

The OIC's Strategies and Impact on Combating Religious Defamation and Islamophobia

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Abstract: Since its inception, the OIC has been a pivotal force in combating defamation of religions. It has successfully mobilized international public opinion against the defamation of religious symbols, Quran burning, and Islamophobia-driven incidents. Through strategic use of its political influence, represented by its 57 member states, the OIC has generated significant legal and human rights momentum within the United Nations and its Human Rights Council. This has led to the adoption of several international resolutions that criminalize the defamation of religions and attacks on Islamic sanctities and symbols. This article examines the OIC's efforts in securing the adoption of UN Resolution 35/16, the international controversy it sparked, and the subsequent replacement with the landmark Human Rights Council Resolution 18/16. It also explores the launch of the Istanbul Process, aimed at implementing the provisions of this resolution, and the OIC's continued progress culminating in Resolution 53/1. Through these efforts, the OIC has solidified its achievements in defending religious freedom and the right to practice religion free from stereotypes and oppression, while also highlighting Islamophobia, which has recently become a top priority for the organization. The article employs an analytical method to investigate the topic's scientific material, identifying both the successes and shortcomings of the OIC in this critical area.

Keywords: Islam, defamation of religions, Quran, Islamophobia, OIC, UN, UNHRC

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Introduction

Since its foundation, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (hereinafter OIC) has evolved significantly. The OIC was founded in 1969 and has become the second-largest intergovernmental organization globally, following the United Nations. It consists of 57 member states located on four continents. The OIC was established in direct response to the arson attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Its primary objective is to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world, with the aim of fostering international peace and harmony. Over the years, the OIC has expanded its focus beyond political objectives and safeguarding Islamic holy sites, to encompass a diverse array of matters that impact its member nations, therefore establishing itself as a key player in world diplomacy (OIC 1972).

The OIC has a broad mandate that includes multiple areas of responsibility, such as promoting economic cooperation, fostering political cohesion, facilitating cultural interaction, encouraging scientific collaboration, and advocating for human rights. One of its main goals is to advance global peace and security, especially in areas of conflict that have a significant Muslim population. The organization has been actively engaged in resolving the Palestinian issue, endorsing the rights of the Palestinian people to determine their own fate, and fighting for the acknowledgment of East Jerusalem as the capital of a sovereign Palestinian state. Similarly, the OIC has adopted positions on various crises that have impacted the Muslim world, such as the conflicts in Kashmir, Bosnia, and more recently, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar (OIC 2024).

Within the domain of human rights, the OIC has demonstrated significant engagement in advocating for the rights of women, children, and marginalized people among its member states. The primary responsibility of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of the OIC is to guarantee the preservation of justice, equality, and the rule of law within the Muslim world. In addition, the OIC has placed growing emphasis on countering extremism and terrorism, pushing for a well-rounded strategy that tackles the underlying factors contributing to these issues, while also promoting a narrative centered around peace and moderation (OIC 2024).

An persistent concern that the OIC has tackled is the problem of religious defamation, which is both large and long-lasting. The release of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, in 1988 represented a pivotal event in the OIC's involvement with this matter. The book, deemed heretical by numerous Muslims, sparked extensive demonstrations throughout the Muslim world. The OIC, in accordance with the opinions of its member states, denounced the book and endorsed initiatives to prohibit its circulation. The Rushdie case underscored the necessity for a unified reaction from the Muslim community towards matters that were seen as affronts to Islam (OIC 1978).

The OIC's reaction to the Rushdie controversy was complex and had many different aspects. The actions taken included not only publishing statements denouncing the book, but also actively collaborating with international organizations such as the United Nations to advocate for increased consideration of religious sensitivities. The OIC promoted the establishment of international legislation to prohibit the defamation of faiths, so initiating a persistent battle inside the organization (Bielefeldt et al. 2016, 67).

The OIC's campaign gained momentum in the early 2000s, particularly following the September 11 attacks, which resulted in a widespread increase in Islamophobia worldwide. Another significant event in the OIC's involvement with the issue of defamation of religions was the Danish cartoons controversy in 2005-2006. The global demonstrations and heightened tensions between the Muslim world and the West were triggered by the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. The Organization contended that the vilification of Islam and the depiction of Muslims in an unfavorable manner were fostering a hostile atmosphere that posed a threat to peace and security.

From 1999 to 2010, the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council approved multiple resolutions against the defamation of religions, which received significant backing from member states of the OIC. These resolutions highlighted the importance of honoring religious symbols and beliefs and urged states to implement measures to prevent the defamation of religions. Nevertheless, Western countries criticized these resolutions, contending that they infringed upon freedom of speech and were incongruous with international human rights norms.

