

**Sixth session of the Human Rights Council**

**Intervention by Ambassador Elchin Amirbayov of Azerbaijan**

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief  
13.09.2007, Geneva**

Let me first of all align myself with the intervention made by Pakistan on behalf of the OIC.

We, like others, welcome Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Madame Asma Jahangir once again to the Human Rights Council and would like to thank her for the detailed and comprehensive statement and report.

Unfortunately, since her last appearance before the Council not much has changed and the international community continues to witness, maybe with even more intensity, in the stances of religious and cultural prejudice, misunderstanding, intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. We thank Ms Jahangir for highlighting in her report the worrying trends in the field of freedom of religion or belief describing various contemporary manifestations of religious intolerance over the world. The report proves the significance of the mandate which Azerbaijan fully supports and looks forward to cooperating with in the months and years to come.

Special Rapporteur touched upon a broad range of manifestations of religious intolerance in her report. And given the scarcity of time available I will not go in all of those, since many of them have already been covered by the previous speakers. I'd like to dwell upon a couple of issues reflected in the document.

It is our strong conviction that the national authorities should respect the religious communities' right to freedom of religion or belief. In the same manner the religious communities should abide by the national legislation by rejecting all forms intolerance, spreading radicalism and extremism. Only through balance and mutual respect would it be possible to strengthen genuine religious harmony in society.

Special Rapporteur refers to the cases where members of religious groups try to convert other persons by "unethical means" such as material benefit or by taking advantage of their vulnerable situation. While sharing the view by Special Rapporteur that perhaps it would not be advisable to criminalize such acts, we believe this issue may be also considered from a broader perspective with a particular emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights of the converted person.

Indeed, places of worship and other religious sites more and more become a subject to attacks and vandalism in the world, in particular in the context of armed conflicts. This is even more true in the occupied territories that for most of the time have turned into the so-called uncontrolled gray zones unreachable for the international scrutiny and fertile for various kinds of criminal and illegal activities. We fully share the opinion of the Special Rapporteur that States should pay increased attention to attacks on places of worship and ensure that all perpetrators of such attacks are properly

prosecuted. This is certainly true with regard to States that are for the time being in control of those occupied territories. Unfortunately, this kind of calls often are left unheeded and places of worship are misused for illegitimate purposes, leading to their abuse and desecration. We strongly believe that the Human Rights Council should pay proper attention to addressing this serious challenge. *I would appreciate S.P.'s thoughts on how exactly this could be done?*

We share your view, Madame Special Rapporteur, that inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue is very crucial for the prevention of intolerance and discrimination and for promoting respect for religions and beliefs. We have to keep fresh in mind last year's controversy around cartoons and its serious consequences in order not to repeat this kind of unfortunate incidents in the future. Such kinds of incidents have an adverse affect to our global efforts to create an atmosphere for dialogue among civilizations and various cultures. The minimum prerequisite for harmonious coexistence is that different civilizations and traditions recognize and mutually respect each other's cultural differences. We need an approach that understands importance to preserve and respect differences as enriching elements instead of abandoning them to create fertile ground for enmity and hatred.

I thank you.