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Letter dated 7 July 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Mauritania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Group in New York, I am writing to you to convey the Group's strongest condemnation of the despicable act of the desecration of the Holy Qur'an outside a mosque in Sweden on the occasion of Eid al-Adha.

I also have the honour to transmit the joint statement by the OIC Group in New York (see annex I) and a copy of the communiqué adopted at the extraordinary open-ended meeting of the OIC Executive Committee on the recent incident of the desecration of the Holy Qur'an in Sweden (see annex II).

This vile act is yet another manifestation of the alarming level of the Islamophobic, racist and discriminatory trends spreading across the globe. Such provocative acts not only trigger widespread anguish among 1.5 billion Muslims, but also denigrate their religious sensitivities.

OIC welcomes the condemnation by the United Nations of the recent heinous act of desecration of the Holy Qur'an in Sweden and requests you to urge all States Members of the United Nations to take credible and concrete measures to prevent the rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annexes could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 14, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Sidi Mohamed Laghdaf
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
Chair of the OIC Group in New York



Annex I to the letter dated 7 July 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Mauritania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Joint Statement by the OIC Group in New York on “the recent act of desecration of the Holy Quran”

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Group in New York, strongly condemns the despicable act of desecration of the Holy Quran outside a mosque in Sweden on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha.

This abhorrent act is yet another manifestation of the alarming level of the Islamophobic, racist and discriminatory trends spreading across the globe. Such senseless and provocative acts not only trigger widespread anguish among 1.5 billion Muslims but also denigrate their religious sensitivities.

In fact, the desecration of any religious scripture is a matter of great concern and goes against the fundamental values of religious coexistence and intercultural dialogue that the United Nations stand for.

Such provocative acts are contrary to the spirit of Articles (19) and (20) of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and cannot be justified under the right to freedom of expression or opinion, which carries responsibilities under international law. They also undermine mutual respect and harmony among peoples and aim at reversing the international efforts to attain a culture of peace, tolerance, and mutual respect.

The OIC Group also notes with concern other recent acts of Islamophobia, including heinous attacks on mosques and persecution of Muslims around the world driven by religious intolerance, hatred and negative stereotypes.

Under international law, States are duty bound to prohibit any advocacy of religious hatred, leading to incitement of violence. The rise in such Islamophobic incidents during the last few months in some European and other countries, despite global condemnation, calls into serious question the legal framework which permits such hate-driven actions.

There is a need for a collective resolve to promote inter-faith harmony and peaceful co-existence, the spirit of which was reflected in the commemoration of the first ever International Day to combat Islamophobia earlier this year.

The United Nations Member States must take credible and concrete measures to prevent the rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. The relevant stakeholders must ensure that the perpetrators of such acts are brought to justice and appropriate measures are taken to prevent similar incidents in the future.

New York, 7 July 2023

Annex II to the letter dated 7 July 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Mauritania to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Final Communiqué of the Extraordinary Open-Ended meeting of the OIC Executive Committee at the Level of Permanent Representatives Regarding the Recent Incident of Desecration of Copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif in Sweden

Date: 02/07/2023

At the invitation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Chair of the 14th Islamic Summit, and Chair of the Executive Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Executive Committee convened an extraordinary open-ended meeting on Sunday, 14 Dhul-Hijjah, 1444 AH, corresponding to 2 July 2023, at the headquarters of the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah, to discuss the recent desecration of the copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif in Sweden.

The OIC Executive Committee,

Guided by the principles and objectives enshrined in the OIC and UN Charters and other international documents, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights;

Affirming the commitment made by all States under the UN Charter to promote and encourage universal respect for the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without discrimination based on race, gender, language, or religion;

Underscoring that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression entails special duties and responsibilities in the light of Article 19 (3) and Article 20 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the role played by the exercise of those rights in countering all forms of religious intolerance;

Recalling the various resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) calling for global efforts to promote tolerance, peace, and dialogue among civilizations, especially Resolution No. 66/167 and Human Rights Council Resolution No. 16/18 of March 2011 to address the issue of intolerance and incitement to hatred and violence on religious grounds;

Recalling the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 76/254 designated 15 March as the “International Day to Combat Islamophobia”;

