



United Nations Human Rights Council, 24th Session (9 – 27 September 2013)

Item 4 General Debate

Tuesday 17 September 2013

**Speaker: BHA representative Amelia Cooper
OIC Permanent Mission to the European Union**

Mr President,

The Special Rapporteur of Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, recently stated that '*Religious freedom is as universal as any other human right and as liberal as freedom of expression.*'¹

Why then are governments able to systematically abuse this right through the presence and propagation of discriminatory laws on blasphemy, apostasy, and defamation of religion?

Such laws, present in 94 countries, including the majority of OIC member states, stand in contravention to Articles 18 and 19 of the ICCPR, as well as the Human Rights Committee's 22nd general comment regarding official ideology.²

In June, the OIC inaugurated a Permanent Observer Mission to the European Union, ostensibly to improve co-operation between the EU and OIC. However, in the inaugural speech, OIC Secretary General Ihsanoglu stated that the mission was to '*seriously fight against Islamophobia*',³ a concept indistinguishable in the minds of the OIC, it would seem, to any criticism of Islam and Sharia Law.

This is demonstrative of the OIC's well-documented desire to exercise control over what can be said about Islam, and its ambitions for the aggressive Istanbul Process, which reportedly aims to enshrine a global ban on 'Islamophobia'.⁴

The instalment of a Permanent Observer Mission is another example of what the Special Rapporteur calls '*the enormous politicisation of religion*'⁵, and it does the OIC no credit to attempt to exaggerate the level of hostility towards Muslims in Europe through the creation of this permanent mission.

We can well imagine the OIC's reaction should the European Union make a reciprocal gesture in opening a Permanent Observer Mission to monitor freedom of expression, religion and belief in the Islamic world.

Thank you sir.

¹ Heiner Bielefeldt, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, as quoted in an interview with Brian Pellot, Director of Global Strategy and Religious Freedom editor at RNS, posted 6th September 2013 <http://brianpellot.religionnews.com/2013/09/06/ca-with-united-nations-religious-freedom-czar-heiner-bielefeldt/>

² General Comment 22 states i.a. that '*If a set of beliefs is treated as official ideology in constitutions...or in actual practice, this shall not result in any impairment of the freedoms under article 18 or any other rights recognised under the ICCPR.*'

³ OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, as quoted in 'OIC Opens Office in Brussels to Fight "Islamophobia" in Europe' (<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3790/oic-brussels-islamophobia>) June 26, 2013

⁴ 'OIC Opens Office in Brussels to Fight "Islamophobia" in Europe' (<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3790/oic-brussels-islamophobia>) June 26, 2013

⁵ Heiner Bielefeldt, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, as quoted in an interview with Brian Pellot, Director of Global Strategy and Religious Freedom editor at RNS, posted 6th September 2013 <http://brianpellot.religionnews.com/2013/09/06/ca-with-united-nations-religious-freedom-czar-heiner-bielefeldt/>