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Geneva - ARTICLE 19 and CIHRS Welcome Agreement on the Final Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference

Delegates to the Durban Review Conference in Geneva adopted a final Outcome Document on 21 April in a move welcomed by ARTICLE 19 and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS).

After a less than perfect process, characterised by polarisation and withdrawals, the Outcome Document was adopted without any changes or amendments. It contains provisions reaffirming the importance of freedom of expression and access to information in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It also omits the controversial concept of “defamation of religion” and focuses instead on protecting the rights of individual believers, rather than belief systems.

“By insisting on the necessity to protect religious believers against discrimination, and not religions as such, the Outcome Document shifts the terms of the debate on ‘defamation of religion’. Both the drafting committee and the governments that have endorsed the document must be commended for this breakthrough,” comments Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

ARTICLE 19 and CIHR call on all governments to learn from, and turn the page on, the controversies that have accompanied the preparatory process. The two organisations urge all 10 states that have withdrawn from the Conference to endorse the Outcome Document.

Moataz El Fegeiry, Executive Director CIHRS says *“It is crucial that, even though some states may have expressed problems with the process leading up to the Durban Review, all states should now develop concrete implementation strategies, including revised legislation where necessary, to ensure that the causes of both free expression and equality are advanced in the national context.”*

ARTICLE 19 and CIHR call on:

All governments

- **To implement the Outcome Document on a national level by adopting all necessary legal and policy measures;**

- To rely on the Outcome Document to revitalise and invigorate their existing domestic anti-discrimination laws, policies, institutions and practices;
- To promote, through education and awareness programmes, broader public understanding of the right to equality and freedom of expression as mutually reinforcing human rights;
- To promote and strengthen the protection of individuals and groups, rather than belief systems, against discrimination, through actions taken at UN bodies;
- To refrain from slipping back into the language of defamation of religion in future UN resolutions adopted by the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly;

National human rights institutions

- To use the Outcome Document as a key reference point to inform their approaches to promoting the rights to freedom of expression and equality;

Civil society and media organisations

- To promote the domestic and international implementation of the Outcome Document within states and at the UN;
- To promote the mutually reinforcing nature of the rights to equality and freedom of expression.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- For more information on the Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality: <http://www.article19.org/advocacy/campaigns/camden-principles/index.html>
- CIHRS is an independent, regional NGO based in Cairo, Egypt, with offices in Paris and Geneva. CIHRS attempts to analyze and address the legal and cultural challenges to implementing universal human rights standards throughout the Arab region.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.