

UN resolution on Quran burning passes despite negative vote from U.S. and European Union

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An Iranian protester holds the Quran in her hand during a protest against a the stunt in Stockholm [File: Majid Asgaripour/WANA via Reuters]

Geneva, July 12 RHC)-- The United Nations Human Rights Council has approved a resolution on religious hatred and bigotry in the wake of a Quran-burning stunt in Sweden that led to protests across the Muslim world.

The resolution passed on Wednesday was opposed by the United States and European Union, which said it conflicts with their positions on human rights and freedom of expression.

Pakistan and other Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries, concerned by the incident last month outside Stockholm's main mosque, during which an Iraqi immigrant desecrated the Quran on the Eid al-Adha holiday, secured an urgent debate at the UN's top rights body on Tuesday.

"We must see this clearly for what it is: incitement to religious hatred, discrimination and attempts to provoke violence," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told the Geneva-based council via video on Tuesday. He said that such acts occurred under "government sanction and with the sense of impunity".

Bhutto Zardari's remarks were echoed by ministers from Iran, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. "Stop abusing freedom of expression," said Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi. "Silence means complicity."

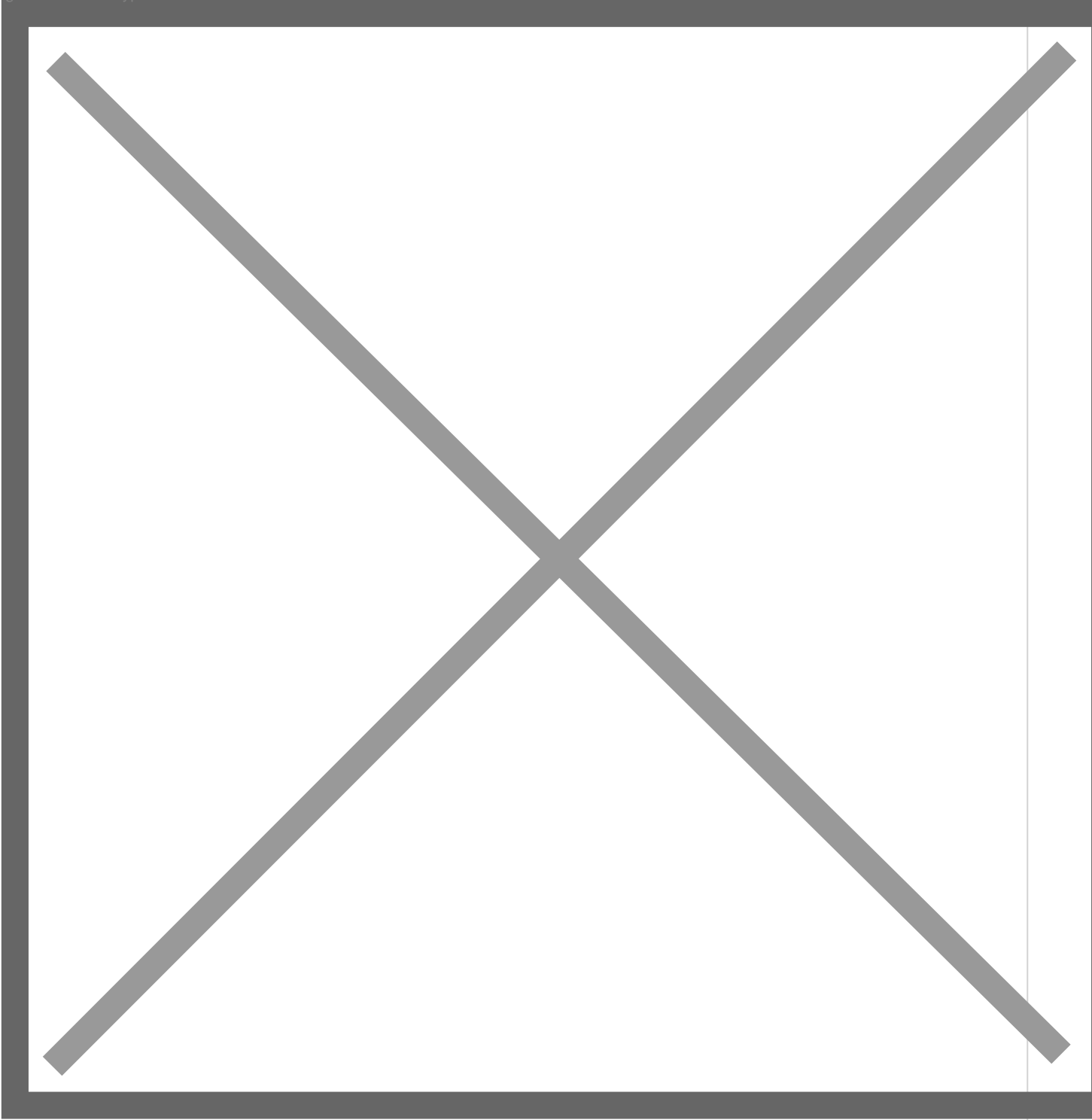
UN human rights chief Volker Turk told the council that inflammatory acts against Muslims, as well as other religions or minorities, are "offensive, irresponsible and wrong."

The Swedish government condemned the Quran burning as "Islamophobic", but added that the country had a "constitutionally-protected right to freedom of assembly, expression and demonstration."

On Tuesday, France's ambassador Jerome Bonnafont noted that human rights "protect people – not religions, doctrines, beliefs or their symbols ... It is neither for the United Nations nor for states to define what is sacred."

United Nations Human Rights Council resolutions are not legally binding, but are seen as strong political commitments by states. Tuesday's motion called on countries to "impede the prevention and prosecution of acts and advocacy of religious hatred."

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Here is how countries voted:

Yes:

Algeria; Argentina; Bangladesh; Bolivia; Cameroon; China; Cuba; Eritrea; Gabon; Gambia; India; Ivory Coast; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Malawi; Malaysia; Maldives; Morocco; Pakistan; Qatar; Senegal; Somalia; South Africa; Sudan; Ukraine; UAE; Uzbekistan; Vietnam

No:

Belgium; Costa Rica; Czech Republic; Finland; France; Germany; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Montenegro; Romania; UK; US

Abstained:

Benin; Chile; Georgia; Honduras; Mexico; Nepal; Paraguay

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