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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
(ODVV), 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.

[23 August 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Defamation of Religion

The United Nations Declaration on Religious Intolerance 36/55 was ratified by the General Assembly in November 1981. One of the UN Charter principles is the inherent equality and dignity and freedom of all humans. One of these is the freedom of expression.

The fact that the Al-Qaeda 9/11, Madrid and London terror attacks played key roles in the rise of xenophobia and defamation of religion is absolutely undeniable and irrefutable. The spate of kidnappings of foreigners in Iraq and their grotesque executions by masked men shouting Allah-uh-Akbar (God is Great) captured on video and broadcast on some media channels and the internet for the whole world to see, also helped stir up anti-Islam sentiments, particularly in western and Christian countries. The most important fact to remember is that these individuals that carry out these brutal attacks are not true Muslims. The Muslim world shuns them strongly. A religion must not be judged by the acts of a very few, who go completely against what the particular religion preaches, Islam in this case.

These events in turn have caused a sharp rise in anti-Islam xenophobic sentiments in Christian countries, mainly in Europe and North America. Although this is very understandable and comes to no surprise, but the fact of the matter is that two wrongs do not make one right. The outcome of this Islamophobia sadly was a rise in attacks on Asians and Middle-Eastern foreigners in European countries, especially those that wore their traditional and or religious clothes or women with the Islamic Hijab. Other broader developments included the publication of offensive cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper; and in a show of solidarity a number of other European countries republished the cartoons in their newspapers. These actions caused a huge protest among the Muslim communities of Europe and the Muslim world. Ambassadors of the affected European countries were summoned to the foreign ministries of Muslim countries one by one, demanding an explanation and immediate apology.

In Holland, Dutch filmmaker and direct descendant of painter Vincent van Gogh, Theo van Gogh was murdered by angry Muslims for the making of a controversial documentary on Muslim women.

The latest of these religious intolerance actions was the documentary made by far-right Dutch MP Geert Wilders called Fitna, which very wrongly portrayed Muslims as advocates of violence and intolerance. He did this despite Dutch government's caution to him to refrain from releasing the documentary which might damage national interests in the world.

One thing which is forgotten in all of this is that there are over 1.5 billion Muslims around the world, and the individuals who committed and continue to commit atrocities against innocent people, are only a very tiny fraction of a percent of the Muslim population of the world.

The true teachings of Islam emphasise the respect of the rights of all human beings, this also includes respect of the faith of others. Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism have clearly been mentioned in the Koran as Monotheist religions which must be respected by all, including Muslims.

It is not all dark and bleak. There are some signs of progress or if not efforts to bring about religious understanding and tolerance. Some of the noted moves are the reopening of the Department of Inter-Religious Dialogue by Pope Benedict XVI in May 2007. The annual Iftar (Muslim fast-breaking meal) that George W. Bush gives to leading American Muslims each year on Eid Fitr (the last day of the fasting month of Ramadan), are just a few examples of efforts in trying to bridge a gap between two different religions.

In its Combating against Defamation of Religion, Human Rights Resolution 2005/3, UN Commission on Human Rights Expressed “deep concern that Islam is frequently and wrongly associated with human rights violations and terrorism”; Also expressed “deep concern at programmes and agendas pursued by extremist organizations and groups aimed at the defamation of religions, in particular when supported by Governments”; and Deplored “the use of the print, audio-visual and electronic media, including the Internet, and any other means to incite acts of violence, xenophobia or related intolerance and discrimination towards Islam or any other religion” (paragraphs 4., 5. and 6.).

As human rights defenders that believe in the UN Charter and all UN Covenants, Conventions, and Treaties, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) firmly believes that the international community, governmental and nongovernmental organizations are not doing enough to combat defamation of religion.

The ODVV believes that dialogue and education are fundamental in every aspect of conciliation, understanding and tolerance between nations and civilizations.

Being an NGO with special consultative status to ECOSOC and in Association with UNDPI, and also having membership of various international organizations and networks, the ODVV declares its readiness and ability to hold international sittings, conferences, seminars and workshops on the fight against defamation of religion.

In the hope of a world full of tolerance, peace and security.

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