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Clustered ID with SR on Freedom of Religion and SR on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

Delivered by Mr. Yoel Mester,
Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN in Geneva

Thank you, Mr. President.

We would like to refer in our intervention to the report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion. We would like to thank him for his report which highlights important challenges to freedom of religion in the world today.

Religious tolerance in the Middle East seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Against this backdrop, Israel is a unique case of co-existence between people of different faiths. This is exemplified by flourishing Muslim, Christian, Druze and Baha'i communities as well as other smaller denominations who compose close to 25% of the population, and who all enjoy full and equal rights. In addition, those who prefer freedom from religion are equally protected.

Diversity also means that sometimes there are tensions, but the democratic nature of Israel ensures that challenges are publicly talked about, and addressed by the authorities. For example, hate crimes today are dealt with decisively by a special police unit set up specifically for the task.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur points to an increasingly worrying trend: The rise of violence in the name of religion, and its association with extremism.

The Rapporteur mentions ISIL and Boko Haram, but falls short of mentioning by name other non-state actors in the Middle East, who espouse a religiously motivated form of terror. Organizations such as Hamas in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon should be denounced by this Council for their abuse of religion as an excuse to trample human rights, and deliberately attack innocent civilians.

In addition, we invite the Special Rapporteur to pay special attention to the reckless manner in which the Palestinian Authority plays the religious card to advance its political agenda against Israel. The PA's statements exceed by far the threshold set forth by the Rabat Plan of Action, and cannot be considered anything but religious incitement to violence.

I thank you Mr. President.