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*President:* Mr. Kőrösi . . . . . (Hungary)

*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

## Agenda item 134

### Report of the United Nations Youth Office

#### Report of the Secretary-General (A/77/955)

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

**Mr. Camelli** (European Union): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States.

The European Union is a steadfast supporter of young people's rights and the meaningful participation of youth in decision-making. For that reason, we welcome the opportunity to discuss young people and their role within the United Nations system today.

At the outset, we would like to express our gratitude for the work of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, which has championed young people around the world since its inception in 2013 and allowed them to flourish at the United Nations and make their impact on the Organization, laying the foundation for what is today the United Nations Youth Office. In particular, we wish to commend the work, leadership, service and dedication of Ms. Wickramanayake.

Allow us to also thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/77/955), in particular for the updates on the establishment of the new United Nations Youth Office. The EU strongly supports the United Nations

youth agenda and the formation of the Youth Office, which will give youth voices their rightful place at the heart of the United Nations system.

We are pleased to hear of the progress made and the milestones achieved so far. We welcome in particular the focus on consultations with youth, youth-led and youth-serving civil society organizations and networks.

In addition, we would like to echo the need for accountability within the United Nations system to ensure the meaningful participation of youth. We are pleased to see the United Nations Youth Strategy permeating the United Nations work across the world and United Nations country teams taking up meaningful youth engagement. We look forward to the role that the new Youth Office will play in strengthening policies and coordinating processes and platforms on youth engagement across the United Nations system.

At the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development last week, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, Ms. Urpilainen, stated "empowering young people is the single greatest investment we can make in the future". When it comes to youth affairs, the EU is walking the talk. Indeed, the European External Action Service's first Youth Action Plan aims to foster strong partnerships with young people worldwide, in order to empower and enable them to shape solutions for the problems that affect them. That includes our Women and Youth in Democracy Initiative, which is growing the engagement and impact of young people and women in democratic processes. It also includes our Youth Empowerment Fund to support

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and finance youth-led initiatives for the Sustainable Development Goals, and it further includes the Africa-Europe Youth Academy, which aims at advancing learning opportunities and exchanges between young people in Africa and the European Union.

In conclusion, we look forward to our continued work together on youth affairs. As the work continues to operationalize the United Nations Youth Office and, ultimately, to enable meaningful youth engagement across the world, we should be guided by this simple principle: nothing should be about young people without young people.

**Mr. Mohamed** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of Egypt welcomes the measures taken by the Secretariat to establish a United Nations Youth Office, pursuant to resolution 76/306, which was adopted by consensus in September 2022.

We recall that the adoption of that resolution demonstrates the readiness of the General Assembly to advance the youth agenda at the United Nations and to promote the Organization's efforts to advance that important dossier. In that context, the delegation of Egypt takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/77/955) and the measures therein. We also note the short time between the issuing of the report and the holding of this meeting. We look forward to taking that into consideration in future reports on the work of the Office.

Egypt was pleased to work with Guyana last year in facilitating the intergovernmental consultations on the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office. There was consensus among the Member States in the consultations on the need to foster communication with the youth and listen to their voices, in particular as their numbers increase throughout the world. The number of youth now exceeds 1.2 billion persons, which compels us to take their priorities into consideration in our efforts to address the growing challenges and to continue our efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.

The delegation of Egypt looks forward to completing the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office and to the appointment process reflecting a balance between different age groups and geographical representation, as per the seventh preambular paragraph of the resolution, and in a manner that reflects the largest percentage of young people worldwide in the developing countries. We also hope that the new Office

will redouble its efforts to engage with youth-related envoys of regional organizations as per operative paragraph 3 (e) and to promote dialogue among the youth in various geographical regions, especially in developing countries.

The delegation of Egypt welcomes the efforts made to transfer the tasks and mandate of the Secretary-General's Youth Envoy office to the new Office and to allocate to it the financial resources that will preserve the institutional work.

We would like to note the report's use of terminology that does not enjoy international consensus. We trust that completing the establishment of the Office as per the establishing resolution will prevent the recurrence of such use and will promote the use of terminology that unites global youth rather than dividing them.

Resolution 76/306 highlights the important role of youth in the three pillars of the United Nations work, namely, the promotion of peace and security, development and human rights. It also emphasizes the need for effective participation of youth in decision-making. It is certain that we will not achieve a prosperous future without involvement of the youth. They are the main category that will participate in and benefit from it.

The Declaration on the Right to Development has stressed that human beings are central to the development process. Therefore, achieving development means equal opportunities for all, in particular youth, while ensuring fundamental issues, such as housing, health care and employment. That contributes to establishing an appropriate environment for youth to realize their capabilities and enjoy all their rights.

Egypt remains committed to promoting the involvement of youth, empowering them and increasing their job opportunities, out of our belief in their potential and the important role they can play in advancing development and growth. Egypt declared 2016 the Year of the Youth and took many measures to expand the programmes that foster their capabilities and prepare them for work. In addition, the number of youth appointees to leading and legislative positions in Egypt has increased, and we have also established a World Youth Forum, which has provided through its four iterations an important forum for the youth from various countries of the world to exchange views and ideas on peace, development and creativity.

In conclusion, the delegation of Egypt looks forward to the continued integration of the activities undertaken by the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth into those being carried out by the new United Nations office. We hope that the response of the United Nations to the aspirations and hopes of the youth at the international level will be encouraged, with a view to achieving a safer, more stable and prosperous world.

**Ms. Chan Valverde** (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the establishment of the United Nations Office for Youth, in line with resolution 76/306 (A/77/955). We commend the work of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, and her Office for the results obtained in the process of establishing the new body, and the progress in the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy 2030. Costa Rica emphasizes that these achievements have advanced the mainstreaming of the youth perspective in the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. The transition process towards the United Nations Youth Office is therefore a great opportunity to position the youth agenda in all areas of the Organization.

Costa Rica has taken actions at the national level to encourage and promote the participation of young people in public affairs and in their communities, as well as in the representation of youth abroad in different fields. Costa Rica's Vice Ministry of Youth, the leading national institution in this area, has multiple institutional spaces for participation and consultation with youth, an experience that was presented at this year's Economic and Social Council Youth Forum.

Various Costa Rican youth representatives are already contributing their innovative ideas to our work, for example, in preparing the national contribution to the initiative for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights launched by the High Commissioner. The new Youth Office has many pathways and a great deal of potential on the road to a more inclusive and expressive United Nations. In the process towards the establishment of the Office, Costa Rica considers it necessary to emphasize the following points.

First, the United Nations Youth Office should reflect the diversity of our global community and ensure gender parity and non-discrimination as principles of its composition. Costa Rica recommends

the appointment of another woman to head the Office, ensuring the continuity of the leadership shown by the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.

Secondly, Costa Rica recalls the importance of the mandate to promote and facilitate dialogue, collaboration and intergenerational solidarity. We encourage the Office to apply this approach by linking it to agendas related to aging and demographic transition, and by facilitating pathways for the participation of people of all ages, including children. Building a society for all ages is part of the commitments we have made as States.

Thirdly, we believe that the Secretary-General's youth strategy is of particular relevance to the work of the Office. However, taking into account the Office's strengthened capacity, Costa Rica believes that it should aspire to strengthening its strategic and programmatic agenda, for example, by building a stronger network of focal points in the system and enhancing its synergies with regional organizations. We also stress the importance of supporting and advising developing countries and small missions in promoting greater involvement of youth at all levels.

In conclusion, the meaningful, inclusive and effective participation of all youth in the United Nations will be nothing less than a guarantee of success for the Youth Office's mandate; it must therefore be a cross-cutting pillar of its work. Their participation must also be protected, ensuring that it is safe for all young people at all times. Costa Rica reaffirms its full support for the forward-looking agenda represented by creating the Youth Office and encourages the ambition and optimism that characterizes youth to be applied in the process towards its establishment. We look forward to working with the Office on these and other issues of interest.

**Ms. Zacarias** (Portugal): We thank the Secretary-General for the presentation of the first report on the new United Nations Youth Office (A/77/955), and we commend the work done by the United Nations on youth over the past several decades, with the adoption of numerous resolutions and a range of activities and achievements within the United Nations system. There has also been growing recognition of the role of young persons as positive agents of change and key contributors to the advancement of agreed global frameworks. In particular, we are pleased to see improvements in the engagement with youth-led civil society organizations and networks.

But we need to deliver more for young people with young people, if we want to have a United Nations system that is truly inclusive. For this, the establishment of the Youth Office through resolution 76/306 as the first concrete deliverable of *Our Common Agenda* is a key development. Portugal attached great importance to the establishment of the Office, and we reiterate our full commitment to reinvigorating our efforts for youth, which must be put on a more sustainable footing, ensuring complementarity with existing functions on youth across the system and with a clear mandate to coordinate United Nations system efforts in this regard.

We look forward to the recruitment process for the staff of the new Youth Office, which we expect to be represented by an agile team, leveraging the rich capacity and technical expertise of the United Nations system as a whole and taking stock of the experience brought by the current Envoy on Youth, whose work we truly commend.

In the UN75 declaration, Member States made a commitment to listening to and working with youth. We are confident that the Youth Office will fulfil this commitment, turn it into reality across the three pillars of the United Nations, and, in the short term, at the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals Summit, support the meaningful engagement of youth.

**Mr. Hadjichrysanthou** (Cyprus): At the outset, we express our appreciation to the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth and her team for the invaluable work in fostering the position of youth throughout the United Nations system. My delegation fully subscribes to the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer. I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Cyprus is a strong supporter of the full, effective, constructive and inclusive participation of youth in decision-making structures. Youth have an indispensable role to play within the United Nations system. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Youth Office (A/77/955), and we are grateful for all the updates provided in relation to the establishment of the new Office.

We believe that the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office based on resolution 76/306 should effectively integrate the current activities of the Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth. The United

Nations Youth Office should continue to lead high-level advocacy and serve as the anchor for United Nations system coordination and accountability on youth matters, including peace and security, sustainable development, humanitarian action and human rights. Cyprus continues to support the integration of the current activities of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in the new Youth Office and reiterates the importance of institutional memory related to youth issues across the United Nations system.

