

HILLARY CLINTON'S CROSSHAIRS ON FREE SPEECH AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Criminalizing intolerance

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<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/12>At a United Nations conference this week, free speech is in the cross hairs.

This week in Washington, the United States is hosting an international conference obliquely titled "Expert Meeting on Implementing the U.N. Human Rights Resolution 16/18." The impenetrable title conceals the disturbing agenda: to establish international standards for, among other things, criminalizing "intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of ... religion and belief." The unstated enemy of religion in this conference is free speech, and the Obama administration is facilitating efforts by Muslim countries to "deter" some speech in the name of human rights.

FOR THE RECORD:

Blasphemy: The phrase "the prosecution of" was inadvertently dropped in a Dec. 13 Op-Ed about a U.N. resolution on blasphemy. The sentence should read: "While the resolution also speaks to combating incitement to violence, the core purpose behind this and previous measures has been to justify the prosecution of those who speak against religion."

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violence, the core purpose behind this and previous measures has been to justify those who speak against religion. The members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or OIC, have been pushing for years to gain international legitimacy of their domestic criminal prosecutions of anti-religious speech.

This year, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton invited nations to come to implement the resolution and “to build those muscles” needed “to avoid a return to the old patterns of division.” Those “old patterns” include instances in which writers and cartoonists became the targets of protests by religious groups. The most famous such incident occurred in 2005 when a Danish newspaper published cartoons mocking the prophet Muhammad. The result were worldwide protests in which Muslims reportedly killed more than 100 people – a curious way to demonstrate religious tolerance. While Western governments reaffirmed the right of people to free speech after the riots, they quietly moved toward greater prosecution of anti-religious speech under laws prohibiting hate speech and discrimination.

The OIC members have long sought to elevate religious dogma over individual rights. In 1990, members adopted the Cairo Declaration, which rejected core provisions of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and affirmed that free speech and other rights must be consistent with “the principles of the sharia,” or Islamic law. The biggest victory of the OIC came in 2009 when the Obama administration joined in condemning speech containing “negative racial and religious stereotyping” and asked states to “take effective measures” to combat incidents, including those of “religious intolerance.” Then, in March, the U.S. supported Resolution 16/18’s call for states to “criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief.” It also “condemns” statements that advocate “hostility” toward religion. Although the latest resolution refers to “incitement” rather than “defamation” of

religion (which appeared in the 2005 resolution), it continues the disingenuous effort to justify crackdowns on religious critics in the name of human rights law.

The OIC has hit on a winning strategy to get Western countries to break away from their commitment to free speech by repackaging blasphemy as hate speech and free speech as the manifestation of “intolerance.” Now, orthodoxy is to be protected in the name of pluralism – requiring their own notion of “respect and empathy and tolerance.” One has to look only at the OIC member countries, however, to see their vision of empathy and tolerance, as well as their low threshold for anti-religious speech that incites people. In September, a Kuwaiti court jailed a person for tweeting a message deemed derogatory to Shiites. In Pakistan last year, a doctor was arrested for throwing out a business card of a man named Muhammad because he shared the prophet’s name.

The core countries behind this effort show little tolerance or “empathy” themselves for opposing religions or viewpoints. Saudi Arabia will not allow the construction of a church in the kingdom, let alone allow public observance of other faiths. This year, the Saudi interior minister declared free speech to be an offense against God, declaring the kingdom “categorically [bans] all sorts of demonstrations, marches and sit-ins ... as they contradict Islamic sharia law and the values and traditions of Saudi society.” Last week, Saudi courts sentenced an Australian Muslim to be flogged 500 times and sent to jail for “insulting” Muhammad.