



General Assembly

Seventy-eighth session

62nd plenary meeting

Friday, 15 March 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Francis (Trinidad and Tobago)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Pieris (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 14 (continued)

Culture of peace

Draft resolution (A/78/L.48)

Draft amendments (A/78/L.51, A/78/L.52)

The Acting President: Before we proceed to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to inform members that the Assembly will hold a debate on this item at a later date to be announced.

I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan to introduce draft resolution A/78/L.48.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): First, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Dennis Francis, for arranging the convening of this meeting on this day, 15 March, which was declared two years ago as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia by the General Assembly in resolution 76/254, sponsored by the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and other like-minded Member States.

I asked for the floor today to introduce the follow-up draft resolution A/78/L.48, on behalf of OIC and other co-sponsors, on measures to combat Islamophobia. Islamophobia is as old as Islam itself. It was generated by atavistic fears and prejudice. It was manifested by the racist colonization and brutalization of much of the

Islamic world in the past few centuries. In the current era, Islamophobia resurged after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Despite the adoption of the General Assembly's resolution on Islamophobia two years ago, despite the declarations and statements made against Islamophobia by the Secretary-General, by the High Commissioner on Human Rights, by several of the Special Rapporteurs and mandate holders of the Human Rights Council and by other leaders promoting interreligious and intercommunal harmony, the incidence of Islamophobia, discrimination, prejudice and violence against Muslims and all that they hold sacred have risen exponentially, both at the societal and State levels.

At the societal level Islamophobic incidents happen across the world almost on a daily basis. They are manifested in the despicable acts of desecration of the Holy Qur'an, with seven such incidents recorded last year alone, and the lynching of Muslims by cow vigilantes. Islamophobia is also manifested in the widespread hate speech against Muslims, online and offline; in discrimination in education and employment; in attacks on women wearing the hijab; in the vandalization and destruction of mosques and other holy sites, including the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem; in racial and religious profiling; in the media, which spews hate and prejudice and fuels fear against Muslims; and in the calls for genocide against Muslims and Muslim minorities, which go unpunished.

And yet, most Governments refuse to adopt laws and rules that would prevent and punish such acts of Islamophobia and incitement to violence, often on the spurious grounds of the defence of the right to freedom

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of expression. Yet this freedom ends if the Holocaust is denied. This freedom ends if you are demonstrating for Palestinian rights or protesting against Israel's plausible genocide in Gaza. What is worse is that Islamophobia is not only tolerated but propagated by a growing number of States and political leaders in the democracies of this world. The rise of right-wing and fascist parties and politicians in recent elections confirms and consolidates this Islamophobic trend. There is, I fear, an emerging coalition of the killing.

A Prime Minister gleefully consecrates a Hindu temple on the ruins of a historic 500-year-old mosque. His party is bent on eradicating the country's rich Islamic legacy. A citizenship law is implemented that would deny asylum to Muslims alone and is designed to render 200 million Muslims either stateless or second-class citizens. In another geographical area, a Home Secretary of the oldest democracy castigates the police for being "too lenient" against pro-Palestinian demonstrators opposing Israel's brutal Gaza campaign. Immigration policies are designed to deliberately exclude Muslims. Travel bans are imposed against Muslims. Hijab bans are officially imposed. The Muslim call to prayer is prohibited in some States, and ridiculous rules have been promulgated to prevent so-called "love jihad". In the largest democracy, Islamic names of cities are being replaced. The Islamic legacy is being obliterated.

The most egregious current manifestation of Islamophobia and racism is Israel's military onslaught in Gaza. The killing of more than 30,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, in Gaza, and calls for genocide against the Palestinians have been justified by describing them as "human animals". The same mindset has led to the foreign occupation and suppression of Muslims elsewhere and to the series of foreign interventions in Muslim countries.

Clearly, for those who adhere to the principles of interreligious and intercultural harmony, it is entirely evident that bold and decisive actions are needed to counter and combat Islamophobia. This is the purpose of the draft resolution submitted as document A/78/L.48. The original version of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) draft resolution was circulated more than a month ago. The sponsors conducted three rounds of open informal consultations. In good faith, we accommodated a number of concerns expressed by the European Union and other interlocutors. Changes were made in both the preambular and operative parts of the

draft resolution. With respect to operative paragraph 2, we face the inexplicable opposition to the reference to the Holy Qur'an, so we changed the language to mention the "holy book". In the same paragraph, we also dropped the words "condemnation in the strongest possible terms of the Islamophobic incidents", and we deleted the phrase that originally stated that such acts were in violation of international law.

And yet, after accepting all the concessions made by the OIC sponsors, these mostly European delegations have submitted the amendments contained in documents A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52. These last-minute amendments are inconsistent with the constructive approach of the co-sponsors throughout the negotiations on the draft resolution. If we had known that our interlocutors were bent on preventing a consensus, we would not have accepted to make the significant concessions that we made, for example, by removing the call for the formulation of a plan of action to combat Islamophobia. We would have kept our original text.

In any case, we strongly oppose both the amendments. The proposal in document A/78/L.51 to remove the reference to the "holy book" is unacceptable. The desecration of the Holy Qur'an offends the sentiments of all Muslims and other peoples of faith. We do not agree that deliberate acts of burning and desecration of our holy book can be justified by the so-called right of freedom of expression. The OIC has consistently called for the criminalization of such acts, and in fact, this was agreed in resolution 16/18 of the Human Rights Council 13 years ago, but it has not been implemented. We welcome Denmark's agreement to do so. We urge all other countries, especially the sponsors of these amendments, to follow this example. We urge all members of the Assembly who revere and respect all holy books and sacred texts to oppose this amendment.

Similarly, we oppose the amendment in document A/78/L.52 to replace our call for the appointment by the Secretary-General of a special envoy by a "focal point". Let me explain why. A focal point implies a role of coordination. This may be sufficient and appropriate when numerous actions are being taken in various places against a particular problem, such as anti-Semitism. However, in the case of Islamophobia, no specific and concrete actions are being taken by most Governments, or even by international organizations such as the United Nations, despite the statements by the Secretary-General or by national agencies. The

exception is the welcome appointment of a Special Envoy on Islamophobia by the Administration of the United States. Can the United Nations do less? Why should not the United Nations also have a special envoy so that we can take action against the rampant rise in Islamophobia?

Our purpose in seeking the appointment of a United Nations Special Envoy is to initiate specific actions to combat Islamophobia. We hope the Secretary-General will deliver on his several statements that he is willing to propagate such actions. We also hope that the United Nations Special Envoy will take the lead in formulating actions to be taken by the United Nations and all its Member States to combat Islamophobia.

We believe that the text of draft resolution A/78/L.48 is balanced and deserves the widest possible support of the Member States by the United Nations. We urge all fair-minded delegations to stand firm against prejudice and reject the draft amendments contained in documents A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52 and to vote in favour of the draft resolution. We thank those that have already co-sponsored draft resolution A/78/L.48, and we count on their full support and that of other delegations for this important draft resolution.

The sponsors are confident that, on this International Day, the world's peoples will unite in combating Islamophobia and other ideologies of hate, domination and division. Let us firmly oppose those who seek to promote Islamophobia, particularly on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, by obstructing consensus on this critical issue in the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium to introduce draft amendments A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52.

