

Assessment of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion or belief's mandate
Mandate holder: Ms. Asma Jahangir

EU intervention

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

We again thank Ms. Jahangir for the excellent report delivered yesterday which provided a very useful overview of the mandate on freedom of religion or belief established in 1986.

Since 1986, the mandate has dealt with a number of important issues of concern including violations of individuals' freedom to adopt, change or renounce a religion or belief and forms of discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief. It has also highlighted particularly vulnerable groups, and has dealt with the relationship between freedom of religion or belief and other human rights such as freedom of expression, the right to life, and the right to liberty.

The particularly sensitive nature of the issues relating to freedom of religion or belief is a challenge that makes this mandate particularly difficult to discharge, and the EU would like to use this occasion to compliment you and your predecessors in the non-selective manner in which you have

addressed and advanced the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Despite the mandate's role in increasing awareness of the problems of discrimination based on religion or belief, the very complete international human rights standards concerning freedom of religion or belief as well as non discrimination based on religion or belief, and the steps taken to combat intolerance, the EU concurs in your assessment that significant further efforts need to be made at international and national levels to implement all these commitments in order to eliminate intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

The EU also agrees that these efforts should include ways and means to prevent violations of freedom of religion or belief and welcomes the Special Rapporteur's recommendations in this regard.

As you, Ms. Jahangir, have stated one year ago before this body, "it is apparent that the right to freedom of religion or belief is often violated and reluctantly protected". It is a reason for great concern that, after 26 years, the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief still lacks universal implementation.

For this reason, the EU is proposing to renew this mandate for a further period of 3 years in the present Council's session in the context of the draft resolution on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief.

Finally, the EU would like to commend you for the tools you have developed, namely the framework for communications and the online digest available on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They provide a very useful insight into the international human rights standards pertaining to freedom of religion or belief and their practical illustration by the mandate-holders' findings since 1986. They also constitute an example of best practices to be highlighted in the context of the special procedures' work.

We would now like to ask you the following questions on your mandate:

1 – Having identified and summarized in your report the issues of concern that were analysed since the beginning of this mandate, what in your view should be the priorities for the mandate/holder in the next three years?

2 – Having also emphasized the importance of States devising strategies to prevent violations of the right to freedom of

religion or belief, namely through education, inter and intra-religious dialogue and cultural, dispassionate relationship between believers and non believers and cultural exchange programmes, do you envisage a role for this mandate to work further in the area of prevention?

3 – And finally, what attention should be devoted in the next mandate period to the vulnerable groups and strategies to address their situation?

I thank you very much.