It is imperative to consider young people's priorities and address their obstacles to realizing their full potential at the local, national, regional and international levels. Our top priority should be the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Young people form the backbone of our societies, holding tremendous potential for positive action and innovative solutions. We therefore need to recognize and empower youth in that regard.

We recognize the rich input young people bring as advocates, experts, activists, scientists, entrepreneurs, among others. Cyprus is therefore implementing programmes and specific actions on how to strengthen youth participation. One concrete example is the project "Youth Parliament of Cyprus", an initiative by two youth non-governmental organizations that has been institutionalized by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, providing a permanent space for the young people of Cyprus to present their ideas and proposals to policymaking and decision-making structures.

The launch of the Youth2030 agenda in 2018, as well as the dedicated track on *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982), provide us with great momentum for meaningful youth engagement at all levels. I take this opportunity to express once more our appreciation to the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth for her participation in the event "Youth of Cyprus celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations". That event, organized by the Cypriot youth non-governmental organization "Cyprus Youth DiplomaCY" in December 2020, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave our youth the opportunity to express — directly and at the highest level — their views on the United Nations they want. Events and initiatives of civil society, like the one just mentioned, highlight the importance of youth as meaningful and equal partners for a transformative future.

Allow me to conclude by saying that we must mainstream youth voices, initiatives and actions across the work and outcomes of the United Nations system. There is no issue that does not affect youth or to which youth have nothing to contribute. To quote former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, when addressing a youth audience: “You are never too young to lead, and we are never too old to learn”.

**Mr. Gertze** (Namibia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting today. Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General for the report (A/77/955) that informs our discussions here today, as well as for the work done over the past year to operationalize the United Nations Youth Office.

As correctly stated by the Secretary-General, it is our duty as humankind to act and think today “for the long term, to deliver more for young people and succeeding generations and to be better prepared for the challenges ahead”. The decision to establish a United Nations Youth Office was a monumental step towards achieving that necessary goal. So too are the reported activities of the United Nations Youth Office to date.

By 2030, young people in Africa are expected to constitute 42 per cent of global youth. This is a generation of young people that has lived through and spearheaded the continent’s meteoric rise, including in mobile and Internet penetration rates. Today African youth are increasingly taking an active role in shaping their future.

In his policy brief, entitled “Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes” the Secretary-General outlines three critical guiding principles towards the meaningful and genuine positioning of youth as equal partners in decision-making, namely resources, institutionalization and accessibility. Strengthening the involvement of young people in decision-making processes across all levels contributes to the overarching objective of fostering inclusive and effective multilateralism capable of tackling the complex challenges confronting the world today.

From our own context, in Namibia, we have seen the benefits of empowering young people and having them sit at the table as able decision makers. That has resulted an increase in representation of young people in both houses of our bicameral Parliament as able representatives of their constituencies. Young people must be offered the necessary funding and education,

and decision-making processes must be made accessible to all young people, without coercion or discrimination.

Therefore, I would like to reiterate some of the important calls made by Member States and young people from around the world during the consultations that led to the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office, particularly as efforts to get the office running are under way.

First, there is a need to manage a robust hiring process for the United Nations Youth Office, including for the position of Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs.

Secondly, the Office must build the capacity to host professional development opportunities for youth at the national and regional levels.

Thirdly, there are also valid expectations that the inclusion of those who are marginalized during their engagement in operational functions, such as eliminating digital barriers to ensure young people’s meaningful participation, will take centre stage.

The youth look to us to bequeath them a sense of belonging and ownership in a world that takes them and their interests into consideration. As a developing country in Africa, for us, involving young people in politics and society is not merely a question of inclusion, but one that is vital for economic growth, innovation, peace and security.

**Ms. Mousa** (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my country’s delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening a general debate on this important item for the first time.

My delegation also takes note of the Secretary-General’s report (A/77/955) entitled “United Nations Youth Office”.

The delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia welcomes the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office and supports the operational steps taken to date to establish the new Office and to carry forward its main mandates. My delegation appreciates the efforts of the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth in that regard.

Young people are half of the present and all of the future. In that regard, I emphasize my country’s support for all efforts to promote the participation, empowerment and involvement of young people in the United Nations system. Those efforts are consistent

with my country's national priorities, where young people under the age of 30 constitute more than 63 per cent of the total population.

The youth in my country are receiving the attention of their leadership in the development process and opening our prospects for cooperation with the world by promoting the culture of dialogue and the values of tolerance and moderation, while building on the goals and programmes of the Saudi Vision 2030, which relies on young people in many of its initiatives and objectives, as well as in the many opportunities that depend on gender equality and contribute to the realization of their aspirations.

The Youth agenda is given the highest priority in my country. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia led the international efforts undertaken by the Group of 20 (G-20) through our presidency of the Group in 2020. We adopted the G-20 road map, which sets forth a 15 per cent reduction of marginalized youth in the labour market by 2025.

In that context, while my country reiterates its support for the United Nations Youth Office and the efforts made in that regard, we stress the need to build those efforts on comprehensive, complementary steps that take into account the diverse priorities and aspirations of all young people, various economic and social aspects, and the cultural specificities and diverse social values of young people from different countries and geographical regions.

In conclusion, my delegation looks forward to the prominent and promising role that the United Nations Youth Office will play and to the positive impact the Office is expected to have on the international system in support of sustainable development plans, in line with resolution 76/306.

**Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett** (Guyana): I thank the Secretary-General for his report on the activities of the new United Nations Youth Office (A/77/955). Indeed, I wish to recall that the establishment of the new Youth Office is the first deliverable from the Secretary-General's recommendations in his report, *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982). It is appropriately and fittingly so, as we seek to capitalize on the abundance of enthusiasm, boldness and energy of the 1.8 billion young people across the world, while recognizing and addressing the obstacles to their flourishing. By creating the opportunities for them to be fully engaged and involved,

we stand a much better chance of making this world a better place for now and for future generations.

Having had the privilege, together with Ambassador Osama Mahmoud Abdelkhalek Mahmoud of Egypt, to co-facilitate resolution 76/306, which established the Youth Office, and to listen to young people from across the world, Guyana and I are very pleased to note the progress that has been made thus far. We are mindful that this is a transitional report, since it has been only six months since the transition to the new Youth Office began. However, we are of the view that the two tracks of the transition process signal that the United Nations is on the right track in establishing the Office and ultimately advancing the youth agenda. We note that the Office is likely to be up and functioning by the end of this year.

Guyana has taken note of the many activities in which the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has been engaged over the reporting period, and indeed, over the past few years. We take this opportunity to thank the Envoy, Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, and her team, for their tireless efforts in advancing the youth agenda, including through United Nations system coordination and during this ongoing transition process. I believe we can all agree that the amplification of youth voices has exponentially increased across the United Nations system.

The functions of the new Youth Office are ambitious, as they should be. In view of the cross-cutting issues that affect our young people, prioritizing will present a challenge. However, as the Office moves forward, it will be necessary to prioritize the priorities, choosing those that have the greatest chance of effecting real and positive change, at the country level and throughout the United Nations system, while being mindful of regional and national needs.

The establishment of the Youth Office by the General Assembly demonstrates the collective commitment of Member States to ensuring the meaningful engagement and involvement of youth in all spheres, including in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the ultimate success of the Youth Office, as the Secretary-General aptly recalled in the report, will be dependent on the resourcing of its operations and the overall contribution of the United Nations system to a more peaceful, sustainable, just and equal world, where young people are supported, empowered, engaged and equipped to fulfil their potential.

As for Guyana, over 60 per cent of its population are young people, and their engagement and involvement in the country's development are largely mainstream. Nevertheless, we recognize the importance of intentional and targeted engagement of youth across ministries. We have established a Presidential Youth Advisory Council through the President's Office, providing young people with the opportunity to be directly involved in informing policies and programmes. In the Ministry of Housing, we have established a home-ownership programme for young professionals. We have increased the resources allocated to the Ministry of Youth, and we have established a young influencers' programme in the Ministry of Human Services.

Guyana reaffirms its commitment to continue doing its part, and we pledge our support in working with the new United Nations Youth Office and all Member States, including by sharing best practices.

**Ms. Matos Menéndez** (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am pleased to welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Youth Office (A/77/955). Nearly a year ago, we adopted resolution 76/306, establishing that important office, a major achievement that compels us even more to acknowledge and value the immeasurable contribution made by young people and the organizations they lead. Their unique vision and perspectives enrich our understanding of global challenges. Young people are essential partners in the quest for effective solutions.

In that regard, I would be remiss in failing to highlight the arduous and commendable work carried out over a decade by the Secretary-General's Envoys on Youth. Their efforts have been crucial for the United Nations youth agenda and for youth in general, leaving an unimpeachable, admirable legacy. It is important to underscore that the new United Nations Youth Office is being built on the accomplishments of the Office of the Envoy on Youth. The establishment of the Youth Office should effectively incorporate existing activities and anchor matters related to youth, ranging from peace and sustainable development to humanitarian and human rights issues, preserving the Office's culture, innovative approaches and vital activities.

Upon review of the report, it is encouraging to note the complementary, coordinated approach of the United Nations Youth Office, working closely with a wide range of United Nations system entities. We therefore hope that future reports of the Secretary-General continue to encompass in a holistic manner the progress

and challenges related to youth issues throughout the United Nations system, thus ensuring that the actions undertaken are coherent and effective. In addition, we recognize the significant progress achieved in promoting the active, equitable and meaningful participation of young people in decision-making and in mandates related to youth within the United Nations system.

The implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy 2030 has gained momentum, and efforts to accelerate its implementation, tackling critical obstacles and gaps, deserve our recognition. The bid to prioritize policies, processes and platforms that promote the meaningful participation of young people in all areas in terms of decision-making attests to a genuine commitment to inclusion and collaborative efforts. Moreover, we also highly value the initiatives led by young people towards meaningful engagement on key issues, including at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit and through the Secretary-General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change. Those actions reflect a determined dedication to ensuring that the voices of young people are heard in policymaking on global challenges.

In terms of combating abuse and harassment, we welcome the virtual training and guidelines provided for youth speakers. The creation of the fictional avatar, "Nova", to protect the identity of young activists participating in dialogues, is worth emulating. For example, it could be used for testimonies of victims and survivors of sexual violence or human trafficking.

