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Finland's EU Presidency

UNITED NATIONS
UNGA 61, 3rd Committee, 48th meeting
Item 67(b) - A/C.3/61/L.28: Combating defamation of religions

Explanation of Vote on behalf of the European Union

Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations

New York, 17 November 2006

(check against delivery)

Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and Moldova align themselves with this explanation of vote.

*) Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Mr. Chairperson,

As the draft resolution on *Combating defamation of religions* comes before the Third Committee today, we, the European Union, have, once again, the opportunity to underline our genuine commitment to promote the principles of tolerance and respect, in particular the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

In our view, tolerance and full respect of the freedom of religion and belief, is key to relieve sensitivities and bring durable solutions to the tensions that, at times, surge on matters related to religion or belief.

In this regard, we appreciate that dialogue that has taken place between us and the main sponsors of this draft resolution this year. It has brought some helpful clarifications of the differences in general approach to the issue at stake. More importantly, we hope to build on this interaction in setting up a platform for a constructive and genuine two-way dialogue on the related human rights issues within the United Nations framework and beyond.

Mr. Chairperson,

In previous years, the European Union has repeatedly expressed its concerns regarding the general approach, conceptual framework and terminology of this draft resolution. Unfortunately, these fundamental difficulties still hold, as the general thrust of this draft resolution remains unchanged. Further, this year there were further controversial elements introduced to draft text. While this was an unfortunate development, we do appreciate that there was some - although limited - engagement on the text and slight accommodation of some of the concerns we raised.

We believe that a broader, more balanced and firmly rights-based text would be best suited to address the issues underlying this draft resolution. In the Third Committee, the focus should be on human rights, including the use of human rights concepts and pursuing a rights-based approach to issues at hand. The European Union does not see the concept of "defamation of religions" as a valid

one in a human rights discourse. International human rights law protects primarily individuals in the exercise of their freedom of religion or belief and not the religions as such. Members of religions or communities of belief can not be viewed as mere particles of homogenous and monolith entities.

Moreover, discrimination based on religion or belief, which is a serious violation of human rights, needs to be addressed comprehensively. It should be recognized that it is not confined to any one religion or belief, nor to any one part of the world; ample evidence exists to that effect.

The European Union is, as ever, fully committed to take all appropriate measures to promote tolerance and eliminate discrimination based on religion or belief. We would like to see that any action for this purpose would be based on and reaffirm equal promotion and protection of all human rights, including freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, in all their aspects.

Mr. Chairperson,

We have to note with regret that the draft resolution on *Combating defamation of religions* is not in line with these fundamental principles guiding our approach to the issue at stake. Therefore, the European Union will vote against it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson