

U.S. Statement on Religious Intolerance

Human Rights Council

Mr. President, the United States shares the concern of those who are disturbed by incitement to racial and religious hatred, and those who favor the promotion of tolerance and greater understanding. The promotion of tolerance goes hand in hand with the respect for religious freedom, ~~which is~~ a fundamental belief in the founding of the United States ~~and which~~ ^{THAT} remains a core objective of U.S. foreign policy. It is ~~also~~ articulated in our ~~the~~ Constitution, as well as in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

The vast majority of the world's people have religious beliefs that they cherish and hold dear. It is because people view religion as playing a central role in their lives that many regard religious freedom as the most important of all human rights. At

the same time, global trends often lead to significant overlap between religious identity and ethnicity, class, language group, or political affiliation. Invariably, there will be a natural tension between respect for religious diversity and freedom of expression, a tension that we have all seen erupt in serious, sometimes violent misunderstanding ~~in recent weeks and months~~. The sacred principle of freedom of speech and expression needs to be preserved, as we promote respectful dialogue between cultures and religions as the antidote to prevent intolerant and hateful acts against particular religious ^{individuals of} groups.

As noted in the 1981 ~~United Nations Declaration~~ on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, it is essential to promote understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to

~~freedom of religion and belief.~~ Those exercising their legitimate freedom of expression must be sensitive to the potential for harm their words may cause. In turn, States must ensure that religious freedom is respected in their countries for all religions, be they Christian, Muslim or Jewish, or be they Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Baha'i or any other religion. The freedoms not to affiliate with any religion at all, to change religion or belief, and to manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance must also be respected by all UN members. For surely promoting tolerance is the first necessary step to developing a genuine respect for our differences – and also to laying the foundation for understanding and fully appreciating our similarities. ~~For it is greater understanding that is our need today – and that understanding is a daily, weekly, monthly process – gradually altering opinions, slowly eroding all barriers, quietly building new structures of understanding.~~