



**United Nations Human Rights Council: 26<sup>th</sup> Session (10<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> June 2014)**  
**Item 4: General Debate**  
**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> June**  
**Speaker: BHA Representative, Amelia Cooper**  
**Global Religious Intolerance: State Passivity and Active Abuse of Human Rights**

Thank you Mr President.

Violence and discrimination against religious groups by rival faiths or governments have reached a six-year high worldwide, affecting three quarters of the global population<sup>1</sup>.

Many States and faith groups are unable to leave behind damaging 'us-versus-them' demarcations, which are often instrumentalised to 'provide scapegoats on whom to project multiple fears'<sup>2</sup>.

Religious intolerance greatly affects global stability: religious identity transcends borders, and thus stories of conflict reawaken and reinforce international sectarian divisions.

In the Central African Republic, violence between Christians and Muslims continues to escalate, resulting in the displacement of nearly one million people<sup>3</sup>, the deaths of an estimated 2000<sup>4</sup> between December and March alone, and recent assaults against Muslims being equated with 'ethnic cleansing'<sup>5</sup>.

In Myanmar, leaked documents implicate government officials in crimes against humanity<sup>6</sup> relating to the relentless Buddhist persecution of Rohingya Muslims. The government of Myanmar has not responded, publicly or privately, to these revelations, and the restrictions upon the Rohingya Muslims remain in force.

Non-believers are globally persecuted, with thirteen States – all of them Islamic – punishing atheism or apostasy by death<sup>7</sup>.

Conflicts caused by the schism in Islam rage in the Middle East and North Africa, where social hostility is three times the global average<sup>8</sup>. In Pakistan, targeted civilian killings and bombings by members of the other sect are commonplace<sup>9</sup>.

Religious intolerance not only violates Article 18 of the ICCPR: it is the foundation for the denial of a myriad of fundamental human rights.

We urge all States to examine their own culpability, be that through their passivity or their constitutional preferences for certain religions; to make necessary amendments to their penal codes; and to follow UN guidance including the Rabat Plan of Action such that freedom of thought and its concomitant rights can be freely enjoyed.

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, published 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/#fn-18486-1>

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, p.5, A/HRC/25/58

<sup>3</sup> Widely reported, including in BusinessWeek <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2014-05-13/obama-orders-sanctions-over-conflict-in-central-african-republic>

<sup>4</sup> Security Dilemma in CAR, Al Jazeera, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014 <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/africa/security-dilemma-central-african-republic>

<sup>5</sup> 'Central African Republic: Ethnic Cleansing and Sectarian Killings', Amnesty International, published 12<sup>th</sup> February 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/news/central-african-republic-ethnic-cleansing-sectarian-violence-2014-02-12>

<sup>6</sup> Fortify Rights, published 25<sup>th</sup> February 2014 <http://www.fortifyrights.org/publication-20140225.html>

<sup>7</sup> Freedom of Thought Report, International Humanist and Ethical Union, published 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013, available to download <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, published 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/#fn-18486-1>

<sup>9</sup> Pakistan: Sectarian violence in Pakistan, list of incidents and death tolls, South Asia Terrorism Portal <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/sect-killing.htm>; also seen regularly in mass media 21/1/2014 bus of Shia pilgrims bombed <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25832979>; 15/11/2013 Shia protestors kill 7 Sunnis <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/pakistani-shias-kill-7-sunnis-in-religious-dispute-1.2428287>; 09/06/2014 At least 23 Shia pilgrims killed <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/06/border-attack-kills-pakistani-pilgrims-201468225422138438.html>. Iraq: 27/11/2013 [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/28/world/middleeast/a-grim-day-for-civilians-in-iraq-as-executions-spike.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/28/world/middleeast/a-grim-day-for-civilians-in-iraq-as-executions-spike.html?_r=0); <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/12/21/iraq-in-2014-backtocivilwar.html>; [http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/u-n-in-iraq-worried-about-increase-in-sectarian-violence/article\\_eeba52c1-9bd8-58b1-b843-8a467b59420a.html](http://www.santafenewmexican.com/news/u-n-in-iraq-worried-about-increase-in-sectarian-violence/article_eeba52c1-9bd8-58b1-b843-8a467b59420a.html)