



**Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
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Statement

by

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**Arria Formula Meeting: Religion, Belief and Conflict - Advancing the
Protection of Members of Religious and Belief Groups in Conflict and the
Role of Religious Actors in Conflict Resolution**

Security Council

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New York

Check against delivery

Thank you Ambassador Woodward,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes today's discussion and we thank the United Kingdom for convening this meeting. We also thank the briefers for their insightful presentations.

People of all religions and beliefs, no matter their class, gender, or ethnicity should be allowed to express their beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution. Refugees, internally displaced persons, and those who are stateless should also be free to practice their faith, in safety and security. The fundamental liberties of thought, conscience and religion, ascribed to all persons under international humanitarian and human rights law, must be protected in conflict settings - no matter the circumstances.

When persons are targeted solely on the grounds of their religion or belief; when they are punished for practicing their faith; when they are forcibly converted, or coerced into any act forbidden by their religion - these actions may amount to war crimes and must be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators held to account. When these "outrages upon personal dignity" are committed on such a scale that they may threaten international peace and security, the Security Council is obligated to respond in order to save lives. The persecution of the Yazidis and other religious groups by ISIL is but one egregious example.

Religious leaders, through their community engagements, have a significant role to play in conflict settings by providing mediation, promoting tolerance, and fostering trust and social cohesion amongst stakeholders. When involved in peace processes, religious leaders and faith-based organisations can assist conflict-affected communities to mend their social fabrics by facilitating inter-faith dialogue and advancing inclusivity as a social norm, while safeguarding local cultures and traditions. The Sant'Egidio Community's valuable contributions to the South Sudan peace process serves as testament to the critical role of faith-based organisations. We have also borne witness to the papal encyclical which calls for swift and united action on Climate Change - which remains a key driver of conflict and instability globally. And today, we are pleased to have heard from the Archbishop of Canterbury on his noble efforts to promote mediation and reconciliation.

All parties to conflict must ensure that religious personnel are respected and protected during active hostilities. Religious and sacred sites, including places of worship, monuments, burial grounds, or

other cultural property should be regarded as neutral territory; and should never be subjected to any form of attack, occupation, or otherwise utilised in military operations.

In conclusion, our delegation reaffirms that freedom of thought, conscience and religion are intricately connected to the Sustainable Development Goals. Our common promise of leaving no one behind will only be fulfilled when people of all creeds are free to practice their spiritual or religious beliefs, in dignity and in equality. I thank you.