Mr. Lagatie (Belgium): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States to introduce two draft amendments to draft resolution A/78/L.48, as contained in 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 purposes and principles of the United Nations, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations 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 working together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (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 the 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 that 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 article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law".

The freedom of religion or belief is like all other human rights, that is, an individual right that can be exercised in community with others. It does not protect a religion or belief as such, or its symbols. And neither does it prohibit the criticism of religions or beliefs.

We appreciate that facilitator — Pakistan — on behalf of the OIC, organized and formal 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 appropriate in the context of the United Nations.

First, the EU has strong reservations against the wording of paragraph 2. In our view, the United Nations should be religiously 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, and neither does it prohibit the criticism of religions or beliefs.

Secondly, the EU has reservations against the creation of a special envoy as proposed in paragraph 3. We are concerned about the duplication of several mechanisms in place to address discrimination based on religion or belief and about the financial implications. We strongly believe that a focal point would be more appropriate, while making use of existing structures and resources, such as the current focal point to monitor antisemitism — the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos Cuyaubé — whose valuable role is also recognized in the preambular section of the draft resolution.

For those reasons, the EU decided to propose draft amendments to paragraphs 2 and 3, in line with our and other delegations' proposals all along the informal consultation process. In new paragraph 2 as contained in document A/78/L.51, our draft amendment brings the wording in line with international human rights law. In new paragraph 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 in favour of those draft amendments.

The Acting President: We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/78/L.48 and draft amendments A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. Sharma (Department for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services): I have two oral statements to make, one in relation to draft resolution, A/78/L.48, and the other one in relation to the same draft resolution if it were to be amended by draft amendment A/78/L.52.

The first oral statement is made in the context of rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. The present statement has been distributed to Member States.

Under the terms of paragraphs 3 and 6 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would, first, request the Secretary-General to appoint a United Nations Special Envoy to combat Islamophobia; and secondly, request the Secretary-General to prepare and submit a report to its seventy-ninth session on the implementation of the present draft resolution and on measures taken by Member States and the United Nations pursuant to the

present draft resolution to combat Islamophobia in all its forms and manifestations.

The requests contained in operative paragraphs 3 and 6 of the draft resolution would entail budgetary implications, as they relate to the appointment of a United Nations Special Envoy to combat Islamophobia, starting in 2025, and the preparation of a report for submission to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session.

Should the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution, the Secretariat would conduct internal consultations to determine the detailed budgetary requirements for 2025, which would be submitted for consideration by the General Assembly, through the Fifth Committee, during the main part of its seventy-ninth session under the agenda item "Proposed programme budget for 2025", in line with the budgetary procedures.

The second oral statement is also made in the context of rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. The present statement has also been distributed to Member States.

Under the terms of operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would request the Secretary-General to prepare and submit a report to it at its seventy-ninth session on the implementation of the present resolution and on measures taken by Member States and the United Nations pursuant to the present resolution to combat Islamophobia in all its forms and manifestations.

The request contained in operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution would entail budgetary implications, as they relate to the preparation of a report for submission to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session. It is the Secretariat's understanding that the report shall be submitted at the seventy-ninth resumed session.

Should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/78/L.48 as amended by A/78/L.52, additional resource requirements for 2025 estimated at up to \$31,000 under section 2, "General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management", would be submitted for consideration by the General Assembly through the Fifth Committee, during the main part of its seventy-ninth session under the agenda item "Proposed programme budget for 2025", in line with the budgetary procedures.

I should like to announce that, since the submission of the draft resolution, and in addition to the delegations

listed in the document, the following countries have also become sponsors of A/78/L.48: the Plurinational State of Bolivia, China, Nicaragua, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

Since the submission of the draft amendment, and in addition to the delegations listed in the document, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has also become a sponsor of A/78/L.51.

Since the submission of the draft amendment, and in addition to the delegations listed in the document, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has also become a sponsor of A/78/L.52.

The Acting President: Delegations wishing to make a statement in explanation of vote before the vote on any proposal under this item are invited to do so now in one intervention. After action on all of them, there will be an opportunity for explanations of vote after the vote on any or all of them.

Before giving the floor for explanations of vote before the vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes, and should be made by delegations from their seat.

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to reiterate our full support to the initiative proposed by the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to undertake follow-up measures to address the growing trend of intolerance and prejudice against Islam and Muslims worldwide, which is a daunting challenge to the international community.

Over the past few decades, harmful stereotypes and prejudices regarding Muslims and Islam have been constantly reinforced by certain media outlets, politicians and influencers of popular culture, and numerous discriminatory practices implemented in various parts of the world, aimed at preventing Muslims from living in accordance with their belief system. At such a critical moment, it is important to ensure that the United Nations remains united against attempts to embrace Islamophobia and such measures as Muslim travel bans, as well as against the burning of the Qur'an and bans on the hijab and Muslim symbols.

We are of the firm belief that the arrangements proposed in the draft resolution, including the decision to appoint a United Nations Special Envoy to combat Islamophobia will assist the Organization in mobilizing efforts to combat these growing challenges. Equally

important, it is necessary for the General Assembly to strongly condemn violent acts against religious symbols and the holy book of Muslims. The desecration of holy books is already recognized by the General Assembly as a violation of international law, and it is deeply offensive and disrespectful. They are indeed acts of incitement, hostility and violence that shall be criminalized and prohibited by law at the national level, to prevent, and establish accountability for, such acts.

It is unfortunate that such acts take place in countries that claim to have established and enforced the rule of law, and it is reprehensible that such actions are justified under the guise of freedom of expression. We regret that despite the best efforts of the OIC to garner consensus, the member States of the European Union have tabled amendments that directly affect the core objectives of the draft resolution aimed at combating Islamophobia worldwide.

Iran aligns its position with the OIC members, strongly objects to these amendments and urges all members to vote against them. We will continue to demand that all Member States shoulder their responsibilities and live up to their legal obligations in order to advance the shared values of peaceful coexistence, tolerance and mutual understanding. Let us keep striving for justice, dignity and inclusion for our Muslim brothers and sisters and for all humankind.

Mr. Albanai (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): As we are in the holy month of Ramadan, I would like to congratulate all those who are in the General Assembly Hall today, as well as all the peoples of their countries.

(*spoke in English*)

I speak today as a representative of a proud member State of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that has always advocated tolerance, religious coexistence and harmony among nations. I express my sincere appreciation to the delegation of Pakistan in its role in facilitating the consultations on the draft resolution entitled "Measures to combat Islamophobia", (A/78/L.48). We look forward to the adoption of the draft resolution today.

I take pleasure in reiterating that, throughout the course of consultations regarding the text of the draft resolution, we received a variety of constructive proposals. However, it was disappointing to have been engaged by some Member States with what seem to be proposals embedded in a misguided sense of denial of

the existence of Islamophobically charged incidents around the world. It is that denial that has brought us to this disappointing situation today, wherein it was expected that a draft resolution designed to provide victims of Islamophobia a form of redress and to create a means for Member States to tackle the phenomenon of Islamophobia, which has gripped societies the world over, has come under opposition, actioned with obstructive draft amendments. It is saddening that, despite the concerted efforts of the OIC to accommodate the concerns of all Member States with regard to the draft solution, it was still not enough. We are now sending the world a clear message that we could not find consensus on how to tackle the rise in Islamophobia. We have turned the suffering of many into a debate on syntax.

