

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 54th SESSION

### Interactive Dialogue on the High Commissioner's oral updates on drivers, root causes, and Human Rights impacts of religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence

05 October 2023

In his opening remarks, **Mr Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, affirmed that **religious hatred** has been rooted in prejudice, ignorance, or a deep-seated fear of the other. In the profound and painful legacies of past conflict, where religion has been weaponized and manipulated for political gain. Miscommunication, misunderstanding, and ethnocentric mindsets feed off the belief that one group is superior to another. Religious hate speech, a phenomenon that is far from new, is now unfolding unchecked. Online, and social media algorithms are amplifying hateful messages and nourishing the echo chambers of ignorance.

**The human rights** impacts of religious hatred and discrimination are clear. They thwart social progress, exclude, and polarize. They perpetuate mistrust and stereotypes that undermine human dignity. They humiliate and may lead to incitement of violence – or to violence itself. They can erode social cohesion. This has a real impact on people's lives. On their ability to enjoy their rights to participate, to freely associate, to speak up, and to be free from violence and discrimination. On their capacity to express their faith freely, without fear. In some countries, religious minorities are facing severe discrimination in the job and housing markets, within criminal justice systems, and beyond. He stressed that **refugee and migration policies** feed perceptions of double standards in the value of human worth. The denial of individuals and communities affected by religious hatred to participate in decision-making on policies that directly impact their lives closes the doors to shaping solutions that will actually work.

To address these deeply complex issues, the United Nations has developed a number of pertinent tools. They can help navigate the fine line between free speech and incitement, assessing the context, speaker, intent, content, extent, and likelihood of harm in each case; they aim to support governments, the private sector, and societies in tackling hate speech, together; and they facilitate cross-disciplinary reflection and action against incitement to religious hatred.

In conclusion, he affirmed that the dialogue is the first step in this process, to identify and promote creative solutions based on tolerance, respect, and diversity. A key focus for the Office will be to build on our existing work by looking at major social media companies and their implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The intention is to conduct an in-depth analysis to explore the adequacy of existing policies and to uncover the uneven approaches within the sector. Overcoming religious hatred requires a renewed social contract, with trust and respect at its base.

On how to improve the efforts, move forward from mere dialogue to genuine inter-faith engagement, and embark on concrete actions to foster understanding, it is clear that interfaith harmony and mutual respect need to be promoted in the interest of all communities. Religious and political leaders have a duty to speak out when any group is subject to attack and make it clear that violence was never justified by previous actions of any of the parties. Each community must feel that their rights are fully respected. Social media companies have a very important role to play when it comes to limiting hate speech. If hate is allowed to spread, it has enormous negative consequences, and thus efforts need to be improved to ensure that early warning signals are identified.

### Interactive dialogue

**All member states** highlighted that in many parts of the world, persons continued to be discriminated against, persecuted, and sometimes even killed because of their opinion or their religion, which was very concerning. Hate speech was on the rise globally, and needed to be actively countered through

dialogue, education, awareness raising, and inter-faith and inter-community engagement. Freedom of expression could not be used as an excuse to condone and incite religious hatred; the authorities concerned needed to pay serious attention to the implications of such actions. Prevention and accountability were needed to protect individuals and communities from the negative impacts of religious hatred, hostility, and incitement to violence. It was important to have mutual respect and tolerance of all faiths, which was critical to global peace and security. **Venezuela** affirmed the need to strengthen the fight against marginalization and discrimination, promoting the protection and social inclusion of all people, including those belonging to religious minorities. **Arab and North African Countries** stressed their firm opposition to blasphemy laws, which went against the very essence of the right to freedom of religion or belief, as well as the right to freedom of expression. The rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion are important pillars of any pluralistic society, said **Switzerland**. **India** is unequivocally opposed to all forms of religious intolerance and all acts of religious hatred, discrimination, and violence. There is an increase in manifestations of hatred on religious grounds in a number of countries. Acts of burning the Koran, sanctioned by the authorities of European states and inciting hatred towards Muslims, have become commonplace. **The Russian Federation** condemned these relics of the Crusades.

**The Legal Analysis and Research Public Union** affirmed that Anti-Semitic acts of vandalism are of particular concern. **A number of NGOs** strongly condemned despicable acts of burning the holy Qu’ran, which had been on the rise in Western countries. This created a basis for racism and discrimination and undermined peaceful coexistence. They were concerned about attacks against religious minorities and the ensuing loss of life that resulted from religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence. Often, religious hatred spilled into violence in a context where religious minorities were disenfranchised, stigmatized, scapegoated, and discriminated against. Addressing drivers, root causes, and human rights impacts of religious hatred needed to account for the presence and situation of religious minorities. Education remained of primary importance to instill the values of respect and coexistence for the new generations, **the World Jewish Congress**, said. True enlightenment occurred when nations confronted their shadows and worked from all sides. Some NGOs highlighted that protecting human rights instead of placing limitations on freedom of expression was crucial and advocated for interfaith dialogue. The **CIHRS** affirmed that a fundamental step to combating religious hatred and, most importantly, human rights violations resulting from religious hatred, is to ensure that apostasy and blasphemy laws are dismantled.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (47 country delegations):

*European Union, Pakistan (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Oman (on behalf of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Libya (on behalf of the Arab Group), Brunei Darussalam, Switzerland, Sovereign Order of Malta, Libya, Qatar, Holy See, Jordan, Kuwait, Israel, Luxembourg, Saudi Arabia, Poland, Iraq, Malawi, Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Russian Federation, Pakistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Cuba, Togo, Mauritania, Türkiye, Gambia, India, Uganda, Oman, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt, League of Arab States, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Azerbaijan, Maldives, United States of America, Finland (on behalf of a group of countries), Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (9):

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue, Institut International pour les Droits et le Développement, Institute for NGO Research, Legal Analysis and Research Public Union, Public Organization "Public Advocacy", Stichting Global Human Rights Defence, World Evangelical Alliance, World Jewish Congress.

International organizations: UN Peace.

To watch the full meeting refer to UN Web TV: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).