



General Assembly

Seventy-fifth session

50th plenary meeting
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New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Bozkir (Turkey)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 145 (continued)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/75/661/Add.1)

The President: Before proceeding to the item on our agenda, I would like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/75/661/Add.1, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/75/661, Libya, the Niger and Zimbabwe have made the payment necessary to reduce their arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in document A/75/661/Add.1?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 15 (continued)

Culture of peace

Draft resolution (A/75/L.54)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia to introduce draft resolution A/75/L.54.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my pleasure today to address the General Assembly on behalf of my country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and on behalf of the Kingdom of Morocco,

the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of Yemen, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and scores of other friendly countries co-sponsoring draft resolution A/75/L.54, entitled “Promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites”, which was drafted based on the United Nations initiative to protect religious sites.

The draft resolution seeks to achieve a number of objectives, including the following.

The first objective is to develop a culture of peace regarding the relations among individuals, groups and States and make that culture a strong shield against extremism, hatred and violence, especially when they are based on racial, religious and cultural differences.

Secondly is the harnessing of the culture of peace to protect religious sites and symbols against acts of violence, provocation and mockery.

The third goal is to avert a clash between religious values and beliefs on the one hand and tolerance and freedom of expression on the other hand, through mutual respect and self-awareness of the limits that should be respected to prevent any strife or provocation.

Fourthly, it asserts that there can be no justification at all for the use of violence to express points of view, especially in the case of respecting differences of religions and beliefs.

And, fifthly, it stresses the great importance and lofty status of religious sites and the need to maintain

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and protect them as places of peace, enlightenment and history.

Human bonds are the basis for equal rights and dignity for all peoples. The main responsibility for that is shared by all the countries of the world, as they are committed to the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Religious sites are places of peace and worship. They represent the history and social fabric of peoples. It is painful to see religious sites being threatened or destroyed, whether Muslim mosques, Christian churches, Jewish synagogues or Sikh and Hindu temples.

We condemn any insult, mockery and underestimation of religious symbols and respected figures. We believe that freedoms should not be used as a tool for provocation and clashes but rather as a catalyst for understanding, dialogue and acceptance of others.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stresses its firm principled positions of respecting differences and condemning aggression and terrorism whatever the source or justification. We condemn anything that could help in the commission of an act of terrorism, whether by providing direct support to terrorists or by provoking and inciting them, directly or indirectly, to carry out criminal acts.

Today we submit this draft resolution, as its sponsoring countries have worked together with all Member States and regional groups in an inclusive and transparent manner. We held lengthy discussions for nearly four months to ensure that members' concerns and proposals were taken into consideration and included, in the best way possible, in the draft resolution, which we hope will be adopted by consensus. The aim is to promote unity and solidarity and to stress to the world that we all stand united against terrorism and extremism. We stand united to protect human values and religious sites. We stand united to protect fundamental human rights, including the freedom of belief, freedom of opinion and freedom of expression, within the framework of mutual respect, tolerance and continuous dialogue.

The President: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/75/L.54. Before giving the floor for explanations of vote before the voting, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Lopes da Graça (Portugal): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 27 member States. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate to the EU Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the European Free Trade Association member country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

It is also my honour to speak on behalf of the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Norway, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Together we wish to explain our position on the draft resolution contained in document A/75/L.54.

We value the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage and religious sites. We recognize that this subject was last addressed by the General Assembly in 2001, while the Security Council adopted resolution 2347 (2017), and the issue is regularly addressed by UNESCO. We are also staunch supporters of freedom of religion or belief and actively encourage and support interreligious and intercultural dialogue. These values are at the core of our action at the United Nations.

In that regard, we would recall two landmark periodic resolutions recently adopted by the General Assembly, namely, on the freedom of religion or belief (resolution 75/188) and on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief (resolution 75/187). We consider those texts to be the main references for all matters relating to freedom of religion or belief, interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. The resolutions have been carefully negotiated by the Third Committee throughout the years, at it is important to maintain the delicate balance achieved. We firmly believe that the Third Committee is the right forum to consider these issues.

At the same time, we would like to underline the importance of freedom of expression. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression and the freedom to hold opinions, including on religion, and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authorities. Furthermore, freedom of expression and the role of media as platforms for expression represent one of the most important pillars of democracy. Without

freedom of expression and freedom of the media, an informed, active and engaged citizenry is impossible.