Today I ask everyone to shed the shackles of discrimination, prejudice and hate speech. I urge all members all to vote against the draft amendments proposed to the draft resolution. I ask everyone to keep the text as it is, as a whole, just as the OIC intended it to be. Surely an ethical priority exists in recognizing that the natural mandate of the OIC would be to combat Islamophobia. Hence the spirit of multilateralism dictates that the OIC should be supported in exercising that natural mandate in the form of a subject-centred resolution, as envisioned.

This is our collective home and absolutely the place to combat and resist Islamophobic trends. And it is our collective responsibility, not that of the OIC member States. Please, enough with double standards. Remember the golden rule: do unto others as you would like done unto you. As His Excellency Ambassador Akram said in his introduction, stand firm against prejudice on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. If it is financial implications that members are worried about, it is without doubt money well-spent to appoint a special envoy to combat this phenomenon.

Mr. Alwasil (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to recall that draft resolution A/78/L.48 is based on an increase in the physical and verbal violence against Muslims in several countries around the world. That is why my delegation believes that the draft resolution in its current form will meet the concerns to combat the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Many remarks by States were taken into consideration and were reflected in the current form of the draft resolution, thereby meeting the main reason behind it, namely, to combat Islamophobia.

The draft amendments proposed on the draft resolution (A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52) are not in line with efforts to combat Islamophobia. That is why my country will vote against the proposed draft amendments, and we call on all countries to also vote against them.

Mr. Elshandawily (Egypt): My delegation takes the floor in explanation of vote before the voting on the draft amendments to paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 of draft resolution A/78/L.48), as contained in documents A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52.

Egypt deeply regrets the fact that, despite attempts and sincere efforts to arrive at consensus on this important draft resolution, we find ourselves at extreme ends of confrontation, as opposed to dialogue aimed at addressing Islamophobia and its many manifestations, which are growing at a worrisome rate, threatening societal peace and harmony as well as exacerbating extremist ideologies. It is incumbent upon Member States, in accordance with their obligations under international law, to prohibit any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement, hostility or violence. As such, my delegation strongly condemns all acts of incitement directed against Muslims, their religious sites, properties, the desecration of the Holy Qur'an and other actions that are grounded in Islamophobia. It is quite regrettable that, throughout the negotiations on the draft resolution, it was evident that a number of delegations were aiming to dilute the draft resolution, shifting its focus away from its core objective, which is engaging the international community through the United Nations system to address the rising and worrisome trends in Islamophobia. This is now manifested in the introduction of the objectionable draft amendments currently being discussed.

As such, Egypt will vote against the draft amendments and trusts that all delegations subscribing to the culture of peace and dialogue will vote against the draft amendments too.

Mr. Nasir (Indonesia): Indonesia delivers this explanation of vote before the voting on the draft amendments put forward by the representative of the European Union (A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52).

The Qur'an, like other holy books, is a pillar of the Muslim faith. Its desecration is an assault on its spiritual foundation. For Muslims, desecrating the Qur'an is not merely desecrating an object, it is desecrating our dignity, our sense of being. An act of burning the Qur'an

is a clear manifestation of Islamophobia. For Muslims, the burning of the Qur'an, or any other holy book, is a violation of human rights. It needs to end.

Throughout the negotiation process, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and its core group have strived to reach a balance. We have been working in good faith and in close consultation with all. We have submitted numerous proposals to refine the text of the draft resolution (A/78/L.48) without diluting its essence. We believe that combating Islamophobia is an act of humanity and deserves consensus. This draft resolution is about promoting peace and tolerance, which deserves consensus. We therefore regret that our sincere pursuit was met with last-minute amendments. The aim is to dismiss the very heart of the text. Indonesia views that the amendments deny the peaceful spirit of our resolution, as well as the principles of respect, tolerance and understanding that we have worked hard to cultivate. It is time to choose solidarity over division and humanity over hatred, and to affirm the need to combat Islamophobia in all its forms.

My delegation thus calls for all Member States to stand on the side of humanity and dignity and vote against the amendments.

Mr. Al-Fatlawi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which has spared no effort to reach a balanced and consensus text.

Iraq condemns and denounces the phenomenon of Islamophobia, hate speech and any conduct that runs counter to the values of tolerance, accepting others and peaceful coexistence and democratic values, such as burning and desecrating the Holy Qur'an and other religious texts under the pretext of freedom of thought and expression. Allowing the desecration of the Holy Qur'an has encouraged certain people to repeat those hateful acts and has fuelled hatred and racism and obstructed international efforts to spread the values of tolerance, moderation, anti-extremism and terrorism. It has also undermined mutual respect among peoples and led to threats to peace and societal security.

Iraq recalls that human rights are universal, interconnected and mutually reinforcing. We reiterate our call on the Secretary-General to take decisive measures to prevent the repetition of those acts through the appointment of a United Nations special envoy to address hate speech and any undermining of the principles of peaceful coexistence among followers

of various religions. Iraq calls on Member States to shoulder their moral and legal responsibilities by establishing effective frameworks to criminalize hate speech, violence against Muslims and the targeting of religious sites, and to also hold accountable the perpetrators regardless of where those acts took place or the identity of the perpetrators.

The original text of draft resolution A/78/L.48, submitted on behalf of Organization of Islamic Cooperation member States, reflects all of those concepts and objectives that we are calling for. However, the two proposed amendments (A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52) run counter to them. That is why Iraq will vote against the two amendments. We call on all Member States to also vote against them.

Mr. Muhamad (Malaysia): Malaysia regrets that we have come to this unfortunate situation, in which voting on a very important draft resolution on combating Islamophobia (A/78/L.48) is required. We commend the tireless efforts carried out by Pakistan and the core group in their endeavour to find compromise that would enable the draft resolution to be adopted by consensus.

While we believe that the overall content of the text could have been further strengthened, we acknowledge that much effort has been carried out, and utmost flexibility has been exercised to reach a middle ground. Therefore, Malaysia strongly believes that the text circulated by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is an acceptable compromise that accommodates various concerns expressed by Member States. In this regard, we urge all Member States to be constructive in exercising their votes while recognizing all the efforts that have been undertaken to come to this compromise.

Ms. Gurhan (Uganda): My delegation is taking the floor in the explanation of vote before the vote on the amendments contained in documents A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52.

Uganda attaches great importance to promoting a culture of peaceful coexistence and combating Islamophobia, a disturbing trend that includes hate speech, discrimination and violent attacks against Muslims, their places of worship and the sacred Holy Qur'an. We strongly condemn such acts of violence and support the language contained in draft resolution A/78/L.48.

