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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by International Foundation Witnesses Ashoora, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 August 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Islamophobia and Attacks against Mosques

Introduction

In recent years, the world has witnessed a new wave of violent extremism that has claimed the lives of many innocent people of different faiths, ethnicities and nationalities. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the number of deaths caused by violent extremism and terrorism has increased more than nine fold, from 3,329 in 2000 to 32,685 in 2014. Globally, the number of attacks by violent extremists is on the rise. However, while numerous events have attracted international attention, most of the daily victims of violent extremism go unnoticed. All of these acts have been inspired by ideologies ranging from religious fundamentalism to separatism, xenophobia and radical nationalism. In essence, extremist ideologies glorify the supremacy of a particular group, be it on the basis of religion, race, citizenship, class or belief, and thus oppose the idea of a more open and inclusive society.

Violations of Human Rights: Atrocities Against Mosques and the Fight for Religious Freedom

Freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression are mutually reinforcing and allow all people, regardless of their religion or belief or no religion, to demand tolerance, participate in public life and contribute openly and equally to society. Meanwhile, harassment, intimidation, violence and incitement based on religion or belief have risen sharply worldwide in the last year, reaching alarming levels that shock our conscience and create a climate of fear and deep mistrust.

the world is experiencing an increase in hate speech and acts of religious intolerance that incite hatred, foment social discord and create political tensions. The staged public burning of the Holy Quran and the desecration of mosques in some countries are deplorable acts and must be condemned.

in recent years, there have been several attacks on mosques in the European Union. Countries such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have reported several attacks on mosques. Thus, the aftermath of high-profile terrorist attacks has sometimes led to retaliation against Muslim places of worship. Islamophobia is on the rise and people in the EU community are subject to attacks because they are Muslim, but they don't necessarily report it.

Germany

- Germany is a country with more than 84 million inhabitants and has the second largest Muslim population in Western Europe after France. The rise in far-right sentiment has led to numerous attacks on mosques. In 2018 alone, there were over 100 reported attacks on Muslim institutions. Germany has seen an increase in anti-Muslim racism and violence in recent years, fueled by the propaganda of far-right parties and movements. The rise in Islamophobia in Germany is due to the fact that the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which declares in its platform that Islam does not belong in Germany, moved up to second place in the polls last year, prompting mainstream parties to talk tougher about migration and Islamic migration in particular.
- Neo-Nazis threw stones at a mosque in the western city of Siegburg on October 20, 2023, the latest in a series of attacks on the Muslim community in Germany.

- The Secretary General of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB) is calling on the German public and politicians to take action against the increasing anti-Muslim attacks on Turkish mosques in the country. These attacks range from threats to the burning of the Holy Quran and the malicious supply of pork to mosques, which is forbidden in Islam. There has also been an increase in hate mail. The organization said it has received at least 17 emails and letters containing hateful and threatening material.
- In 2023, CLAIM, a network of NGOs monitoring Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate, recorded 1,926 anti-Muslim incidents – an increase of 114 percent. While mosques in Germany reported an increase in Islamophobic vandalism, harassment and threats in 2023, attacks have increased even further since the occupying forces' war on Gaza.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

- Almost half (42%) of mosques and Islamic institutions have experienced religiously motivated attacks in the last three years, a new study shows. The survey, conducted by MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development) in partnership with the Muslim Census, also found that 35% of Islamic institutions have experienced a religiously motivated attack at least once a year. Over 100 mosques across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland were surveyed for the report.
- With the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland rising by 335 since October 7, members of the Anti-Muslim Hate Working Group (AMHWG) have expressed concern about the state's inability to reboot the group and tackle the rise in anti-Muslim hate crime. The most common form of attack is vandalism, followed by theft, although 17% of mosques have experienced physical attacks on staff or worshippers.
- Finsbury Park Mosque was the target of an attack in 2017, when a man drove a van into a group of Muslim worshippers, resulting in one death and several injuries.
- In early 2023, a group of people vandalized the mosque in Southport by daubing it with graffiti and damaging the building.
- Since mid-February 2024, there have been a number of incidents at mosques in London, including break-ins at three mosques – Palmers Green Mosque, Southgate Mosque and Masjid Ayesha .
- Two teenagers were arrested after an arson attack on a mosque in Essex. The arson attack in August 2023 damaged curtains and carpets in the prayer room at Northbrooks Mosque.
- Police are investigating a number of racially motivated incidents in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, including a break-in at a mosque in Newtownards. The break-in occurred at around 9:50pm on Friday, August 9. Police believe that this incident and several others involving the burning of cars are racially motivated crimes. In another case, police are investigating an attack on a mosque in Newtownards in the early hours of August 10. At around 1am, officers on patrol discovered graffiti on the front door and walls of the building in Greenwell Street.

- On Monday, July 29, three young girls were killed and several others injured in a stabbing at a children's dance party organized by Taylor Swift in Southport, Merseyside. A 17-year-old boy from the area, whose motive is still unknown, is believed to be responsible for the tragedy, which is one of the worst mass casualty incidents in recent history of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Self-styled "news" outlets were quick to spread falsehoods about the perpetrator. One viral report falsely referred to him as 'Ali al-Shakati', a Muslim migrant new to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This was later debunked by the police. Nonetheless, the false claims surrounding the attack quickly reached millions of views online, fueled by anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant activists and promoted by the platforms' recommendation systems. Far-right networks – a mix of formal groups and a broader ecosystem of individual actors – used this wave of activity to mobilize online, organizing anti-Muslim protests outside the local mosque that later turned violent. Far-right online networks began organizing numerous protests the day after the attack. At this point, false information and anti-Muslim narratives were already widespread.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The rise of Islamophobia is a major challenge for social cohesion in Europe. Continued efforts are needed at individual, community and governmental levels to counter these trends, promote tolerance and ensure the safety of all communities. We are concerned about the alarming rise in Islamophobic incidents in several countries, which take the form of online hate, restrictions, exclusion and state persecution:

- States should fulfill their obligations under international law to eliminate all forms of discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief and provide a human rights response to Islamophobia.
- If the promotion of religious hatred constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, it must be prohibited by law under international standards.
- States and religious actors have a responsibility for human rights and must take action against such violations in accordance with the Rabat Plan of Action.
- International law requires states to prohibit the promotion of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence in accordance with Article 20(2) of the ICCR. Governments must act accordingly.

International Solidarity Movement (ISM) NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM THROUGH PROMOTING INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT, TOLERANCE AND RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY Report, United Nations Development Programme

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