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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up 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.

[03 June 2019]

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



Islamophobia

Islamophobia, meaning fear, hatred and prejudice against Islam or Muslims specifically is a political force, enmity and or discrimination against Muslims which is the basis for violation of human rights. Although its identification and proof in some particular cases is difficult, Islamophobia is a problem which appears in various forms of discrimination, violence, rejection and insult, and the daily spreading of the phenomenon has negative and irreparable effects not only on Muslim communities, but the international community, be it the East or the West.

International and human rights organizations have tried to control this evil phenomenon through adopting laws in the form of conventions and treaties. The Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963), Durban Declaration and Plan of Action (2001) and also the Durban II Conference (2009) stress on important issues such as condemnation of racial discrimination, and commitment of states in the elimination of racial discrimination. These treaties show that with the start the empowerment of international organizations has been a promising move towards the elimination of racial discrimination. It was expected that after signing these treaties, we witness the expansion of goals mentioned in the documents, as well as further elimination of Islamophobia as a form of discrimination.

However, the rhetoric used by some politicians which is covered by the media contributes to the spread of hate speech. World statistics shows a worrying the increase of xenophobic attacks as a result of islamophobia against Muslims around the world.

Also, according to researchers terms such as “Islamic terrorism”, “Islamic extremism”, “Islamic bombs” etc., which are used in the media, create a negative picture of Islam and Muslims in the mind of the audience. We cannot disregard the role of the media in the spread of Islamophobia. Often, the media further highlight terror attacks that are carried out by Muslims, and report the attacks as religious in nature. But the media gives less coverage to terror attacks committed by non-Muslims, and if there is such a coverage, there is no mention of religion of the culprit.

The Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of Racism, Xenophobia and Racial Discrimination on 31 October 2017 submitting his report to the UN General Assembly, stressed that hate speech and security measures contribute to increase of racism, xenophobia and religion based discrimination.

According to CAIR report¹ there’s been an increase of 17 percent in inhuman incidents against Muslims around the world in 2017 compared to the previous year. Furthermore, more than half of Britons see Islam (the mainstream religion, not Islamist fundamental groups) as a threat to Western liberal democracy. According to Metropolitan police, over 30 percent of young children believe Muslims are “taking over England” and hate crime against Muslims continued to rise, up by 70 percent in the last year.²

In the review of the factors that produce hatred and fear of Islam, special attention must be paid to the institutional concept of Islamophobia. In fact, it can be said that following 9/11, and particularly in the recent years Islamophobia has moved up from the lower levels of society and the media to the legislative institutions and governmental departments.

In this type of Islamophobia, discrimination and pressures against Muslims affect government institutions and bodies who recreate Islamophobia within society (legislation, the police, departments...) never see themselves accountable nor are willing to take effective measures to eliminate Islamophobia.

¹ <http://www.islamophobia.org/reports/228-2018-civil-rights-report-bias-incident-data.html>.

² <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/why-the-british-media-is-responsible-for-the-rise-in-islamophobia-in-britain-a6967546.html>.

Overall institutionalized Islamophobia has an impact more than violence against Muslims, because institutionalized Islamophobia undermines social unity, recreates violence and human rights violation in affected societies.

Recommendations

As a nongovernmental organization, Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) believes that presentation of a correct narrative of Islam requires commitment of various bodies such as domestic bodies in Muslim countries (including schools, the media, officials, civil society organizations and the police) as well as international organizations. Also, the fight against racism must be a common fight and those that are in power must have more accountability.

The Human Rights Council is an arena for dialogue and must play an active role in defining concepts. To this aim, presentation of an accurate definition of Islamophobia and highlighting its examples according to human rights conventions and treaties can be positive steps in the reduction of Islamophobia.

ODVV calls on the Human Rights Council to encourage world leaders to be committed to international treaties, avoid hate speech and make efforts towards multilateralism.