I would also like to highlight the impressive work of the 17 Young Leaders for the SDGs, an initiative that has placed young people at the centre of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. I am convinced that the new United Nations Youth Office will continue to drive and promote those valuable initiatives. It is the responsibility of all of us as an international community to join efforts and collectively strengthen those types of initiatives.

Despite the progress made, we recognize that there are still challenges that need to be addressed. It is essential to ensure a broader and more diverse representation of young people in decision-making processes, including in peace processes. The Secretary-General's policy brief on meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes includes suggestions that we aim to promote, in collaboration with the Youth Office. Those recommendations can provide a road

map for addressing various challenges with regard to youth participation.

In conclusion, the Secretary-General's report reflects comprehensive efforts to support and promote meaningful engagement with young people. The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has proven to be a driving force towards a more inclusive, sustainable and peaceful world for youth. We are convinced that this new Office will continue on that path. The Dominican Republic reiterates its commitment to continuing its determined efforts in support of the United Nations Youth Office.

**Ms. Zhang Sisi (China)** (*spoke in Chinese*): China has always attached great importance to and supported young people's active participation in United Nations affairs. We welcome the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office and the General Assembly's thematic discussions on relevant issues.

At present, the world has entered a new era, unseen in a century, of turmoil, change and accelerated evolution. More than ever, the international community should listen to the voices of young people, believe in their strength and provide resources and create conditions for them to realize their potential. In that regard, China would like to share the following points.

First, we must recognize the important role of youth in advancing development. We need to amplify young people's role as a driving force for social change, economic growth and technological innovation and help them to further demonstrate their resilience in poverty reduction and eradication, climate change and post-pandemic recovery, so that they may contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Secondly, a broad platform should be created for young people, especially those from developing countries, to participate in United Nations activities. China appreciates the positive efforts made by the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in promoting youth participation, and it encourages the Youth Office to consolidate existing resources, innovate working methods and provide more opportunities for young people, especially those from developing countries, to participate in United Nations internships and employment opportunities, on the basis of projects such as the young professionals programme. More opportunities and platforms should be provided for the

equal participation of young people from all countries, especially developing countries.

Thirdly, we support the establishment of the Youth Office as soon as possible. China thanks the Secretary-General for his report (A/77/955), which gives an update on the progress made in the preparation of the Office, and we look forward to the early and full operationalization of the Office, so that it can play a greater role in promoting the broad and in-depth participation of young people in United Nations affairs. We hope that the composition of the Youth Office will be geographically balanced and that more young people from developing countries will be invited to join the Office.

China, which attaches great importance to youth development, successfully hosted the World Youth Development Forum and launched the international initiative on priority youth development and the Action Plan for Global Youth Development. The Action Plan calls for a hundred model youth-development projects from around the world, aims to nurture outstanding young talent for sustainable development and focuses on capacity-building exchanges, the sharing of practices, project promotion and other activities. We welcome the active participation of young people from all countries of the world in writing a new chapter of solidarity and cooperation among the world's youth.

**Ms. Qureshi (Pakistan)**: The meaningful participation and engagement of youth in all its forms is crucial to achieve sustainable and inclusive development and counter the enormous challenges that the world is facing today. The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, while transitioning to the United Nations Youth Office, will provide a strong foundation for building a more peaceful, sustainable, just and equal world in future — a world in which young people are supported, empowered, engaged and equipped to fulfil their potential.

In order to enable greater collaboration, coordination and accountability across the United Nations system, advance youth issues and promote meaningful youth engagement, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has continued to coordinate the implementation of the United Nations Youth Strategy. At the entity level, evidence-gathering, capacity-building, knowledge exchange and advocacy and communication are improving. It is encouraging that, at the country-team level, in 2022, meaningful youth engagement increased from 7 per cent to



44 per cent, United Nations support for Governments increased from 17 per cent to 38 per cent, and support for projects led by country teams increased from 30 per cent to 53 per cent. However, there are sizable variations across countries and regions and across United Nations entities and country teams.

Almost 68 per cent of the total population of Pakistan is under 30 years old, qualifying it as a young nation. Pakistan sees this youth bulge as an opportunity to channel youth potential for dynamic growth and a sustainable future for the nation. Pursuant to the demographic trends, the Government of Pakistan launched the Prime Minister's Youth Programme in 2013. The Programme focuses on four core areas for intervention: education, employment, engagement and environment. These four core areas will contribute to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, creating an inclusive society and ensuring the country's economic development. A digital youth hub is being developed via the Programme's web portal and mobile app. A few initiatives under these four core areas are noteworthy.

The right to education was declared as a fundamental right through an amendment to Pakistan's Constitution. Approximately 400,000 people have been professionally trained, free of cost, in technology and conventional trades. A national youth employment initiative is in process to identify 2 million direct job opportunities by creating linkages between academia and industry. Approximately 73.55 billion rupees have been disbursed to deserving youth under the Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme. Pakistan is ensuring the meaningful engagement of young people across the country by enabling their participation in policymaking processes through the National Youth Council and Youth Parliament.

We take note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/77/955) on the United Nations Youth Office. We appreciate the work of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and welcome its integration into the United Nations Youth Office. And while we support and commend all the good work that these Offices have been engaged in, my delegation suggests the following measures to enhance the outcomes of the Youth Office and its programmes.

First, in recruiting the staff for the United Nations Youth Office, adequate geographical representation must be taken into account in order to have a more inclusive and diverse workforce. Secondly, adequate

funds must be made available for developing countries in order to enable their youth to participate more effectively and efficiently in youth-led and youth-oriented United Nations processes. Thirdly, the development agenda must take into account the issues relevant to the Global South and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Fourthly, United Nations communication and outreach must be enhanced to increase the participation of developing countries so that they can also avail themselves of such opportunities as internships and events and sessions relevant to youth. Finally, country teams may also be facilitated in the Global South to include the youth of those regions in briefings on the United Nations Youth Strategy and bilateral support for the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Ms. Alameri** (United Arab Emirates): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his relevant policy briefs, as well as his transitional report on the United Nations Youth Office (A/77/955).

The United Arab Emirates acknowledges the significant progress that has been made since January 2023 through the efforts of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, in collaboration with other Secretariat offices and departments, to advance the transition process to the new United Nations Youth Office. We are pleased with the smooth roll-out of the two-track implementation process and look forward to the full recruitment of staff and to finalizing the transition of responsibilities from the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth to the new United Nations Youth Office.

As we have mentioned before during the numerous consultations on the establishment of the United Nations Youth Office, the importance of youth in our region cannot be understated. In the Middle East and North Africa, 55 per cent of the population is under 30 years old, and these young people have emerged as a catalysing force for positive change, driving towards a more prosperous and stable future for themselves and their communities.

Young people will have to bear the consequences of our actions today. Our planning and decision-making cannot afford to ignore their interests or exclude them from the conversation. If young people are able to meaningfully contribute to these processes, then together we can build a better world for them and for generations to come.

Likewise, the engagement of youth is a high priority for my country. In February 2016, the United Arab Emirates appointed its first Minister of Youth, who at the time was 22 years old and one of the youngest ministers in the world. The United Arab Emirates also enacted a national youth strategy and continues to engage youth in Government through its federal youth circles.

Given the great importance placed on the engagement of youth at all levels, we would like to reiterate our full support to the United Nations Youth Office, as it will promote the meaningful, inclusive and effective engagement of youth with Member States and throughout the work of the Organization.

**Ms. Pongor** (Hungary): Hungary aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of European Union and wishes to add some remarks in its national capacity.

First of all, we wish to thank the Secretary-General for the report (A/77/955) and express our appreciation to team members in the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth for all their hard work and commitment throughout the past years to raising the matter of youth to the top of the United Nations agenda. We are especially thankful to the United Nations Youth Envoy, Her Excellency Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake, for her leadership, which will leave a strong legacy on which the new Youth Office can build.

Hungary is a strong supporter of the youth agenda at the United Nations. We believe that the perspectives, experiences and expertise of young people greatly benefit the Organization. We therefore advocate the integration of a youth perspective and the participation of youth across all the work of the United Nations system and intergovernmental processes. We salute the significant progress made in United Nations country teams and United Nations entities in that regard. The United Nations Youth Delegate Programme is also an important means for participation, which we wish to see strengthened and expanded.

Hungary strongly supports the newly established Youth Office, which should be given all necessary resources to fulfil its important mandate. We emphasize the importance of ensuring continuity between the work of the Youth Envoy and that of the new Youth Office, including by integrating the Youth Envoy's Office into the new Youth Office, as set out in resolution 76/306. That requires continuing to build on existing

initiatives, sustaining the work undertaken thus far by the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, and maintaining institutional memory.

We welcome the publication of the Secretary-General's policy brief entitled "Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes", as well as the consultations organized by the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in its preparation. The policy brief includes a list of important proposals that we support and on which we stand ready to engage in order to start their implementation. We very much look forward to the opportunity to discuss and take forward those proposals.

In conclusion, Hungary wishes to reiterate its support for the Youth Office and looks forward to its full establishment and the successful continuation of its crucial mandate.

**Mr. Greco** (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union. I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Italy welcomes the decision by the General Assembly to establish the United Nations Youth Office as a dedicated office for youth affairs in the United Nations Secretariat. We look forward to the role of the Office in promoting and in strengthening youth engagement, participation and active contribution to the United Nations processes. We would like to reiterate our gratitude to the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth for the excellent work done and to Ms. Wickramanayake for being, through her commitment and dedication, a source of inspiration for so many young persons around the world.

We take note of the efforts aimed at ensuring a smooth transition from the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy to the new Youth Office while, at the same time, advancing the implementation of an agenda that has become more and more central, as we build our common vision for the future, as the report of the Secretary-General (A/77/955) has shown. In this perspective, it will be crucial for the new Office to build upon the knowledge, initiatives and institutional memory of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, which will help to consolidate the results achieved and ensure their sustainability, in the spirit of resolution 76/306.

Investing in youth means investing in our future and in the future of the planet. We welcome the Secretary-

General's policy brief entitled "Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes", as well as the references to youth in the Secretary-General's recent policy brief on a New Agenda for Peace. We concur with the idea that a truly transformative agenda can be achieved only through the effective and constructive participation of young people and if our collective commitment to sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and gender equality is reaffirmed, and new solutions are called for.