In consideration of the aforementioned, we would have wished that the draft resolution submitted for adoption today had focused on the safeguarding of religious sites in order to avoid duplication with long-standing agreed texts and the cherry-picking of resolutions. For that reason, throughout the negotiations the proposals that we put forward were aimed at keeping the focus mainly on the safeguarding of religious sites, having in mind the overall balance of the text. We also stressed the necessity of safeguarding important human rights such as the freedom of expression and the freedom of religion or belief against attempts to curtail or redefine them.

We also strongly maintain that freedom of religion and belief, including the right not to believe and to change one's religion or belief, belongs to individuals. As enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, freedom of thought, conscience and religion includes the freedom to practice religions either individually or in community with others, in public or in private. We stressed the notion that individuals, not religions or belief systems and their symbols, are the holders of rights.

The text in front of us today has been considerably improved from the initial version thanks to inclusive and transparent negotiations that allowed us to express our concerns throughout the process. For that reason, we will join the consensus today, with the clarifications and understandings we have just expressed.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position before taking action.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/75/L.54, entitled "Promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites".

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Nakano (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that, since the submission of draft resolution A/75/L.54, and in addition to those delegations listed in the document, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/75/L.54: Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Guatemala, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Nicaragua, Qatar, Senegal and Tunisia.

The President: May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/75/L.54?

Draft resolution A/75/L.54 was adopted (resolution 75/258).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of position, may remind delegations that explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Messenger (United States of America): The United States strongly believes in encouraging a culture of peace through the promotion of justice democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as by rejecting violence and addressing the root causes of conflict. In recognition of those values, we support the resolution just adopted on promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites (resolution 75/258). We thank the Kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Morocco for their leadership on the text and for their work to ensure that it reflected the views of all United Nations delegations.

The United States is a strong proponent of the protection of religious sites and was a sponsor of resolution 55/254 on this subject. We continue to support the underlying premise of the resolution but are concerned about its many references to limits on or condemning speech and at times equating speech to acts of violence. Odious or offensive speech is not in itself a form of violence, and describing it as such should not be used as a means to justify the suppression of speech or the exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Rather than seek restrictions to expression to deal with intolerance and hate speech, the United States advocates robust protections of speech as well as the enforcement of appropriate legal regimes that deal with discriminatory acts and hate crimes. We remind Member States that, as recognized in the Istanbul Process, the open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas, as well as interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the local, national, and international level, can play a positive role in combating violence and religious hatred.

With regard to the reference in paragraph 8 to "programmes and agendas pursued by extremist individuals", the United States understands the paragraph to refer specifically to violent extremist individuals. In addition, the United States is pleased to join the European Union statement on this resolution and recalls that the right to freedom of religion or belief

and freedom of expression are mutually reinforcing and complementary. Any restrictions on these rights must be consistent with States' obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Mr. Sharma (India): I thank the President for giving me the opportunity to explain our position on resolution 75/258. At the outset, we sincerely acknowledge the efforts of the facilitators of the negotiations, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, for their inclusive and transparent approach during the negotiations. India joined the consensus today on the adoption of the resolution.

India attaches great importance to the safeguarding of cultural heritage and religious sites. The Preamble of the Indian Constitution declares India as a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic, which secures to all its citizens liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion and guarantees all citizens the right to equal treatment before the law and the right to equal protection of the law. Article 25 of the Constitution accords everybody the freedom of conscience and the right to practice, propagate and preach their religion.

India also has a strong legal framework for acts of violence and discrimination based on religion, including violence targeted at places of worship. The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991 prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and provides for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship. The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988 prohibits the use of any premises of any religious institution for any act that promotes or attempts to promote disharmony or feelings of enmity or hatred between different religious, racial, language or regional groups.

In this world of growing terrorism, violent extremism, radicalization and intolerance, religious sites and cultural heritage sites remain vulnerable to terrorist acts, violence and destruction. The images of the shattering of the iconic Bamiyan Buddhas by fundamentalists are still vivid in memory for every one of us. The terrorist bombing of the Sikh Gurdwara in Afghanistan, where 25 Sikh worshippers were killed, is yet another example of this vulnerability. Most recently, in December 2020, a historic Hindu temple was attacked and set on fire by a mob in the Karak district in Pakistan, with the explicit support of and

connivance with law enforcement agencies. We stood as mute spectators while the historic temple was razed.

