



PAKISTAN

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Statement

by

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on behalf of the OIC Countries

**under agenda item
*Implementation of General Assembly Resolution A/60/251
“Human Rights Council”***

**at the
First Session of the Human Rights Council**

**Geneva
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Mr. President,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

On 19 June, addressing the inaugural session of the Human Rights Council, Secretary General Kofi Annan had reminded us that "the eyes of the world - especially the eyes of those whose human rights are denied, threatened or infringed - are turned towards this chamber and this Council". Today, as the Council begins its substantive work under implementation of the Resolution A/60/251, we have a responsibility to enable the Council to effectively address injustices and gross human rights violations.

Mr. President,

For more than half a century the people of Palestine, and other occupied Arab territories, have been victims of a great injustice and human rights abuses. The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has worsened in recent months due to a rise in indiscriminate attacks by the occupying power killing, maiming and injuring the civilian population.

Cutting off international aid, and denying legitimate tax revenues to Palestine has further aggravated the situation. The economic siege has traumatized the Palestinians. Food is scarce and medicines not available in hospitals. Special Rapporteur John Dugard who visited the Occupied Palestinian Territory recently, has said that "it was first time that an occupied people have been so treated".

The Council, as the primary human rights body, to which hopes of many victims of human rights violations are pinned, should take concrete measures to redress the situation by: (a) dispatching immediately the Special Rapporteur to the occupied territories on a fact finding mission; (b) ensuring the end of the economic siege of Palestine; and (c) ending the suffering and human rights violations in occupied Arab territories including Syrian Golan and Lebanese Shebaa Farms. The Council should consider the issue in a substantive manner in September.

Mr. President,

Discrimination based on racial and religious intolerance is a major human rights challenge of our times. High Commissioner Louise Arbour presenting her report to the Council, last week, appealed that "the use of harmful stereotypes, and perpetuation of myths that demonize, ridicule or insult deep rooted religious feelings and a profound sense of identity, must be denounced". We support her call.

OIC countries are deeply concerned about the intensification of Islamophobia and ethnic and religious profiling of Muslims in recent years. Manifestations of this phenomenon are expanding and its implications growing. Hate speech targeting Muslims, physical attacks them and their businesses, cultural centres, mosques and religious symbols are on the increase.

More subtle forms of discrimination against Muslims and Arabs have evolved in many parts of the world. Islam and Muslims continue to be widely, but wrongly, associated with terrorism and human rights violations. The upsurge of far-right racist and xenophobic platforms in mainstream politics in many parts of the world has contributed to increased stigmatization of Muslims and legitimizing discrimination against them. The trend is

unfortunately marked by an organized intellectual and media discourse sharply focused on Islam and Muslims.

The increasing campaign of Islamophobia is leading to social disharmony and erosion of the basic human rights of Muslim minorities in many societies. Increase in verbal abuse, slurs and discrimination at the workplace obviously adds to social disharmony. Hate crime against Muslims is also on the rise. Muslims and people of Arab descent are the most frequent victims of inhuman and degrading treatment, covert detentions and rendition or deportation.

Special Rapporteur Doudou Diene, entitled "Situation of Muslims and Arab peoples in various parts of the world", has presented a comprehensive analysis of the increasing trend of Islamophobia and has suggested wide-ranging measures to effectively stem it. He concluded that (a) there was a serious upsurge in Islamophobic incidents; (b) the central theme of these manifestations was hostility towards Islam itself and its believers; (c) there was open validation of Islamophobia in intellectual discourse; and (d) association of Islam and Muslims with terrorism with excessive emphasis on containment from security angle through control of Muslim education and monitoring of places of worship and congregations.

Mr. President,

Recent events have indicated that Islamophobia is not just a slogan but a serious human rights challenge. Printing and reprinting of caricatures in several European newspapers, and thus displaying total disregard for the beliefs and sentiments of Muslims, have not only highlighted sensitive questions surrounding Islamophobia but also underscored the urgent need for effective measures to promote respect of religions and religious beliefs.

Special Rapporteur Diene, in his report, has pointed to the disturbing dominant theme underlying the caricatures of associating "Islam with terrorism". He has concluded that the caricatures were "clearly defamatory to Islam" and that the response to the publications revealed "trivialization of Islamophobia at the political level".

The caricatures issue has revealed the ominous potential of Islamophobia in igniting religious and racial hatred and undermining global harmony. Stemming this trend requires firm political will at the national and international levels. The international community, demonstrating its solidarity to meet this challenge, in Resolution A/60/251 on "Human Rights Council" affirmed the commitment to continue international efforts to promote tolerance, respect for and freedom of religion and belief. The eyes of the world are now on the Human Rights Council for devising an effective strategy.

The caricatures issue has revealed a misleading tendency to project a contradiction between respect of religions and the freedom of expression. This is not correct. The relevant articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention for Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination as well as several regional instruments including the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms clearly establish that: the right to freedom of expression is not absolute; its is subject to certain restrictions; responsibilities and duties necessary for respect of rights or reputations of others and; it should not be used to incite national, racial or religious hatred. In fact, the right to freedom of speech and respect for religions are complementary, not contradictory.

Despite these safeguards, there is a juridical vacuum or deficiency in dealing with the question of respect of religions. There is no existing international instrument on people's human rights relating to respect of religions and religious beliefs. This deficiency must be addressed.

OIC countries urge the Human Rights Council to work towards: (a) taking effective measures for combating defamation of all religions, especially Islam; b) prohibiting dissemination of xenophobic and Islamophobic materials; (c) promoting tolerance and respect for all religions and religious beliefs; and (d) pursuing the agenda for "Alliance among Civilizations". The Council should remain seized of the issue and consider it in a substantive manner in the September session.

Mr. President,

We support the efforts and commitment of the Government of Sudan and the international community for the implementation of the Darfur peace agreement signed between the Government of Sudan and main rebel faction (SLM) with the support of African Union and the UN. In this regard, we emphasize importance of a positive engagement by the international community; compliance of the agreement by SLM; allocation of resources for capacity building and development and; support to the continued efforts of the African Union for sustaining peace through involvement and cooperation of the Government of Sudan and respecting its territorial sovereignty. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CAP) in southern Sudan should be fully supported and implemented.

Mr. President,

The Islamic countries recognize the valuable contributions of the human rights defenders for the promotion and protection of human rights as well as the prevention of human rights violations. In view of their important role in the field of human rights, we support calls for continuing efforts for combating impunity and intimidation against human rights defenders.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we request you to reflect the views expressed by the OIC in this statement in the conclusions and recommendations to be adopted by the Council.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.