Italy is a staunch supporter of the Youth Delegate Programme. Every year, our youth delegates join our Permanent Mission's team in New York and contribute with their ideas, speeches and the joint initiatives they undertake with their peers. We hope to support the strengthening of the youth and peace and security agenda and the work of the younger peacebuilders and young leaders for peace, recalling the importance of working at the local and community levels and with civil society. In this spirit, we look forward to our continued work together on youth affairs, building on this momentum to advance United Nations work for and with youth.

**Mr. Rizal** (Malaysia): At the outset, Malaysia thanks the Secretary-General for his report (A/77/955) on the United Nations Youth Office.

Ten months ago, the General Assembly adopted the momentous resolution 76/306, which decided to establish the Youth Office as a dedicated office for youth affairs in the United Nations Secretariat. It was a significant milestone, in line with the commitment to listen to and work with youth, as outlined in the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (resolution 75/1), adopted in September 2020, as well as the proposal outlined by the Secretary-General in his report, *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982), with a view to ensuring that the voices of youth are more systematically integrated across the United Nations system.

We note that efforts have been under way since early this year vis-à-vis the establishment of the Youth Office, particularly with regard to recruitment and transition of responsibilities. We wish to underscore the following points as the process of establishing the Office is still ongoing.

First, it is imperative that the Office become operational at the earliest opportunity. In this regard,

we note that recruitment for the 16 regular budget posts of the Office is ongoing, that at least half of the posts, including the post of Assistant Secretary-General, will be occupied by the fourth quarter of 2023, and that the full complement of 16 staff will be onboarded by the end of the year.

Secondly, it is of paramount importance that the recruitment of personnel for the Youth Office take into account gender parity, as well as age and geographic representation. This diversity in representation would help to ensure the Office's effectiveness in representing the views of youth around the world, not from a specific hemisphere.

Thirdly, it is crucial that the Youth Office implement the mandates outlined in paragraph 3 of resolution 76/306 to advance youth engagement, discourse, involvement and representation within United Nations forums.

Fourthly, the Youth Office should streamline efforts vis-à-vis youth within the United Nations system to optimize resources and avoid duplication. The Office must be able to utilize frameworks and resources under other relevant United Nations entities, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Children's Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

Lastly, the annual consideration of the Secretary-General's report on the Youth Office should also serve as an opportunity for Member States to engage in dialogue with the Office towards advancing the youth agenda within the United Nations. It should be an opportunity for the Office, as well as Member States, to offer insights and suggestions in order to improve each other's efforts vis-à-vis youth within the United Nations sphere.

There is a proverb in the Malay language — "*Pemuda harapan bangsa, pemudi tiang negara*", which, loosely translated, means, "Youth are the hope of the people and pillar of the nation." Accordingly, it is imperative that we undertake efforts to empower our youth at the national, regional and international levels, as they will be the leaders of tomorrow. The quest for the achievement of world peace, economic advancement and social justice will be possible through meaningful engagement with youth.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Malaysia's full commitment to the youth empowerment agenda. Accordingly, the General Assembly may be assured of

Malaysia's unwavering support for the Youth Office and other youth-empowerment initiatives within the United Nations.

**Mr. Tommo Monthe** (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): There is no longer any need to stress the importance of youth. In the case of Cameroon, an entire framework and programmes are dedicated to young people, consisting of, for example, the Ministries of Youth and Civic Education and of Employment and Vocational Training, the National Youth Council, which happens to be headed by a woman, the President's Guarantee Fund for young entrepreneurs, which is endowed with sufficient resources, and, finally, the Youth Parliament, which our Parliament convenes every year so that young people can become familiar with parliamentary issues.

We do not believe that young people are mere spearheads for the nation's future or that they represent its potential. Young people are already the nation in the present, as they already occupy numerous decision-making positions. That is why we attach importance to the issue within the framework of the United Nations. We are pleased that resolution 76/306 is up and running. Yesterday, we had the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. Today, and going forward, we have the United Nations Youth Office, which represents a step forward in the consideration we give to youth in terms of the activities of the United Nations.

We can unreservedly say that, in its work, the Office must consider all young people collectively throughout world. As we know, the world is diverse and changing, and the Office must reflect its diversity. Appointments must be made based on the principle of equitable geographical distribution. Resolution 76/306 charges the Office with meeting the ultimate goal of advocating the inclusion of youth in United Nations activities.

In that regard, young people are faced by several challenges that they must overcome through their abilities. One such challenge is the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is much to be done, and young people are equipped to do it. The hallmark traits of youth are enthusiasm, energy, innovation, technological savvy and overall emotional purity with regard to their intellectual and moral integrity. They must be enabled to manifest these qualities.

Accordingly, we also believe that young people must be aware of the fact that they are an integral part of the world and the countries of the world and that they

must commit themselves together with their elders. At a certain point, youth is no longer a matter of age. It is a perennial state of mind, heart and conscience, upon which wrinkles have no bearing. The young will also become old and must therefore learn to be old.

The role of the young is to cause the old to age, and the role of the old is to cause the young to age. The link is circular between the young and the old. One sustains the other. According to an African proverb, a seated old person sees farther than a child standing on top of a mountain. The Office must be aware of the fact that the fountain of perpetual youth can also be found in old age blessed with experience. Only a tree firmly entrenched in the nurturing ground can reach out to conquer the sun. Young people can reach out to conquer the sun only if they emulate such a tree, which sinks its roots in the nurturing ground — in the values culled by the experience of their elders.

It is in that spirit and in that spirit alone that we in Cameroon believe that opportunities to build our countries and the world as a whole are to be celebrated, with everyone — youth, adults, the elderly, women and men — venturing forth in these endeavours, more and more deeply, together, hand in hand.

**Mr. Riva Grella** (Uruguay): I do not want to delay the much-anticipated adoption of the draft resolution under agenda item 14, which will take place in a few minutes. I will therefore be brief.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

We thank the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and her team for the work done both in leading the Office and facilitating the transition process. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (A/2023/995) on the United Nations Youth Office, which represents a milestone in the journey that began with the adoption of resolution 76/306 last year.

Uruguay would like to reiterate that the participation of youth in the implementation of public policies is key to creating more inclusive and equitable societies. Young people make up a significant percentage of the population, and therefore their perspectives, needs and aspirations must be taken into account in Government decision-making. Involving young people in that process not only empowers them as responsible citizens, but also fosters the creation of more effective and relevant policies to address the challenges facing present and future generations.

Youth participation in the implementation of public policies is also essential to strengthen democracy by allowing them to have an active voice in setting the political agenda and evaluating Government strategies. This approach promotes a greater sense of ownership and civic responsibility among young people. In addition, their participation contributes to the identification of innovative and creative solutions to complex problems facing society.

We believe that the creation of the Youth Office will provide us with a new opportunity to strengthen the role of young people in policy implementation. But countries must work towards the genuine representation of young people in their vision, prioritizing their own agenda and avoiding practices whereby young people are simply invited to have a say on the agenda of adults.

Uruguay has taken steps forward in the search for concrete systems to help its young people find their voice. To that end, we are taking a three-pronged approach of, first, inviting young people into the domain of State participation; secondly, of bringing the State to those places where young people are already present, such as educational, social and sports centres and approaching them; and thirdly, making use of data with the utmost respect for the right to privacy but with the aim of understanding the trends in young people's lives and needs. Only with a holistic and integral vision will we be able to get closer to the vision of our young people and their views on current problems. That is why we need investment and stable and predictable public policies.

We do not expect the United Nations Youth Office to solve all the problems facing the world, but we do expect the Office to address those challenges with boldness, tenacity, dedication and commitment — the same principles that guide both the youth movement and the actions of the United Nations. That can serve as an example of what needs to be changed and reformed at this moment in time.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the youth population is close to 160 million people. In several countries of the region, the proportion of young people will continue to increase significantly. In addition to the persistent structural gaps that exist among youth, we would also highlight inequalities in education and in the development of labour skills. Those inequalities require urgent solutions if we are to move forward on the path to sustainability with equality.

There is no doubt that young people can provide innovative and extremely valuable solutions to address the great challenges facing our region arising from the need to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In that regard, we stress the importance of Latin America's voice being represented in our Youth Office, in accordance with the aforementioned principle of equitable geographic inclusion.

**The President:** We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly has thus concluded its stage of its consideration of agenda item 134.

#### **Agenda item 14 (continued)**

##### **Culture of peace**

##### **Draft resolution (A/77/L.89)**

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco to introduce draft resolution A/77/L.89.

**Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (spoke in French):** It is my pleasure to introduce to the Assembly draft resolution A/77/L.89, entitled "Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech". The draft resolution is a continuation of the historic resolution 73/328, the first of its kind on hate speech adopted in 2019, and the subsequent resolution 75/309, which in 2021 proclaimed 18 June of each year as the International Day for Countering Hate Speech.

The new text, presented under agenda item 14, is aimed primarily at strengthening our collective commitment to promoting a culture of peace and non-violence for the good of humankind and future generations, and to reiterate the importance and obligation of collectively combating hate speech in all its forms and manifestations. This matter of priority is all the more pressing, given that recent months have been marked by an exponential exacerbation and alarming rise in hate speech and intolerance.

In accordance with the instructions of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Commander of the Faithful, the Kingdom of Morocco became aware at an early stage of the danger of hate speech conveyed by violent extremism, obscurantism and populism, as well as racism of all kinds. Therefore, in his royal address delivered at the opening ceremony of the ninth Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations,

held in Fez in November 2022, His Majesty the King stressed:

“Never before has our civilization been so exposed; never before has our ‘living together’ come under such threat on a daily basis; rarely has the ‘other’ been perceived with such a level of suspicion or used to stir up fear and foment hatred. Radical positions are permeating the debate and cancelling out moderate voices; religions are too often manipulated, when they are not simply stigmatized. Populism is rocking societies and inventing questions without answering them, except to brandish migration as a scarecrow or an electoral weapon and to turn migrants into scapegoats”.

In order to face up to the many dangers, the Sovereign has called for a vision of solidarity in the world. In his royal address to the participants of the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue under the theme of “Working together for our common future”, which was held in Marrakech in June 2023, His Majesty the King emphasized:

“[T]he bleak picture reflected by the conflict of beliefs in the world today must not obscure a brighter reality, nor the bold initiatives launched to strengthen communication and interaction between the components of the international community and followers of different faiths and to help to cultivate in everyone a spirit of tolerance, a climate of understanding and the ideal of coexistence”.