India reiterates its call for the application of the principles of objectivity, non-selectivity and impartiality to form the basis of discussions in the United Nations, especially on the issue of religion. The United Nations, including the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, should not take sides, and as long as such selectivity exists, the world can never truly foster a culture of peace. We must stand united against the forces that supplant dialogue and peace with hatred and violence.

It is a matter of great irony that the country where the most recent attack and demolition of a Hindu temple took place, in a series of such attacks, and where the rights of minorities are being crippled is one of the sponsors of the resolution just adopted under the agenda item "Culture of peace". Resolution 75/258 cannot be a smokescreen for countries such as Pakistan to hide behind.

In conclusion, my delegation once again acknowledges the efforts of Saudi Arabia and Morocco to pilot the delicate negotiations for achieving a consensus text for resolution 75/258.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position after adoption of resolution 75/258. We will now hear statements after the adoption of the resolution.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (spoke in French): Allow me at the outset to take this opportunity to congratulate all of us on the adoption by consensus of resolution 75/258, entitled "Promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites".

I would also like to extend my warmest congratulations and thanks to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for taking the initiative to submit this important resolution to the General Assembly. This initiative of Saudi Arabia reflects the attention and commitment of the Kingdom to counter all forms of extremism, violence and radicalism and to act in favour of the culture of peace, coexistence and living together.

The multiple attacks perpetrated against mosques, churches, synagogues and temples are always fresh in our memory to remind us of the imperative of acting together to face this scourge. These are abject acts that call for a collective response, hence the relevance and importance of the resolution we just adopted.

The resolution reaffirms the importance of strengthening international, regional and subregional cooperation in order to improve the capacity of Member States to effectively prevent and repress attacks on places of worship or religious sites. It therefore remains a substantial and relevant means of achieving this noble cause.

The Kingdom of Morocco was actively engaged in the negotiation process with the core group of sponsors and with all Member States throughout the last four months and welcomes this very significant adoption, which marks the firm and solid commitment of the international community to the protection of religious sites throughout the world. My country also recalls its unwavering commitment to full respect of the special status of holy sites and the need to work together to ensure their upkeep and protection, as we consider them to be oases of serenity, spaces for enlightenment and places for the blossoming of culture, peace, living together and coexistence.

Morocco would like to commend the leading role played by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, which has developed, inter alia, the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, its important initiatives to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and its activities to further a culture of peace and non-violence.

Finally, Morocco wishes to express once again its thanks to the members of the core group, in particular to my colleague and brother the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and to all delegations and partners for their commendable efforts, which were constructive and showed commitment and flexibility in the interest of all to reach a consensus text.

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in exercise of the right of reply, may I remind delegations that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Zulqarnain (Pakistan): I am obliged to take the floor in response to the statement made by the representative of India.

Pakistan categorically rejects completely unwarranted assertions by the Indian delegation in connection with the Hindu temple incident in Karak. This is not the first time that India has tried to feign concern for minority rights elsewhere while being itself the most egregious and persistent violator of minority rights. From the discriminatory Citizenship (Amendment) Act to the National Register of Citizens, from the Gujarat massacre of 2002 to the Delhi pogrom of 2020, from the reprehensible demolition of Babri Mosque in 1992 to the despicable acquittal of all the accused by the Indian Court in 2020, from blaming Muslims for spreading coronavirus to banning interfaith marriages and raising the bogey of love jihad, from cow vigilantism and mob lynching to calling the Muslims of West Bengal “termites” and threatening to throw them into the Bay of Bengal, from extrajudicial killings of innocent Kashmiris to blatant attempts to turn Kashmiris into a minority in their own land through distribution of fake domicile certificates, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-Bharatiya Janata Party regime’s record is replete with instances of gross and systemic violations of the rights of minorities, in particular Muslims. As a perennial purveyor of State-sponsored discrimination against its minorities, India is in no position to pontificate on the issue of minority rights.

The clear difference between India and Pakistan in respect of minority rights can be gauged from the fact that the accused in the Karak incident was immediately arrested, orders were issued for repair of the temple, the highest level of judiciary took immediate notice and senior political leadership condemned the incident, whereas in India the blatant acts of discrimination against Muslims and other minorities take place with State complicity. The Indian leadership has yet to condemn the perpetrators of the Delhi massacre in February 2020, let alone bring those criminals to justice.

Given those incontrovertible facts, the Indian Government would be well-advised to set its own house in order rather than feign concerns for minority rights elsewhere.

The President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 15.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.