These intolerant actions violate the fundamental human rights of Muslims and threaten societal stability

and security. To address the issues effectively, concrete measures must be taken to combat Islamophobia and religious intolerance, including enacting laws to protect the rights of all citizens and holding perpetrators of discrimination and violence accountable. Therefore, in line with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation position, Uganda will vote against those amendments, and we appeal to all Member States to do the same.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Pakistan for their leadership throughout the facilitation of this important draft resolution.

Mrs. Güven (Türkiye): We are concerned that Islamophobic rhetoric and acts are increasing.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation group has shown utmost flexibility by taking different views on board and has chosen inclusive language with a view to adopting the draft resolution (A/78/L.48) by consensus. Unfortunately, the amendments run against that constructive approach. Therefore, my delegation will vote against the two amendments. We also call on Member States to support the inclusive text that was drafted and submitted as a result of compromise and a constructive approach.

The Acting President: Before we take a decision on draft resolution A/78/L.48, in accordance with rule 90 of the Rules of Procedure, the Assembly shall first take a decision on draft amendments A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft amendment A/78/L.51, entitled “Measures to combat Islamophobia”. A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Montenegro, Mozambique, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Norway, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Sudan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:

Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, China, Comoros, Côte d’Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Zimbabwe

Abstaining:

Australia, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Uruguay

Draft amendment A/78/L.51 was rejected by 53 votes to 61, with 28 abstentions.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft amendment A/78/L.52, also entitled “Measures to combat Islamophobia”.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Sudan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of

Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay

Against:

Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, China, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Zimbabwe

Abstaining:

Australia, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, New Zealand, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago

Draft amendment A/78/L.52 was rejected by 61 votes to 57, with 24 abstentions.

The Acting President: Since draft amendments A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52 were not adopted, we shall now proceed to take action on draft resolution A/78/L.48.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/78/L.48 entitled, "Measures to Combat Islamophobia". A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Albania, Algeria, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zimbabwe

Against:

None

Abstaining:

Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Sudan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Draft resolution A/78/L.48 was adopted by 115 votes to none, with 44 abstentions (resolution 78/264).

The Acting President: Before giving the floor for explanations of vote after the vote, may I remind the allegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Kamboj (India): I take the floor to explain India's position on the resolution just adopted (resolution 78/264).

In our world today, we are confronted with escalating geopolitical tensions and unequal development, resulting in a concerning rise in intolerance, discrimination and violence based on religion or belief. India, as a proud champion of pluralism, firmly upholds the principle of equal protection and promotion of all religions and all faiths. Our rich history as a pluralistic and democratic nation, embracing diverse religions, has long served as a refuge for those persecuted for their faith. Whether Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Jews or adherents of any other belief, they have consistently found in India a sanctuary free from persecution or discrimination. At the heart of this ethos is our principle of *Sarva Dharma Sambhava*, encapsulating Indian secularism and affirming the inherent goodness of all religions, each deserving of equal respect. This principle is not merely a facet of our culture, it is firmly enshrined within the Constitution of India.

It is therefore with deep concern that we observe the growing manifestation of intolerance, discrimination and violence against followers of various religions. We condemn all acts motivated by antisemitism, Christianophobia or Islamophobia. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that such phobias extend beyond the Abrahamic religions. Clear evidence shows that over decades, followers of non-Abrahamic religions have also been affected by religion-phobia. This has led to the emergence of contemporary forms of religion-phobia, in particular anti-Hindu, anti-Buddhist and anti-Sikh elements. These contemporary forms of religion-phobia are evident in the increasing attacks on places of religious worship, such as gurudwaras, monasteries and temples, as well as the spreading of hatred and disinformation against non-Abrahamic religions in many countries. The destruction of the Bamiyan buddhas, violations of gurudwara premises, massacres of Sikh pilgrims and gurudwaras, attacks on temples and the glorification of breaking idols and temples all contribute to the rise of contemporary forms of religion-phobia against non-Abrahamic religions. It is crucial to recognize that Hinduism, with more than 1.2 billion followers, Buddhism, with more than 535 million followers, and Sikhism, with more than 30 million followers worldwide, are all subject to religion-phobia. It is time that we acknowledge the prevalence of religion-phobia rather than just singling one out.

In this context, I would ask all Member States to consider the broader scope of religious discrimination

that persists globally. While the issue of Islamophobia is undoubtedly significant, we must acknowledge that other religions are also facing discrimination and violence. Allocating resources solely to combat Islamophobia while neglecting similar challenges faced by other faiths might inadvertently perpetuate a sense of exclusion and inequality. Moreover, the substantial budgetary implications of establishing such a position prompt us to pause and reflect on whether this is the most effective use of resources. Could we not achieve greater impact through a more inclusive approach that addresses religious discrimination in its entirety?

Therefore, we are in principle opposed to the creation of the post of a special envoy on the basis of a special religion. We trust that the resolution adopted today does not establish a precedent that could result in numerous resolutions centred on phobias tied to specific religions, potentially dividing the United Nations into religious camps. It is crucial for the United Nations to maintain its stance above such religious concerns, which have the potential to fragment us rather than unite us under the banner of peace and harmony, embracing the world as one global family.

India stands against all forms of religion-phobia, be it antisemitism, Christianophobia or Islamophobia, as we stand against all anti-Hindu, anti-Buddhist and anti-Sikh sentiments.

One final point concerns a delegation that, much like a broken record, remains sadly stagnant while the world progresses. It is unfortunate indeed to witness this delegation's limited and misguided perspective on matters relating to my country. The more so, when the General Assembly considers a matter that demands wisdom, depth and a global outlook from the entire membership, perhaps not the forte of that delegation.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this important meeting on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

I would like to emphasize that Tunisia is committed to upholding the principles of tolerance, moderation and respect for religions. We reiterate our rejection to all forms of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and all heinous acts promoting the phenomenon of hate speech against Islam and Muslims, including burning of the Holy Qur'an, contempt for religious symbols, attacking mosques and targeting Muslims with all acts of aggression worldwide. In that

context, we underscore Tunisia's rejection of every form of contempt for religions and religious symbols. We reiterate our call for concerted efforts to address all such practices and end the dissemination of hate speech, smear campaigns, incitement and racial discrimination, in particular in social media. We also reiterate our rejection of associating terrorism with any religion, race or gender, and we call for the prevention of all forms of intolerance and violent extremism.

Incidents that targeted Muslims motivated by their religious beliefs have revealed the danger of such practices for security, peace and coexistence among peoples and cultures. We call for respect for the cultural and religious particularities of all peoples, prioritizing constructive dialogue, global values and respect for human rights, while rejecting all forms of discrimination, racial and religious profiling.

In that context, we call on everyone to take all legal, legislative and preventive measures to prevent contemptuous acts against religions and attacks against religious symbols, prevent all forms of violence based on hatred and religious and cultural discrimination and criminalize such acts. We stress that such acts cannot be categorized as freedom of expression, which requires a certain level of responsibility and respect for the other and commitment to laws and international and humanitarian instruments.

In the light of the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including war crimes, genocide and repeated systematic attacks against places of worship and worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Tunisia reaffirms its strongest condemnation of such violations, which run counter to all human values and international law. We call for ending such practices and compelling the occupying Power to respect international law, international human rights law and the sanctity of religions and places of worship.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our support for the efforts of the Secretary-General and the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to address hate speech and Islamophobia and promote dialogue and peaceful coexistence among civilizations and religions. We also emphasize the importance of resolution 78/264, just adopted, and call for its implementation.

