

**Special High-Level Event on “Commemoration of International Day to
Combat Islamophobia”**

10 March 2023

Opening Statement by the Foreign Minister

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

At the outset, let me thank the President General Assembly for joining OIC in co-convening the first-ever commemoration of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. I also welcome you all to this historic event.

The observance of this Day serves to reinforce our shared commitment to raise awareness about the insidious phenomenon of Islamophobia, advance mutual respect and understanding, and develop concrete measures to eradicate this contemporary plague.

Excellencies,

Islam is a religion of moderation, tolerance and pluralism.

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) taught Muslims to treat everyone with dignity and respect regardless of race, culture, gender or religion.

Yet, unfounded phobia of Islam and its adherents is a sad reality of our times.

This phenomenon is neither new nor an irrational bias held by the few, as often portrayed.

The challenge before us is much deeper, and deeply rooted.

Since colonial times, the entrenched notions that depict Muslims and their beliefs as cultural “others” and “threats” have served to perpetuate, validate and normalize Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

Since the tragedy of 9/11, animosity and institutional suspicion of Muslims and Islam across the world have only escalated to “epidemic proportions”.

A narrative has been developed and peddled which associates Muslim communities and their religion with violence and danger.

This Islamophobic narrative is not just confined to an extremist marginal propaganda but regrettably, has found acceptance by section of mainstream media, academia, policy-makers and State machinery.

Islamophobia is therefore being constantly fueled by structural discrimination, xenophobia, and negative stereotyping of Muslims and their faith.

Excellencies,

The tragic events in Christchurch and several other atrocities are a grim reminder that the tide of state-driven Islamophobia is sweeping across the globe.

It is obvious in the manifestos of far right and neo-fascist parties; in the open calls for the expulsion and exclusion of Muslims, in the politicization and censorship of the hijab, in provocative burning of the Holy Quran, in the deliberate defamation of our Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the vandalization of Islamic symbols and holy sites.

We should not underestimate the resentment and sense of injustice felt by Muslim in reaction to such acts of Islamophobia. Their faith is a deeply personal issue for Muslims.

The exercise of the right to freedom of expression carries with it responsibilities and obligations not to disseminate racist ideas or defame and ridicule religious symbols, and religious personalities.

And, despite protestations to the contrary, Islam and Muslims are routinely linked to terrorism.

In some cases, the rhetoric of hate and incitement to violence is officially inspired. Repeated pogroms of Muslims have been instigated by officially sanctioned neo-fascist policies and ideologies with complete impunity.

The policies and violent actions of those who deny the right of self-determination of Muslim peoples represent the worst manifestations of Islamophobia today.

Islamophobia has been whipped up in cyberspace. Digital and social media platforms are being used pervasively and systematically to spread hatred against Muslims and incitement to violence.

This has unfortunately been the situation during the COVID pandemic when a tsunami of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobic narrative surged on digital platforms.

At times, it appears that those who manage these digital platforms are sympathetic to the extremist anti-Muslims groups and ideologies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite its pervasive and widely documented manifestations, Islamophobia remains under-acknowledged, poorly understood, and less effectively countered.

The dangers of Islamophobia often gain international attention when a heinous act of violence and terrorism strikes innocent Muslims while the daily, silent drip of discrimination, hatred, and hostility against Muslims remains largely ignored and underreported.

Therefore, our resolve to combat Islamophobia must translate into concrete and practical action.

To that end, we urge the UN Secretary-General to formulate an action plan, in coordination with the OIC countries, to halt and reverse Islamophobia.

Such an Action Plan could include:

- The appointment of a UN Special Envoy to combat Islamophobia;
- The adoption of international measures for the protection of Holy Sites, including the thousands of Mosques and Mausoleums which are presently under threat of destruction;
- The adoption of laws – at the national and international level - to outlaw hate speech, acts of vandalization of the Holy Quran, and discrimination and violence against Muslims and other communities;
- The provision of legal assistance and appropriate compensation to those subjected to such Islamophobic acts and;

- The establishment of national and international judicial mechanisms and laws to hold those responsible for acts of Islamophobia accountable.

Excellencies,

The declaration of 15 March as an International Day to Combat Islamophobia by the General Assembly is a demonstration of global solidarity with both known and unknown victims of Islamophobia.

Today, we must renew our resolve to build inclusive societies where different cultures and beliefs are celebrated and diversity embraced. We can ill afford to ignore dangerous ideologies and acts dividing us as humanity.

Let all of us – from any religion or creed – stand together in the fight against hatred, bigotry and intolerance.

I thank you.