The OIC's strategic involvement at the United Nations has resulted in the acceptance of multiple significant resolutions with the objective of making acts of religious defamation illegal and safeguarding religious symbols and sanctities. Out of these, UN Resolution 35/16 is notable for being a significant accomplishment, despite the presence of controversy. The discussion over this resolution emphasized the intricate equilibrium between the right to freedom of speech and the safeguarding of religious convictions, a balance that continues to be a sensitive matter in the realm of international law and human rights discussions (Butt 2023).

In order to tackle these difficulties, the OIC played a crucial role in the acceptance of the significant Human Rights Council Resolution 18/16. This resolution replaced the previous one and aimed to build a more sophisticated strategy for countering religious defamation. The resolution also established the Istanbul Process, an ongoing endeavor that seeks to enforce the treaty's obligations and promote worldwide discussion on the matter. The efforts of the OIC have progressed and developed throughout time, ultimately resulting in the approval of Resolution 53/1. This resolution marks a key achievement in the organization's ongoing struggle to protect religious freedom and combat Islamophobia (OIC 2011).

This article explores the extensive endeavors of the OIC in this crucial domain,

offering a meticulous examination of the organization's achievements and obstacles. This study aims to shed light on the OIC's influence on global human rights discourse by analyzing diplomatic documents pertaining to its initiatives, particularly in relation to creating international standards on religious defamation. Furthermore, the paper will examine the consequences of the OIC's efforts in relation to the increasing prevalence of Islamophobia, a matter that has recently gained significant attention from the organization. This analysis seeks to enhance comprehension of the OIC's impact on the global arena and its continuous endeavors to safeguard religious freedom and foster peace in an increasingly intricate and divided world.

The International Debates on Defamation of Religions before Resolution No: 16/18

The OIC spearheaded efforts to garner extensive backing for novel global standards and legal structures aimed at tackling the issue of "defamation of religions." The OIC seeks to strengthen the unity and solidarity among Muslims and its member governments. Achieving this objective is arduous due to the heterogeneous composition of its member states, the strong focus on non-intervention in internal matters, and the OIC's comparatively constrained financial resources. Saudi Arabia continues to be the main financial backer, with prominent member states such as Pakistan, Malaysia, and Iran (OIC 2024).

Religious matters have gained significant importance for the OIC since the 1980s and 1990s. The OIC has become a prominent influencer in defining the current Islamic conversation. In 1989, the release of *The Satanic Verses* and the ensuing Rushdie affair led to the OIC issuing a declaration denouncing acts of blasphemy against Islam. Since the 1990s, the leadership of the OIC has become more worried about what it sees as a rising animosity towards Islam and Muslims in Western countries. As a result, the OIC has made steps to restrict the act of "defaming religions." (UN Human Rights Council 2011). In recent decades, the OIC has had a substantial impact on the UN, particularly during the tenure of Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the Turkish Secretary-General of the OIC from 2004 to 2013 (Butt 2023). Within the United Nations system, the OIC has effectively formed a powerful group of countries that vote together on matters like the "defamation of religions" agenda and the Palestinian cause. The OIC has established permanent delegations to the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU). Pakistan takes charge of coordinating the OIC's voting and policies in preparation for each session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva (Grim and Finke 2010).

The notion of "defamation of religions" was initially presented at the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1999, when Pakistan put forward a preliminary resolution on "Combating defamation of Islam." Zamir Akram, Pakistan's

ambassador in Geneva, asserted that the resolution was essential in addressing the emerging forms of intolerance, misunderstanding, and even hatred towards Islam and Muslims in different regions of the globe. Additionally, it aimed to confront the inclination in certain nations and international media to depict Islam as antagonistic towards human rights, posing a threat to the Western world, and linked with terrorism and violence (OIC 2024). The draft resolution highlighted the major passages that raised apprehension regarding the dissemination of intolerance against Islam through print, audiovisual, or electronic media. It also urged the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to provide a report on instances of hostility towards Islam and endeavors to malign its reputation. Despite the EU, Canada, and Japan expressing their disapproval of the draft's narrow focus on Islam, the resolution was ultimately accepted unanimously after Pakistan agreed to broaden its scope to include the defamation of other religions (U.S. Department of State 2015). An analogous resolution put forth in 2000 was likewise accepted unanimously. Nevertheless, in 2001 the OIC put forth a resolution urging nations to offer sufficient safeguards against any human rights infringements arising from religious defamation. However, Western powers insisted on a vote, leading to 28 countries voting in favor, 15 voting against, and 9 abstaining. Starting in 2001, resolutions supported by the OIC were put to votes (UN 2011).