Mr. Rojas (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru voted in favour of the resolution entitled "Measures to combat Islamophobia" (resolution 78/264), given its

commitment to the protection of the rights of all persons without distinction, including the followers of Islam. That is why my delegation participated constructively in the negotiation process, always seeking to contribute to a respectful dialogue to enable the interests and concerns of all parties to be understood. In that regard, Peru would like to thank Pakistan, as the delegation that facilitated the resolution, and the other countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for their receptiveness to the various proposals put forward. In that sense, we must acknowledge the flexibility that they showed in withdrawing references that would have even further complicated the debate, such as the use of criminal law in measures to combat Islamophobia or the question of whether certain acts violate international law either by definition or only in certain contexts. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that the fact that amendments were introduced and that we had to vote several times shows that we must continue the discussion in order to reach greater consensus on particularly sensitive and complex issues, such as the question of the balance between the freedom of religion and belief, on the one hand, and the freedom of expression, on the other.

In that regard, my delegation deems it necessary to clarify why Peru voted as it did.

First, Peru approached the resolution within the framework of its firm commitment to the full implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as compliance with its other human rights obligations. In that regard, Peru's support for the resolution is based on a thorough reading and interpretation of it, which in turn implies that the content of paragraph 2 and the measures referred to in paragraph 4 presuppose due consideration of the rights contained within the framework, including the provisions of articles 18, 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Moreover, our vote in favour of the draft amendment to paragraph 3 (A/78/L.52) was based on the fact that, as we made clear during the negotiations, we believe that, instead of the Secretary-General appointing a new special envoy, it would be more productive to designate the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations as the focal point of the Organization to combat Islamophobia, since he performs similar

functions vis-à-vis antisemitism. Without prejudice to the foregoing, we must specify that Peru does not oppose the use of the term “Islamophobia”, which is why, in due course, we joined the consensus to adopt resolution 76/254, which established the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. My delegation believes that the Peru’s intent in voting for the proposed draft amendments to the paragraphs concerned, as well as this explanation of vote, makes clear our national position. The draft resolution put to the vote (A/78/L.48), although not perfect, is acceptable to Peru if we consider it as a whole and the concessions made by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation during the negotiations.

In conclusion, Peru would like to stress that we are dealing with a resolution submitted under the agenda item entitled “Culture of peace”, to which we attach great importance, as it is closely linked to one of the purposes of the United Nations. In that regard, Peru encourages all delegations to persevere in the search for consensus and reiterates its commitment to maintaining a constructive and good-faith approach to future discussions and negotiations on the subject.

Mr. Hirji (Canada): At the outset, I would like to wish *Ramadan karim* to colleagues here today who observe. I would also like to thank Pakistan and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for their hard work in introducing and facilitating this resolution (resolution 78/264) and take note of their flexibility during the negotiations.

Canada voted in favour of the resolution, as we believe that combating Islamophobia and all forms of violence and hatred based on religion or belief is more important now than ever. For that reason, we also abstained in the voting on all proposals to amend the text. While we voted in favour of the resolution, we remain concerned about some elements.

First, suggestions to integrate gender language were not taken on board. Muslim women and girls faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and are often themselves the targets of Islamophobic acts. It has been Canada’s experience that, in order to effectively combat Islamophobia, we need to acknowledge the gendered aspects behind Islamophobic attacks and the specific challenges faced by women and girls.

Secondly, we regret that efforts to broaden the scope of condemnation of hate were not taken on board. Canada is one of the very few countries in the world that has both a special representative to combat Islamophobia

and a special envoy to combat antisemitism. We are concerned about the inequity that the resolution creates between efforts combating different forms of hate in the United Nations system and that it risks suggesting that the United Nations does not see the need to address other forms of discrimination equally at a time when instances of antisemitism are also on the rise globally.

Additionally, the post of new special envoy would have significant budget-related impacts on an already strained fiscal environment. It may also have implications on pre-existing United Nations structures, including the Office of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. We are concerned about the precedent that the appointment of a special envoy would set, including in the context of the current liquidity crisis. We will also need to ensure that this new position does not undermine or duplicate the efforts of the United Nations on combating religious intolerance. When we are inefficient in our work, we make it even harder to make meaningful progress on this common priority.

All that said, adopting this resolution 78/264 on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia is both relevant and timely. No one should be a target on the basis of their faith. Canada remains committed to working with all Member States and all stakeholders, upholding freedom of religion or belief for persons of all backgrounds, and to working together to combat Islamophobia.

Ms. Zabolotskaya (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for preparing the resolution on “Measures to combat Islamophobia” and, in particular, the delegation of Pakistan for its efforts as facilitator of the negotiation process.

The Russian Federation is a multi-ethnic and multi-faith State, where the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue is prioritized at both the national and international level. Representatives of more than 190 nationalities live in peace and harmony in Russia. More than 20 million people in our country are followers of Islam, which makes it the second largest religion in our State.

We fully share the view that promoting a culture of peace and mutual respect is the key to resolving contemporary challenges. We firmly believe that discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or belief, in all its forms and manifestations, including

neo-Nazism, Islamophobia, Christianophobia and antisemitism, poses a threat to social cohesion in general, and not only to the racial and ethnic groups it directly targets. This important provision is reflected in another resolution of the General Assembly that is adopted annually on the initiative of the Russian Federation and a group of like-minded countries, including many Muslim countries. The resolution is entitled “Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”.

Hate towards any religion should be condemned and requires an immediate response from the international community. We believe that traditional religions, including Islam, are being attacked in a host of States. We must point out that alongside Islam, attacks are also being made on Orthodox Christianity. In Ukraine, it has become a State policy and must be stopped. At the same time, we believe that the views held by several delegations that submitted amendments to resolution 78/264 are today are largely deceitful and reveal an unwillingness to combat Islamophobia or other kinds of religious intolerance. The Russian Federation does not agree with the views of those countries that indulge in the barbaric acts of burning the Qur’an, insulting the sentiments of believers on their territories and allowing those who are guilty of those acts unpunished on the grounds of allegedly exercising their right to the freedom of opinion and expression.

We view this resolution as an important step by the international community to protect our traditional religions. It also provides an opportunity for the international community to once again demonstrate its unwavering commitment to combating all forms of hate in fulfilment of its obligations under international law, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular part III, article 20, which stipulates that any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence should be prohibited by law.

We are pleased to join the sponsors of resolution 78/264 and call on the international community to fulfil its international legal obligations to protect religious rights.

Mr. Lagatie (Belgium): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member

States to explain our position on the resolution just adopted as resolution 78/264.

As we stated before, 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 United Nations.

First, as our amendment A/78/L.51 was not adopted by a small margin, the EU continues to have strong reservations against the wording of operative paragraph 2. In our view, the United Nations 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, as our amendment A/78/L.51 was not adopted by a small margin, the EU continues to have reservations about the appointment of a special envoy, as proposed in operative paragraph 3. We are concerned about 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 of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Moratinos Cuyaubé, whose valuable role is also recognized in the preambular section of the resolution.

