



Statement of the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the 53rd Regular Session of the Human Rights Council

Item 1: Urgent Debate to discuss the alarming rise in premeditated and public acts of religious hatred as manifested by recurrent desecration of the Holy Quran in some European and other countries

Geneva, 11 July 2023

Mister President,

The Holy See condemns in the strongest possible terms **the** desecration, destruction or disrespect for religious objects, symbols and places of worship. The recent burning of the Quran on the first day of the Muslim feast of Eid al-Adha is particularly troubling, as the significance of that holy day was also denigrated. In response to that appalling act, Pope Francis noted that *“Any book considered sacred by its people must be respected out of respect for its believers, and freedom of expression must never be used as an excuse to despise others, and to allow this, must be rejected and condemned.”*¹

Indeed, religious belief is an expression of the human person’s search for truth, meaning and purpose in life. As such, to willfully insult religious beliefs, traditions or sacred objects constitutes an attack on the human dignity of the believer.

On the other hand, we must also be aware that rogue actors frequently commit acts of religious intolerance, abusing the precious gift of freedom of expression, to provoke a disproportionate reaction. They feed hatred, intolerance, and create greater polarization in society. True faith, founded on deeper truths, enables believers to bear offenses, and even to forgive. Indeed, people of faith play an important role in constructing a world that upholds human dignity, protects human rights and promotes the common good.

Mister President,

In conclusion, allow me to echo the heartfelt appeal of Pope Francis: *“Today we need builders of peace, not makers of weapons; today we need builders of peace, not instigators of conflict; we need firefighters, not arsonists; we need advocates of reconciliation, not people who threaten destruction.”*²

Thank you, Mister President.

¹ Pope Francis, Interview published in *Al-Ittihad*, 3 July 2023; cf. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-07/pope-decries-the-burning-of-the-quran-in-sweden.html>.

² Pope Francis, Interview published in *Al-Ittihad*, 3 July 2023.