

International Community must pay attention to the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims worldwide

On 13 July 2021, UN human rights experts have expressed their deep concern over the lack of attention to the serious human rights violations perpetrated against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community around the world and called on the international community to step up efforts in bringing an end to the ongoing persecution of Ahmadi Muslims.

"It is of the utmost importance to shed light on the persistent human rights violations and the rising acts of discrimination against the Ahmadi Muslims worldwide, which we find deeply worrying," the experts said.

"We call on the international community to be vigilant and to undertake coordinated action to respond to the violations faced by the Ahmadi Muslims around the world, particularly in countries where their lives are most at risk."

While Ahmadis constitute a global religious community with rich history and tens of millions of members, we have received, for more than 15 years, reports of religious intolerance, discrimination and violence perpetrated against this community by state officials as well as non-state actors in a number of countries, including Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

In our capacity as Special Procedures mandate holders, we have intervened with the concerned Governments and strengthened awareness of international community about the dire situation in which Ahmadis find themselves and we have raised serious concerns at the panoply of human rights violations suffered by them. Such violations are not limited to existing discriminatory institutional and legal settings, but they also extend to acts and coordinated campaigns of discrimination, stigmatization and blatant aggression against their identity, cultural, social and political existence, often on the grounds of a perceived and politically instrumentalized doctrinal disagreement around Islam, and the entrenched prejudice that they are not to be considered as "real Muslims".

We note with concern the existence of laws and regulations that promote and institutionalize the predominance of majority ethno-religious communities over minorities, and the promotion of certain religions and beliefs over others. Such institutional and legal frameworks impose significant obstacles in the enjoyment of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including the principle of non-discrimination, the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, freedom of opinion and expression, as well as cultural and socio-economic rights guaranteed in international human rights instruments, including in the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and the 1992 UN

Declaration on the Rights Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Of particular concern are the constitutional provisions, special ordinances, ministerial decrees and religious *fatwas* that stigmatize and discriminate against the Ahmadiyya community in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, and which prohibit Ahmadis from identifying themselves as Muslims, freely expressing their beliefs, practicing their faith, and from effectively participating in public life. Ahmadis are often denied access to public-service employment on religious grounds and are particularly vulnerable to violations under laws on offences relating to religion (blasphemy laws). They are also targeted by laws regulating new technologies and social media platforms, with the aim to suppress their dissenting views and beliefs, enhance control of their minority communities and further increase their persecution through coordinated online hate campaigns and, in certain cases, online coordinated acts of collective punishment.

Furthermore, we note with grave concern the application of discriminatory regulations that appear to aim at denying Ahmadis' fundamental freedoms as citizens, including inter alia their voting rights and their access to identification documents, as well as imposing administrative obstacles in the enjoyment of their right to form and maintain associations.

In addition to discriminatory legislative and policy frameworks, Ahmadiyya Muslims have often been the target of discrimination, exclusion, hate campaigns and violence, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, verbal and physical attacks in the public sphere, as well as attacks against their cultural sites and places of worship. Ahmadi women are particularly affected, as they face harassment and discrimination due to their distinctive traditional Ahmadi attire, which makes them immediately recognisable, while Ahmadi children and youth are often denied admission to schools and higher education institutions because of their faith, and constantly suffer intimidation and bullying, thus forcing them to drop out and interrupt their studies. Reports also indicate that Ahmadis are still portrayed in a negative light in school textbooks, while Ahmadiyya educational institutions are often seized and administratively closed by state authorities.

Furthermore, the recent pandemic outbreak has exacerbated existing religious intolerance and discrimination against minority communities and vulnerable groups worldwide, including the Ahmadis, who have been particularly affected by the upsurge in incitement to hatred and stigmatization, and the propagation of disinformation, holding them responsible for the development and spreading of the COVID-19 virus.

We recall the international standards on non-discrimination and prohibition of any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. We also draw attention to the authoritative interpretation of article 18 of the ICCPR, providing for protection and promotion of all rights under the Covenant – including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (article 18), and the rights of minorities protected under article 27 – even in those cases in which a certain religion is recognized as a State religion, or that it is established as official or traditional, or that its followers comprise the majority of the population. The protection, promotion and fulfilment of the human rights of the adherents of any religion or belief is not contingent upon the official recognition of such a religion or belief. At the same time, the institutionalisation and official recognition of certain beliefs or religions should in no circumstance become the reason or the basis for discrimination of any kind against adherents of other beliefs or religions.

We strongly urge all States to:

- a. a) Repeal all laws that discriminate against Ahmadi Muslims, including laws that curtail their right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, opinion and

expression, offline and online, and amend them in accordance with international human rights standards;

- b. b) In particular, repeal all blasphemy laws or at least, amend them in compliance with the strict requirements of the ICCPR and its articles 2, 19 and 26;
- c. c) Strengthen legislative and institutional responses in effectively addressing hate speech and incitement to national, racial or religious hatred, in accordance with the established international human rights standards and by integrating the guidance provided the Rabat Plan of Action;
- d. d) Ensure equal and effective participation of Ahmadis in public life and in decision-making processes that affect them, including by guaranteeing their political representation and their free exercise of their right to vote; by guaranteeing their access to employment and public services of any kind, and by protecting their right to form and maintain their associations and organizations;
- e. e) Address the multiple and intersecting forms of violence and discrimination suffered by Ahmadi women, children and refugees;
- f. f) Rescind any bans on Ahmadiyya publications, and ensure that Ahmadis fully enjoy their right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, including through any media of their choice;
- g. g) Protect and safeguard Ahmadi cultural places and places of worship against attacks and desecrations;
- h. h) Eliminate discrimination and exclusion of Ahmadi children in education and vocational training; undertake appropriate legislative and policy measures to address physical and psychological violence and bullying inside and outside school premises; and, revise and amend national curricula and textbooks to eliminate prejudicial references that perpetrate stigma against minorities, and with the aim of strengthening human rights education and promoting inter-religious, inter-cultural understanding and dialogue.
- i. i) Ensure accountability and prosecute all those responsible for violations and attacks against Ahmadis and other minorities, and design and implement human rights awareness-raising and training programmes for all relevant state institutions and public officials, with the active participation of Ahmadiyya communities, as well as of religious leaders representing different faiths.

ENDS

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