Combating Global Religious Intolerance and Discrimination: The role of the Human Rights Council and the implementation of resolution 16/18

14.45-17.30h on Thursday 12th February
Restaurant Vieux Bois, Avenue de la Paix 12, 1202 Geneva

It is almost impossible to turn on the news today without witnessing scenes of hatred, violence, intolerance and discrimination, perpetrated in the name of religion or belief. The recent attacks in Paris, mass killings in Nigeria, protests and counter-protests in Germany, the recent hostage-taking and killings in Sydney, and the march of ISIL across Syria and Iraq - these may be the most well-documented examples of such intolerance, but they come against a background of heightened religious hostility and discrimination in virtually every part of the world.

In the face of this rising intolerance and hostility, it is clear that the fight against religious intolerance and discrimination must be a key political priority for the international community, and in particular the UN and its Human Rights Council. The main UN global policy framework for combatting intolerance, stigmatisation, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief is set down in Council resolution 16/18.

The adoption of resolution 16/18 in March 2011 and the establishment of its intergovernmental implementation process (‘the Istanbul Process’) were hailed as a turning point in international efforts to confront religious intolerance. After more than five decades of failure, UN member states had, it was hoped, at last come together to agree a common, consensus-based approach and practical plan of action.

Despite that important and continued consensus, as manifested in annual successor resolutions at both the Council and the General Assembly, differences remain over the nature of the problem, the best role for the international community, and whether the solution to intolerance lies in strengthening the protection of fundamental human rights or in setting clearer limits thereon. Linked to (and indeed flowing from) these conceptual differences, states have increasingly raised the question of whether or not resolution 16/18 is being effectively implemented.

Against the aforementioned backdrop of heightened religious tension and hostility around the world, it is vital for all states from all regions to come together, reconcile differences and recommit to the full – and urgently needed – implementation of resolution 16/18.

Programme

14.45h Arrival
15.00h Introduction by the chair, Mr Marc Limon, Director of the Universal Rights Group (URG)
15.05h Presentation of new URG policy report on ‘Combating Global Religious Intolerance: the implementation of resolution 16/18’, Dr. Nazila Ghanea, University of Oxford

15.20h High-level panel discussion:
H.E. Mr. Zamir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan
H.E. Mr. Mehmet Ferden Çarıkçı, Permanent Representative of Turkey
H.E. Mr. Keith Harper, Ambassador of the United States of America
H.E. Mr. Mark Matthews, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom

16.00h Lead Discussants: H.E. Mr. Auajjar Mohamed, Permanent Representative of Morocco; H.E. Mr. Carsten Staur, Permanent Representative of Denmark; H.E. Mr. Slimane Chikh, Ambassador, Permanent Delegation of the OIC; Mr. Andrew Smith, Legal Officer, Article XIX.

16.30h Open discussion