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Agenda: Combating intolerance, discrimination and stereotypes on basis of religion and belief

I. Mandate of the Human Rights Council

The functions of the Council are set out in paragraphs 2-5 of G.A. Resolution 60/251. The overarching purpose of the Council's work is to promote universal respect for the protection of human rights, without discrimination and to address and make recommendations on situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations. Paragraph 5 of Resolution 60/251 sets out specific functions, which include making recommendations on the promotion and protection of human rights and for the further development of international law in this field.

One element of the Council's role which is a key innovation is that of 'universal periodic review' of each State's compliance with its human rights obligations and commitments. Although Resolution 60/251 provides that the periodic review mechanism should be cooperative and based on interactive dialogue in full cooperation with the State concerned, the detail of the process is left for the Council to work out. The Council shall also assume, review and, where necessary, improve and rationalise all mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the Commission on Human Rights in order to maintain a system of special procedures, expert advice and a complaint procedure.

a. Defining Intolerance

Intolerance, in the general context, means the fact or habit of not tolerating or enduring something or simply the incapacity of endurance. However, specifically for the purposes of this paper, it is the absence of tolerance for difference of opinion or practice, the denial of the right to differ, or a narrow minded or bigoted opposition to dissent.

Intolerance has a meaning distinct from discrimination. Despite this, the General Assembly rather than providing for their precise independent meanings elected to define the phrase "intolerance and discrimination based on religion and belief" in Art. 2(2) of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (Intolerance Declaration), which reads:

Art. 2(2)

For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression "intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference



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based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

It is pertinent to also note art. 4(2) of the Intolerance Declaration, which reads:

Art. 4(2)

All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

As Art 4(2) calls for states to engage a specific set of legislative measures to prohibit discrimination and calls for states to take "all appropriate measures" to combat intolerance, it may be inferred that the General Assembly did not intend the interchangeable use of the words.

II. Stereotype Threat: A Socio-Psychological Harm Caused by Negative Stereotyping

One harm associated with negative stereotyping is that of a stereotype threat. However, stereotyping in its ordinary sense, does not necessarily have a negative connotation. A stereotype is a simplified and standard conception or image invested with special meaning and held in common by members of a group. The word has its origins from the process of making metal printing plates by taking a mould of composed type, and then taking from the mould a cast in type metal. To stereotype is to fix or perpetuate in an unchanging form.

a. Defining Stereotype Threat

Stereotype-threat is a psychological phenomenon that depresses the performance of negatively stereotyped groups when performing stereotype-relevant tasks. In other words, it is the social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies.

b. The Science of Stereotype Activation



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There exists a dichotomy differentiating activating stereotypes from acting upon stereotypes.

While activating stereotypes is limited to the cognitive identification of stereotypes, acting upon stereotypes extends to any act done by an individual in pursuance of a cognitively identified stereotype. Such a distinction is acknowledged by psychologists. Thus, it may also be possible under some circumstances for people to activate, but not to act upon, stereotypes. For example, a display of intolerance such as hate speech would be considered acting upon stereotypes rather than mere activation.

Stereotype Activation distorts perception of person cognitively activating the stereotype. This is because mere stereotyping itself, facilitates the formation of incorrect empirical beliefs.

A stereotype consists of beliefs about the features that characterize a social group, and applying a stereotype means assuming that an apparent member of the group has those features. People using stereotypes thus may be making two kinds of errors-

i. Error of Fact About the Base Rates of Characteristics in the Categorized Population in the Absence of Sufficient Evidence

One makes such an error by accepting a false premise in the absence of sufficient evidence. For example, there has never been a time when most people on welfare in the U.S. are African Americans. Accurate information may serve as an appropriate cure for such an error.

ii. Ignoring Variation Within the Category

By making such an error, one assumes that an individual will have a characteristic attributed to a group. However, merely because all are susceptible to stereotype activation, does not mean that the harm of stereotype threat is impossible to address. Even people who have prejudiced thoughts may still be able to control their behaviour, at least in terms of what would appear blatantly prejudiced, either to themselves or others. However, such control is not without the possible consequence of the re-bounce effect, a theory that postulates that the active suppression of stereotypes leads to increased stereotyping at the next opportunity. The sub-conscious facets of stereotype activation encourage the theory that it is possible to counter stereotypes at the same preconscious level at which they are activated. For example, having and frequently expressing the chronic goal of