For these reasons, the EU decided to abstain in the voting on the resolution as a whole, and we dissociate ourselves from operative paragraphs 2 and 3.

Let me stress again that the European Union 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 working together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the rest of the international community to combat it.

Mr. Valtýsson (Iceland): Iceland supported the amendments proposed by the European Union, which would have added further context to the text, reflecting

our common concerns about growing religious intolerance. It also would have taken budgetary constraints into consideration when it comes to the appointment of special envoys.

Iceland is a strong proponent of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, including religious freedom and freedom of expression. That should have been better reflected in the resolution (resolution 78/264). However, Iceland voted in favour of the resolution as a whole, as Islamophobia is a clear manifestation of growing intolerance based on religion and belief, undermining the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms globally.

Mr. Gafoor (Singapore): Singapore attaches great importance to the issue of combating Islamophobia, and we thank the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for submitting this timely resolution (resolution 78/264).

As a multicultural and multireligious country, Singapore also attaches great importance to combating all forms of religious hatred and discrimination. In 2014, a Pew Research Center study identified Singapore as the world's most religiously diverse country. In 2022, the same survey continued to note that Singapore's religious diversity was remarkable, on a global scale.

As a nation, Singapore has therefore always prioritized racial and religious harmony as key to our social cohesion. As a reflection of our commitment to ensuring harmony, peace and security among various religious groups and preventing incitement and hatred against any religion, the Parliament of Singapore adopted the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in 1990 to ensure that followers of different religions exercise tolerance towards each other's beliefs and do not instigate religious enmity or hatred. In 2019, the Singapore Parliament updated the law to respond more effectively to incidents of religious disharmony and new threats against religious harmony.

It is in the context of Singapore's deep commitment to racial and religious harmony that my delegation today voted in favour of resolution 78/264, entitled "Measures to combat Islamophobia". We would also like to place on record that we voted in favour of draft amendment A/78/L.51, as we regarded it as being in line with our approach to condemning any incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence against all religions and beliefs. At the same time, we regret very much that the draft amendment failed to reflect concerns about the desecration of religious holy books.

Singapore would like to make it very clear that we condemn the desecration of any religious holy book, without any bias or selectivity.

Ms. Wagner (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland thanks Pakistan for introducing resolution 78/264 on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Switzerland condemns, in the strongest terms, discrimination, intolerance, incitement to hatred and violent extremism in all their forms.

My delegation would like to highlight the following principles that guide Switzerland in its approach to combating religious hatred.

First, the protection of the individual is at the heart of human rights. The rights to the freedom of expression and the freedom of religion are important pillars of any pluralistic society.

Secondly, religions or opinions as such are not protected by those rights; however, individuals are. There is a critical difference, on the one hand, between the protection of persons belonging to a particular religion against hatred, violence and discrimination and, on the other hand, the protection of religions, religious figures, holy books and religious symbols against defamation. The defamation of religions and religious defamation are not legal concepts in the framework of international human rights law.

Moreover, peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society requires arbitration. The freedom of expression protects criticism even if it is formulated in an offensive, provocative or mocking manner; but it is not limitless. The question of whether the freedom of expression must be limited in certain cases in order to protect those concerned is a crucial one, as set out in articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We stress that any limitation must be provided for by law, as needed and in a proportionate manner.

Resolution 78/264, adopted today, does not sufficiently reflect those concerns, which is why my delegation abstained in the voting.

Ms. Eyrich (United States of America): The United States thanks Pakistan and the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for their work on resolution 78/264 and the attention being brought to this timely and important issue. We will continue to work with the international community to condemn and counter anti-Muslim hatred — and indeed

all hatred on the basis of religion or belief. The United States remains committed to championing a world in which everyone, everywhere, is free to worship or not, as they choose, in peace, dignity and respect, consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That is why we are concerned about the fact that anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of hatred and violence are undeniably on the rise around the world. That should be of the utmost concern to all of us. President Biden has said,

“We must come together and reject Islamophobia and all forms of bigotry and hatred. I have said repeatedly that I will not be silent in the face of hate”.

The United States has used, and will continue to use, our freedom of speech to unconditionally condemn hateful acts, such as the burning of the Qur'an and other holy books. The United States continues to call for accountability for acts of violence targeting individuals based on religious belief or practice, or lack thereof. The advancement of human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief and the freedom of expression for all, remains at the centre of United States foreign and domestic policy. We remain committed to working with members of civil society, religious actors, the OIC and other Governments to counter anti-Muslim hatred, and we will continue to support both the freedom of expression and the freedom of religion or belief as essential, interconnected and interrelated elements of our human rights responsibilities.

Ms. Pereira Gomes (Brazil): Brazil condemns all forms of discrimination and religious intolerance, including against Muslims. In that sense, we are seriously concerned about the continuing acts of intolerance and violence based on religion or belief, including against religious minorities, in all regions of the world. Such attacks worldwide have shown us that concrete efforts are needed to strengthen the language of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We believe that the promotion of the freedom of opinion and expression is fundamental in our efforts to prevent and fight against religious intolerance.

However, Brazil abstained in the voting on resolution 78/264, which was introduced by the delegation of Pakistan on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The resolution contains elements deemed positive by my delegation, in particular with regard

to the fight against religious or faith-based hatred and discrimination and the need to protect cultural and religious diversity and promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue, while recognizing the positive role of the exercise of the right to the freedom of opinion and expression. Nonetheless, we believe that the main goal should be to protect individuals from hatred or discrimination based on, inter alia, religious grounds, as enshrined in articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Moreover, in recent decades, we have created a robust system to promote and protect the freedom of religion and other fundamental values.

We are concerned by any overlapping that the creation of a special envoy envisaged in resolution 78/264 could entail, in addition to the financial impact on the United Nations budget, which was not discussed. In fact, we should focus on how to strengthen existing mechanisms in order to combat religious hatred and all forms of intolerance.

Finally, my delegation would like to underscore the importance of fighting discrimination against Muslims, Christians and Jews, as well as any other form of discrimination based on religion or faith, on the same footing, without establishing priorities among those phenomena.

We have spent years, both at the Human Rights Council and in the Third Committee, repeatedly criticizing selectivity, politicization and the use of double standards while addressing human rights situations around the world. If we are to take that criticism seriously, there is no way to do so other than by applying it to our current discussions as well.

Mr. Fepuleai (New Zealand): New Zealand reaffirms its strong commitment to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief for all individuals around the world. New Zealand has a long history of supporting the right to the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, both at home and abroad. We unequivocally condemn and reject all forms of religious-based violence and religious intolerance and are fully committed to combating it.

We reiterate our concerns about the increasing levels of violence and discrimination perpetrated on the basis or in the name of religion or belief that are occurring across the globe, including against Muslims. In that regard, we stand in solidarity with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and support

the intent of resolution 78/264, which we acknowledge is a priority for the OIC.

The freedom of religion and belief has a close relationship with the right to the freedoms of opinion and expression. Those rights have a mutually reinforcing effect. Enabling and encouraging the free expression of religion and belief, as well as the exchange of ideas, contributes to combating intolerance and builds well-informed, inclusive and politically mature societies.