The OIC sought to establish a worldwide agreement on the inclusion of prohibitions on “defamation of religions” in international human rights legislation by consistently proposing comparable resolutions annually. While commonly portrayed as a conflict between the “Islamic world” and the “West,” resolutions supported by the OIC received backing from countries outside of the Middle East and the so-called “Muslim world.” From 1999 to 2010, these resolutions were approved by a significant majority, receiving support from numerous Latin American, African, and Asian countries, including Russia and China (UNESCO 2011). At first, the Vatican endorsed these resolutions (de Rivero 2011).

Although the OIC presents itself as “the collective voice of the Muslim world,” the anti-defamation campaign at the UN did not specifically focus on religious aspects. Since its inception, OIC resolutions have employed secular human rights terminology to advocate for limitations on speech or behavior that may cause offense or ridicule towards religion, religious beliefs, and symbols. The term “defamation” was presumably chosen instead of ideas such as “blasphemy” or “sacrilege,” which are closely associated with religious doctrines. The term “defamation” is commonly used in various Western legal systems and is closely associated with secular human rights discussions, including issues of discrimination and the propagation of negative stereotypes (Soofi, 2017). Nevertheless, the notion of “defamation of religions” was a novel idea that lacked a counterpart in international law, as pointed out by legal expert Heini Skorini (Butt 2023). Skeptics of the OIC program frequently depict the utilization of human rights rhetoric as a tactic to garner backing for an authoritarian

copyright agenda designed to curtail freedom of expression and validate national blasphemy regulations (U.S. Department of State 2009). However, as Western governments have a dominant influence on the discussion of norms and rights within the UN, faith-based voices are required to express their concerns using the language and framework of human rights (Soofi 2017) By aligning the anti-defamation campaign with human rights rhetoric, the OIC was able to appeal to a wider audience and achieve a more significant influence on the international platform. Although this plan originally received support from many countries, it also meant that the OIC had entered into an area where human rights specialists and international monitoring groups had the advantage in terms of discourse and legal matters (Butt 2023).

Starting in 2005, the OIC's campaign against defamation of faiths encountered increasing resistance from influential individuals in the United Nations, the European Union, and other Western countries. The OIC capitalized on the 2005-2006 Danish cartoon scandal to intensify its campaign, demanding a legally enforceable resolution that would prohibit disrespect towards religious beliefs and provide penalties for those who violate it. Western states reacted by reasserting their liberal, pro-speech position, which prioritized the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. The agenda was strengthened by ethical and legal justifications put forth by multiple UN Special Rapporteurs (UNESCO 2011). In 2006, Asma Jahangir, who served as the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief from 2004 to 2011, expressed disapproval of the OIC's campaign and characterized blasphemy laws as "counterproductive" (de Rivero 2011). In 2008, a group of Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression issued a joint declaration stating that the concept of "religious defamation" does not conform to international defamation standards. These standards primarily aim to safeguard the reputation of individuals, whereas religions, like any other beliefs, cannot be said to possess their own reputation. They additionally implored the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council to refrain from adopting any more statements that endorse the concept of 'defamation of religions' (Grim and Finke 2010).

In early 2008, the United States significantly increased its diplomatic efforts to resist the resolution of the OIC. These efforts were important in successfully reversing the prevailing tendency within the UN (Soofi 2017) The United States became a member of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton personally expressed a firm opposition to the goal of "defamation of religions." In 2009, the Vatican, along with numerous Latin American governments, changed their stance on the resolution after initially supporting it (UN 2011). Furthermore, proponents of freedom of speech and groups dedicated to protecting human rights also rallied in opposition to the OIC campaign. In 2009, a global petition endorsed by two hundred civil society organizations implored the Human Rights Council to decline the resolution proposed by the OIC (Butt 2023). In 2010, the OIC resolution was adopted with a narrow margin of only three votes, as an increasing number of

countries changed their position. Confronted with this little difference, the OIC had three alternatives: to give up on the defamation attempt, to propose the same resolution and face the possibility of losing, or to reach a compromise on a new text with the United States and the EU. The influential member states of the OIC were split into two factions: Turkey and Pakistan advocated for a compromise, while Saudi Arabia and Egypt were opposed to it. Upon Pakistan's request for a vote, the majority of member states in the OIC voted in favor of accepting a new compromise wording (Grim and Finke 2010).

During the 2010 session of the Human Rights Council, the Secretary-General of the OIC put forward an eight-point plan that recognized the main issues made by diplomats from the United States and Western countries (U.S. Department of State 2009). The aforementioned wording served as the foundation for diplomatic discussions and resulted in a resolution proposed by Pakistan in 2011, titled "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against, individuals based on their religion or belief." With the adoption of Resolution 16/18 by agreement, there was optimism that the longstanding division between the "OIC stream" and the "Western stream" had finally been resolved (Butt 2023). Nevertheless, a more prudent evaluation indicates that the contrasting viewpoints and stances of the two parties were not truly resolved but rather amalgamated and equilibrated within a comprehensive document. Resolution 16/18 explicitly states that protection should be given to persons, not religions, and it is firmly based on the widely accepted human rights framework, albeit being inclusive in character (Soofi 2023).

