

Statement by H E Iruthisham Adam, Permanent Representative of Maldives: Panel on Religious Tolerance

Thank you Mr. President,

The Maldives would like to sincerely thank Pakistan, as coordinator of the OIC, for organizing this extremely important and timely panel debate, as well as the High Commissioner and the panelists for their thought-provoking interventions.

Mr. President,

The Maldives was pleased to cosponsor Resolution 16/18 which was, in our view, one of the most important resolutions adopted by this Council.

Islamophobia and other forms of intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of persons based on religion or belief is one of the most pressing human rights concerns of our time. The problem is not new but has reached new heights in our globalized world where ideas and information, whether good or bad, move from one country to the next, and one individual to the next, with startling ease. This, together with the fall-out from 9/11 and the War and Terror, have led to a situation where Muslims around the world face daily intolerance and discrimination.

The Maldives believes Resolution 16/18 offers an excellent platform for addressing this global problem. It provides a comprehensive framework for action including awareness-raising and education, legislative steps and administrative measures. Most importantly, it was adopted by consensus. Only by working together, by taking action individually and

collectively, can States hope to build a world where people of all faiths and religions live side-by-side in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance, understanding and good-will.

This last point – the importance of all States working individually as well as collectively – is, we think, key.

In the context of tackling Islamophobia, this means that the Maldives does expect countries, especially in the West, which are faced with problems stemming from societal intolerance and vilification of Muslim minorities, to take real and robust action in line with Resolution 16/18. But it also means that we in the Maldives, and in the wider Islamic world, must be willing to also take steps to promote a better understanding of our religion and what it stands for, and to promote dialogue with people of other faiths.

In the Maldives, we are very conscious of this challenge. Like many other countries, we are faced with the growing threat of religious extremism. The Maldives believes in a zero-tolerance approach to those who try to pervert the true nature of Islam and use it to further agendas premised on hate and terror. All States have a responsibility to take robust action, including legal action, against those who advocate violence in the name of religion. Yet it is also important to defeat such people in the battle of ideas. For example, in the Maldives, we are working, in our new democracy, to counteract the false perception that religion must reside in a natural state of tension with democratic institutions and rule of law, or that people must make the false choice between devotion to Islam on the one hand, and the full enjoyment of human rights on the other.

None of this is easy, for the simple reason that the Maldives does not exist in a vacuum. Rather, we are buffeted by global winds. Unless we can build tolerance and understanding internationally, we will not succeed in establishing them in the Maldives.

This is why, in response to the numerous UPR recommendations we received on matters of religious tolerance, the Maldives recently announced its intention to organize, during 2012, a major international conference on progressive Sharia jurisprudence and human rights. With this conference we hope to revive the concepts of peace and tolerance, co-existence and inter-faith harmony that exist in Islam. Our aim is to begin a dialogue with people of all faiths in order to promote an open debate of ideas, tackle misperceptions and show that Islam is entirely compatible with international human rights norms.

Mr. President,

With this in mind, the Maldives would like to ask the panel how we can combine efforts like the one I have just mentioned, with similar national initiatives elsewhere, in order to create collaborative networks and produce an international momentum for change.

Thank you.