In the light of that message of peace, tolerance and solidarity, this draft resolution stems from the humanist vision of human and inter-State relations based on religious coexistence and intercultural harmony. It is the result of three years of substantial negotiations and several bilateral discussions over the past two months. To that end, the Moroccan facilitator has adopted a transparent, open and inclusive approach with the aim of uniting all those of goodwill around the noble and humanist cause of this draft resolution.

The current text that I have the honour of presenting to the Assembly draws on its strength and reaffirms that hate speech and all forms of intolerance associated with it could contribute to the outbreak, intensification and recurrence of conflicts, while also undermining initiatives to fight against the root causes of conflict and prevent and resolve conflict, as well as efforts aimed at reconciliation, reconstruction and peacebuilding.

Furthermore, the draft resolution notes with deep concern the increasing number of cases of discrimination, intolerance and violence targeting members of the many religious communities, including cases motivated by Islamophobia, antisemitism and Christianophobia, as well as acts of violence motivated by discrimination against persons belonging to religious minorities. In addition, the text strongly deplores all violent acts singling out people because of their religion or beliefs and all those targeting religious symbols, holy books, homes, businesses, property, schools, cultural centres or places of worship, in violation of international law.

Moreover, the draft resolution sets out three specific actions of multilateral engagement, for which the United Nations will act as a catalyst, to strengthen our collective efforts to counter hate speech, racism and discrimination.

First, we must commit to elaborating an intergovernmentally agreed definition of hate speech that can help in countering it, in accordance with international law.

Secondly, it requests the Secretary-General to convene, in 2025, a global conference on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech.

Thirdly, it urges Member States and social media companies to take active measures to counter hate speech and address its increasing spread and promote users’ access to effective reporting channels, in a manner consistent with international human rights law.

I will conclude by expressing the heartfelt gratitude of the delegation of Morocco to all delegations that, throughout the negotiation process, contributed to the enrichment of the draft resolution in a constructive fashion. I also wish to warmly thank the delegations that have already co-sponsored this initiative. I am counting on the support and the co-sponsorship of other delegations to ensure that the draft resolution can be adopted by consensus.

**The President:** We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/77/L.89.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

**Ms. Sharma** (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that, since the submission of draft resolution

A/77/L.89 and in addition to those delegations listed in the document, the following countries have also become sponsors of the draft resolution: Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, the Gambia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, the Sudan, Surinam, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

**The President:** Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote before the voting, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I give the floor to the representative of Spain to introduce a draft oral amendment.

**Ms. Jimenez de la Hoz** (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by highlighting that the European Union supports all efforts to promote tolerance and respect for cultural diversity and religious pluralism. We recognize that interreligious, interfaith and intercultural dialogue plays a positive role in countering hate and incitement to violence.

With regard to draft resolution A/77/L.89, our key concern is focused on the thirteenth preambular paragraph and the reference to acts of violence against religious symbols and holy books as a violation of international law. While we agree that they are deeply offensive and disrespectful, those are not violations of international law. Freedom of religion and belief is, like all other human rights, an individual right that can be exercised along with others. It does not protect a religion or belief as such or its symbols, nor does it ban criticism of religions or beliefs.

For those reasons, on behalf of the European Union, we propose the following draft oral amendment. In the thirteenth preambular paragraph, we request the elimination of the last part, specifically the concrete reference to “in violation of international law”. The rest of the paragraph would remain the same.

**Mr. Croker** (United Kingdom): I would just like to support the draft oral amendment proposed by the European Union.

While we appreciate efforts to try to find consensus on draft resolution A/77/L.89, we regret that the compromise proposals suggested have not been taken on board. During negotiations, we were clear that the language of the thirteenth preambular paragraph that suggests that acts of violence against religious books and symbols are in contravention of international law is factually inaccurate.

We also feel that the thirteenth preambular paragraph as drafted does not strike the right balance between freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief, and therefore, given that our concerns have not been addressed, we will be supporting the draft oral amendment.

I will make a further statement later, but just to reassure colleagues, we remain committed to the freedom of religion and belief and the freedom expression.

**The President:** We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote before the voting.

The Assembly will now take action on draft resolution A/77/L.89, entitled “Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech”.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

**Ms. Sharma** (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): The present oral statement is made in the context of rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. It has been distributed to Member States.

Under the terms of operative paragraph 14 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly would request the United Nations Secretary-General to convene, within existing resources, in the year 2025, a global conference on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech that involves United Nations entities, Member States, political figures, religious leaders, faith-based organizations, media, civil society and other relevant stakeholders.

The activities referred to in operative paragraph 14 of the draft resolution would entail new activities in 2024 and 2025 related to the convening of a global conference on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as additional conference

servicing workload for the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

The activities would include the planning, organizing and servicing, including interpretation services, of a one-day conference in Geneva, as well as travel for 10 participants to attend the conference.

In accordance with established practice, the date of the conference would be determined in consultation with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) in Geneva. Should the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, DGACM and any other office involved will make maximum efforts to prepare, organize and service the conference to the extent it can do so within existing resources.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, reference is made to operative paragraph 11 of resolution 69/250 and subsequent resolutions, the most recent of which is resolution 76/237, in which the Assembly invited Member States to include in new legislative mandates adequate information on the modalities for the organization of conferences or meetings.

**The President:** I call on the representative of Morocco on a point of order.

**Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I requested the floor to respond to the statement made by our colleague from Spain, who spoke on behalf of the countries of the European Union and the United Kingdom, seeking to orally amend the draft thirteenth preambular paragraph of draft resolution A/77/L.89.

I would first state that we are a bit surprised and very sorry that this draft oral amendment was introduced, because the draft preambular paragraph in question, with its reference to international law, does not add anything new.

I would remind the Assembly that the language of the draft thirteenth preambular paragraph is taken verbatim from the ninth preambular paragraph of resolution 73/328 and the tenth preambular paragraph of resolution 75/309. Indeed, the phrase “in violation of international law” was included in both of those resolutions, which were on hate speech. However, with the addition of the reference to religious symbols and holy books, the promoters of the draft oral amendment now do not want it to refer to international law.

I would also note that the reference to religious symbols and holy books was not included in the zero draft of draft resolution L.89. We did not want to make a reference to them, but developments in some countries forced the Arab and Muslim worlds to react. Individuals were burning copies of the Qur’an, the holy book of 2 billion Muslims, in front of embassies. The latest such act took place this morning. These acts are repeated approximately every two to three days, as if the world needed them. Apparently, the reactions of our States, with communiqués and declarations, and even the reactions of those countries that do not want this draft paragraph to be retained, have not been enough to stop those who perpetrate these acts of desecration and attacks on religious symbols and holy books. In this regard, we are talking about holy books in the plural. We are not just talking about the Qur’an, but also the Torah and the Gospels. We defend them all. We all have an obligation to respect the religious sentiments of others.

Burning a holy book is not freedom of expression; it is an attack on people’s religious dignity. As I said earlier, it is an attack on the faith of billions of human beings. As Rousseau once said, one person’s freedom ends where another’s begins. An attack on religious or canonical freedom is a denial of the religion of others. It denies the other faith. An attack or desecration or deprivation of a religion’s holy book is a denial of that religion — and a negation of all those who believe in or practice that religion. It is therefore inappropriate to consider any such acts to be a form of freedom of expression. I would like to recall that, a few years ago, when terrorists were trying to distribute instruction manuals for building artisanal bombs and other explosive devices for suicide bombers, we said we had to be careful and ban that activity, even though we had said that freedom of expression was an issue. It took the emergence of Da’esh, it took a war, it took the destruction of a country, it took thousands of innocent people losing their lives for this form of so-called freedom of expression — to be able to say or write whatever you want — to be questioned. Today, as long as the expression does not affect or harm others, it is protected by freedom of expression, but now these how-to guides on bombs and explosive devices are forbidden. Even terrorist thought or travelling with or talking to a terrorist is now banned under international law. It took us nearly 15 years to get to that point. Will it also take 15 or 20 more years of deaths of innocent victims for us to finally say that burning holy texts is not covered by freedom of expression?



I do not want to keep hammering away, but I would like to repeat that we are sorry to see the proposed draft oral amendment, which we vigorously reject. We would like to ask all of those who believe in coexistence among religions, who defend the freedom of religion, who oppose Islamophobia, antisemitism, attacks against Christianity, and any form of racism or discrimination based on colour, ethnicity or place of origin, or on gender, who are moved by the spirit of living in harmony with others and the desire to preserve our humanity, which has suffered so much and which is facing so many other challenges — to vote against the proposed draft oral amendment. It is my hope that, after voting on the proposed draft oral amendment, we will then together — collectively — vote in favour of draft resolution A/77/L.89.

As I said previously, Morocco initiated this draft resolution to be part of a continuum of resolutions on hate speech. We are very proud of our initiative, which has been three years in the making, but when, once again, we talk about holy scriptures, we are not defending our Qur'an: we are defending the holy books of all the States Members of the United Nations present in this Hall. It is a moral duty, a political duty. I think it is fair to say that all of our religions call for coexistence and acceptance of the other. As I stated, accepting for someone to burn the books of another religion is simply a rejection, denial and condemnation of the other. The world needs hope, coexistence, tolerance, understanding and, above all, solidarity in the face of fascism, extremism, populism and all who seek to undermine harmony and coexistence among people, religions, cultures and civilizations.

In conclusion, this is an appeal to all those who have supported us thus far and, we hope, all others, to vote against this draft oral amendment, which removes an important element from the thirteenth preambular paragraph of draft resolution A/77/L.89.

**The President:** The representative of Spain has proposed a draft oral amendment to draft resolution A/77/L.89.

In accordance with rule 90 of the rules of procedure, the Assembly will first take a decision on the draft oral amendment submitted by the representative of Spain.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat to read out the text of the thirteenth preambular paragraph as it would stand according to the oral proposal by Spain.

**Ms. Sharma** (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): The representative of Spain has requested the deletion of the last five words in the thirteenth preambular paragraph, namely “in violation of international law”. The paragraph would then read as follows:

“Strongly deploring all acts of violence against persons on the basis of their religion or belief, as well as any such acts directed against their religious symbols, holy books, homes, businesses, properties, schools, cultural centres or places of worship, as well as all attacks on and in religious places, sites and shrines”.