Resolution 16/18 and the Aftermath

Resolution 16/18 was adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in March 2011, representing a notable endeavor to address religious intolerance on a worldwide scale. The resolution, officially named "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief," was hailed as a significant achievement in diplomacy (UN 2024). Its purpose was to reconcile the need to safeguard religious sensibilities with the imperative of maintaining freedom of expression.

The ratification of the resolution resulted in the creation of the Istanbul Process, an international structure designed to facilitate the implementation of Resolution 16/18. This is achieved through yearly meetings that bring together political leaders and stakeholders (UN 2024). This procedure was regarded as a hopeful opportunity for the OIC, the United States US, and the EU to collaborate on promoting religious tolerance. OIC Secretary-General Ekmelledin Ihsanoglu and US Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton expressed optimism regarding the potential influence of this partnership (U.S. Department of State 2011).

Resolution 16/18 aims to address religious intolerance by urging nations to take action against the “disparagement and negative portrayal of individuals based on their religion” (UN 2011). It prioritizes the safeguarding of individuals rather than specific religions or belief systems, indicating a departure from past resolutions supported by the OIC that aimed to defend religions as entities (Ibidem). The resolution emphasizes the significance of freedom of opinion and expression in bolstering democracy and countering bigotry, agreeing with the principles of free speech in the United States (Ibidem).

The objective is to reconcile the divergent viewpoints regarding the most effective approach to address religious intolerance, specifically between Western nations that value freedom of speech and Muslim-majority countries pushing for enhanced safeguards against the defamation of faiths (Ibidem). The resolution is organized based on numerous crucial clauses that demonstrate this intricate equilibrium.

Resolution 16/18 primarily includes a paragraph that condemns all types of religious intolerance, prejudice, and violence. The resolution unequivocally denounces any promotion of religious animosity that encourages prejudice, enmity, or aggression, redirecting attention from safeguarding religions to safeguarding individuals from harm prompted by religion (Ibidem). Furthermore, it urges states to implement and uphold legislation that forbids prejudice on the grounds of religion or belief, and to actively encourage acceptance and comprehension amongst diverse religious groups (Ibidem).

The resolution reiterates the significance of freedom of expression as a fundamental human right, acknowledging its crucial function in fostering tolerance and comprehension. The statement highlights the need of open and courteous communication in combatting religious intolerance. It also urges nations to foster freedom of speech in a way that acknowledges and upholds the rights of others, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. This section embodies the concerns of Western nations, which have traditionally emphasized the significance of freedom of speech in discussions around religious intolerance (Ibidem).

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Resolution 16/18 further emphasizes the promotion of interfaith dialogue and fostering mutual understanding. The resolution urges nations to endorse programs

that promote discussion and mutual respect among diverse religious communities, such as educational and awareness campaigns that cultivate tolerance and respect for religious diversity (Ibidem). The focus on interfaith conversation is considered a crucial element in the endeavor to address religious intolerance and avert conflicts arising from religious disparities (Ibidem).

The resolution additionally incorporates measures intended to safeguard religious places and symbols from vandalism and violence. The resolution urges states to implement effective measures to protect religious sites, places of worship, and symbols from attacks and vandalism. It acknowledges the significance of safeguarding these sites due to the rising incidents of violence that can worsen religious tensions and promote more intolerance (Bielefeldt et al. 2016, 67).

Resolution 16/18 calls upon states to revoke any discriminatory legislation or practices that specifically target individuals on the basis of their religion or belief, including laws that make blasphemy or apostasy a criminal offense. The resolution highlights the significance of guaranteeing that laws and policies align with international human rights norms and do not exhibit prejudice against individuals based on their religion or belief (UN 2011).

Paragraph 5(f) of the clause promotes the idea that states should make it a crime to provoke immediate violence based on religion or belief, which aligns with the legal notion in the United States known as “fighting words” (Ibidem). The paragraph, authored by American diplomats, played a vital role in obtaining backing for the resolution. Additionally, it underscored the contrasting perspectives held by United Nations member nations regarding freedom of expression and religious acceptance (Telle 2022).

Despite the initial positive outlook, the execution of Resolution 16/18 has encountered substantial obstacles. The resolution lacked legal enforceability and the agreement surrounding it was inherently unstable from the beginning (Telle 2022). The divergent expectations of Western powers and the OIC have further hindered the implementation of the initiative (Telle 2022).

