



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 February 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-fifth session

26 February–5 April 2024

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Geledés - Instituto da Mulher Negra, 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.

[4 February 2024]

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



Addressing Freedom of Religion

Religious racism continues to be a pervasive issue in societies worldwide, particularly in the Global South. This form of religious intolerance poses a significant threat to fundamental human rights and the dignity of individuals, especially those who adhere to non-hegemonic religions like Afro-based practices. Instances of religious racism manifest in various forms, from denial of employment and education to acts of vandalism, physical assaults, and even hate-motivated murders. Victims not only endure immediate physical harm but also face long-term social stigmatization and isolation, resulting in severe emotional and psychological consequences.

In regions like the Global South, religious discrimination primarily targets individuals or groups based on their religious affiliation, with a particular focus on Afro-based religions. This discrimination represents a blatant violation of human rights and is incompatible with the principles of justice and democracy. The term "religious intolerance" falls short in capturing the gravity of the violence faced by followers of Afro-based religions in these regions. A more precise and fitting term is "religious racism," accurately characterizing the systematic and longstanding practice jeopardizing the freedom and existence of individuals practicing their faith in temples known as "terreiros."

Brazil, "a nation historically shaped by racism", stands as a hotspot for religious racism, especially against Afro-Brazilian religions like Umbanda and Candomblé. The term "religious racism" encapsulates the extensive violence faced by practitioners of these faiths, extending beyond mere intolerance. Incidents of discrimination range from the desecration of sacred sites to physical attacks, reflecting a deeply rooted prejudice that threatens the rich cultural heritage of these communities.

The Brazilian government has taken steps to address religious racism, evident in the establishment of a hotline to report human rights violations. However, the grim reality persists, with up to 5 calls per day registering complaints related to religious racism. Although the service does not identify specific religious denominations, data from the Ombudsman of the Secretariat of Justice and Citizenship of São Paulo, the state with the highest number of reported incidents, reveal a disproportionate impact on African-derived religions.

Combating religious racism based on human rights requires a comprehensive approach involving actions across various sectors of society, from government to the community.

In view of this, the following recommendations for combating religious racism based on human rights must be highlighted:

(i) Anti-Discrimination Legislation:

Implement and strengthen laws prohibiting religious discrimination in all areas of life, including employment, education, housing, and access to public services.

(ii) Awareness and Education:

Promote awareness and education programs that teach about religious diversity, human rights, and the importance of religious tolerance from an early age in schools and society at large.

(iii) Training and Sensitization:

Provide training and sensitization for professionals, such as police officers, educators, and healthcare professionals, so they can recognize and appropriately address cases of religious racism.

(iv) Monitoring and Reporting:

Establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track and document incidents of religious racism, ensuring that they are addressed appropriately by authorities.

(v) Support for Victims:

Provide legal, psychological, and social support to victims of religious racism, ensuring they have access to adequate resources and protection.

(vi) Political Intervention:

Work to ensure that public policies promote religious equality and guarantee the equitable participation of all religious communities in public life.

(vii) Civil Society Engagement:

Make information and technical reports on the status of institutional racism reports due to racial and religious violence available to civil society on government transparency platforms, within the jurisdiction of each federative entity, in state and federal Public Prosecutors' Offices, in the armed forces' ombudsmen, and in the civil, military, and municipal police ombudsmen.

(viii) Promotion of Diversity in Institutions:

Promote religious diversity in government institutions, schools, and workplaces, ensuring that individuals of all religious beliefs have equal opportunities.

(ix) Protection for Religious Sites:

Call for increased protection of religious sites, including sacred Afro-Brazilian temples. Government initiatives should ensure the preservation and security of these sites as cultural and spiritual heritage.

(x) Global Collaboration on Religious Racism:

Advocate for international collaboration to address religious racism on a global scale. Encourage countries to share best practices, learn from each other's experiences, and work collectively towards eradicating religious discrimination worldwide.

In conclusion, the term "religious racism" accurately captures the gravity of the situation faced by individuals practicing Afro-based religions in Brazil and other parts of the Global South. It is imperative for the international community to take a united stand against religious racism, recognizing it as a violation of fundamental human rights. By implementing these recommendations and fostering international collaboration, we can pave the way for a more just and tolerant world where individuals can freely practice their faith without fear of discrimination or violence.

The Human Rights Council must urge member states to implement comprehensive educational programs that foster understanding and respect for diverse religious practices, with a specific focus on Afro-based religions.