, this work must include faith-based organizations and civil society.

It is indeed vital to **strengthen communication with civil society and faith-based actors**, allowing for ongoing dialogue and exchange of information. In this context, let me stress the wide definition of the term “faith-based actors” under international human rights law, which equally protects all theistic, non-theistic, atheistic and other believers.

Over the past five years, **United Nations Human Rights has been facilitating peer-to-peer learning** on “Faith for Rights”, where participants can share positive experiences and lessons learned. In November, we organized the fifth annual meeting of the Faith for Rights “commUNity of practices”, with a thematic focus on promoting gender equality and countering the instrumentalization of religions, beliefs or their followers.

The **18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”** include the pledge to stand up for the right of minorities to participate equally and effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life. They also pledged to leverage the spiritual and moral weight of religions and beliefs for protecting universal human rights and developing preventative strategies for joint interfaith action, redressing hate speech by remedial compassion and solidarity that transcend religious or belief boundaries.

Faith literacy and human rights literacy are needed to foster harmonious, diverse and cohesive societies. The Secretary-General's recent report on combating intolerance based on religion or belief provides the example of several religious leaders, who are part of the Faith for Rights "commUNity of practices", advocating together for people of all faiths to have unimpeded access to their places of worship, and they have also publicly condemned incitement to violence, discrimination or hostility in the name of religion.

Networks of faith-based actors can effectively transform the messages of mercy and compassion into acts of solidarity. Inter-communal social, developmental and environmental faith-based projects are truly needed at the local, national, regional and global levels. Change on the ground is the goal and concerted action is its logical means for restoring trust and reshaping the future. We all have to unite our joint efforts for peace, human rights and intergenerational climate justice. The overarching objective is to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all, where diversity is not just tolerated but fully respected and celebrated.

The **Secretary-General** called in particular upon political, community and religious leaders to speak out against incitement to violence and religious hatred. Further progress in implementing Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 is needed, including through the Istanbul Process and strategic engagement with faith-based actors. States should redouble their efforts, with the support of United Nations entities, to ensure the equal protection of everyone from discrimination by adopting and duly implementing comprehensive anti-discrimination laws in conformity with international human rights standards.

We support Member States and other stakeholders **in adopting and implementing comprehensive equality laws, policies and practices** – the basis for efforts to combat discrimination on any ground, including religion or belief. While no country has perfect compliance, at the end of 2024 we see 47 countries whose laws are broadly compliant with the comprehensive ban on discrimination. In addition, our analysis shows that 33 countries are now actively working to bring laws into compliance with the standards set out under international law.

In conclusion, we need to **stand up against hate and embrace human rights**. Empowering talk and facilitating joint action may be a healing tool of reconciliation and peacebuilding in the hearts and minds.

Thank you.