



**National Statement, delivered by Amb. Zaman Mehdi, Deputy Permanent Representative, during the Interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's oral update on drivers, root causes and Human Rights impacts of religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence**  
**54<sup>th</sup> HRC Session**  
**5<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

**Mr. Vice President,**

We thank the High Commissioner for his oral update.

The international human rights law is unequivocal in prohibiting any advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

HRC resolution 53/1 has established a measured threshold by stating that deliberate and public burning of the Holy Quran or any other holy book with the intent to incite discrimination, hostility or violence is violation of international law and must be prohibited.

Unfortunately, these vile incidents continue with impunity and have now become a signature of anti-Muslim hatred.

We also remain distressed over the abdication of state responsibility as concerned states find it difficult to honour their obligations as they lack the tool-kit to prevent and prosecute acts of religious hatred.

Lopsided interpretation of article 19 is giving rise to instances of religious hatred and culture of impunity. Free speech is coupled with responsibilities in article 19 and prohibition in article 20, if it constitutes incitement.

We have noted positive consideration by certain states to prevent desecration of holy books. Those criticizing these initiatives must know that defence of free speech should never transcend to defending advocacy of religious hate and protection for racial supremacists.

Inaction by the relevant states, also violates their commitment under long-held consensus resolution 16/18, to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief.

I thank you!