**UNGA Resolution on Islamophobia**

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It is a very bitter and regrettable fact that over the years, Islamophobia has become a reality and its manifestations are hate speech, discrimination and violence against Muslims, which are proliferating in several parts of the world.

Pakistan has been voicing its great concern and worry for quite some time on all international forums drawing the attention of the world at large to take notice of this emerging menace of Islamophobia in furtherance of terrorism.

In the midst of growing terrorism and as a consequence of Islamaphobia in the west, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on March 15, 2022 unanimously adopted a resolution declaring March 15 as the International Day to  Combat Islamophobia. The resolution adopted by consensus was introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIOC)  is indeed a welcome and appreciable move in the right direction and can easily be described as a moral victory for the Muslim Ummah. . This marked the day when a couple of years ago, a gunman had entered two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand,  killing 51 and injuring another 40 of those offering their prayers.

Historically speaking, the passage of the resolution by 193 strong UNGA has come as a sequence, continuation and recognition of a Pakistan-led resolution on Islamophobia which was unanimously adopted by the 47th OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting held in  Niamey, Nigeria, in November 2020.

Tackling Islamophobia was the main highlight of the Prime Minister’s speech at the 14th Summit of the OIC held in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, in June 2019.

The resolution inter alia authorized the OIC Permanent Missions in New York to jointly table a resolution in the UNGA for designating March 15 as the “International Day to Combat Islamophobia”; urged OIC Member States to organize and support various high-visibility events aimed at effectively increasing awareness at all levels       about curbing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred; reaffirmed that desecration of the Holy Quran and reprinting  of caricatures of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)  are not legitimate  expressions of the right to freedom of expression and opinion under the international human rights law; called on the OIC Secretary-General  to continue monitoring the phenomenon of Islamophobia by strengthening the scope of Islamophobia Observatory  and take necessary steps for building a common position of the Muslims Ummah on  this issue, and also: called upon the UN Secretary-General  to initiate a global debate  on countering  rising Islamophobia and promoting inter-faith harmony.

It is also worth mentioning here that Pakistan’s  Prime  Minister Imran Khan was amongst the first leaders of the Islamic world to raise the issue of Islamophobia on the international stage and continued to avail every opportunity to forcefully advocate the dire need to effectively combat this scourge.

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In his maiden address to the 74th UN General Assembly session in New York in September 2019, he had emphatically stated the pandemic of COVID-19 was an opportunity to bring humanity together but unfortunately it has instead fanned hatred and violence against vulnerable minorities in several places, these trends have also accentuated Islamophobia, Muslims continue to be targeted with impunity in many countries. Incidents in Europe, including the republication of blasphemous sketches stressed that willful provocations and incitement to hate and violence must be universally outlawed and the UNGA should declare as “International Day to Combat Islamophobia”building a coalition to fight this scourge that splits the humanity.

On this occasion, Prime Minister Imran Khan had pointedly stated that India remains the one country in the world today where the state continues to sponsor Islamophobia. The reason behind this is the RSS ideology that is, unfortunately, ruling India.

Pakistan, through its leader at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, in September 2021, had also highlighted the menace of Islamophobia and this scribe would like to quote that from the  available record:

“Islamophobia is another pernicious  phenomenon  that we all need to collectively combat, in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks, terrorism has been associated with Islam by some quarters,  this has increased the tendency o right-wing, xenophobic and violent nationalities, extremists and terrorist groups to target Muslims, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy has recognized these emerging threats………the Secretary-General should convene a global dialogue on countering the rise of Islamophobia  and the worst and most pervasive form of Islamophobia now rules India, the hate-filled “Hindutva’ ideology propagated by the fascist RSS-BJP regime has unleashed a lesson a reign of fear and violence  against India’s 200 million-strong Muslim community.”

Through the adoption of the resolution, the Muslim Ummah has achieved a moral victory despite opposition by India, France and the European Union. Now, it should move forward collectively to c ontinue highlighting the menace of Islamophobia.

Along with the observance of the “International Day to Combat Islamophobia” on March 15 every year from now onwards, the leaders of the countries from which terrorist organisations originate and operate also need to address the lack of education, poverty and human rights concerns to eliminate the fear, ignorance and desperation that causes the people, particularly the youth, to fall prey to the rhetoric of extremists. World leaders also need to work together on this highly sensitive issue preserving the space for all nations to live in peace. The situation in the world at large also makes it obligatory for the Muslim countries to forge common strategy in their ranks to protect Islam from the dangers  it faces from deviant Muslims themselves or a scared and uninformed world at large.

Quite obviously, Pakistan and the OIC ought to continue closer collaboration for the preparation of a plan to effectively and collectively combat Islamphobia.

Adoption of the Resolution by the 193 member body has  quite successfully marked the culmination of long concerted efforts by a group of OIC countries  Pakistan, Turkey,  Saudi Arabia,  Iran, Jordan, Indonesia and Nigeria which led to securing the much needed and desired  agreement and cooperation  of the  Western world  in actively combating the growing menace of Islamophobia along with threats posed by the extremists and terrorists here, there and everywhere around the globe.  Pakistan, on its part, is determined and committed to continue making efforts to counter Islamophobia and terrorism in all manifestations. Only through closer collaboration and cooperation by all living and ruling, the world can be turned into a happy and peaceful place to live together forward and onward, please.

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