Resolution 16/18 was perceived by Western states as a framework to tackle religious intolerance within their own borders. It specifically targeted censorship and limited religious freedom in countries with a Muslim majority (Dacey 2012). On the other hand, the OIC aimed to tackle matters such as provocation, anti-Islamic sentiment, and bias against Muslim communities in Western countries (UN 2012). The conflicting priorities have resulted in a deadlock in the Istanbul Process, particularly over the execution of Paragraph 5(f), which continues to be a contentious matter (Dacey 2012).

The absence of diplomatic dialogue and the failure to convene regular sessions within the Istanbul Process have impeded advancements (Dacey 2012). Since the implementation of Resolution 16/18, a total of seven meetings have taken place, with the most recent one occurring in 2019 (Farrar 2021). The scheduled meeting in

Pakistan, either in 2020 or 2021, did not occur, providing additional evidence that the Istanbul Process is currently suspended (Farrar 2021).

The discussion around incitement to violence has also drawn focus to the matter of blasphemy legislation. Western stakeholders perceive the execution of Resolution 16/18 as necessitating the revocation of these restrictions, which they consider to be troublesome for both the principles of free speech and freedom of religion or belief (Telle 2022). The Rabat Plan of Action, formulated by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, urges nations to repeal blasphemy laws and instead employ non-coercive strategies such as education and intra-religious dialogue to combat prejudice and the provocation of hatred (Awal 2015).

Nevertheless, the OIC has condemned Western nations for upholding blasphemy laws while simultaneously opposing them in global arenas, alleging their hypocrisy (Farrar 2021). The OIC has utilized specific judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to justify the implementation of blasphemy laws, asserting that they are essential for safeguarding religious sensibilities (Bleich 2019).

The OIC's strategy regarding hate speech and blasphemy laws indicates an attempt to expand the range of current hate speech regulations to encompass offenses against religion, so blurring the distinction between hate speech and blasphemy (Telle 2022). There are fears that this strategy could lead to the expansion of hate speech legislation to also serve as restrictions against blasphemy (Telle 2022).

The Istanbul Process: History, Objectives, Key Meetings, and Outcomes

The Istanbul Process emerged from a prolonged and frequently disputed discussion inside the UN over the interplay between freedom of expression and the safeguarding of religious beliefs. Over an extended period, the OIC has consistently advocated for resolutions that seek to address what it considers to be the “defamation of religions.” These resolutions, presented each year at the United Nations since the late 1990s, have advocated for legislative actions to prohibit speech or activities that are considered offensive to religious organizations, namely Islam (UN 2011).

Nevertheless, Western governments and human rights organizations strongly opposed these attempts, contending that they may potentially be utilized to legitimize censorship and stifle freedom of expression. The Western bloc argued that prioritizing the protection of religious beliefs over freedom of expression contradicted international human rights standards, which give more importance to individual rights rather than the safeguarding of abstract ideas or belief systems (URG team 2023).

A novel strategy arose as a result of this deadlock. Instead of prioritizing the safeguarding of faiths, the focus has switched towards safeguarding individuals from discrimination, violence, and intolerance rooted in religion or belief. The approval of UNHRC Resolution 16/18 in March 2011 represented a notable shift in focus and a

break from prior resolutions sponsored by the OIC. Resolution 16/18 prioritized the safeguarding of individuals over religions and aimed to tackle the underlying reasons behind religious prejudice using a mix of legal and non-legal approaches (UN 2011).

The Istanbul Process (IP 2020) was created with the aim of facilitating the execution of Resolution 16/18 by means of a sequence of multilateral gatherings and discussions. The main goals of the Istanbul Process are:

Combating Religious Intolerance: The objective of the Istanbul Process is to address and counteract intolerance, adverse stereotyping, and stigmatization of persons on the basis of their religion or belief. This encompasses the task of confronting and dealing with hate speech, discrimination, and acts of violence specifically targeted towards religious minority groups;

Promoting Freedom of Expression: The primary goal of the Istanbul Process is to guarantee that endeavors to address religious intolerance do not violate the right to freedom of expression. The method aims to strike a balance between safeguarding persons from being encouraged to engage in violent behavior and upholding the right to free expression as a fundamental human entitlement;

Encouraging Legal and Policy Reforms: The Istanbul Process promotes the adoption of legislative and policy measures by governments that are in line with the principles stated in Resolution 16/18. This encompasses the criminalization of incitement to violence that is motivated by religion or belief, while ensuring that laws are not too restrictive towards freedom of speech;

Facilitating Dialogue and Cooperation: The Istanbul Process serves as a forum for discussion and collaboration between United Nations member states, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and other relevant parties. The objective of the process is to establish agreement on the most effective methods for fostering religious tolerance and mitigating violence;

Enhancing Reporting and Monitoring: The Istanbul Process aims to improve the documentation and oversight of governmental efforts to enforce Resolution 16/18. This entails promoting and urging states to regularly provide updates on their advancements in addressing religious intolerance and safeguarding the freedom of expression;

