



United Nations Human Rights Council, 22nd Session (25 February – 22 March 2013)

Item 4 General Debate

Tuesday 12 March 2013

Speaker: BHA, IHEU, and CFI representative, Roy Brown

Mr President,

Freedom of expression is once again under sustained attack from the member states of the OIC.

In Saudi Arabia last week, two activists were sentenced to ten years in jail for exposing hundreds of cases of human rights abuses in the kingdom.¹

In Iran, we have seen protestors imprisoned and even sentenced to death for “waging war against God”.² But what strange logic can possibly equate criticism and peaceful protest with waging war? And since when did any government equate itself with God?

In Morocco, a colleague has had to flee for his life because he wrote of his doubts about Islam.³

In Mauritania, last Saturday, a group of nine antislavery protestors were attacked and severely beaten by police.⁴

In Pakistan, hundreds of Shias have been murdered for holding the “wrong” beliefs.⁵

But we have waited in vain for condemnation by the OIC of human rights abuses carried out by agents of the State within its member States. Instead we have seen protests against Islamic extremism condemned as “Islamophobia”, which, was recently described by the prime minister of Turkey as “a crime against humanity”.

A crime against humanity, Mr President? No Sir. We see murder, ethnic cleansing, torture, kidnappings, suicide bombings, and terrorist attacks as crimes against humanity.

It is people that have human rights, Mr President, not beliefs. Protesting against a human rights abuse, and pointing out where the responsibility lies, is not a crime, it is a duty. And it is the duty of every member of this Council to uphold the right to freedom of expression, not condemn it.

Thank you, Sir.

¹ <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/09/world/meast/saudi-arabia-activists-sentenced>

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/19/iranian-court-jails-human-rights-activist>

³ Speech by Kacem El Ghazzali, HRC22, item 4, 11 March 2013

⁴ Private communication from IRA Mauritania, 10 March 2013

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/03/pakistan-car-bomb-karachi>

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