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egalitarianism can suppress the degree to which we automatically activate stereotypes

Though, stereotype activation may be in certain cases entirely a sub-conscious process, there exist psychological factors affecting it. For example stereotypes are more easily activated in people who display more conscious prejudice, words associated with the negative features of a stereotype will activate the stereotype in persons of both low and high prejudice, associated words that are positive or neutral will activate the stereotype only in more prejudicial people and all people are less likely to activate stereotypes during periods in which exceptional demands are placed on cognitive resources.

c. Where Stereotype Activation Causes Stereotype Threat: Performance of Affected Individuals and Groups is Impaired

The fear of stereotype confirmation can hijack the cognitive systems required for optimal performance, resulting in low test performance. The activation of stereotypes can also affect the behaviour and performance of persons in stereotyped groups, including how well they perform on tests that ostensibly measure ability.

V. Defining and Identifying the Marginalized, a Group Having Higher Susceptibility to Intolerance and Stereotype Threat Than the Integrated

A marginalized individual or group is one which is marked by contact by disparate cultures, and acquiring some, but not all the traits or values common to any one of them.⁶⁶ It is one that belongs to two differing cultures or societies, but not fully integrated into either.

a. The Marginalized are more susceptible to Intolerance and other Actions Upon Stereotypes than the Integrated

We may note that marginalization amounts to acting upon the stereotype and is not mere stereotype activation, because to marginalize an individual or a group is to place it in a position of marginal importance, influence or power. Henceforth, we may draw the inference that an individual or a group which has been marginalized is already a victim of a stereotype acted upon. The susceptibility of the marginalized to further stereotype activation and actions thereupon compared to the integrated, is enhanced by their history of having already been victims of a stereotype acted upon. Since intolerance is a specie in



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the genus of acting upon stereotypes, the increase of likelihood of acting upon stereotypes in general may increase the likelihood of the occurrence of intolerance in particular. It naturally follows that unlike the marginalized, the integrated are less susceptible to actions upon stereotypes including intolerance.

b. The Marginalized are More Susceptible to Stereotype Threats than the Integrated

As the susceptibility of the marginalized to further stereotype activation and actions thereupon compared to the integrated is enhanced, the likelihood of the existence of a preexisting perception of the stereotype in the minds of external groups and individuals is increased. As a result, the likelihood of an individual or a group being affected by a stereotype threat is enhanced.

VI. Research Guidelines

a. Researching the Agenda and Substantive Issues

The background guide contained in this document gives a basic background to some of sociolegal concepts which form the core of the debate. We recommend that delegates read the contents of the background guide as a starting reference for research and do not rely upon the same as the sole source of authorities that may be discussed in the session.

As procedural intricacies will be explained during the session for the benefit of those participating in their first session, we strongly recommend that the substantive research of delegates should comprehensively cover the following aspects-

- A Reading of the Background Guide
- Foreign Policy of one's own country
- Contemporary issues related to the Agenda, which may be researched from the following websites-
- Reuters
- B.B.C.

c. Researching Foreign Policy

To represent your country accurately, start by answering the following questions:

- What sort of government does your country have?
- What types of ideologies (political, religious or other) influence your country's government?



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- Which domestic issues might influence your country's foreign policy?
- What are some major events in your country's history? Why are they important?
- Which ethnicities, religions and languages can be found in your country?
- Where is your country located and how does its geography affect its political relationships?
- Which countries share a border with your country?
- Which countries are considered allies of your country?
- Which countries are considered enemies of your country?
- What are the characteristics of your country's economy?
- What is your country's gross domestic product (G.D.P.)?
- How does this compare to other countries in the world?
- When did your country become a member of the U.N.?
- Does your country belong to any intergovernmental organizations outside the U.N. system such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (N.A.T.O.) or the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (O.P.E.C.)?
- Does your country belong to any regional organizations such as the European Union (E.U.), the African Union (A.U.) or the Organization of American States (O.A.S.)?