**The President:** The Assembly will now proceed to take a decision on the draft oral amendment.

A recorded vote has been requested.

*A recorded vote was taken.*

*In favour:*

Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

*Against:*

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Chad, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Guatemala, Guyana, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Türkiye, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Zimbabwe

*Abstaining:*

Australia, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Georgia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, New Zealand, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Republic of Korea, Togo, Uruguay

*The draft oral amendment to draft resolution A/77/L.89 was rejected by 44 votes to 62, with 24 abstentions.*

**The President:** We shall now proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/77/L.89.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/77/L.89?

*Draft resolution A/77/L.89 was adopted (resolution 77/318).*

**The President:** Before giving floor to speakers in explanation of vote or position after the voting, may I remind delegations that explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

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

Let me start by saying that the EU supports all efforts to promote tolerance and respect for cultural diversity and religious pluralism. We recognize that interreligious, interfaith and intercultural dialogue plays a positive role in combating hatred, incitement and violence.

Let me also recall that the EU made its position clear at the urgent debate in the 12 July Human Rights Council — burning a book that is regarded as holy by many, is offensive, disrespectful and a clear act of provocation.

The EU opposes all forms of incitement to violence or hatred and hate speech, online and offline, but we also stand for the right to freedom of opinion and expression. In compliance with article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, EU member States prohibit any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that might constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

Striking a balance between the enjoyment of freedom of expression and the protection of the right

to freedom of religion or belief has been a difficult topic of discussion within the United Nations for decades. In 2011, a delicate balance was found, which allowed us to pursue a consensual approach through Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, which, in turn, led to important achievements such as the Rabat Plan of Action, the Istanbul Process for Combating Intolerance, Discrimination and Incitement to Hatred and/or Violence on the Basis of Religion or Belief and the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights. All these documents share the premise that the threshold for unlawful incitement must be set high, based on an analysis of the context, and that limitations of freedom of expression must remain the exception.

Hate speech is a cross-cutting phenomenon and, as such, needs to be addressed through a comprehensive approach, tackling all aspects and grounds of discrimination and violence. We regret that the draft before us focuses on hate speech in the limited context of religious hatred. We appreciate that the facilitator, Morocco, organized informal consultations, in which the EU engaged constructively. The EU made several proposals aimed at improving the text, and we are disappointed to see that there were not all taken on board. We also regret that there was no willingness to allow for more time to continue the negotiations.

Regrettably, the text in front of us falls short of fully meeting the requirements of international human rights law. One key concern is the thirteenth preambular paragraph and the references to violent acts against religious symbols and holy books as a violation of international law. While we agree that it is deeply offensive and disrespectful, it is not a violation of international law. Freedom of religion or belief, like all other human rights, 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, nor does it prohibit the criticism of religions or beliefs.

For these reasons, the EU had no other choice than to propose a draft oral amendment to the thirteenth preambular paragraph, whereby we call for the deletion of the phrase “in violation of international law”. For those reasons, the EU strongly disassociates itself from the last part of the thirteenth preambular paragraph. With those clarifications, the EU joined consensus, despite our reservations.

**Mr. Szczerski** (Poland): Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech is crucial to achieve a climate of mutual

respect and understanding, peaceful coexistence and cooperation. No act of violence, based on any religion or belief, can be tolerated or justified in any case.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms must be universally protected and promoted. At the centre of the Polish legal systems lies the recognition of the inalienable dignity of every human being, both believers and non-believers. Respect for human dignity, in our tradition, is not at odds with freedoms in public life. Those freedoms allow for the acceptance of, and respect for, differences among religions and for dialogue in many dimensions — artistic, scientific and spiritual — and regarding key values of various religions. Believers and non-believers alike can participate in that dialogue.

Having led the initiative to declare the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, Poland calls for efforts to protect individuals and their dignity to be intensified. We strongly condemn all acts of discrimination or violence against individuals based on their religion or belief. Dialogue and education can be powerful tools in addressing and facing challenges caused by hate speech, both online and offline. In that context, we underline the need to counter the spread of disinformation and misinformation. We believe that interreligious and intercultural dialogue is essential to promote social cohesion, peace and development.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that our efforts on a global and local level must be grounded in human rights and international human rights law. Only by acting together and strengthening our partnership will it be possible to promote the values of respect, tolerance, non-discrimination, pluralism and freedom of opinion and expression and to counter hate speech narratives.

**Ms. Pongor** (Hungary): Hungary aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and wishes to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

Hungary is firmly committed to promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance with a view to countering hate speech, incitement and violence, and we support all efforts in that regard. In line with 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. Certain violent acts referred to in resolution

77/318, albeit deeply offensive and disrespectful, may not be a violation of international law.

At the same time, Hungarian law contains very clear provisions on such acts. According to our criminal code, a person destroying or damaging an object of religious worship is guilty of vandalism and shall be punished by imprisonment for up to three years. Furthermore, our criminal code sanctions antisocial conduct capable of causing alarm in members of national, ethnic, racial or religious groups by targeting persons belonging to those respective groups. Our legal system also contains provisions on incitement against a community, sanctioning, among other things, incitement to violence or hatred against a religious group or a member of such a group. Hungary is also deeply committed to the right to freedom of religion or belief, which can be exercised individually or in community with others. It is in that spirit that we joined consensus on the resolution.

**Mr. Al Hassan** (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I deliver this statement on behalf of the delegation of my country, the Sultanate of Oman.

I wish to begin by saying that this is an important day in United Nations history, with the achievement of an international consensus in support of the resolution 77/318, just adopted. By adopting the resolution on this important occasion, the Organization has assumed full responsibility. My country, the Sultanate of Oman, was one of the sponsors of the resolution, introduced under agenda item 14, and voted in favour of it. We thank the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco for continuing to sponsor the resolution and for the thoughts, contents and recommendations contained therein.

We believe that a culture of peace must be built on mutual respect and that sacred symbols must not be attacked. We stress that doing so is a form of hate speech that must not be allowed in this Organization. In our view, burning the holy books of any religion or faith is harmful, improper and irresponsible behaviour that is indicative of hatred and cannot be interpreted as acceptable under any pretext. Its perpetrators must be held accountable. We call for an end to such acts, which harm us all and do not support mutual understanding and coexistence among peoples.

In recent years, we have noticed the steady rise of Islamophobia in many countries, leading to increased acts of hatred associated with direct and indirect violence. My country, the Sultanate of Oman, supports coexistence, mutual understanding and respect. We call

for putting an end to the burning of holy books of any religion, including the Holy Qur'an, as such acts do not contribute to achieving a world free of hatred.

We also reject the politicization of this issue, namely, attacks on beliefs and religions, as well as their followers. Such acts constitute a violation of international law and of the lofty and noble principles upon which this Organization has been founded. Such acts cannot be justified under any pretext, including the freedom of expression. We call upon the Secretary-General to monitor such phenomena of hatred and to make available the necessary financial resources to report on them in future reports. We in this Organization are striving to build bridges of cooperation and mutual understanding, not the contrary. That is our message.

We welcome the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union concerning its condemnation of such acts. We consider such acts to be contrary to international law and the fundamental, noble and lofty principles on which this Organization was founded.

**Ms. Korac** (United States of America): The United States strongly condemns acts of hate and continues to underscore the harm they can cause to individuals. We expressed our deep concern regarding the 28 June desecration of the Holy Qur'an, and we repeat those sentiments again today. The United States categorically calls out anti-Muslim hatred whenever it occurs. As President Biden stated in May,

“confronting Islamophobia is a priority for my Administration. Standing up against anti-Muslim hate is essential to who we are as a country founded on freedom and justice for all”.

We find the act of desecrating any religious text to be abhorrent, and we stand in solidarity with our partners in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and with all people wishing to live their lives in accordance with their religious identities or beliefs without discrimination. Twenty-five years ago, President Clinton signed the International Religious Freedom Act into law. At that time, he noted that freedom of religion was a bedrock American belief, saying,

“when we promote religious freedom, we also promote freedom of expression, conscience and association and other human rights”.

We are proud of our leadership role in promoting the values enshrined in Human Rights Council resolution

16/18, which carefully navigates the relationship between freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression and was negotiated at senior levels with members of the OIC and adopted by consensus in 2011. Prior to that watershed moment, some perceived those two rights to be in conflict. The resolution made clear that they are in fact complementary. That remains our approach to this issue, and we hope the international community continues to reaffirm that approach. Regarding today's resolution 77/318, we appreciate Morocco's leadership and recognize the critical importance of this topic. While we support the resolution, we continue to have concerns that it does not represent the range of views in this organ on countering hate speech in line with respect for human rights.

First, we regret that the resolution cited language from Security Council resolution 2686 (2023) that includes acts of extremism without a clear link to violence. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are under assault, including by Governments seeking to infringe on those rights under the cover of combating extremism. It is of the utmost priority for the United States not to grant license to States to repress dissenting views under the pretext of countering extremism or maintaining peace or societal harmony. For years, the United Nations has appropriately focused on addressing violent extremism, including in the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and in the existing commitments Member States have made to prevent and counter violent extremism. Opinions and beliefs must be protected, even if characterized as extreme.

With regard to operative paragraph 2, we note that the term “hate speech” generally encompasses a wide breadth of speech, most of which is protected by freedom of expression. By expressing support for countering hate speech, we are in no way supporting efforts to criminalize such speech. Any effort to counter hate speech must be carried out in a manner consistent with respect for human rights, including the freedom of expression.

Finally, the United States has concerns about the approach that the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations has taken with respect to freedom of expression, including during the forum held in Fez in November 2022. In particular, the Fez declaration purports to recognize moderation as a societal value. Unfortunately, many Governments touting the virtues of moderation have used the term as a justification to

bar dissent and place undue legal limits on expression and, in particular, religious expression. The United States joins others in disassociating from the thirteenth preambular paragraph, given that the draft oral amendment to correct the language therein was not adopted today. Despite those concerns, the United States did ultimately join the consensus today on resolution 77/318, as we remain committed to working with the international community to promote tolerance and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

**Ms. Kasahara** (Japan): My delegation would like to make a brief explanation of vote. Japan is a staunch supporter of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which underpin the values contained in the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech. In the light of those values, Japan joined the consensus on resolution 77/318. However, my delegation regrets the lack of dialogue and the manner in which the resolution was facilitated. Japan is always ready to engage constructively in the consultative process and is determined to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue to counter hate speech.

