

## **The Durban review process and “the defamation of religions”**

*Statement by the Center for Inquiry-International  
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UN Human Rights Council 10<sup>th</sup> Session  
Agenda Item 9  
March 2009*

The Center for Inquiry joins the High Commissioner for Human Rights in welcoming the present draft outcome document of the Durban Review Conference.<sup>1</sup> As an organization dedicated to safeguarding the freedom to question, doubt, and dissent, we are especially pleased that the negotiations resulted in the removal from the document of the notion of defamation of religions.

This result reflects the overwhelming agreement by the relevant UN experts—including the Special Rapporteur on racism—that the concept of defamation of religions is not the right legal instrument with which to address the problems of racism and discrimination based on religion or belief.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, divisive debates over offenses to religious feelings will only detract from legitimate attempts to grapple with racism and discrimination.

We are therefore all the more dismayed that a similar consensus could not be reached in the Council, and that the objectionable language of the defamation of religions is still being introduced under Item 9. Such discourse has not brought us closer to ending prejudice. It has only perpetuated a political impasse.

Due to the extraordinary degree of international attention that the Durban review process has attracted, the world is watching what happens in this session.

The world is watching to see whether the members of this Council will side with the victims of discrimination or whether they are more concerned with choosing sides in an invented clash of civilizations.

We would respectfully urge all member states, and in particular those who in the past have remained uncommitted on this issue, to consider carefully the global significance of the position they take now.

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<sup>1</sup> “Pillay hails ‘significantly shorter’ outcome document for Durban Review conference,” United Nations Radio, 18 March 2009, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/detail/71370.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Doudou Diène, on the manifestations of defamation of religions and in particular on the serious implications of Islamophobia on the enjoyment of all rights, A/HRC/9/12, 2 September 2008, para. 13, 65.