

## **USCIRF Condemns Passage of UN “Defamation of Religions” Resolution, but Welcomes Continued Decline in Support**

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Though disappointed that the UN General Assembly has again passed a resolution urging countries to outlaw the so-called “defamation of religions,” the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today welcomed the fact that support in the world body for this pernicious idea continues to decline.

“Thankfully, more countries are recognizing that these resolutions seek to create a global blasphemy law, which would promote intolerance and human rights violations,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. “Instead of addressing the very real problems of religious persecution and discrimination around the world, these resolutions exacerbate them,” continued Mr. Leo. “In countries that have blasphemy laws, like Pakistan, these laws result in gross abuses, particularly against religious minorities and dissenters.”

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has sponsored annual “defamation of religions” resolutions in the UN Human Rights Council or its predecessor the Human Rights Commission since 1999 and in the General Assembly since 2005. Although both bodies continue to adopt these resolutions, the votes in favor since March 2008 have decreased from an absolute majority of all present to a mere plurality of members. “This is the fourth consecutive time this issue has been considered that the ‘no-votes’ and abstentions have outnumbered the ‘yes-votes,’” said Mr. Leo. “This year, the General Assembly vote was 80 in favor, 61 against, and 42 abstentions, down from 86-53-43 last year.”

“This positive trend is encouraging, and we urge the U.S. government to do more to ensure that more nations step up to the plate and vote ‘no’ if this issue comes up again at the Human Rights Council in March,” concluded Mr. Leo. “Religious intolerance is best fought through education and other efforts to encourage respect for every individual’s human rights, not through laws against blasphemy.”

For more information on this issue, see the recent USCIRF Policy Focus *The Dangerous Idea of Protecting Religions from “Defamation,” A Threat to Universal Human Rights Standards*.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF

Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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