Since its establishment in 2011, the Istanbul Process has organized multiple significant gatherings with the purpose of promoting the goals of Resolution 16/18. These sessions have served as a platform for nations and other stakeholders to exchange successful strategies, deliberate on obstacles, and pinpoint opportunities for additional cooperation:

First Meeting (Istanbul, 2011): The first meeting of the Istanbul Process occurred in Istanbul, Turkey, in July 2011. The summit, organized by the OIC, convened delegates from different UN member nations, international organizations, and civil society groups. The discussions centered around the execution of Resolution 16/18, with participants highlighting the necessity of adopting a comprehensive strategy

to address religious intolerance. The discussion ended with a pledge to maintain the conversation through further gatherings;

Second Meeting (Washington, D.C., 2011): The second convening of the Istanbul Process took place in December 2011 in Washington, D.C. and was hosted by the United States. The discussion was remarkable for its emphasis on the legal dimensions of enacting Resolution 16/18, namely the difficulty of reconciling freedom of speech with the prohibition of instigating violence. Attendees engaged in discussions regarding different domestic and global legal structures and examined strategies to align them with the goals of the resolution. The gathering emphasized the significance of involving civic society in developing religious tolerance;

Third Meeting (London, 2012): The third iteration of the Istanbul Process occurred in London, United Kingdom, during December 2012. The British government hosted this symposium, which focused on the significance of education in mitigating religious intolerance. The participants engaged in a discussion regarding the creation of educational programs and curricula that foster mutual comprehension and admiration among diverse religious and cultural factions. The group also discussed the influence of the media on public perceptions of religion and stressed the importance of responsible journalism in curbing the dissemination of religious animosity;

Fourth Meeting (Doha, 2013): The fourth meeting took place in Doha, Qatar, in 2013. The primary objective of this meeting was to discuss the execution of Resolution 16/18 within the framework of Islamic law, also known as Sharia. Representatives from nations with mostly Muslim populations discussed their efforts to foster religious tolerance within the context of Sharia law, while simultaneously confronting the difficulties presented by radical interpretations of Islam. The forum emphasized the significance of intra-religious communication and the involvement of religious leaders in combating extremism;

Fifth Meeting (Jeddah, 2014): The fifth assembly was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 2014. The meeting was notable for its emphasis on the involvement of international organizations in facilitating the execution of Resolution 16/18. The participants were delegates from the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the European Union (EU), and many other regional organizations. The debates emphasized the necessity for enhanced collaboration among global stakeholders in advocating religious tolerance and safeguarding freedom of speech. The group also discussed the matter of hate speech on social media and the difficulties of overseeing internet content;

Sixth Meeting (Singapore, 2016): The Istanbul Process convened its sixth conference in Singapore in 2016. The primary objective of this gathering was to discuss the involvement of the commercial sector in advancing religious tolerance. The participants engaged in a discussion of the obligations of businesses, namely in the technology and media sectors, to prevent the dissemination of religious animosity and foster an environment of diversity and inclusivity. The meeting also examined the

possibility of public-private partnerships in promoting the goals of Resolution 16/18;

Seventh Meeting (Netherlands, 2019): The seventh assembly was held in Geneva, Switzerland, in the year 2019. The discussion, organized by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), centered on the function of human rights institutions in overseeing and assisting the execution of Resolution 16/18. The participants deliberated on the capacity of the UN Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, and other human rights organizations to enhance their involvement in advocating religious tolerance and safeguarding freedom of expression;

Eighth Meeting (Geneva, 2019): The latest convening of the Istanbul Process took place in Geneva in 2019. This meeting reviewed the topics discussed in earlier meetings, with a specific emphasis on the difficulties of putting Resolution 16/18 into practice in the era of digital technology. The participants engaged in a discussion regarding the function of social media platforms in addressing hate speech and the possibility of utilizing new technology to foster interfaith discourse and enhance mutual comprehension. The summit also discussed the persistent difficulties presented by religious extremism and emphasized the necessity for continuous international collaboration in combating these risks.

The Istanbul Process has greatly enhanced worldwide endeavors to combat religious intolerance and maintain the right to freedom of speech by creating a reliable platform for debate and collaboration among a wide array of global participants. It has promoted comprehension and cooperation among diverse areas, religions, and sectors, facilitating the sharing of exemplary methods and inventive approaches to address intolerance (IP 2020). The process has additionally prompted legislative and policy reforms in numerous nations, resulting in the implementation or enhancement of legislation banning hate speech and instigation of violence. Furthermore, educational efforts have been established to cultivate religious tolerance. In addition, there have been enhancements in the reporting and monitoring systems, leading the United Nations to pass resolutions that urge countries to provide updates on their advancements in implementing Resolution 16/18. This further strengthens the initiatives aimed at combating religious intolerance (IP 2020).