**Ms. Rizk**: (Egypt): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Kingdom of Morocco and its delegation and to thank them for their efforts in leading the negotiations on this important and timely resolution (resolution 77/318) in good faith and in an attempt to arrive at consensus at an early stage.

My delegation supports the resolution adopted today. It not only addresses the linkage between interreligious and intercultural dialogue in countering hate speech but is also a very timely resolution. In recent months, the global community has witnessed a recurrence and upsurge in acts of incitement and violence driven by hatred against Islam and its followers — namely, Islamophobia. Just today, the Egyptian embassy in Denmark witnessed another incident of burning the Holy Qur'an, which Muslims consider as part of their identity. That and previous heinous acts not only constitute an affront to the feelings of almost 2 billion Muslims around the globe, but also constitute a violation of the rights of Muslim communities in the countries in which such acts occur, in particular the right to freedom of religion or belief. Such acts cannot and should not be justified under the guise of freedom of expression.

As we heard earlier in the interventions by our fellow Member States, article 20 of the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights clearly states that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. In that connection, my delegation emphasizes that the latest acts of burning the Holy Qur'an or any other attacks on holy books is indeed a violation and a manifestation of anti-Muslim and anti-religious hatred and sentiment. They are indeed acts of incitement, hostility and violence that should be prohibited by law — and they take place in countries that claim that the establishment and enforcement of the rule of law is the basic tenet of human rights and modern democracy. Accordingly, such countries are required by their obligations under international human rights law, as well as their own claimed values of democracy and human rights, to establish in their legal systems the means and the provisions to prevent and establish accountability for such acts. No statement or oral amendment, be it hostile or not, would absolve Member States from their legal obligations in that regard.

Accordingly, Egypt voted against the draft oral amendment proposed in the Hall, but co-sponsored and voted in favour of resolution 77/318.

**Mr. Akbulut** (Türkiye): We thank Morocco for its work as facilitator and for its efforts to make resolution 77/318 a document that reflects the current realities.

Today hate crimes, racism and xenophobia have reached unprecedented levels. Unfortunately, Islamophobia is among the most common forms of hatred and racism. Muslims increasingly face systemic practices of denial of freedom of religion, hate crimes and various manifestations of Islamophobia. As a result, the desecration of the Holy Qur'an and mosques and the violation of freedom of religion are on the rise. The despicable attacks perpetrated by anti-Islam instigators in Europe against the Holy Qur'an are blatant displays of hatred, intolerance, xenophobia and discrimination. We strongly condemn those repeated vile attacks. Allowing those abhorrent acts can never be justified under the pretext of freedom of expression. On the contrary, they are flagrant violations and indeed abuses of democratic freedoms and basic rights. Sacred values and symbols should be free from the reach of provocateurs, fanatics and opportunists. We call on all countries and the United Nations to take concrete steps against the deplorable acts of violence, discrimination and intolerance based on religion, particularly the increasing manifestations of Islamophobia.

The General Assembly's designation of 15 March as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia was a landmark step. Earlier this month, on 12 July, Human Rights Council resolution 53/1 was adopted, defining attacks on the Holy Qur'an as religious hatred. We would like to highlight the growing role of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in preventing and ending hate speech through its mandate, which includes, among others, the promotion of mutual understanding among different cultures and religions. The Alliance, its programmes and initiatives, such as the #SpreadNoHate initiative, aim to alleviate tensions among and within societies with a view to creating a basis for harmonious and peaceful coexistence. Türkiye will continue its firm support for all international efforts to eliminate that scourge, which threatens the common values that bind us together.

**Mr. Pedroza** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru condemns all incidents of intolerance, discrimination and violence against people based on their religion or beliefs in any region of the world. Peru therefore supported the adoption of resolution 77/318. We need to combat religious intolerance and ensure respect for the rights of all people, regardless of borders.

In accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, States have the duty to prohibit any advocacy of national, religious or racial hate that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Everybody has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief — rights that continue to be the foundation of democratic, pluralistic and inclusive societies.

Finally, we would like to recall that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a historic milestone that brings together peoples and nations, proclaims that global freedom, justice and peace are rooted in the recognition of the intrinsic dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all.

**Mr. Chaudhary** (Pakistan): My delegation wishes to express its profound satisfaction about the adoption of resolution 77/318.

The text adopted today resonates with Human Rights Council resolution 53/1, on religious hatred, adopted recently in Geneva. That landmark resolution, presented by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, condemned all advocacy and manifestations of religious hatred, including recent public and premeditated acts that have desecrated

the Holy Qur'an. The resolution called for countries to adopt laws enabling them to bring to justice those responsible for such acts.

Islamophobia is on the rise, with repeated incidents of desecration of the Holy Qur'an. Those acts are not just a provocation of the feelings of more than 2 billion Muslims, but are also a step to sabotage interfaith harmony and peace. Such incidents are also a manifestation of racial hatred and xenophobia, and the absence of preventive legal deterrence, inaction and shying away from speaking out against those acts encourages further incitement to hatred and violence. We therefore strongly echo the views of those who have expressed their support for today's resolution, including the thirteenth preambular paragraph.

Finally, my delegation wishes to note that the text adopted today does not seek to curtail the right to free speech but tries to underline the special duties and responsibilities of the international community to safeguard interfaith peace and harmony.

**Ms. Wegter** (Denmark): I am pleased to deliver this explanation of vote on behalf of the Nordic countries — Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and, my own country, Denmark.

The Nordic countries would like to underline that we oppose all forms of incitement to violence or hatred and hate speech, both online and offline. In compliance with article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, we prohibit advocacy of national racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. We support efforts aimed at promoting tolerance and respect for cultural diversity and religious pluralism. We recognize that interreligious, interfaith and intercultural dialogue play positive roles in combating hatred, incitement and violence. We also staunchly support the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for all individuals, including the right to manifest, observe and practise a religion or belief.

Burning the Qur'an or any other holy book is offensive, disrespectful and a clear act of provocation. We condemn such acts and strongly disassociate ourselves from them. They are disgraceful and shameful, disrespect the religion of others, hurt many people and create divisions among various religions and cultures. Yet we also stand for the right to freedom of opinion and expression, which constitutes an essential pillar of free, open democracies. In that regard, we emphasize

the need to carefully distinguish between acts that are offensive and morally reprehensible, yet legal, and acts that constitute incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence and are, therefore, unlawful.

Fortunately, we have several international standards and a rich normative framework from which to draw when making that often very difficult distinction. They include Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, the Rabat Plan of Action, the Istanbul Process framework and the Beirut Declaration on Faith for Rights. We invite all to make use of that framework in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. This is the time to stand together across religious and political beliefs. In doing so, we demonstrate to the few individuals responsible that our unity will not be challenged by their senseless and disgraceful provocations.

As mentioned by the representative of the European Union, we regret the fact that resolution 77/318 focuses only on hate speech in the context of religious hatred, rather than as a cross-cutting phenomenon. We appreciate the fact that the facilitator organized informal consultations on those very important issues, but regret that there was insufficient time to reach a fully consensus-based outcome, which, indeed, would have been preferable.

A key concern is the thirteenth preambular paragraph and the reference to violent acts against religious symbols and holy books as a violation of international law. While we agree that those acts are deeply offensive and disrespectful, they are not a violation of international law. Freedom of religion or belief is, like all other human rights, an individual right. It does not protect religion or religious symbols as such, nor does it prohibit the criticism of religions or belief. For those reasons, the Nordics disassociate themselves from the reference to a violation of international law in the thirteenth preambular paragraph. With that clarification, the Nordic States join the consensus.

**Ms. Zoghbi** (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank the Kingdom of Morocco for introducing resolution 77/318, entitled “Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech”. We supported the resolution, as Lebanon is a symbol of coexistence among religions and cultures.

In the light of the recent acts of desecration of the Holy Qur’an, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon issued a statement, in which

it stressed that the Lebanese people denounce and condemn the desecration, once again, of the Holy Qur’an, which is an ongoing violation of the feelings and dignity of Muslims. We have called for appropriate measures to be taken to put an end to actions that exacerbate feelings of hatred, racism in all its forms, incitement to violence and denigration of religion.

In conclusion, Lebanon is an example of religious and cultural pluralism, as well as a source of diversity, richness and coexistence. It sends a message of tolerance and fraternity to peoples of all walks of life.

**Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico thanks Morocco for its work in facilitating resolution 77/318, on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue in countering hate speech. We believe that the text is a milestone in promoting the rights and development of peoples and a step towards the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. We also thank the facilitator for including in the resolution some of the suggestions made by our delegation.

Mexico’s position is clear. We are strongly opposed to any act of discrimination, intolerance or violence directed at any individual because of their religion or belief. We specifically condemn the recent burning of the Qur’an, which is an attack on people’s dignity and human rights. In a world in which violence is a latent threat, we must work hard to put an end to discrimination based on religion or of any other sort. Regrettably, for my country, Mexico, the resolution is limited in scope as it does not include protection for all people, based on the many factors of identity. Often, hate speech becomes language that reflects xenophobia and discrimination directed at migrants and refugees. Similarly, violence experienced by people of various sexual orientations or gender identities is encouraged through derogatory language, rooted in intolerance and hate.

All people, regardless of their identity, can be the target of hate speech. For that reason, Mexico believes that the resolution should have a broad focus that leaves no one outside of its necessary sphere of protection. Hate speech directed at one person is hate directed at all people.

**Ms. Naric** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): In the fight against hate speech, interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the promotion of tolerance are imperative.

We firmly believe that such approaches are key to combating discrimination, intolerance, incitement to hatred and violent extremism. Switzerland condemns in the strongest terms such manifestations in all their forms and thanks Morocco for introducing resolution 77/318 on this important and topical subject. We must discuss the need to limit the freedom of expression in certain cases in order to protect individuals, as set out in articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We underscore that any limit must be provided for by law and must be necessary and proportionate. However, it is imperative to distinguish between the protection of people belonging to a specific religion against hatred, violence and discrimination and the protection of religions, holy books and religious symbols against defamation. The defamation of religions, or religious defamation, are not legal concepts recognized under the normative framework of international human rights law.

**Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the delegation of Morocco for taking this very important initiative, which led to the adoption of resolution 77/318, on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech. We were pleased to join the consensus on the document, which makes a significant contribution to the development of international cooperation in the area.

Islamophobia, Christianophobia and antisemitism are particularly dangerous today. We are concerned about recent trends in certain European countries involving the burning of holy books. Such attacks on a religion and the dignity of its believers is a rejection of all religions and an attack on, affront to, and violation of, the right to the freedom of religion. Such actions are manifestation of extremism that undermine human rights and fuel conflict. We condemn the position taken by States that, instead of protecting the right of freedom of religion, actually condone and encourage such extremists, while shielding them from punishment. As such, those States contribute to the continuation of human rights violations. We call on European countries to act in a civilized manner and show tolerance for and respect the representatives of other religions. Tolerating extremism is unacceptable. Impunity for such acts, such as the burning of holy books, is likely to have disastrous ramifications.

**Ms. Alawadhi** (United Arab Emirates): The United Arab Emirates takes the floor in explanation of vote

after the voting on the draft oral amendment on the thirteenth preambular paragraph of resolution 77/318, entitled “Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech”, which was adopted today by consensus.

It is regrettable that a draft oral amendment was proposed to a traditionally consensual resolution, especially since the Kingdom of Morocco, as facilitator, spared no effort in accommodating and bridging the widely differing views of all delegations. We voted against the draft oral amendment because we strongly believe that the freedom of expression must not be used as an excuse to fuel hatred among people and societies. Hatred should not have any place in our world today.

The United Arab Emirates stresses the need to respect religious symbols and holy books in order to avoid incitement and polarization at a time when the international community needs to work together to reaffirm its commitment to upholding the universal principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Once again, we appreciate the Kingdom of Morocco for its leadership and the successful adoption of the resolution, which the United Arab Emirates proudly co-sponsored.

**Ms. Zhang Sisi** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Morocco for introducing resolution 77/318, entitled “Promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech”, and for working on behalf of all parties to enhance tolerance and mutual learning among civilizations in order to respond to and eliminate hate speech. China actively supports the resolution and is honoured to have co-sponsored it.

The world today is faced with many complex problems and interconnected crises and challenges, underneath which lie long-term accumulated trust deficits. Not long ago, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Civilization Initiative, which advocates respect for the civilizational diversity of the world, the promotion of the shared values of humankind, the importance of the heritage and innovation of civilizations and robust international people-centred exchanges and cooperation. The Initiative is yet another important public good that China has offered in a new era for the international community. We stand ready to join hands with all parties to promote tolerance, coexistence, exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations, including by giving full play to the role of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as bridges of communication and a means for eliminating all forms of hate speech,



xenophobia, racism and related intolerance. We firmly reject imposing one's own values and models on others, inciting civilizational conflicts, stoking ideological confrontation and eroding mutual understanding and cooperation among civilizations.

China supports the holding of an urgently needed debate at the fifty-third session of the Human Rights Council concerning the recent incidents involving the burning of the Qur'an in certain countries and the adoption of resolution 53/1, submitted by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Islamic civilization has made major contributions to the world's civilizations. The faith and religious sensibilities of Muslims should be respected. China opposes all forms of Islamophobia and believes that the freedom of speech should not be used as a reason to fuel civilizational conflict or create civilizational antagonism. We support Morocco, which, in the light of the views of the majority of Member States, included language on Islamophobia and the condemnation of, inter alia, acts of violence against holy books. We congratulate Morocco on the consensual adoption of the resolution. We hope that the relevant countries will show the needed political will, inter alia, take concrete actions, resolve the deep-seated issues of rhetoric and behaviours based on discrimination and xenophobia and promote the understanding of, and respect for, different religions and civilizations.

**Mr. Rizal (Malaysia):** At the outset, my delegation would like to express its heartfelt appreciation to the Kingdom of Morocco for introducing this important resolution, again this year, to the General Assembly. We appreciate the focused conduct of the negotiations of the text and the willingness of the facilitator to take into consideration recent developments that are pertinent to the draft resolution.

It is unfortunate that a draft oral amendment was introduced to the thirteenth preambular paragraph. My delegation very vividly remembers the calls made by a number of delegations for stronger human rights language during the negotiations on the draft resolution. Yet, on violations of holy books, which is an integral component of the right to freedom of religion and belief, the desire for stronger language on human rights is somewhat subdued.

While acknowledging that the exercise of freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental human right, we strongly disagree with the notion that the defamation of religion is not an infringement of human

rights. The defamation of any religion constitutes a derogation of the right to freedom of religion or belief and is intimately linked to the incitement of racial and religious hatred.

My delegation has consistently stressed that rights should not be in competition with one another, nor should one right be seen as superior to another. The exercise of the freedom of speech and expression entails responsibility and accountability, which are critical components in countering hate speech. It is imperative that we uphold all human rights on an equal footing and address all human rights issues in an impartial, non-discriminatory and objective manner.

It is on the basis of those considerations that we advocated for and supported the insertion of "holy books" in this draft resolution and voted against the draft oral amendment introduced.

My delegation firmly believes in the principles of tolerance and mutual understanding and the importance of addressing acts that clearly seek to provoke and incite racial and religious hatred. It is our hope that we will be able to make progress within the United Nations forums in countering hate speech, especially on the basis of religion and belief, towards achieving a true advancement of human rights.

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

I call on the representative of the United Kingdom on a point of order.

**Mr. Croker (United Kingdom):** I would like to confirm that, having spoken earlier in the debate, I am unable to make a further statement now. Therefore, in order to disassociate my delegation from the thirteenth preambular paragraph and operative paragraph two, I would need to send a written statement, which could be circulated, for the official record, alongside a broader statement.

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

#### **Agenda item 126 (continued)**

#### **Strengthening of the United Nations system**

**The President:** We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/77/L.88, entitled "Supporting the United Nations International School

in enhancing international education and promoting multicultural interaction”.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

**Ms. Sharma** (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): 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 become sponsors draft resolution A/77/L.88: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Georgia, Guatemala, Iceland, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

**The President:** May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/77/L.88?

*Draft resolution A/77/L.88 was adopted (resolution 77/319).*

**The President:** The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 126.

#### **Agenda item 128 (continued)**

##### **Global health and foreign policy**

**The President:** The General Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 128, entitled “Global health and foreign policy” to take action on three draft decisions, issued as A/77/L.85, A/77/L.86 and A/77/L.87.

We shall now proceed to consider draft decisions A/77/L.85, A/77/L.86 and A/77/L.87, one by one. Delegations wishing to make a statement in explanation of vote before the voting on any of the three draft decisions are invited to do so now in one intervention.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft decision on A/77/L.85, entitled “Participation of non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector in the high-level meeting on universal health coverage”.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft decision A/77/L.85?

*Draft decision A/77/L.85 was adopted (decision 77/562).*

**The President:** The Assembly will now take a decision on draft decision A/77/L.86, entitled “Participation of non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector in the high-level meeting on the fight against tuberculosis”.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft decision A/77/L.86?

*Draft decision A/77/L.86 was adopted (decision 77/563).*

**The President:** The Assembly will now take a decision on draft decision A/77/L.87, entitled “Participation of non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector in the high-level meeting on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response”.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft decision A/77/L.87?

*Draft decision A/77/L.87 was adopted (decision 77/564).*

**The President:** The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 128.

#### **Agenda item 133 (continued)**

##### **Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets**

###### **Draft resolution (A/77/L.84)**

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico to introduce draft resolution A/77/L.84.

**Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/77/L.84, entitled “Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets”, for the consideration of the General Assembly. This draft resolution, which Mexico has the honour to introduce for the fourth time, consists of technical updates, since we recognize that substantive issues related to the impact of rapid

technological change on sustainable development are addressed in broader forums, such as the discussions on the Global Digital Compact, whose negotiations will take place within the framework of the 2024 Summit of the Future. In that process, Mexico will advocate for the incorporation of important elements already contained in the draft, such as universal, affordable and meaningful connectivity; capacity-building to adapt to technological change; digital public goods; strengthening digital cooperation; and the debate on the use of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

We are convinced that global collaboration is essential to develop effective solutions that enable us to face technological challenges in a comprehensive manner. Mexico expresses its sincere thanks to all Member States for their active participation in the negotiation process. That participation was essential in order to adequately reflect in the text how we can meet the challenges posed by rapid technological progress to our joint pursuit of sustainable and equitable development.

My country reiterates the importance of fully implementing the mandates established in General Assembly resolutions. Without meeting that basic requirement, it is not possible to ensure appropriate follow-up to the work arising from those documents, especially on the rapidly evolving issue of technological change. It is essential that the decisions adopted in the General Assembly be translated into concrete compliance and tangible progress towards the objectives that unite us. In that regard, Mexico calls for the United Nations system to comply, in time and form, with the decisions reached by the Member States in this forum. The mandates contained in General Assembly resolutions are an integral part of multilateral norms, and failure to heed them undermines not only the follow-up and strengthening of substantive issues, but also the soundness of the resolution itself.

Mexico recognizes that accelerated technological progress can be an ally in the effort to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, facilitating the rapid and broad application of innovative solutions

to address economic, social and environmental challenges. However, it is also critical to carry out an in-depth assessment of the impact of that accelerated progress on sustainable development so that we can ensure the comprehensive benefit of those innovations in the interest of all.

The resolution we are adopting today constitutes an important step in our joint pursuit of a more prosperous and sustainable future. Mexico will continue to reiterate time and again its commitment to continue working to implement effective solutions that will allow us to confront challenges and seize the opportunities that technological change presents us with. We know that we have the support of the Assembly and of the United Nations entities that support the mandates contained in this resolution.

**The President:** The General Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/77/L.84, entitled “Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets”.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

**Ms. Sharma** (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): 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 draft resolution A/77/L.84: Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Paraguay, Singapore and Türkiye.

**The President:** May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/77/L.84?

*Draft resolution A/77/L.84 was adopted (resolution 77/320).*

**The President:** May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 133?

*It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.*