



Empowering Responses to Religious Hatred

Side event on the sidelines of the 55th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Organizer: ADF International

Co-sponsors:* Jubilee Campaign – Forum of Catholic-inspired Organizations in Geneva – Anglican Communion – CAP Liberté de Conscience – Fundación para la Mejora de la Vida, la Cultura y la Sociedad

Date & Venue: 8 March 2024, 11:00 am - 12:00 pm – Room XXV, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Objective: To highlight the need for empowering approaches for addressing religious hatred that are firmly rooted in international human rights law; to identify and promote best practices, actionable measures, and cooperative efforts in this regard.

Background

Hostility towards persons belonging to religious minorities persists across all regions of the world. The duty and responsibility of States to prevent and respond to acts of violence and discrimination against persons based on religion is firmly established in various international human rights instruments, including Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as Article 4 of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The question of religious hatred has recently garnered increasing attention at both national and international levels, including within the United Nations. Recent incidents involving the desecration of religious symbols and places of worship have reignited the debate over strategies to prevent and tackle expression deemed to constitute “advocacy of hatred based on religion or belief”. This has prompted certain state and non-state actors to question the current international human rights framework safeguarding freedom of expression, advocating for more stringent limitations to the exercise of this fundamental freedom in the name of safeguarding individuals and communities from the potential consequences of such acts.

Against this background, however, it must be observed that *restrictive* approaches to eliminating advocacy of religious hatred have proven ineffective at addressing the root causes and drivers of social hostility and to instead impose further barriers to the free exercise of religion or belief by the most vulnerable minority groups. Furthermore, resultant laws and policies are often abused as a vehicle for exacerbating discriminatory targeting of members of such communities, while also threatening everyone’s capacity to contribute openly to the marketplace of ideas fundamental to the functioning of a democratic society.

* The co-sponsors’ list is provisional and subject to change.

Given this context, there is a pressing need for a renewed global commitment to implementing *empowering* approaches for addressing religious hatred, aimed at strengthening the social resilience of religious minority groups while simultaneously ensuring the respect, protection and promotion of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all.

Discussion Questions

The following provides a list of thematic questions that will be discussed by panelists:

- What are the key trends in violations taking place against persons belonging to religious or belief communities, and how can the concept of “religious hatred” be effectively understood to encompass the situation on the ground?
- What is the relevant international human rights framework relating to States’ responses to acts of religious hatred? How can apparent tensions in this area be reconciled?
- What are the shortcomings of restrictive approaches to religious hatred, and how are religious or belief minority communities affected by the abuse of related laws and policies?
- What are the essential features of empowering approaches to religious hatred, and what are some examples of best practices in this regard?
- What role can States, the UN and civil society, as well as faith actors, play in promoting the social resilience of religious communities and actors and effectively tackling religious hatred in a human rights-affirming manner?

Format

The 1-hour event will consist of a 45-minute panel discussion (opening remarks included), followed by a 15-minute Q&A (closing remarks included).

List of Speakers

- **Mrs. Fiona Bruce, MP**, Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion of Belief, United Kingdom;
- **H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero**, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva;
- **Mrs. Tehmina Arora**, Director of Asia Advocacy, ADF International;
- **Mr. Joseph Janssen**, Advocacy Officer, Jubilee Campaign;
- **Mr. Jonas Fiebrantz**, Advocacy Officer, ADF International.

Please RSVP via email at vsims@adfinternational.org by Thursday, 7 March 2024.