Shifting toward Islamophobia

In the years 2022 and 2023, there was a significant rise in incidents of burning the Quʾran, particularly in Scandinavian countries. Additionally, there was a concerning surge in Islamophobic attacks targeting Muslims in various places globally. The escalating occurrences have been condemned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who characterized these actions as rude and provocative, with the intention of instigating violence and fostering division (UN

2023). During its fifty-third session on July 11, 2023, the Human Rights Council conducted an urgent debate regarding the increasing occurrence of intentional acts of religious animosity, which includes the defilement of the Holy Qur'an in different nations. The debate was initiated upon the request of Pakistan and Palestine, representing the member states of the OIC (UN 2023).

On July 12, 2023, the Human Rights Council passed Resolution 53/1, entitled "Countering Religious Hatred Constituting Incitement to Discrimination, Hostility or Violence." The resolution expressed strong disapproval of actions of religious animosity, such as the defilement of the Qur'an, and demanded that those responsible be held accountable in accordance with established principles of international human rights law. The statement called upon states to adopt national legislation and policies to deter and prosecute acts of religious animosity and instigation.

Resolution 53/1 seeks to address the issue of religious animosity that might result in prejudice, enmity, or physical aggression by pursuing various important goals. The document strongly encourages governments to strengthen their legal systems by implementing and executing legislation that specifically addresses hate speech and incitement to violence, while also ensuring the protection of fundamental freedoms (UN 2023). The resolution proposes the establishment of educational initiatives aimed at cultivating mutual respect and understanding among varied religious and cultural groups, with the goal of overcoming stereotypes and prejudices (Ibidem). The text emphasizes the significance of global collaboration, urging nations, international entities, and civil society to work together, exchange successful strategies, and endorse impactful actions against religious intolerance. Resolution 53/1 highlights the importance of providing justice and support services to victims of religious hate. Additionally, it demands the establishment of systems to oversee and document instances of religious animosity, mandating that nations consistently enhance their endeavors and exchange knowledge regarding effective tactics and obstacles (UN 2023).

The decision has contributed to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's accomplishments on the global stage, particularly in its endeavors to combat the issue of Islamophobia. The Secretary-General of the Organization, Mr. Hussein Ibrahim Taha, views this decision as a triumph for the Organization and its member nations in countering the escalating Islamophobia machinery prevalent in numerous countries worldwide. This machinery has started to noticeably impact international peace and stability (Ibidem).

The potential consequences of this Resolution on Islamophobia can be enumerated as follows:

Enhanced Legal Protections: Resolution 53/1 has a significant effect on Islamophobia by strengthening legal safeguards against hate speech and instigation of violence. The resolution encourages nations to enhance their legal structures, which will enable them to respond more effectively to anti-Muslim speech and actions. This

can result in the formulation of more precise definitions and stricter punishments for hate speech and discriminatory actions targeting Islam.

Promoting Education and Awareness: Education has a key role in combating Islamophobia. The focus of Resolution 53/1 on educational programs is in line with endeavors to foster comprehension and acceptance. Implementing educational initiatives that actively challenge misconceptions and offer precise knowledge about Islam and Muslim communities can effectively diminish prejudice and promote enhanced intercultural interaction.

Encouraging International Cooperation: The resolution's appeal for international collaboration bolsters endeavors to combat Islamophobia worldwide. Resolution 53/1 promotes cooperation between states and organizations to effectively address anti-Muslim discrimination by facilitating the exchange of best practices and resources. This can result in enhanced collaboration and inventive strategies to address Islamophobia.

Supporting Victims: The emphasis of Resolution 53/1 on providing assistance to individuals who have been targeted due to religious animosity is especially pertinent in combating Islamophobia. The resolution highlights the need of providing access to justice and support services for victims, ensuring that persons who face anti-Muslim violence or prejudice receive the necessary compensation and aid.

Monitoring and Reporting: The resolution's endorsement of surveillance and documentation measures can aid in monitoring and assessing the extent and consequences of Islamophobia. Consistent documentation of instances of anti-Muslim prejudice and violence facilitates a more comprehensive comprehension of the problem and aids in shaping governmental responses. Furthermore, it ensures that states are held responsible for tackling Islamophobia and implementing efficient remedies.

Conclusion

The OIC has been a prominent advocate for the rights of Muslims worldwide, specifically in its endeavors to address the defamation of faiths and the increasing prevalence of Islamophobia. By strategically engaging with international organizations like the UN, the OIC has effectively raised awareness of these challenges on a worldwide scale. This has resulted in the adoption of important resolutions and the promotion of programs such as the Istanbul Process. The organization's dedication to safeguarding religious freedoms, fostering intercultural discourse, and promoting peace and tolerance in a world characterized by growing polarization and conflict has been emphasized through these endeavors.

