



**Conclusions from the Washington Conference
on Threats to Religious and Ethnic Minorities Under Da'esh**

Washington, DC

28-29 July 2016

The Washington Conference continued an initiative launched by France at the UN Security Council in March 2015 to discuss and seek ways to address the plight of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria. The United States welcomed and participated actively in this effort, which continued at the Paris Conference in September under the co-sponsorship of France and Jordan. The Paris Conference focused on the three fields: Humanitarian, Political, and Legal. The United States views the resulting Paris Action Plan, which highlights steps nations can take to aid religious and ethnic minorities, as an important and useful roadmap for action by the international community. Subsequent conferences organized by Greece and Morocco further raised the profile of this important issue, including through the January 2016 Marrakesh Declaration. The government of Spain will host a follow-on conference in the coming months.

Discussions in Washington emphasized the return of refugees and displaced peoples, fighting impunity, protection of cultural legacies, promotion of policies of reconciliation, and the prevention and fight against violent extremism. A number of specific themes emerged from the Washington Conference:

- Participants condemned the wide-scale suffering experienced by people of all faiths, majority and minority, in both Iraq and Syria. Recognizing the existential threat facing religious and ethnic minorities, participants specifically condemned Da'esh atrocities against members of these minority communities and expressed strong support for protecting their human rights and preserving religious diversity in the region.
- Participants recognized the urgency of the threats and needs, given the continuing Da'esh atrocities in Iraq and Syria. They reaffirmed that the human rights of members of religious and ethnic minorities, including freedom of religion or belief, must be protected, and minority community members be recognized as equal persons before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection under the law.
- Participants discussed the recent progress towards liberating Mosul and the surrounding Ninewa Plain, which provides an additional impetus for the international community to review current efforts to determine what more can be done to enable religious and ethnic minorities to return to, and remain in, their ancestral homelands.

- Participants discussed steps the international community can take to: foster accountability for mass atrocities; increase aid to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; address post-liberation challenges for religious and ethnic minorities, including durable solutions for those who choose to return to their homes; and address the cultural and religious heritage protection needs of minority faith communities.
- Participants reaffirmed the importance of engaging religious and civic leaders to better understand and respond to the needs of communities. In that effort, participants expressed their appreciation for the candid insights provided by civil society representatives at the meeting co-sponsored by the State Department and Georgetown University. Participants welcomed partnerships with non-governmental and faith-based organizations to meet humanitarian needs and stressed the importance of these groups having rapid, safe, and unhindered access to populations in need.
- Recognizing the need for a stronger international response to assist religious and ethnic minorities, participants emphasized the importance of considering additional actions their governments can undertake immediately to assist members of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as new initiatives to present at the next meeting in Spain.