

Agenda Item 3: “Protection of the existence of and prevention of violence against religious minorities”

**Delivered by the Delegation of the United States of America
Sixth Forum on Minority Issues
Geneva, November 26, 2013**

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

The United States deplores any act of violence against individuals of all faiths on the basis of religion or belief.

We wholeheartedly believe that education and dialogue are some of the most effective tools to help prevent sectarian violence and foster religious tolerance and understanding. We remain deeply concerned with the ongoing violence, persecution, and harassment that members of religious minorities face around the world, particularly in the Middle East and South and Central Asia. In our foreign policy, we use a full range of tools, including public condemnation of abuses, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, and partnerships with NGOs to administer country-specific programs to promote tolerance and protect members of minorities.

The United States supports Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, which focuses on concrete, positive measures that states can take to combat religious bias and intolerance. We as well strongly endorse the Istanbul Process, and we call upon all states to fully implement Resolution 16/18.

The United States government actively works to protect all its residents from threats and violence directed at them because of their religion or ethnicity, and to prevent acts of discrimination against them in the workplace, schools, and many other areas.

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Department of Justice has brought scores of federal prosecutions against individuals for committing acts of violence, threats, assaults, and vandalisms targeting Arabs, Muslims, Sikhs, and South Asians, and those perceived to be members of these groups. In the civil law context, the Department of Justice has, for example, brought suits to protect the right of individuals in places of work and study to express their religious beliefs. Examples of such suits involved the ability of a Muslim student to wear a headscarf to school, protecting Muslim and Sikh students from harassment, and

protecting the ability of Muslim and Jewish employees to wear religious clothing and to take time off from work for religious observances.

The United States is taking steps to engage with members of diverse communities and create mechanisms to address potential areas of conflict. The Community Relations Service (CRS) of the U.S. Department of Justice, for example, is a federal program that is available to state, local, and tribal jurisdictions to help prevent and resolve racial and ethnic conflict and to employ strategies to prevent and respond to alleged violent hate crimes committed on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. From years of experience on a wide range of cases, CRS has developed a set of “best practices” to assist localities in preventing hate crimes and restoring harmony in communities.

As one example of its work, following arson attacks on churches, mosques, and Sikh gurdwaras, CRS staff members have worked directly with hundreds of local jurisdictions to train community leaders and law enforcement officers, conduct community dialogues, and provide assistance to bring together law enforcement agencies and members of minority neighborhoods. Among CRS’s activities is the presentation of the Arab, Muslim, and Sikh Awareness and Protocol Seminar – a series of educational law enforcement protocols for federal, state, and local officials. CRS also created a law enforcement roll-call video entitled “The First Three to Five Seconds,” which helps police officers reduce tension by differentiating between threats and cultural norms in non-crisis situations involving members of religious minorities. CRS has brought students and parents together with local law enforcement, government, and school officials to address allegations of discrimination and harassment in schools through cultural professionalism programs.

Full protection of the freedom of religion or belief for members of religious minorities, education, and tolerance promotion are some of the best ways to protect the existence of and prevent violence against members of religious minorities.

Drafted: IO/HRH: RKris

Cleared: IO/HRH: PFrayne (ok)
DRL/IRF: AMcIntyre (ok)
DRL/MLGA: ASuleman (ok)
L/HRR: SRajpal (ok)
L/HRR: JTampio (ok)
DOJ/CRT: ETreene (ok)
Geneva: STownley/ANeedham (ok)