Also recalling relevant resolutions and declarations by the Islamic Summit Conference and Council of Foreign Ministers, in particular, the Final Communiqué of the 14th Islamic Summit, held in Makkah Al-Mukarramah, on 31 May 2019, the Final Communiqué issued at the extraordinary open-ended meeting of the OIC Executive Committee on 09 Rajah 1444 AH, corresponding to 31 January 2023, as well as the resolutions adopted by the 49th Council of Foreign Ministers, held in Nouakchott, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania on 16–17 March 2023, in particular, Resolution No. 32/49-POL on ‘Combating Islamophobia and Eliminating Hatred and Prejudice against Islam,’ Resolution No. 34/49-POL on ‘Combating Defamation of Religions’, and Resolution No. 35/49-POL on ‘Condemnation of Desecration of the copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif,’

Expressing grave concern at the increasing incidences of intolerance, discrimination, and acts of violence in the world, and noting with concern that Islamophobia is on the rise in many parts of the world as evidenced by the increasing

number of incidents of religious intolerance, negative stereotypes, hatred, and violence against Muslims;

Deeply concerned by the resurgence of racist movements and far-right extremism in multiple regions of the world through repeated acts of provocation by supporters of the far-right insulting Islamic religious symbols and sanctities, including the desecration of the copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif;

Condemning any advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence, whether through the use of printed means, audio-visual or electronic means, social media, or any other means;

Reiterating the importance of promoting dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among religions, cultures, and civilizations for peace and harmony in the world and that spreading the values of tolerance and peace is the best way to confront hate speech, fanaticism, extremism, violence, and incitement;

1. Strongly condemns the recent despicable aggression against the sanctity of the Mushaf ash- Sharif in the Kingdom of Sweden, on the first day of Eid al-Adha, 1444, outside the central mosque in the capital city of Stockholm, deplores the recurrence of acts of desecration of the copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif, and deeply Regrets the issuance by the authorities of a permit allowing that action to occur.

2. Requests the Secretary-General to send a letter on behalf of the OIC Member States to the Swedish government and to consider conducting an official visit to Stockholm and the European Union Commission to express the condemnation of the incident of burning the copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif and call on them to take the necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of that criminal act under the pretext of freedom of expression.

3. Condemns all attempts to denigrate the sanctity of al Mushaf ash-Sharif as well as other sacred values and symbols of Islam under the garb of freedom of expression, which is contrary to the spirit of Articles (19) and (20) of the ICCPR; and calls upon the international community to stand against those provocative attempts.

4. Invites the ambassadors of the OIC Member States in the respective capitals where vile acts against the copies of Mushaf ash-Sharif and other Islamic holy symbols take place to collectively make efforts concerning the national parliaments, media, civil society organizations as well as the governmental institutions, to express the OIC's stance and to induce the relevant authorities to take the necessary legislative actions to criminalize such attacks, cognizant of the fact that the exercise of freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities.

5. Calls on all the OIC Overseas Missions (New York, Geneva, and Brussels) to take the initiative to address, in the respective international organizations, which are accredited to them, these acts of hatred against Islam and its sacred symbols in the interpretation of the relevant conventions as well as the formulation of new international legal texts to this end.

6. Calls on Muslim civil society organisations to work with their counterparts in those countries where Islamophobic attacks against the copies of Mushaf ash-Sharif and other sacred values take place to resort to local courts and exhaust domestic remedies, with the guidance of professional legal counsel, before taking their cases to international judiciary bodies, where applicable.

7. Calls upon the General Secretariat to expedite the implementation of the 'Plan of Action for Combating Islamophobia' adopted by Ministers of OIC States Members of the Contact Group on Peace and Dialogue on the sidelines of the UNGA 74th Session in New York.

8. Reiterates the significance of the eight-point Action Plan unanimously agreed upon under UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 as an important step in the United Nations to counter incitement to hatred, discrimination, stigmatization, and violence based on one's religion or belief and calls on all Member States to review the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan and for all-out efforts to preserve international consensus on this important OIC initiative.

9. Reaffirms the essential role of political commitment at the highest level towards the full and effective implementation of UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 and encourages States to pay particular attention to the importance of criminalizing incitement to violence based on religion or belief while recognizing the positive role of open, constructive and respectful debate and interfaith dialogue in this regard.

10. Calls upon all governments to fully implement their existing legal and administrative framework and adapt new legislation, if needed, consistent with their obligations under international law, norms, and standards to protect all individuals and communities against hate and violence based on religion and faith and to ensure the protection of places of worship.

