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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 the Organisation internationale pour les pays les moins avancés (OIPMA), 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.

[8 February 2019]

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



Paving the way for tolerance and freedom of religion: Lessons learnt from United Arab Emirates

The “Organisation Internationale pour les pays les Moins Avancés” (OIPMA) / The International Organization for Least Developed Countries (IOLDCs) acknowledges the reports A/HRC/40/30 and A/HRC/40/44 presented by the United Nations High-Commissioner of Human Rights to the 40th session of the Human Rights Council, on “Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities” and on “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief”.

In the report of February 2018 of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, it was mentioned a global study of religious restrictions and social hostility motivated by religion or belief which illustrated a strong correlation between the degree to which a Government is entangled with religion and its propensity for protecting or violating freedom of religion or belief and/or combating religious intolerance. Some 24 (58.5 per cent) of the 41 States with an official State religion in that study imposed “very high” or “high” levels of restrictions on religious practices, while 11 (27.5 per cent) of the 40 States with favored religion(s), imposed such restrictions in the period 2014–2015.

The Human Rights Council has expressed in many of its resolutions, including its resolution number HRC/ RES / 25/34 its concern about the growing manifestations of extremism and intolerance based on religion or belief which could generate hatred and violence within and among nations, having serious implications at the national, regional and international levels.

Additionally, it was also stressed the importance of respect for religious and cultural diversity and dialogue between religions and cultures in order to promote a culture of tolerance and fraternity among individuals, communities and nations. It also called for the promotion of harmony between religions, cultures and beliefs and the fight against discrimination, and approved the establishment of an appropriate mechanism within Governments to, inter alia, identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities and to help prevent and mediate conflicts.

However, the growing phenomenon of extremism, terrorism, hatred and religious intolerance has provided a fertile environment for the outbreak of conflicts and wars in the Middle East. The existing mobilization of extremism and intolerance by political Islam groups have been shown in the call for the use of violence and brainwash of students and young people with religious extremist ideas in private schools and mosques, in media communications and the establishment of the specialized charities, to create chaos and the dissemination of terrorism and the outbreak of conflicts and civil and sectarian wars.

For instance, in one of the gravest ongoing conflicts worldwide, in Yemen, since 1980 facts and events have proved that radical Islamist groups spread the extremist ideas, instigating to terrorism, sectarianism and intolerance based on religion or belief among others. For example, since the return of “Arab Afghans”, the emergence of Al Qaeda, the impact of the Iranian revolution on the movements of political Islam and the establishment of the Islah party (Muslim Brotherhood), violent religious extremism has increased dramatically.

In order to promote tolerance and prevent violent extremism and hatred based on religion and/or belief, in line with the Human Rights Council, the “Organisation Internationale pour les Pays les Moins Avancés” (OIPMA) / The International Organization for Least Developed Countries (IOLDCs) acknowledges the steps taken by the United Arab Emirates, declaring 2019 as the year of tolerance, to deepen the values of tolerance and openness to the cultures and peoples, by focusing on the values of tolerance among the new generations, and to recognize Abu Dhabi as the capital of global tolerance through a range of initiatives and major projects in this framework, including research contributions to social and cultural studies.

In this context, the Human Fraternity Meeting held on the 4th February 2019 in Abu Dhabi, with the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis with Dr. Ahmed Tayeb, Sheikh of Al-Azhar and in the presence of religious leaders from around the world, has been an historical event

with relevant personalities promoting peace and tolerance, culminating with the “Document on Human Fraternity for world peace and living together”.

OIPMA recognizes the importance of this document as a tool to paving the way towards dialogue between cultures and civilizations. This should be put in practice through targeted media initiatives, and the development of legislation and policies aimed at institutionalizing the cultural, religious and social values of tolerance.

The Human Fraternity Meeting has effectively embodied what the Council and the United Nations General Assembly have alluded to in their previous resolutions relating to tolerance, non-violence, intolerance, extremism, hatred and terrorism.

As proclaimed in the “Document on Human Fraternity for World peace and living together”, “history shows that religious extremism, national extremism and intolerance have produced in the world, be it in the East or West, what might be referred to as signs of a third world war being fought piecemeal. In several parts of the world and in many tragic circumstances these signs have begun to be painfully apparent, as in those situations where the precise number of victims, widows and orphans is unknown. We see, in addition, other regions preparing to become theatres of new conflicts, with outbreaks of tension and a build-up of arms and ammunition, and all this in a global context overshadowed by uncertainty, disillusionment, fear of the future, and controlled by narrow-minded economic interests”.

Moreover, the document declares “religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women in order to make them act in a way that has nothing to do with the truth of religion”.

Following the declaration of the United Arab Emirates to consider 2019 as the year of tolerance and provided the recent outcomes of the fraternity meeting presenting the Document on Human Fraternity, OIPMA believes that this state has been able to offer a unique model of tolerance and dialogue between religions, cultures and civilizations based on mutual respect. Consequently, tolerance has become an integral part of the structure of the UAE’s society and has been characterized by the establishment of a culture of human coexistence with legislation criminalizing hate speech, culminated with the Anti-Discrimination and Hate Act of 2015.

Moreover, in 2016 in the United Arab Emirates it was established the first Ministry of tolerance in the world, announcing a number of initiatives in promoting dialogue among people and religions, such as the “National Program for Tolerance”, the “Mohammed Bin Rashid Award for Tolerance” and “the International Institute for Tolerance” alongside the creation of many centers for the fight against extremism.

For that reason, OIPMA, supports the stated initiatives as the way towards combating extremism, intolerance, hate and terrorism in the Middle East, and recommends to the Council for its 40th session to consider, in its resolution under tolerance agenda item, the inclusion of the following recommendations:

1. To welcome the declaration of the United Arab Emirates to consider 2019 as the year of tolerance and its approach to the establishment of a culture of human coexistence and the maintenance of a culture of tolerance and protection against any form of intolerance.
2. To welcome the “Document on Human Fraternity for World peace and living” together signed by the two religious’ leaders, His Holiness Pope Francis and Dr. Ahmed Tayeb on the 4th February 2019 in Abu Dhabi.
3. To support the declaration of His Holiness Pope Francis recognizing Abu Dhabi as the world’s capital of tolerance and a bridge of communication and convergence between the peoples and cultures of the world.
4. Welcoming the establishment of the first Ministry of Tolerance in the world by the United Arab Emirates.

As a result, the Human Rights Council, by supporting the outcomes of the Human Fraternity Meeting in Abu Dhabi and the steps taken by the United Arab Emirates combating intolerance, it would encourage States members to follow these steps and to take appropriate measures to ensure that intolerance does not interfere in the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This process should begin from the basis, thus, future generations and their education on tolerance and respect at schools. For instance, using the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religion and Beliefs in Public Schools would be a step towards a future without discrimination, based on acceptance and tolerance.
