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Final declaration of the 32nd Abant international forum



11.3.2014



FINAL DECLARATION OF

The 32nd ABANT INTERNATIONAL FORUM

“FREEDOM OF SPEECH & RESPECT FOR THE SACRED”

African Union HQ

08-09 March 2014, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



The 32nd Abant International Forum, in line with the recommendations of the 29th Forum with the theme “Africa: Between Experience and Inspiration” was convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 08-09 March 2014 to discuss the topic “Freedom of Speech and Respect for the Sacred”.

The Forum was jointly organized by the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission (DPA/AUC) and the Abant Platform of the Journalists and Writers Foundation of Turkey. The distinguished guests including the representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as well as 155 participants from 15 countries from around the world have actively contributed to the discussions.

The Forum:

Recognizing the efforts of the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and other international and regional organizations to promote freedom of expression (FoE) and a better understanding of the FoE and respect for all religions;

Affirming that the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Resolution 16/18, titled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief”, provides a common ground for the international community to promote the FoE and respect for the sacred (RfS);

Reiterating the importance of the efforts of the international community in promoting FoE and intolerance for hate speech;

Expressing strong disapproval of any undue pressure on the FoE and freedom of speech (FoS) and also rejects anything that profanes the sacred which is defined in accordance with the UNCHR Resolution 16/18 (The Resolution);

Recognizing the FoE and the respect for the sacred (RfS) as interdependent elements of each other and indispensable for nonviolence and democracy;

Considering the social and legal aspects of FoE and RfS, **emphasizing** that FoE is not to destroy societies but to build them;

Noting that FoE and RfS complement one another the FoE should never be perceived as a freedom to offend the religious figures and values deemed sacred by the others;

Further notes that individual or collective acts of demonizing and/or desecrating the sacred contribute to spreading religious intolerance;

Recognizing that the search for a fine balance between FoE and RfS is a continuous endeavor by the international community should contribute to implementing universally acceptable norms with broader civic participation.

The Forum:

Calls upon the international and regional organizations to take policy measures in line with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Resolution 16/18;

Calls upon governments of the world to incorporate the Resolution into domestic legislation;

Calls upon the media to play a constructive role in promoting the right to FoE as well as utmost respect for the sacred as stipulated in the Resolution;

Calls upon all religious leaders and representatives of all faiths to respect the Resolution;

Calls upon the governmental organizations (GOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and all civil society organizations (CSOs) to advocate for FoE and RfS.

The Forum was concluded by the statements kindly delivered by His Grace Abbune Gabriel, and Chairperson of Interreligious Council of Ethiopia H.E. Aisha L. Abdullahi, Commissioner for DPA/AUC, H.E. Ato Demeke Mekonnen, Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

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