



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

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Statement delivered by

Ambassador Karl Lagatie,
Deputy Permanent Representative

EU Introduction of Amendments [A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52]

**Resolution on Measures to Combat Islamophobia
[A/78/L.48]**

New York, 15 March 2024

Chair,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States to introduce two amendments on the present resolution, documents A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52.

Let me first stress that Anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination is unacceptable and violates the principles and purposes of the UN as enshrined in its Charter and the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The EU and its Member States strongly condemn anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination, as we condemn all forms of discrimination, hostility or violence against persons on the basis of their religion or belief. We are wholeheartedly dedicated to this cause, and remain committed to work together with the OIC and the rest of the international community.

Combating anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination can best be undertaken by promoting and protecting everyone's right to freedom of religion or belief. As the main sponsor of the annual resolutions on "Freedom of Religion or Belief" - in New York and Geneva - the EU advocates for a comprehensive and universal approach which seeks to eliminate all forms of incitement to discrimination, hostility, violence and intolerance directed against persons based on their religion or belief, including non-believers.

We firmly believe that the freedom of expression includes the right to free speech on religious matters. For us, it is essential to maintain the internationally agreed definition of hate speech, as contained in Art 20 of the ICCPR: *Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law*

Freedom of religion or belief is, like all other human rights, an individual right, which can be exercised in community with others. It does not protect a religion or belief as such, or its symbols, nor does it prohibit the criticism of religions or beliefs.

Chair,

We appreciate that the facilitator Pakistan, on behalf of the OIC, organized informal consultations, in which the EU engaged constructively. The EU made several proposals aimed at improving the text and we are disappointed to see that our main concerns were not taken on board.

Regrettably, the text in front of us falls short of fully meeting the requirements of international human rights law and diverges from the inclusive approach to combat intolerance, hate, discrimination and violence against persons on the basis of their religion or belief appropriate in the context of the United Nations.

Firstly,

The EU has strong reservations against the wording of operative paragraph 2. In our view, the UN should be religion-neutral and not refer to “desecration of holy books”. Under the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, for instance, the term “desecration” is limited to religious sites only. International human rights law does not protect a religion or belief as such, or its symbols, nor does it prohibit the criticism of religions or beliefs.

Secondly,

The EU has reservations against the creation of a Special Envoy, as proposed in operative paragraph 3. We are concerned with the duplication of several mechanisms in place to address discrimination based on religion or belief and the financial implications. We strongly believe that a Focal Point would be more appropriate, making use of existing structures and resources, such as the current Focal Point against Antisemitism, High Representative Moratinos of the Alliance of Civilizations whose valuable role is also recognized in the preambular section of the resolution.

For these reasons, the EU decided to propose amendments to operative paragraphs 2 and 3 in line with our and other delegations’ proposals all along the informal consultation process.

In the new OP 2 as contained in A/78/L.51, our amendment brings the wording in line with international human rights law.

In the new OP 3, as contained in A/78/L.52, our proposal is to establish a focal point, within existing structures and resources, instead of a costly Special Envoy.

We call on all delegations to vote yes on these amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.