



Pakistan Statement, by Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Foreign Minister at the Human Rights Council during its Urgent Debate to Discuss Premeditated Acts of Religious Hatred
53rd HRC Session
11 July 2023

**Mr. President,
High Commissioner,
Excellencies,**

I thank the Human Rights Council for holding this urgent debate.

Three months ago, we observed the First International Day to Combat Islamophobia. We, in our capacity as OIC Chair, have the privilege to co-chair along the UNSG and UNPGA the first ever session to mark the occasion in the UN General Assembly.

Unanimously, we all spoke with one voice in condemnation of Islamophobia. Unfortunately, the deliberate desecration of the Holy Quran has continued under government sanction and with the sense of the impunity.

Increasingly, these acts are designed to maximize provocation.

We must see this clearly for what it is. Incitement to religious hatred, discrimination and attempts to provoke violence!

We must join hands in condemning it. We must isolate those who stroke hatred.

Mr. President,

The Holy Quran is a spiritual anchor for two billion Muslims. It is inseparable from their sense of identity and dignity.



It is important to understand the deep hurt that a public and premeditated act of the Quran's desecration causes to Muslims. It is an attack on their faith.

The call in the draft text before this Council for prevention and accountability is, therefore, reasonable and necessary. In making this call, I am not losing sight of the fundamental right of free speech.

Free speech is as indispensable as hate speech should be indefensible.

Our vigor to protect free speech must not lose sight of the imperative to reject hate speech.

There is not a single Muslim country on the planet that allows the desecration of holy text of other religions. Such an act is unthinkable to any Muslim which is forbidden by faith, by culture and by law.

It is in the same spirit, I resolutely stand alongside those who are calling for prevention, legal deterrence and accountability of actions that constitute incitement to hostility against people of faith.

Mr. President,

Let us unite against hatred, discrimination, intolerance and forge pathways for mutual respect, understanding and tolerance.

Thank you.