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CONSEIL DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

SPECIAL PROCEDURES OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

REFERENCE: AL G/SO 214 (78-15) G/SO 214 (56-23)
USA 4/2011

24 March 2011

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; and as Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251 and to Human Rights Council resolutions 6/37 and 7/34.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **burning of a copy of the Qur'an by church members of the Dove World Outreach Center** in Gainesville, Florida. Their initial plan to burn copies of the Qur'an on 11 September 2010 has already been subject of our allegation letter dated 8 September 2010, to which we have not yet received a reply from your Excellency's Government.

According to new information received:

On a website, the Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Florida, publicly announced that it would hold a mock trial entitled "International Judge the Qur'an Day" on 20 March 2011. In an online poll, 14 out of 15 people reportedly found the Qur'an guilty of "inciting murder, rape and terrorist activities" and that it was "under suspicion of the direct or indirect murder of millions of people around the world".

On 20 March 2011, a copy of the Qur'an was soaked in kerosene and set on fire by pastor Wayne Sapp under the supervision of pastor X. Around 30 people attended this event in Gainesville and photos of the mock trial were subsequently posted online.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we would like to appeal your Excellency's Government to take all necessary steps to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief in accordance with the principles set forth in the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion

or Belief and article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Furthermore, we would like to refer to General Assembly resolution 64/164, in which the Assembly urges States “to step up their efforts to protect and promote freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and to this end: [...] (h) To exert the utmost efforts, in accordance with their national legislation and in conformity with international human rights law, to ensure that religious places, sites, shrines and symbols are fully respected and protected and to take additional measures in cases where they are vulnerable to desecration and destruction; [...] (k) To take all necessary and appropriate action, in conformity with international standards of human rights, to combat hatred, discrimination, intolerance and acts of violence, intimidation and coercion motivated by intolerance based on religion or belief, as well as incitement to hostility and violence, with particular regard to members of religious minorities in all parts of the world; (l) To promote, through education and other means, understanding, tolerance, non-discrimination and respect in all matters relating to freedom of religion or belief by encouraging a wider knowledge in the society at large of the history, traditions, languages and culture of the various religious minorities existing within their jurisdiction”.

We would also like to refer to the Durban Programme of Action, which in paragraph 211 “urges leaders of religious communities to continue to confront racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance through, inter alia, promotion and sponsoring of dialogue and partnerships to bring about reconciliation, healing and harmony within and among societies, invites religious communities to participate in promoting economic and social revitalization and encourages religious leaders to foster greater cooperation and contact between diverse racial groups”. Furthermore, paragraph 106 of the Durban Review Conference Outcome Document “reaffirms that the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance should aim not only at promoting equality and eliminating discrimination but also at promoting interaction, social harmony and integration, respect for tolerance and diversity among ethnic, cultural and religious communities”.

We urge your Excellency’s Government to take all necessary measures to guarantee that the rights and freedoms of members of the Muslim community in the United States of America are respected and protected.

Moreover, it is our responsibility under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention. Since we are expected to report on these cases to the Human Rights Council, we would be grateful for your cooperation and your observations on the following matters:

1. Are the facts alleged in the above summary of the case accurate?
2. Has a complaint been lodged with regard to the burning of copies of the Qur’an in Gainesville?

3. Please provide the information on any initiatives taken by your Excellency's Government in this regard, including preventive ones.

We would appreciate a response within sixty days. We undertake to ensure that your Excellency's Government's response to each of these questions is accurately reflected in the reports we will submit to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Githu Muigai
Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial
discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief