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To: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Re: Resolution 30/15 of the Human Rights Council on “Human Rights and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism”

We are grateful to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its commitment to addressing violent extremism and the ethic that violent extremism cannot be and should not be associated by any religion. We believe that religion should not be a source for violence or sanction violence in any form. Moreover, we believe that religion should be a source of peacefulness among humanity with respect for the human rights and human dignity of all persons, regardless of human or cultural difference.

The common ethic of all religions is compassion which must be the antidote to violent extremism. Violent extremism must be a concern for all religions, for all faith traditions in all countries. We are deeply concerned about the violent teachings and actions against women, children, refugees and migrants, sexual minorities, political, religious and ethnic minorities and the poor around the world.

We believe that education about human rights and protecting human rights contributes to preventing and countering violent extremism. We believe in the centrality and compatibility of human rights and their correspondence with faith values such as the sacred creation of all beings, compassion for all persons and all living things, stewardship of creation and respect for the earth, and the promotion of peace.

While the Global Faith and Justice Project is informed and inspired by the Christian faith, we work within multi-faith contexts. Moreover, while our project has holds a global perspective the focus of our work for the last three years has been in partnership and solidarity with African faith leaders and scholars. It is within the context of this work with African faith leaders and scholars that we want to share our learnings with regard to insights about the conversation and application of human rights in an African setting.

We held a convening of African faith leaders and scholars in association with the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal’s Journal of Theology for Southern Africa in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa in July, 2014. The discussion of human rights and how it can be best understood, applied and make a difference in the African context was a vibrant conversation among this group of 40

African faith leaders and scholars from eight African countries. The characterization of human rights as “foreign, Western and not African” was a primary concern for this group as they all believed in the value of human rights and everyone agreed that the language of human rights was a challenge in their contexts. This concern led to a discussion of ways to connect human rights with indigenous African values and teachings. The consensus of the group was that human rights needed to be connected to the African ethic of Ubuntu, or “I am because you are.” The second recommendation of this group, particularly from a religious perspective was that the emphasis upon “human dignity” as it pertains to human rights would be helpful in the African context.

Therefore, in preventing and countering violent extremism, particularly when there is a religious source or sanction, the application of human rights would be helped, at least in the African context, by connecting human rights with indigenous African values such as Ubuntu and the emphasis upon human dignity. We imagine that this one African example may offer insight to other cultural contexts around the world where the language of human rights is not immediately accessible or where the opposition to human rights allege that human rights is foreign or Western.

We are indeed grateful for Resolution 30/15 of the Human Rights Council. And, we are grateful for this opportunity to share our learnings from our context of doing human rights from our faith and justice perspective.

Respectfully submitted,

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