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Note to Media on India by Under-Secretary-General Adama Dieng, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

(New York, 18 May 2020) The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, expressed his concern over reports of increased hate speech and discrimination against minority communities in India since the adoption of the Citizenship Amendment Act in December 2019.

The act expedites the citizenship process for Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs who are fleeing alleged persecution in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and who have been residents in India before 2014. While the protection of minority communities is commendable, it is concerning that this protection is not extended to all groups, including Muslims. This is contrary to the rights law, in particular on non-discrimination, the Special Adviser stated.

The Special Adviser also expressed concern over reports that demonstrations against the law, which occurred across some regions of India since its enactment, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, had reportedly resulted in the injury and death of civilians, attacks on religious sites, as well as an internet shutdown. The Special Adviser added that statements such as those expressed by Member of Parliament Subramanian Swamy, that all people are not equal, and that Muslims are not equal, are extremely alarming. Hate speech and the dehumanization of others goes against international human rights norms and values.

The Special Adviser recognized India's long standing and well recognized history of promoting inclusive and peaceful societies, with respect for equality and principles of non-discrimination. He welcomed recent statements by the Prime Minister of India in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that the virus “*does not see race, religion, colour, caste, creed, language or border before striking and that our response and conduct...should attach primacy to unity and brotherhood.*” Under-Secretary-General Dieng encouraged the Government of India to continue to abide by this guidance by ensuring that national laws and policies follow international standards related to non-discrimination and to address and counter the rise of hate speech through messages of inclusion, respect for diversity and unity. He reiterated that he would continue to follow developments and expressed his readiness to support initiatives to counter and address hate speech.

In these extraordinary times brought about by the COVID-19 crisis it is more important than ever that we stand united as one humanity, demonstrating unity and solidarity rather than division and hate.
