



6th session of the Human Rights Council

Questions for the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief 13 September 2007

Friends World Committee for Consultation (Quakers), International Service for Human Rights and Amnesty International wish to stress that all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief are equally prohibited by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of All forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and must be addressed accordingly by this Human Rights Council. These international standards recognise the rights of individuals to freedom of religion and belief that can be practised alone or in community with others.

We recognise that at different times and places adherents of certain religious groups, or those of no religion or belief, are or may be subjected to greater, more harmful or higher profile forms of discrimination than those of other religious groups. The degree, nature and subject of discrimination vary in different countries, regions and sub-regions. A focus on the adherents of only some religions fails to address the need to eliminate all forms of intolerance based on religion or belief and is also discriminatory and unacceptable.

Furthermore, focussing on only some religions fails to take account of the discrimination and religious intolerance which occurs within faiths. Intolerance and discrimination are not only practised between adherents of different religions. Indeed, the adherents of many religious groups experience as great or greater discrimination and harm from persons of the 'same' religion as from those of 'other' religions. The implication that religious intolerance and discrimination are only practised by 'outsiders' is not only wrong, it is misleading. It is dangerously so, because it indeed helps to propagate the attitude that what is happening is a clash of religions or beliefs, rather than the pernicious discrimination on the basis of misconceived attitudes that identify others by certain characteristics (real or imagined), and deems it acceptable to treat them differently when the possession of such characteristics is actually irrelevant.

Our organisations welcome the report (A/HRC/6/5) of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief with its careful identification of the issues of concern

which have arisen under the mandate, and would like to ask her how the mandate can assist States and the Human Rights Council itself to:

1. Address the question of freedom of religion or belief consistently and without discrimination as required by universal human rights standards?
2. Promote non-discrimination and tolerance in relation to *all* religions and beliefs, including within religions and beliefs?
3. Explore ways in which to address that some “religious intolerance” may be as much about xenophobia as about religion *per se*?
4. Avoid characterisations that may propagate the idea of a clash of religions?