**Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed.**

46th session of the Human Rights Council, 02 March 2021

**A/HRC/46/30**

**Theme of report: Countering Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim Hatred to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief**

The present report examines how Islamophobia perpetuates a vicious circle whereby State policy validates private Islamophobic attitudes and actions, and the prevalence of such attitudes can propel State policies that penalize Muslims; with stark consequences for the enjoyment of human rights including freedom of religion or belief. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that Islamophobic discrimination in both the public and the private sphere often make it difficult for a Muslim to be a Muslim. He notes that disproportionate restrictions on the ability of Muslims to manifest their beliefs, securitization of whole communities, limits on access to citizenship, socioeconomic exclusion, and pervasive stigmatization of Muslim communities, cumulatively, in some contexts, may amount to the level of coercion as prohibited under international law.

The report also highlights that, discrimination, hostility and violence against actual or perceived Muslims is often intersectional, with religious-based discrimination intersecting with or compounding discrimination based on their nationality, gender, racial or ethnic background amongst other protected characteristics. Muslims are frequently targeted based on visible “Muslim” characteristics, such as their names, skin colour and religious attire, including headscarves. Muslim women may face a “triple penalty” as women, minority ethnic and Muslim.

The Special Rapporteur is deeply alarmed by the frequent, widespread nature of violence targeting Muslims worldwide, including incidents where authorities allegedly have incited, engaged in or failed to respond to violence. He recalls studies identifying a dialectic between State policies and practices that discriminate against Muslims and the Islamophobia that fuels individual assailants to carry out violent attacks against Muslims and their property.

Over the past two decades, Muslim individuals and communities have borne the brunt of the use and abuse of counter-terrorism measures. Collective blame cast on Muslims for terrorist acts purportedly carried out in the name of Islam, alongside Islamophobic attitudes that draw on negative overgeneralizations about Islam and essentializations of Muslims — which depict them as threatening and centre on constructions of irreconcilable cultural difference between Muslims and that the values of majority populations — have fuelled acts of discrimination, hostility and violence against Muslim individuals and communities.

The expert stressed that international human rights law protects individuals, not religions. The criticism of the ideas, leaders, symbols or practices of Islam is not Islamophobic *per se*; unless it is accompanied by hatred or bias towards Muslims in general.

The Special Rapporteur also urges States to prohibit any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Furthermore, he calls upon the civil society, media and digital technology companies, employers and the UN to take action in addressing Islamophobia within the wider human rights framework. He is emphatic that all responses must be consistent with international human rights law and specifically recommends the utilisation of existing international human standards such as the Rabat Plan of Action and Human Rights Council resolution 16/18.

**Questions:**

1. Have your country set up any monitoring mechanisms to record hate speech and acts of intolerance, hatred or violence that are considered to be anti-Muslim or Islamophobic in nature? What trend have you observed?
2. What measures have you taken to tackle the increasing Islamophobia, especially in the time of COVID-19?
3. What are the good practices that you can share with others in addressing hate crimes, discrimination, hostility or violence against Muslims?