



For immediate release – 29 March 2010

## STATEMENT

### **UN Human Rights Council: ARTICLE 19 Welcomes Decrease in Support for “Defamation of Religions”**

**Votes at the UN Human Rights Council at the end of last week have shown a decrease in support for the concept of “defamation of religions”. ARTICLE 19 joins its voice to those of many civil society organisations around the world who have welcomed this positive move. This latest result further consolidates those observed in 2009 at the Durban Review Conference and the September session of the HRC.**

In the vote on the resolution on combating “defamation of religions”, 20 states voted in favour, 17 states voted against and eight states abstained. Three states withdrew their support and six voted against the defamation resolution, including Argentina and Zambia who voted “no” for the first time.

In the run-up to the vote, many governments and non-governmental organisations campaigned against the resolution on the basis that it violates international human rights law on freedom of expression and other rights. While the resolution’s adoption is disappointing, the close vote indicates a significant decrease in the political support for such resolutions over previous years and raises the hope that in the future, a more constructive approach will emerge.

The Human Rights Council also adopted, without a vote, a technical and procedural resolution on the elaboration of complementary standards to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The resolution underlines “*the imperative need for the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards to the ICERD to elaborate complementary standards to the ICERD in accordance with paragraph 199 of the Durban Programme of Action*”. The resolution decides, “*to remain seized of this priority issue*” and also takes note of the report of the chairperson of the Committee and sets the dates for the Committee’s next session (29 November to 10 December 2010).

The wording of this resolution is a significant improvement on an earlier proposal which requested the committee to elaborate upon additional protocols to the ICERD. Such proposals were intended to lead to the development of a new binding international agreement on “defamation of religions”. In the opinion of many states and non-governmental organisations, long established international human rights guarantees on freedom of expression and equality are adequate to deal with global

challenges of violence, discrimination and hatred on racial and religious grounds. The extension of existing norms would do little to prevent these problems, while having a substantial impact on the freedom of expression and religion.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- The following states voted for the resolution on defamation of religions: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and South Africa (20).
- The following states voted against the resolution: Argentina, Belgium, Chile, France, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay and Zambia (17).
- The following states abstained in the vote: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cameroon, Ghana, India, Japan, Madagascar and Mauritius (8). Angola and Gabon were absent at the vote.
- Letter of the 47 organisations: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/letters/letter-from-civil-society-organizations-to-state-representatives-defamation-.pdf>
- IFEX Joint Action statement: [http://www.ifex.org/international/2010/03/25/hrc\\_defamation\\_ja/](http://www.ifex.org/international/2010/03/25/hrc_defamation_ja/)
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- 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.