Nevertheless, the OIC's endeavors in these domains encounter very serious obstacles. An important challenge is the intricate equilibrium between promoting the

safeguarding of religious beliefs and maintaining the ideals of freedom of expression. The contradiction is apparent in the discussions around the resolutions advocated by the OIC, with detractors contending that attempts to make defamation of faiths a criminal offense may encroach upon freedom of speech. The persistent dispute has hindered the OIC's ability to secure unanimous backing for its objectives, especially from Western nations that regard freedom of speech as a fundamental human right. The organization faces challenges in addressing Islamophobia due to the diverse interpretations and legal systems regarding hate speech and religious expression in different areas. These differences often result in disagreements and inconsistencies when implementing international resolutions.

A notable obstacle that arises is the presence of political and cultural heterogeneity within the OIC itself. The organization consists of 57 member states that are located on four different continents. It includes a diverse spectrum of governmental systems, cultural practices, and religious perspectives. The presence of diversity, although advantageous, also poses a difficulty in reaching agreement on important matters. The absence of coherence and collective action among member nations has occasionally weakened the influence and efficacy of the OIC, especially when dealing with intricate matters such as Islamophobia, where member states may have divergent objectives and approaches.

Furthermore, the OIC's capacity to implement its resolutions and objectives is frequently constrained by its dependence on diplomatic coercion rather than legally enforceable processes. The organization has achieved success in increasing awareness and influencing global standards. However, its ability to bring about concrete changes on the ground is limited due to the non-binding nature of its resolutions and the differing levels of dedication from its member states. The OIC's efforts to support Muslim communities in regions such as Palestine, Kashmir, and Myanmar have not always resulted in tangible improvements in the lives of people impacted, highlighting a clear shortcoming.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, there exist substantial domains of progress that could augment the OIC's influence. It is imperative to enhance internal cohesion and promote increased collaboration among member states. This could involve creating more robust mechanisms for conflict resolution and decision-making within the organization, ensuring that the OIC can present a more united front on critical issues. In addition, the OIC might enhance its involvement with civil society, non-governmental organizations, and international human rights groups. Through the establishment of partnerships and alliances with entities outside of its member states, the OIC has the potential to enhance its voice and expand its influence in international forums.

The organization should consider investigating novel strategies for combating Islamophobia and the vilification of faiths in the era of digital technology. In light of the increasing prominence of social media and other digital platforms as arenas

for religious dialogue and, regrettably, the dissemination of hateful rhetoric, it is imperative for the OIC to formulate measures that effectively tackle these emerging circumstances. These activities may involve efforts to enhance digital literacy, combat online hate speech, and cultivate good narratives regarding Islam and Muslim communities in the digital realm.

Moreover, the OIC could broaden its scope to tackle the underlying factors contributing to Islamophobia, including economic disparity, social alienation, and political marginalization. The OIC can contribute to the reduction of the attractiveness of extremist ideology and the strengthening of resistance against Islamophobia by fostering social and economic growth among its member states. This comprehensive strategy will not only tackle the symptoms of the issue but also promote enduring solutions that cultivate peace, tolerance, and mutual respect.

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Ријад Амрауи

Стратегије и утицај Организације исламске сарадње у борби против клеветања религије и исламофобије

Сажетак: Од свог оснивања, Организација исламске сарадње (ОИС) представља кључну снагу у борби против клеветања религија. Успела је да мобилише међународно јавно мњење против вређања верских симбола, паљења Кур'ана и инцидената подстакнутих исламофобијом. Стратешким коришћењем свог политичког утицаја, који проистиче из 57 држава чланица, ОИС је покренула значајне правне и људскоправне процесе унутар Уједињених нација и њеног Савета за људска права. То је довело до усвајања више међународних резолуција које криминализују клеветање религија и нападе на исламске светиње и симболе. У овом чланку анализирају се напори ОИС-а да обезбеди усвајање Резолуције УН 35/16, контроверзе које је изазвала на међународном плану, као и њена замена историјском Резолуцијом Савета за људска права 18/16. Такође се разматра покретање Истанбулског процеса, који има за циљ спровођење одредби те резолуције, као и даљи напредак ОИС-а који је кулминирао Резолуцијом 53/1. Кроз ове напоре, ОИС је учврстила своја достигнућа у одбрани верских слобода и права на верску праксу без стереотипа и угњетавања, истовремено наглашавајући проблем исламофобије, која је у последње време постала један од њених приоритета. Чланак користи аналитички метод у разматрању научног материјала, указујући и на успехе и на недостатке ОИС-а у овој кључној области.

Кључне речи: ислам, клеветање религија, Кур'ан, исламофобија, ОИС, УН, УНХЦР