



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 9

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

### **Written statement\* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization 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.

[22 August 2023]

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

## **Desecration of holy books as religious hatred, discrimination and violence**

Despite the emphasis of many international documents, including the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, numerous covenants and conventions, and declarations on respecting fundamental freedoms without discrimination based on religion, we still observe actions such as burning the Koran in some European countries. The actions are carried out under the pretext of freedom of expression, when the Article 19 (1) of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights emphasizes on two points: First, the exercise of the right to freedom of expression requires provision of certain rights and responsibilities, and therefore it may be subject to certain restrictions specified in the law. Second, respect for the rights and dignity of others must be guaranteed. Article 20 of the same convention, clarifies that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law".

Expressing deep concern on the increase in incidents related to the desecration of sacred books and places of worship and religious symbols, which leads to clear violation of Article 20 of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, we consider the deliberate and public burning of the Quran as incitement to religious hatred and violence and in clear contradiction with the international obligations of States.

This association also emphasizes that all human rights, including the right to peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of speech, and the right to freedom of religion and belief, are interdependent and complementary. Achieving one of these rights should not lead to the violation of the other.

While ODVV condemns any support and advocacy for religious hatred and desecration of holy books, it emphasizes the need for States to respond to these incidents in accordance with their international obligations.

Also, considering the recent cases of Koran burning in Denmark, Holland and Sweden, our organization asks these governments to criminalize such humiliating, insulting, hateful and discrimination-based behaviors against certain individuals and groups and define their punishment in domestic laws.

ODVV calls on relevant special procedures of the Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner for Human Rights to pay more attention to the issue of desecration of holy books that leads to spread of religious hatred and incitement to violence and continuously provide recommendations to control such actions.

Finally, our organization calls on the Human Rights Council to hold an Expert Panel in the upcoming meetings to examine the causes of such actions, their consequences, and cultural and legal solutions to prevent and reduce such incidents.

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<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>