Side Event – Human Rights Council 62nd Session

From Rabat to Glion – Safeguarding Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Digital Age

22 June 2026, 1–2 p.m.
Palais des Nations, Building A, Concordia 1

Background

The Human Rights Council has long worked to promote and protect the interdependent and mutually reinforcing freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. Initiatives such as Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, the Istanbul Process, and the Rabat Plan of Action (RPA) on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, have established key frameworks to guide this work.

Since the adoption of the RPA in 2012, the rapid expansion of social media, combined with evolving content moderation standards and the dynamics of virality, has enabled hatred to be created, disseminated and amplified online in new and unprecedented ways. The increasing use of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies has further enhanced the capacity to generate and spread hateful content. Ultimately, the rise in hate speech, coupled with structural power imbalances in digital spaces, risks marginalising religious groups and minorities and driving them out of public debate.

Against this backdrop, after a first side-event on the margins of HRC60, an expert workshop held in Glion in April 2026, convened by Switzerland in collaboration with OHCHR and ARTICLE 19, brought together representatives from Member States, the United Nations, civil society, academia and tech companies. The discussions focused on identifying emerging and persistent challenges related to online hate speech targeting religious groups and minorities, highlighting good practices and practical approaches to strengthen the implementation of the RPA in the digital context – including clarifying the operationalisation of its six-part threshold test.

Objective

This side event will present the key points, challenges and best practices discussed at the Glion expert workshop as well as outline a preliminary direction for recommendations based thereon. It will explore how the RPA's framework can be more effectively applied in digital environments, with a view to strengthening freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, while addressing evolving risks associated with online hate speech.

Discussion Themes

- Emerging and persistent challenges related to safeguarding freedom of expression online while preventing and countering online hate speech targeting religious groups and minorities.
- The relevance of the RPA's key principles and its six-part "threshold test", also in digital contexts.
- Preliminary directions for recommendations, including good practices and practical solutions, to ensure the effective implementation of the RPA in the digital age.
- The role of various stakeholders in implementing the RPA in online contexts.

Target Audience

- Member States and Permanent Missions
- OHCHR and UN mandate holders
- Tech companies, digital policy experts
- Civil society actors and faith-based organizations
- Academia and legal practitioners engaged in freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief

Format

Interactive panel discussion in English followed by Q&A. This side event will be held in a hybrid format. To participate online, please use the following link: https://ungeneva-vc.webex.com/ungeneva-vc/j.php?MTID=m339ef5320e58b0b19b07717409ae85d8.

Agenda

13h00 – Welcome and Opening remarks by Switzerland

13h10 – Panel discussion

13h35 – Reactions from the floor

13h45 – Reactions by the panellists

13h50 – Closing remarks and next steps Switzerland

Speakers

Daniel Frank, Head of Human Rights and Rule of Law Section, Directorate of International Law, Switzerland

Abdessalam El Ouazzani, Expert, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Morocco to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva

Michael Wiener, Human Rights Officer, Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section, OHCHR

Callum Birch, Senior UN Advocacy Advisor, ARTICLE 19

Gabrielle Guillemin, Head of Human Rights Policy, Expression and Standards, Meta

Vasilika Hysi, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva

Co-sponsors

Permanent Missions of Albania and Morocco