Position Statement on Religious Persecution and Genocide

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Issue:
Religious persecution and genocide pose significant threats to the mental health of large groups of people in the world today. Religious persecution is a key risk factor for mental health problems in refugee children resettled in high-income countries, according to a large recent meta-analysis of numerous studies.¹ The United Nations Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide proclaims that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, be a crime under international law that the contracting parties pledge to prevent and punish. The convention defines genocide as acts intended to destroy (in whole or in part) a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.² This includes:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

POSITION:
1. APA condemns acts of religious persecution, and genocide on the basis of any national, ethnic, racial, or religious identity.
2. APA urges psychiatrists to speak out against religious persecution and genocide through professional and political channels.
3. APA calls for further research on the mental health impacts of trauma due to religious persecution or genocide, as well as potential treatment strategies for working with populations that have experienced these.

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¹Fazel M., Reed R., Panter-Brick C., Stein A. Mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in high-income countries: risk and protective factors. Lancet 2012; 379:266-82.
²http://legal.un.org/avl/ha/cppcg/cppcg.html