

Hundred and seventy-fourth session

174 EX/42
PARIS, 30 March 2006
Original: French

Item 46 of the provisional agenda

**RESPECT FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND RESPECT FOR
SACRED BELIEFS AND VALUES AND RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS**

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 174th session of the Executive Board at the request of the following States: Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Gabon, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

An explanatory note follows.

Explanatory note

1. The publication of caricatures of the Prophet of Islam has caused deep and widespread offence and indignation within the Muslim community around the world. Any appreciation of this context must be founded on the principles and aims of the Charter of the United Nations and the UNESCO Constitution, and on the various relevant international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and on full compliance with the obligations under those instruments, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance and the resolution adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 33rd session on the misuse of religious symbols and expressions.
2. Respect for freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs and symbols are two indissociable principles and go hand in hand in combating ignorance and lack of understanding with a view to building peace and establishing dialogue among cultures, civilizations, religions and peoples.
3. Freedom of expression should be exercised with a deep sense of responsibility and in a spirit of respect for religions, beliefs and convictions.
4. All societies must comply with international standards advocating human dignity and human rights, including freedom of expression and respect for religious and cultural beliefs and values. Any reaction must be expressed peacefully and constructively and must give precedence to seeking collective, lasting solutions.
5. Given the importance of religion to peoples and to dignity and the way of life in different cultures, respect for different religious beliefs is essential to international peace and security and to the progress of human civilizations.
6. The proposal to include this item in the agenda of the 174th session of the Executive Board is consistent with the UNESCO Constitution, which aims “to develop and to increase the means of communication between [their] peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other’s lives”.
7. The grave situation resulting from the publication of these caricatures calls for a judicious, dispassionate handling of the matter away from any context of violence. The Organization, by virtue of its mandate, is well placed to play an active role in seeking to establish constructive dialogue on the issue.
8. UNESCO has the legitimate right and duty to state its views on this question in a visible and constructive manner, taking measures consistent with the spirit of its Constitution and its mandate through its mechanisms and programmes in order to prevent such situations of incomprehension from occurring in the future.