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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Fifty-ninth session  
Item 11 (e) of the provisional agenda

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTIONS OF:  
RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Written statement\* submitted by the B'nai B'rith International,  
a non-governmental organization on the Roster

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

[14 February 2003]

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\*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

1. Resolution 2002/9 adopted on 15 April 2002 contains many laudable principles in support of religious tolerance and mutual comprehension both in its preambular and operative portions. However, in deploring specific acts of intolerance and physical violence, the resolution singles out such acts only when they are directed against Islam and Muslim minorities, places of worship, cultural centres and other institutions. Moreover, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is directed "to examine the situation of Muslim and Arab peoples in various parts of the world ... and to submit a preliminary report on his findings for consideration by the Commission at its next session." (underlining added). Whereas the Resolution is "alarmed at the impact of the events of 11 September 2001 on Muslim minorities and communities in some non-Muslim countries", H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan in referring to these events -- more appropriately -- stated: "All religions have suffered from the violence and extremism of a few." ("The real voice of Islam", International Herald Tribune, 14/15 December 2002).
2. B'nai B'rith International, the oldest international Jewish humanitarian and advocacy organization engaged in the struggle for human rights and against religious discrimination for 160 years, is concerned that the Resolution limits the Commission's attention to only one aspect of religious discrimination around the world today, whereas discrimination and intolerance have been observed vis-a-vis other religious groups in the recent past as well.
3. After the publication of an exhaustive two-year study commissioned by H.H. Pope John-Paul II ("Ils sont morts pour leur foi," Ed. Plon), he concluded that never since the period of the Catacombs had Christians been so persecuted as during the 20th century and stated: "At the end of the 2nd millennium, the Church has again become a Church of martyrs". Countries where anti-Christian violence and discrimination have been observed span the globe, with particular vehemence in certain countries of Africa and South/Southeast Asia. In certain Muslim countries, Christians along with Jews are "beneficiaries" of governmental "tolerance" ("Dhimmi"), that actually masks their status of second-class citizens.
4. The persecution of the Baha'i in Iran over the years and manifestations of anti-Hindu violence in India, where an entire train of pilgrims was massacred during the last year, also merit the Commission's attention.
5. In Western Europe anti-semitism, a historically unique form of racism which is fed by prejudice stemming from religious, ethnic, national and racial sources, has experienced an exponential growth in the last few years, not evidenced since the 1930's. During the single month when the Commission of Human Rights adopted its Resolution -- April 2002 - the American Jewish Committee counted almost 200 anti-Semitic incidents throughout the world, with particular frequency and ferocity in Western Europe. American university campuses have also witnessed expressions of unabashed anti-Semitism, such as slogans in praise of the Holocaust and demands for visual identification of Jewish students and teaching staff. One of the most lamentable incidents of anti-Semitism over the last year was the broadcast throughout the Arab world of a 41-part "historical" drama called "Horsemen without a Horse" by the Egyptian State television,

which is being described as a “work of art”, even though it is based on the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, the infamous document produced by Czarist Russia’s political police “Okhrana” in the late 19th century, exposed as a forgery by the London Times in 1920 and used by anti-Semitic groups throughout the world ever since, including by Nazi Germany in preparation for the Holocaust. The reply of the Egyptian delegation to questions on anti-Semitism in the Egyptian media raised in the Human Rights Committee last October simply referred to the “Semitic” origin of the Egyptian people, thereby allegedly making manifestations of anti-Semitism impossible by definition, although the TV series, like other anti-Semitic propaganda, is exclusively directed against Jews, regardless of their vernacular language, rather than against people speaking languages of Semitic origin.

6. In view of the diverse nature of religious intolerance in today’s world, it behooves the Commission to expand last year’s resolution, requesting the Special Rapporteur to include forms of religious intolerance other than those directed against Islam and Muslims, such as persecution and intolerance against Christians, Baha’i and Jews, and eliminating references to ethnic groups that introduce political elements into a resolution designed to “combating defamation of religions.”

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