**55th session of the Human Rights Council**

**Panel discussion on countering religious hatred** **constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence**

***Concept note*** *(as of 20 February 2024)*

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| **Date and venue:** | **Friday, 8 March 2023, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.  Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva**  *(broadcast live and archived on* [*https://webtv.un.org*](https://webtv.un.org)) |
| **Objectives and mandate:** | In paragraph 5 of its [resolution 53/1](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/53/1), the Human Rights Council decided to organize an interactive panel discussion of experts at its fifty-fifth session to identify drivers, root causes and human rights impacts of the desecration of sacred books and places of worship, as well as religious symbols, as a manifestation of religious hatred that could constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.  The interactive panel discussion will gather representatives of States, relevant United Nations bodies and agencies, relevant human rights mechanisms, civil society and other stakeholders to:   * Discuss the drivers, root causes and human rights impacts of the desecration of sacred books, places of worship and religious symbols as a manifestation of religious hatred that could constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence; * Outline gaps that may exist in laws, policies, practices and law enforcement that impede the prevention and prosecution of such public and premeditated acts; * Propose normative, legal, policy and administrative deterrence measures, both offline and online, to counter such acts of religious hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence; * Reflect on how manifestations of religious hatred against individuals based on their religion or belief hinder the full enjoyment of their fundamental rights and freedoms; * Share lessons learned and positive examples of national laws, policies and law enforcement frameworks that address, prevent and prosecute acts and advocacy of religious hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Mr. Omar Zniber**, President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statement:** | **Mr. Volker Türk**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| **Panellists:** | * **H.E. Mr. Zamir Akram**, former Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva and Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Right to Development * **Ms. Irene Khan**,Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression * **Ms.** **Kobauyah Tchamdja Kpatcha**,Vice-Chair of the Human Rights Committee * **Mr. Thiago Alves Pinto**, Member of the Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and Director of Studies in Religion and Theology at the University of Oxford |
| **Background:** | In 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights referred through several public statements[[1]](#footnote-2) to recurring incidents of burning the Qur’an, strongly rejecting these disrespectful and offensive acts, especially those having the clear aim to provoke violence and stir division.[[2]](#footnote-3)  On 11 July 2023, during its fifty-third session, the Human Rights Council, held an [urgent debate](https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/human-rights-council-hold-urgent-debate-acts-religious-hatred-11-july) to “discuss the alarming rise in premeditated and public acts of religious hatred as manifested by recurrent desecration of the Holy Quran in some European and other countries.” The urgent debate was convened per an official request submitted by Pakistan on behalf of the States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).  During the urgent debate, the High Commissioner [called](https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/countering-religious-hatred-constituting-incitement-discrimination-hostility-or-violence) on States to combat the weaponization of religious differences for political purposes, and he stated that all societies, whatever their religious and cultural backgrounds, must strive to become magnets for respect, dialogue and cooperation among different peoples.  Following the urgent debate, on 12 July 2023, the Human Rights Council adopted its [resolution 53/1](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/53/1), entitled “Countering religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence”. In this resolution, the Human Rights Council condemned and strongly rejected any advocacy or manifestation of religious hatred, including the recent public and premeditated acts of desecration of the Holy Qur’an, and underscored the need for holding those responsible to account in a manner consistent with the obligations of States arising from international human rights law. Furthermore, it called upon States to adopt national laws, policies and law enforcement frameworks that address, prevent and prosecute acts and advocacy of religious hatred that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, and to take immediate steps to ensure accountability.  In paragraph 4 of this resolution, the Human Rights Council requested the High Commissioner to present at its fifty-fourth session an oral update on the various drivers, root causes and human rights impacts of religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, highlighting gaps in existing national, legal, policy and law enforcement frameworks in particular in the context of the urgent debate, held at the fifty-third session of the Human Rights Council, to be followed by an interactive dialogue.  With a view to implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 53/1, OHCHR issued a [public call for inputs](https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/countering-religious-hatred-constituting-incitement-discrimination-hostility-or-violence#:~:text=On%2012%20July%202023%2C%20the,discrimination%2C%20hostility%20or%20violence%E2%80%9D.) to all stakeholders and sent notes verbales of 26 September 2023 to all permanent missions, inviting written contributions concerning the various drivers, root causes and human rights impacts of religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, highlighting gaps in existing national, legal, policy and law enforcement frameworks. The oral update took place on 5 October 2023 (see the [High Commissioner’s oral update](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/religious-hatred-turk-urges-renewed-social-contract-based-trust-and) for further information). |
| **Outcome:** | Main issues discussed during the panel discussion, its conclusions and recommendations, will be compiled in an OHCHR report to be submitted to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-sixth session (HRC resolution 53/1, para. 6). |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion and by conclusions from the panellists. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for podium interventions, including the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 14 States or observers, 2 national human rights institutions and 4 non-governmental organizations. Each speaker will have 1.5 minutes to ask panellists questions or to share relevant experiences. Panellists will respond to questions and comments during the remaining time available.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Delegates who could not take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). |
| **Accessibility:** | In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel discussion will be webcast and made accessible. International sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided and webcast. Participants can access live English captioning on the StreamText web page (<https://www.streamtext.net/player?event=CFI-UNOG>) during the event itself. Hearing loops are available for collection from the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in the *Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities* (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/accessibility>). |
| **Background documents:** | * Human Rights Council [resolution 53/1](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/53/1) of 12 July 2023 on countering religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence * Human Rights Council [resolution 52/38](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/52/38) of 4 April 2023 on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief * Human Rights Council [resolution 52/6](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/52/6) of 3 April 2023 on freedom of religion or belief * The [Rabat Plan of Action](https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/22/17/Add.4) of 5 October 2012 on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence * OHCHR web pages entitled “[Countering religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence](https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/countering-religious-hatred-constituting-incitement-discrimination-hostility-or-violence)” and “[Combating intolerance against persons based on religion or belief](https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/combating-intolerance-against-persons-based-religion-or-belief)” |

1. See the High Commissioner’s statements of [7 March](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/03/global-update-high-commissioner-outlines-concerns-over-40-countries), [11 July](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/07/turk-calls-states-combat-weaponization-religious-differences), [11 September](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/09/turk-human-rights-are-antidote-prevailing-politics-distraction-deception) as well as on [5](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/religious-hatred-turk-urges-renewed-social-contract-based-trust-and), [10](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/general-assembly-turk-urges-support-human-rights-and-international), [16](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/university-ottawa-turk-urges-governments-align-policy-and-action) and [26 October 2023](https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/universal-declaration-human-rights-will-guide-solutions-global). See also [OHCHR web page](https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/countering-religious-hatred-constituting-incitement-discrimination-hostility-or-violence#:~:text=On%2012%20July%202023%2C%20the,discrimination%2C%20hostility%20or%20violence%E2%80%9D.) on countering religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence for further information. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/10/religious-hatred-turk-urges-renewed-social-contract-based-trust-and>.  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)