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Statement

By

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United Nations**

**On Behalf of the Organization of the Islamic
Conference**

**On the Report of the Special Rapporteur on
Freedom of Religion and Belief**

**At the
Sixth Session of the Human Rights Council**

**Geneva
13 September 2007**

Statement by Ambassador Masood Khan,
Permanent Representative of Pakistan on behalf of the OIC
on the report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion or belief

Mr. President,

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the OIC.

We appreciate the efforts made by Ms. Jilani in bringing out a detailed report on different forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. In her effort, she has identified a number of pressing issues impinging upon this fundamental freedom.

The OIC attaches importance to this mandate. It has been vocal in voicing concerns related to a number of issues highlighted in this report. The subject has acquired added significance in the post September 2001 scenario and hence there is a need for making collective efforts to eliminate intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

The Special Rapporteur has said that "following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US, religious intolerance has surfaced in a much more significant way with some religions directly being linked to terrorism, such as Islam and Muslims who have become targets in an unfair and illegal manner". She also called for stronger denunciation of violence by religious leaders in order to "de-link" Islam from terrorism.

Denunciations of terrorisms and extremisms have been made by opinion leaders of the Muslim world. A matching response has not been forthcoming. The ever growing incidents of religious intolerance coupled with democratic legitimization of xenophobic tendencies in the Western societies are taking us far from the aim of religious and cultural harmony.

The OIC condemns and shares concerns of the Special Rapporteur on the issues of forced religious conversions of the members of minorities by the majority religious groups, attacks on the places of worship, unlawful restriction on the use or display of religious symbols and the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children. Under international law and human rights law, states are not only responsible to safeguard the rights of minorities including their religious identity but also to provide protection from abuses committed against them by the non state actors.

Mr. President,

Lately, in order to shrug off responsibility, some states have linked the freedom of religion with the freedom of expression and opinion. The OIC deplors such moves and reiterates its belief that all rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, as also acknowledged by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 1993. Unrestricted and disrespectful freedom of opinion creates hatred and is contrary to the spirit of peaceful dialogue and promotion of multiculturalism. The very article 19 of ICCPR providing for freedom of opinion itself acknowledges the importance of restrictions on this right. Article 20, therefore, goes on to suggest prohibition by law of any advocacy of racial or religious hatred.

The report rightly states that the freedom of thought, conscience and religion is of such paramount importance that it can not be derogated even during the times of emergencies. Equating certain religions with terrorism would have far reaching consequences for its followers. Even terrorist acts carried out by non state actors, in the name of religion, should be de-linked from religion to ensure freedom of religion for the peaceful followers of that faith. States therefore, must ensure that adequate safeguards are provided in national legislations for freedom of religion and belief to all without distinction together with effective remedies to cater for the violations of these rights.

Ms. Jehangir has highlighted that the disregard for and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, continue to bring, directly or indirectly, wars and great suffering to humankind". Further efforts are, therefore, needed to be made to eliminate intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Human rights education can, serve as a valuable tool in promoting respect and tolerance towards multiculturalism and interfaith harmony in different societies.

Incitement to the racial and religious hatred is a serious problem. It has huge economic and political costs and it strikes at the heart of human rights. The Council should, therefore, take responsibility to promote harmony and to make firm laws that would help avert the worst consequences of racial and religious discrimination.

I thank you Mr. President.