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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Joint written statement* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression

Many international documents, including Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 1, 18, 55, and 76 of the United Nations Charter and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, have called for respect and non-discriminatory access to fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion. This is despite the fact that in recent years we have seen cases of Quran-burning in Sweden, Netherlands and Denmark. An action that violates the rights of Muslim minorities in these countries and has always been done under the pretext of access to the right to freedom of expression.

While emphasizing the importance of upholding the freedom of expression as one of the fundamental human rights, we consider the act of Quran-burning, as an expression of hatred towards Muslims. It is disrespectful and insulting to the adherents of Islam and should not be conflated with freedom of expression.

we recall the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/Res/75/258 of 26 January 2021 that reaffirms further that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities, in accordance with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

Also, this resolution emphasizes in paragraph 7 that freedom of religion or belief, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Therefore, it can be stated that enjoying the right to freedom of expression cannot violate the right to freedom of religion and violating the right to freedom of religion by insulting the religion of a group of human beings under the pretext of enjoying the right to freedom of expression is an unfair justification and violates the resolution of the General Assembly.

We also emphasize that mutual respect for all human rights of all people is necessary to create and promote a just, inclusive and peaceful society rooted in human rights and dignity for all.

While inviting nations and governments to pluralism and respecting religions and promoting dialogue among religions, we demand that governments and nations respect Resolution A/Res/75/258 of the United Nations General Assembly.

We also ask the special rapporteurs of freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression to condemn such racist acts, especially the recent Quran-burnings, and end the excuses of human rights violators.

We demand the High Commissioner to condemn such racist actions as well as to take immediate measures with a strong executive guarantee to combat such Islamophobic actions that have threatened the rights of Muslim minorities in European countries.

We also ask the member states of the Human Rights Council to support the agenda Item 9 of the Human Rights Council in order to combat all forms of racism, and ask non-governmental organizations to strengthen global attention towards Item 9 by playing a greater role under this agenda.

Association de l'amitié Euro-Arabe (France) Association SIHR-FHM (France) Geneva Center for Democracy and Human Rights L'observatoire français des droits de l'homme (France) Scandinavian Institute for Human Rights, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.