

The United States is pleased to join consensus on this resolution. We congratulate the sponsors of this resolution for what we hope can become a blueprint for constructive, meaningful actions that the international community will take to promote respect for religious differences.

We have long shared the concerns of the sponsors and others about intolerance, discrimination and violence directed against persons on the basis of their religion or belief. It is deeply concerning that these problems persist in the 21st century in all regions of the world. As Secretary Clinton indicated here three weeks ago, it is time for the Council to step up efforts to combat these problems so as to make tangible improvements in people's lives. This resolution establishes the way forward.

The United States had been unable to support previous efforts of the sponsors to address these very real and serious problems, not because we disagreed with the stated goals, but because those efforts in our view paid insufficient attention to the individual-centered focus of international human rights law and sought to impose legal restrictions on expression as a means to combat intolerance, discrimination and violence based on religion or belief. Not only do we believe such restrictions are wrong and violate universal freedoms of expression and religion; we also are

convinced that they are counterproductive and exacerbate the very problems they ostensibly seek to address. We have seen in various parts of the world how governments have misused laws that criminalize offensive expression to persecute political opponents and minorities. In some cases those engaged in religiously motivated violence have pointed to such laws as justification for their actions.

The resolution being adopted today allows for criminalization of expression in only one circumstance – incitement to imminent violence. It calls upon states to take other measures to counter offensive expression. These include such actions as education, awareness-building, interfaith efforts, and urging political, religious and societal leaders to speak out and condemn offensive expression. The resolution specifically recognizes that the most effective antidote to offensive expression is more expression and the “open public debate of ideas,” not laws that restrict expression in the name of tolerance.

The approach taken by this resolution is one that upholds international human rights standards.

The resolution also sets forth a specific menu of proven measures to prohibit discrimination and invidious profiling, and calls upon states to enforce those

prohibitions effectively. The resolution also calls on states to implement laws to prohibit hate crimes against persons, which are violent crimes such as assault, property destruction, or even murder, motivated by, among other things, bias based on religion or belief. And it expressly recognizes the importance of providing all adherents of religions or beliefs equal protection of the law.

Mr. President, each of us has a lot of work to do to turn the actions recommended in this resolution into reality. To succeed, the approach outlined here must be more than words on paper in a UN resolution. It must be a call to action for each of our governments to take the assertive, concrete measures specified in the resolution. The United States urges member states to heed the call in the resolution to provide updates on the efforts they are making in this regard as part of ongoing reporting to OHCHR.

For our part, we will continue to advocate for robust implementation at home and in all parts of the world and will be working to develop follow on activities to further that goal.”