



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 46th SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

(4 March 2021)

Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief:

Summary of the report: [A/HRC/46/30](#)

- The report focuses on the specific question of how **Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred** infringes upon freedom of religion or belief.
- It highlights that **widespread essentializations that depict Muslims and their beliefs as cultural “others”** and threats have served to **perpetuate, validate and normalize discrimination**, hostility and violence towards Muslim individuals and communities.
- It makes special emphasis on the fact that **harmful stereotypes** about Muslims and Islam are **chronically reinforced by mainstream media, powerful politicians, influencers of popular culture and in academic discourse**.
- The report further elaborates on the **processes of racialization** that propel this form of bias, **documents the personal experiences** of affected communities, and **proposes recommendations** to address and mitigate the impacts of Islamophobia.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur highlighted in his speech that there is an **alarming increase of right-wing extremist groups** that are propagating hatred on online platforms particularly amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard he emphasized that Islamophobic narratives extend to media, academia, schools, healthcare settings and parliamentary bodies.

Additionally, he mentioned that current **stereotypes** about Muslim men and women result in **restricting policies, exclusion and in the justification of impunity** for violence and hate against them and those perceived to be Muslim. In this sense, countries should be developing measures and policies to combat this way of **structural discrimination** while understanding that the issue is **not just irrational anti-Muslim bias or hate**.

Furthermore, countries must understand that the **protection of religion does not mean that the right to freedom of expression has to be restricted or limited**. In this regard, practices have to be oriented towards the **inclusion of Muslims in the work** that is done side by side with the media, internet companies, civil society and States. Moreover, he highlighted that countries must work on the **elimination of discrimination and religious intolerance** through a **human rights response**.

Lastly, the Special Rapporteur reminded all countries that **Islamophobia must not be considered as a stand-alone issue** as it intersects with other issues like discriminatory ideologies, **including xenophobia, racism and sexism which should also be combated**.

Interactive Dialogue

The majority of the speakers commended the report made by the Special Rapporteur and agreed on the fact that more work has to be done to eradicate Islamophobia, especially in developing more **concrete measures to prevent online hatred** from being disseminated. Also, that **anti-Muslim hatred policies** should be **implemented in a variety of sectors** including education, media platforms, employment, and others. In this sense, special emphasis was made by several countries on the fact that **concerted efforts should be directed towards the creation and strengthening of media and social networks’ laws and regulations on hate speech**.

Additionally, countries coincided on the fact that **interfaith dialogues** must take place to promote religious tolerance as well as the importance of embedding this in all institutions. Also, the majority of countries agreed that **Islamophobia leads to further violence and radicalization**.



Several countries raise their concerns on trying to **balance the protection of the right to freedom of expression** at the same time that they **develop anti-Muslim hatred policies** as they **worry, they might jeopardize free speech and advocacy in the process.**

Brazil, Malta, India and the Holy See voiced their concerns with regards to the focus of the report on Islamophobia and the exclusion of other religions and beliefs. Some countries stressed that the Special Rapporteur should have considered all of them in the report as not doing so further promotes division and the politicization of the discussion.

Cuba and Venezuela referred to increasing Islamophobia coming from **right-wing extremists** as well as **condemned the use of religious pretexts** from some countries to **attack other States.**

Syria, Turkey and Slovenia highlighted the **widespread misuse of religion to pursue political goals.**

Ukraine, Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan referred to other countries' attacks and oppression towards Muslims by officials and authorities. **Sudan** specifically regretted the fact the Special Rapporteur couldn't visit the country because of COVID-19 but extended its invitation to whenever it was possible for him.

Lastly, **China and India** denounced the work of the Special Rapporteur categorizing it as **politicized, based on unfounded irresponsible allegations and unverified information.**

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (54 country delegations):

Albania, Algeria, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil on behalf of International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Croatia, Cuba, Egypt, European Union, Fiji, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland on behalf of Nordic and Baltic countries, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya on behalf the Arab Group, Malaysia, Malta, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, Pakistan on behalf of the OIC, Poland, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sovereign Order of Malta, State of Palestine, Sudan, Togo, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Venezuela.

Other observers: *Holy See*

Points of order: **China** (in response to the "inflammatory statements" of an NGO) **Venezuela** (In support to China's point of order against the NGO's "inflammatory language")

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (10):

British Humanist Association, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Coordination des Associations et de Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigen tot Integratie Van Homoseksualiteit – COC Nederland, Freemuse – The World Forum on Music and Censorship, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Minority Rights Group, Universal Rights Group, World Evangelical Alliance, World Jewish Congress.

NGO representatives highlighted **the need to build inclusive societies in which States' fight against hate and racism and generate alliances between religious communities.** Also, they mentioned the important role **social media companies have on combating hate speech.**

Specific country remarks were made towards **India and Cuba**, regarding violent acts against Muslims; **China, Myanmar, Singapore, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Eritrea and Israel**, regarding arbitrary detentions of prisoners of conscience; **France** regarding discriminatory legislation, specially affecting the Muslim LGBTI community; and lastly, **Germany**, regarding religious discrimination against scientologists.

To watch full ID with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion, refer to UN Web TV: [part 1](#), [part 2](#).