11. Refers to the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 34/36 of 24 March 2017, in which the Council requested the elaboration of Complementary Standards to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to ensure the commencement of the negotiations on the draft additional protocol to the Convention criminalizing acts of racist and xenophobic nature, such as Islamophobia.

12. Calls on the Secretary-General to send a letter to the UN Secretary-General and the Chair of the Security Council, urging them to issue statements of condemnation to reject insults to religious symbols and sanctities, which stirs hatred, promotes the growth of violent extremism and fuels terrorism, and call for mutual respect for all religions and beliefs and the promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance.

13. Tasks the Islamic Group in New York and Geneva to keep sensitizing the UN relevant organs of the continuous violations against Islamic symbols and sanctities and what this represents in feeding hate speech and the growing phenomenon of violent extremism.

14. Assigns the Islamic groups in world capitals (especially the capitals in which the blatant acts against the copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif and other sacred Islamic symbols took place) and international organizations, especially the European Union, to take the necessary measures to refer this statement to the ministries of foreign affairs and the concerned agencies in those countries and organizations, and clarify the step and consequences of persisting in insulting Islamic symbols and sanctities.

15. Continue to include the item "Combating Islamophobia" on the agenda of the meetings of the OIC Islamic Group with countries and international and regional groupings.

16. Assigns the Islamic Group in New York to take the necessary measures towards referring this statement to the UN's relevant organs to issue it as an official document and to request them to include this issue on their agenda under the provisions of Article (1-3) of the UN Charter, which calls for promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

17. Assigns all OIC Member States in Geneva to immediately draw the attention of the Human Rights Council to the recent blatant attack on the sanctity of the Mushaf ash-Sharif in the Kingdom of Sweden by calling for an urgent discussion at its ongoing 53rd session and all its coming sessions and to submit a resolution to address the recurrence of these unfortunate incidents to identify and confront the motives and manifestations of this serious human rights issue systematically and institutionally, and to keep the matter under review.

18. Renews its call to the Secretary-General to take immediate steps to strengthen the Islamophobia Observatory in the General Secretariat by transforming it into a complete department for combating Islamophobia, dialogue and outreach, allocating the necessary resources to enable the Observatory to work effectively, implement concrete programs on the ground and facilitate its link with other centers and mechanisms concerned with monitoring Islamophobia around the world and to publish its periodical reports professionally.

19. Calls for placing the desecration of copies of the Mushaf ash-Sharif and Islamic symbols and sanctities on the agenda of the coordination meeting of the foreign ministers of member states on the sidelines of the upcoming UNGA in New York and the upcoming Islamic Summit in Gambia to take more measures to address this negative phenomenon against Islam and Muslims.

20. Calls upon the Secretary-General to consider the possible steps to review the official framework that connects the General Secretariat with any country in which the sanctity of the Mushaf ash-Sharif and other Islamic values, symbols, and sanctities are desecrated with the consent of the concerned country, including suspending the status of a special envoy.

21. Requests the Secretary-General to implement Paragraph 9 of Resolution No. 68/48-POL by appointing a Special Envoy on Islamophobia within the existing resources to lead the collective effort on OIC's behalf.

22. Requests the Secretary-General to consult with the OIC Member States to hold an extraordinary high-level meeting, if necessary.

23. Calls on to hold an Ordinary Meeting of the OIC Executive Committee on Islamophobia in September 2023 to assess the vile attacks against Muslims and Islamic sacred symbols thoroughly, including the desecration of the Mushaf Ash Sarif and to follow up the conclusions and decisions of the previous meetings of the Executive Committee and the Council of Foreign Ministers, as part of the preparation for an OIC Ministerial Level Meeting in coordination with the General Secretariat and in consultation with the Member States.

24. Welcomes the convening of an international conference on Islamophobia and Anti-Muslims Discrimination, from 22 to 23 August 2023 in Kuala Lumpur, in coordination with the OIC General Secretariat.

25. Invites the General Secretariat to organize events on International Day to Combat Islamophobia at its Headquarters and in countries where Islamophobic attacks occur to create more global awareness and mobilize the member states and potential partners to combat Islamophobia most effectively.

26. Requests the Secretary-General to follow up on this Communique's implementation and submit a report thereon to the next Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting.