



12 March 2014 – Manifestations of collective hatred do not ‘erupt’ like a volcano, but they are caused by human beings, whose actions or omissions can set in motion a seemingly unstoppable negative dynamic in societies, which seems to be comparable to that caused by a natural catastrophe.

This was stated by The United Nations [Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#) , Heiner Bielefeldt Mr during the presentation of his latest [report](#)

to the UN Human Rights Council. Mr Bielefeldt urged States to promote and protect everyone’s right of freedom of religion or belief, in order to tackle the growing problem of collective religious hatred in the world.



The human rights expert warned that feelings of collective religious hatred are often caused by a combination of fear and contempt which can trigger a vicious cycle of mistrust, narrow-mindedness and collective hysteria, and called on States to “take an active role in trust-building through public institutions as a trust-worthy guarantor of freedom of religion or belief for everyone.”

In his report, the expert identifies a number of key aggravating political factors behind the expressions of religious hatred, such as endemic corruption which typically undermines reasonable trust in public institutions, and an authoritarian political atmosphere that stifles free and frank public debate and creates a “mentality of suspicion.

He drew special attention to the use of religion for the purposes of national identity politics, “which typically leads to the marginalization and misrepresentation of religious minorities, often disproportionately affecting women from minorities.”

The Special Rapporteur urged States to ensure effective trust building activities, including establishing trustworthy public institutions and promoting [meaningful communication](#) , in particular between different religious or belief communities.

As a positive example of a culture of religious or belief-related pluralism, the expert mentioned his first-hand experience during his recent country visit to Sierra Leone, where the [Interreligious Council](#) has become a key factor in a re-united country that until a decade ago had been torn by civil war.

“I found the open and amicable climate of interreligious cooperation in Sierra Leone – which not only includes Muslims and Christians but also intra-religious groups, such as Sunnis, Ahamdis, Shias, Catholics, Anglicans and Evangelicals – quite remarkable,” Mr. Bielefeldt said.