New Zealand supported resolution 78/264 in recognition of those considerations but abstained in the voting on draft amendments A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52. However, we are concerned about the creation of a special envoy from a budgetary and management perspective. The budget of the United Nations already faces increasing pressure, and we have concerns about further budgetary implications with the creation of a new special envoy in that context.

With respect to the creation of a new special envoy to combat Islamophobia, we are also concerned about elevating one particular religion over others. New Zealand has consistently supported a broad and inclusive approach to religious discrimination, intolerance, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia or related intolerance. We hope that the creation of a special envoy will not create a precedent that suggests or privileges one particular religion over another.

Ongoing attacks, discrimination and violence are a sobering reminder that the international community must remain united in its commitment to advancing the rights to the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief for all persons everywhere.

Mr. Alnwelati (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the President for convening today's meeting in conjunction with the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. I would also like to thank the Permanent Mission of Pakistan for submitting resolution 78/264 and for ably managing the negotiation process.

Syria is the cradle of civilization and religions and continues to be a strong supporter of all efforts aimed at respecting religious and cultural diversity and promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue with a view to enhancing a culture of tolerance and respect among individuals, societies and nations. Accordingly, my country's delegation voted in favour of the resolution, which addresses a dangerous phenomenon that some Western countries turn a blind

eye to under the pretext of the freedom of expression, forgetting that freedom comes with responsibilities that prohibit offending religions and their symbols or disrespecting their beliefs.

My country's delegation voted against draft amendments A/78/L.51 and A/78/L.52, which were proposed by a number of Western delegations, because they sought to undermine the contents of resolution 78/264 and to weaken it. Syria reiterates its rejection of all forms of hate and racial speech that lead to discrimination, hostility or violence, whether on the basis of religion, belief, colour, race or gender. Syria also reiterates its categorical rejection of all forms of discrimination against refugees around the world, including Syrian refugees, in particular discrimination that persecutes them or imposes certain political choices on them.

My country's delegation underscores the need to promote activities aimed at fostering dialogue among religions and cultures in order to enhance peace and stability, as well as to respect cultural diversity. We call on certain Western countries to focus their efforts on promoting a culture of peace and rejecting wars by restoring rights, ending the Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories and stopping the genocide and brutal aggression by the Israeli occupation entity, which have been inflicted on the Palestinian people for nearly six months and represent the worst forms of discrimination, hatred and violence, not to mention violations of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Elizondo Belden (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico thanks Pakistan for introducing resolution 78/264 on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Mexico's position is clear. We fully and categorically reject any act of discrimination, intolerance or violence targeting any person on the basis of their religion or belief. We reject Islamophobia and any manifestation of xenophobia, without any distinction whatsoever. We reject any act of violence, stigmatization or discrimination against the followers of Islam. Moreover, we reject any act that incites hatred or that may pose a threat to the dignity of persons, such as, for example, the burning of books or attacks on places of worship. For Mexico, hate speech targeting one of us affects all

of us because hatred distorts differences and makes them toxic.

Mexico abstained in the voting on draft amendment A/78/L.51 because we are sensitive to the need to give greater visibility to respond more effectively to violence perpetrated against followers of Islam. We therefore believe that the paragraph proposed in that draft amendment should have been broader and not focused on only one religion.

For the same reasons, Mexico voted in favour of draft amendment A/78/L.52. We are concerned that the appointment of a special envoy for a particular religion, regardless of which one, might pave the way for the proliferation of divided mandates. We believe that the current process did not allow sufficient time for discussion and adequate reflection on the appointment of a position such as that of a special envoy with a mandate focused on only one religion. We are concerned that it might undermine efforts towards effective interreligious dialogue.

We are concerned that resolution 78/264 is focused on one religion and not on human beings and their inalienable right to the freedom of religion or belief. The full realization of that right is interdependent with, and indivisible from, the exercise of other human rights. Moreover, we would have liked to have had a text before us that incorporated a gender perspective. Although religious intolerance often displays a gender bias, effective measures to combat that intolerance must also incorporate a gender perspective.

Mexico voted in favour of and supports resolution 78/264 from the perspective of keeping human beings at the centre of all efforts to ensure their equality in dignity and rights, as the basis for the promotion of a culture of peace.

Mr. Oddone (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Argentine Republic wishes to convey its deep concern that acts of intolerance, discrimination, hatred and violence based on religion or belief continue to be committed throughout the world. My country grants the most comprehensive respect for religious freedom, which goes beyond mere religious tolerance and promotes understanding, fraternity and mutual respect among those who hold theistic, non-theistic or atheistic beliefs.

In that connection, we underscore that the right to religious freedom confers the right to freely practice

a religion and not to be discriminated against for practicing it, but in no way includes considering religion a legal right, since it is the practitioners who must be guaranteed their rights and be protected. In that regard, we recall that States have the primary responsibility of [inaudible], and they must always have the right to freely profess their religion and beliefs. We therefore urge States to adopt the necessary and appropriate measures in accordance with international human rights obligations to combat hatred, discrimination, intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation on the basis of religious intolerance.

Finally, we emphasize the need to strengthen the human rights-based approach in all public policies of Member States to prevent hate speech from deepening pre-existing inequalities, especially when they are directed at individuals and groups in vulnerable situations and/or who have historically been discriminated against.

Ms. Bryant (Australia): Australia thanks Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for its leadership on resolution 78/264.

Freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental human right that the United Nations and all Member States must respect and protect. We voted in favour of the resolution because we are deeply concerned about all religious intolerance, including rising incidences of Islamophobia. We unequivocally oppose the desecration of sacred books, places of worship and religious symbols — acts which we see as provocative and inconsistent with Australia's firmly held belief in freedom of religion.

I wish to take this opportunity to clarify Australia's position on the paragraphs in question today.

On operative paragraph 2, Australia maintains that intent is crucial in determining whether acts of violence towards religious symbols and holy books should be considered religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence as per article 20, paragraph 2, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We also maintain that international law does not necessarily prohibit the planned burning of a religious book in all circumstances as it could constitute a legitimate form of freedom of expression. We recognize the OIC's constructive engagement on that paragraph, and we thank the facilitator for listening to Member States' concerns and removing language on violations of international law. With those changes,

Australia was able to support the text proposed by the facilitator.

On operative paragraph 3, Australia remains concerned that a special envoy on Islamophobia may lead to a proliferation and hierarchy of special envoys on different religions when we believe that all religions and beliefs should be promoted and protected equally. We also believe that a special envoy on Islamophobia duplicates existing mechanisms in an already overburdened United Nations system. Our preference was to support a focal point on Islamophobia complimentary to a focal point on antisemitism. However, we abstained from voting on amendment A/78/L.52 in an effort to demonstrate to OIC member States and Muslims around the world, including in Australia, that we are listening to their concerns.

Australia takes a principled approach to all religious intolerances. We are committed to protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas. In voting in favour of this important resolution, Australia stresses that no one should experience discrimination, hate or violence because of their religious beliefs or perceived religious beliefs.

