

Urges Strong Efforts to Oppose its Inclusion into Binding International Law

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WASHINGTON D.C. - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today welcomed the declining support in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for a resolution urging countries to outlaw the so-called “defamation of religions.” Though disappointed that the HRC once again passed this ill-conceived resolution, USCIRF applauds the fact that support for this concept has hit a new low.

“Yesterday’s vote saw the fewest yes-votes and most no-votes ever cast on this issue in the HRC or its predecessor, coming within four votes of defeat,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. “It is heartening that more countries are recognizing the dangerous nature of these resolutions, which seek to create a global blasphemy law, like those found domestically in Pakistan, Iran, and Egypt that are routinely used to oppress religious minorities and political dissidents.”

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has sponsored annual “defamation of religions” resolutions in the HRC and its predecessor, the Human Rights Commission, since 1999 and in the General Assembly since 2005. Although both bodies continue to adopt these flawed resolutions, support has significantly eroded in the past three years, in recognition of the facts that the proper object of international human rights law is the individual rather than particular religions or groups and that the “defamation of religions” concept is overly vague and therefore subject to abusive application.

“To the extent there are problems with hateful religious utterances, they are best combated through education and other efforts to encourage respect for every individual’s rights,” Mr. Leo said.

This is the fifth consecutive time since 2008 that the no-votes and abstentions have outnumbered the yes-votes on these resolutions. This year, the Human Rights Council vote was 20 in favor, 17 against, and eight abstentions, down from 23-11-13 last year.

“This accelerating trend is encouraging” said Mr. Leo. “We thank the diligent engagement of the State Department and the efforts of Members of Congress who worked against these resolutions.”

In addition to these resolutions, the OIC is advocating the inclusion of language outlawing “defamation of religions” in the international treaty against race discrimination. In another resolution, adopted yesterday by consensus, the Human Rights Council decided that its committee considering this issue, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary

Standards, should continue its deliberations and study in this regard.

“The United States, and all other rights-supporting countries, must redouble their efforts to ensure that the misguided and repressive ‘defamation of religions’ concept does not make its way into binding international law,” said Mr. Leo.

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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