**The secretary-general**

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**ReMARKS AT HIGH-LEVEL SPECIAL EVENT**

**INTERNATIONAL DAY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA**

**New York, 10 March 2023**

**[all-English]**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank Pakistan and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for focusing attention – and calling for action – to stamp out the poison of Islamophobia.

The world’s nearly 2 billion Muslims reflect humanity in all its magnificent diversity.

They hail from all corners of the world. They are Arabs, Africans, Europeans, Americans, and Asians.

But they often face bigotry and prejudice for no other reason than their faith.

This anti-Muslim hatred takes many forms.

There is the structural, institutional discrimination.

It manifests itself in socio-economic exclusion, discriminatory immigration policies and unwarranted surveillance and profiling.

It reveals itself in the wholesale stigmatization of Muslim communities.

And it is reinforced by biased media representations, and – shamefully – by the anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies of some political leaders.

Beyond structural Islamophobia, Muslims suffer personal attacks, hateful rhetoric and stereotyping.

Many such acts of intolerance and suspicion may not be reflected into official statistics – but they degrade people’s dignity and our common humanity.

The linkages between anti-Muslim hatred and gender inequality are unmistakable. We see some of the worst impacts in the triple discrimination against Muslim women because of their gender, ethnicity, and faith.

The growing hate that Muslims face is not an isolated development.

It is an inexorable part of the resurgence of ethno-nationalism, neo-Nazi white supremacist ideologies, and violence targeting vulnerable populations including Muslims, Jews, some minority Christian communities and others.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Discrimination diminishes us all. And it is incumbent on all of us to stand up against it. We must never be bystanders to bigotry.

We must strengthen our defenses.

This means pushing for policies that fully respect human rights and protect religious and cultural identities, particularly of minorities.

Our UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites provides concrete recommendations to support governments so that all can enjoy their right to observe religious rituals in safety.

We must recognize diversity not as a threat, but as a richness of our societies.

This means ramping up political, cultural, and economic investments in social cohesion.

And we must confront bigotry wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head.

This includes working to tackle the hate that spreads like wildfire across the internet.

That is why I have called on governments, regulators, technology companies and the media to set up guardrails, and enforce them.

We have launched the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech – to provide a framework for our support to Member States to counter this scourge while respecting freedom of expression and opinion.

As part of *Our Common Agenda*, we are working on a Global Digital Compact for an open, free, inclusive, and secure digital future for all, firmly anchored in human rights and nondiscrimination.

And we are pushing for a code of conduct to promote integrity in public information – so people can make choices based on fact, not fiction; education not ignorance.

I will consider with interest, the new suggestions presented today by the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan.

I am grateful to religious leaders across the world who are joining hands to promote dialogue and interfaith harmony.

The declaration “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” – co-authored by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Ahmed El Tayeb – is a model for compassion and human solidarity.

Excellencies,

We are just days away from the beginning of Ramadan.

For well over a millennium, Islam’s message of peace, compassion, and grace has inspired people the world over.

The very word Islam derives from the same root word – salam / peace.

As UN High Commissioner for Refugees, I saw the generosity of Muslim countries welcoming people forced to flee their homes, while so many others closed their borders.

I saw the modern manifestation of what is found in the Surah Al-Tawbah of the Holy Quran:

“And if anyone seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he can hear the words of God. Then escort him where he can be secure.”

This protection should be accorded to believers and non-believers alike, again, according to the Holy Quran.

What a remarkable articulation of refugee protection centuries ago before the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Every great faith and tradition summons the imperatives of tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

At the heart, we are dealing with universal values: they animate the United Nations Charter and lie at the core of our quest for justice, human rights, and peace.

Let us keep striving to realize these values and protect the sanctity and dignity of every human life.

Let us counter the forces of division by reaffirming our common humanity.

And let us always stand in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

Thank you.