In the holy month of Ramadan, we stand in solidarity with our OIC partners, Muslims living in our own country and all people wishing to live their lives in accordance with their religious identity or beliefs.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Hatred on the basis of religion or belief, including anti-Muslim hatred, antisemitism and the persecution of Christians, is deplorable. We condemn incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence wherever it occurs.

The United Kingdom is a proud multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy. However, we recognize the challenges we face and seek to address those issues. We are funding a national organization to support victims of anti-Muslim hatred, as well as protective security programmes for mosques and schemes helping to keep the Jewish community safe.

Defending freedom of religion or belief for all and combating intolerance against all, is a United Kingdom priority. Therefore, it is with regret that there were elements of resolution 78/264 that the United Kingdom could not support, and for that reason, we abstained.

In the United Kingdom, we have a proud tradition of religious freedom alongside the freedom to critique ideas and teachings of religions. Operative paragraph 2 of the resolution imposes limits on freedom of expression that go beyond the parameters of international law. We agree that people should not burn holy books or express religious intolerance and that such acts can be done to incite religious hatred. But we disagree with the strong implication that such acts always incite hatred.

We believe that free speech is important. We must take care not to introduce processes for blasphemy laws by the back door. People must be free to practice religion, be free from persecution for the practice of their religion, but also be free to criticize religion if they choose.

While we have seen an unacceptable rise in anti-Muslim hatred, globally many people of other beliefs or religions also face discrimination. We are concerned about the resolution's narrow focus on one religious group. Operative paragraph 3 mandates a United Nations mechanism to address problems faced by one specific religious community when those of other religions or beliefs do not have equivalent mechanisms.

We thank Pakistan and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for their engagement but are disappointed that efforts by a range of countries to find more inclusive and human rights-compliant language were not taken on board.

The United Kingdom's position should not be inferred as condoning anti-Muslim hatred or diminishing its solidarity with those who experience it — quite the opposite. It is based on commitment to principles of international law and to treat individuals of all religions or beliefs equally.

Going forward, we hope to work together to protect all people from religious hatred and intolerance and to uphold freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

Mr. Al Rubkhi (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country, the Sultanate of Oman, welcomes the adoption of resolution 78/264. We emphasize that respecting others is one of the noble objectives and purposes that underpin the United Nations. Addressing extremism, intolerance and hatred is a collective international imperative. Therefore, we call on all States to hold accountable those who promote intolerance and hatred,

as respect is required and a must, and coexistence is necessary for mutual understanding and cooperation.

In reference to the reports of the Secretary-General that have warned against the rise of Islamophobia, hatred towards Muslims and xenophobia around the world, we call for combating that negative phenomenon through legislation that criminalizes those acts, which affect the lives of many people.

The world today is in dire need of extending bridges of understanding, cooperation and dialogue. The desecration of peoples' sanctities and religious symbols cannot be a right of freedom of expression or opinion. On the contrary, it is a way to promote hatred, which is rejected by States and peoples.

In conclusion, we appreciate the efforts of the Secretary-General and the High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in combating hate speech and incitement, especially those directed against Islam.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the voting.

We have the honour to have with us the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres. I now give him the floor to address the Assembly on this topic.

The Secretary-General: We gather today as Muslims around the world observe the holy month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is a time of reflection and solidarity. It is a moment to come together and uplift each other. But for many Muslims around the world, these are also times of anguish and fear.

In the spirit of Ramadan, I have called for a silencing of the guns in Gaza and the Sudan. Today, at this important event, I call on all political, religious and community leaders — everyone, everywhere — to join our plea. It is time for peace.

For nearly 2 billion Muslims across the world, Islam is a pillar of faith and worship uniting people in every corner of the globe. And let us remember that it is also a pillar of our shared history.

For centuries, Muslims have been a crucial source of culture, philosophy, scholarship and science, from the enormous influence of Avicenna, the great physician and philosopher whose interpretations of Plato and Aristotle helped shaped the development of Western

European philosophy; to the Muslim mathematician and astronomer Al-Khwarizmi, responsible for delivering Hindu-Arabic numerals and the father of algebra; to the father of rationalism, Averroes, whose groundbreaking commentaries bridged Islamic and Western thought; and to the countless contributions of Muslims across every field — from science, technology and medicine, to literature, art, music and architecture.

Today's event shines a light on a vicious plague that represents a complete denial and ignorance of Islam and Muslims and their undeniable contributions — the plague of Islamophobia. Around the world, we see a rising tide of anti-Muslim hate and bigotry. That can come in many forms: structural and systemic discrimination; socioeconomic exclusion; unequal immigration policies; unwarranted surveillance and profiling; restrictions in accessing citizenship, education, employment and justice. Those and other institutional barriers violate our shared commitment to human rights and dignity. They also perpetuate a vicious cycle of exclusion, poverty and disenfranchisement that echoes across generations.

Meanwhile, divisive rhetoric and misrepresentation are propagating stereotypes, stigmatizing communities and creating an environment of misunderstanding and suspicion. That can lead to an increase in harassment and even outright violence against Muslims — rising accounts of which are being reported by civil society groups in countries around the world. Some are shamefully exploiting anti-Muslim hate and exclusionary policies for political gain. We must call that what it is — hate, plain and simple.

And purveyors of hate speech are misusing the most powerful megaphone in history to amplify and spread their despicable ideologies — social media. Online platforms have become breeding grounds for extremist ideologies and harassment. That not only deepens divisions. It fuels real-life violence.

Sadly, this alarming trend is part of a wider pattern of supremacist ideologies and attacks against Jews, minority Christian communities and many others. Hatred of one group fuels hatred of another. Hate normalizes hate. Hate destroys the fabric of our societies. And hate undermines the equality, understanding and respect for human rights upon which a peaceful future — and a peaceful world — depend.

We cannot stand on the sidelines while hatred and bigotry run wild. Today's event reminds us that

we all have a responsibility to confront and root-out the scourge of anti-Muslim bigotry. Political leaders must lead the way and foster social cohesion, not fear. Governments must condemn inflammatory discourse and safeguard religious freedom — in particular for minorities. And I am grateful to religious leaders who are working together to promote interfaith dialogue.

Digital platforms must moderate and prevent the spread of hateful content, while protecting users from harassment. Artificial intelligence must reduce biases and stereotypes, not reproduce and amplify them. And all of us must do our part to dismantle the walls of intolerance and division in cities, towns and villages; in schools, on the street and online, everywhere and anywhere. Let us all pledge to call out anti-Muslim bigotry, no matter where we see or hear it.

(spoke in French)

Muslims hail from all countries, cultures and walks of life. They represent the wonderful diversity of the human family.

As we stand united on this International Day to Combat Islamophobia, let us renew our commitment to upholding the principles of equality, dignity, human rights and respect. These are the cornerstone of our shared humanity and of the Charter of the United Nations.

Let us promote empathy and invest in social cohesion — by embracing diversity as a strength rather than a source of division. And let us stand in solidarity with Muslims from around the world — in this holy month of Ramadan and every day.

Together, we can build peaceful, just and inclusive societies where every individual, regardless of their faith, can live in harmony and peace.

The Acting President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 14.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.