U.N. to make ban on criticizing Islam mandatory?

Expected proposal would criminalize such comments in U.S.

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Muslim-dominated nations at the United Nations are once again pushing a religious "anti-defamation" plan that would bar worldwide all criticism of their founder Muhammad and his teaching.

According to a report by CNN's Lou Dobbs posted on YouTube, the proposal that has been repeatedly brought in recent years by the Organization of Islamic Conference states is expected to resurface as early as this spring.

This time, however, the resolution wouldn't allow nations to opt out.

"The United Nations has adopted what it calls a Resolution to Combat Defamation of Religion," Dobbs said in the report. "The U.N. now wants to make that anti-blasphemy resolution binding on member nations, including, of course, our own. That would make it a crime in the United States ... to criticize religion, in particular, Islam."

Constitutional lawyer Floyd Abrams said in the report, "What they would do would be to make it illegal to put out a movie or write a book or a poem that somebody could say was defamatory of Islam."

Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, has assembled a petition opposing the plan that has been signed by more than 400,000 people already. He said the most recent U.N. General Assembly vote – which was 86 in favor, 53 opposed and 42 abstentions – was a dramatic shift from the vote from one year ago, which was 108-51-25.

Because of the circuitous route to adoption in the U.N., a single General Assembly vote does not automatically mean adoption. Nor does it mean the proposal will disappear.

Columnist Chuck Hustmyre highlighted some of the practices of nations where Islam already has special protections from criticism.

"Afghanistan and some other OIC member nations impose the death penalty on those who convert from Islam to another religion," he wrote.

The anti-defamation resolutions began with describing the "need" to protect Islam and in recent years has developed into a call for the protection for "religions" from defamation.

However, the only religion specifically cited, in fact, is Islam.

The Muslim nations have sought to have member states enact laws banning such "blasphemy."

The plan expected to be introduced soon, however, will include a recommendation to the U.N. Human Rights Council that the ban be made binding on member nations, the report said.

The need for a mandatory rule was cited by Pakistan's Ambassador Masood Khan, reported Hustmyre, who also cited the apparent implementation of the plan already.

He reported in India, police arrested the editor of an English-language newspaper after it reprinted a British article titled, "Why Should I Respect These Oppressive Religions?"

Newspaper officials were accused of "hurting the religious feelings" of Muslims.

He also reported in the U.S., publisher Random House in 2008 canceled publication plans for a novel, "The Jewel of Medina," because executives feared the book might offend Muslims.

The 57 member nations of the Organization of the Islamic Conference have lobbied for the plan, which is based on the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, since 1999. The Cairo declaration states "that all rights are subject to Shariah law, and makes Shariah law the only source of reference for human rights."

The ACLJ, in promoting its petition to raise awareness of the campaign, said, "The fact is this: The proposal, while purportedly to protect against 'defamation of religions,' is frequently used as a weapon to silence religious minorities, including Christians in many countries.

"The resolution actually targets anyone who speaks negatively in any way about Islam. Sharing your faith would become an international crime punishable by imprisonment – or death," the ACLJ said.

Fox News religion contributor Lauren Green previously reported the encroachment of the plan already.

"But you say, 'That can't happen,' or 'that would be ludicrous.' The fact is, it's already happening. Christians and other minority religions in predominantly Islamic areas or countries are being persecuted to barbaric levels. Reports from Nairobi, Kenya, say that one aid worker was beheaded in September for converting from Islam to Christianity; the Iranian government has already passed a bill calling for execution on the basis of apostasy (anyone converting from Islam to another religion), and of course we've seen the violence that erupted over the Danish cartoon of the prophet Mohammed," Green said.

An ACLJ analysis found the OIC "uses the religious defamation concept as both a shield and a sword. In Islamic countries, blasphemy laws are used as a shield to protect the dominant religion, but even more dangerously, they are used to silence minority religious believers and prevent Muslims from converting to other faiths, which is still a capital crime in many Islamic countries."

The U.S. State Department also has found the proposal unpalatable.

"This resolution is incomplete inasmuch as it fails to address the situation of all religions," said a statement from Leonard Leo. "We believe that such inclusive language would have furthered the objective of promoting religious freedom. We also believe that any resolution on this topic must include mention of the need to change educational systems that promote hatred of other religions, as well as the problem of state-sponsored media that negatively targets any one religion."

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