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Muslim Leaders Make Case for Global Blasphemy Ban at U.N.

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(CNSNews.com) – True to their word, the leaders of the world’s two most populous Muslim countries used their speeches at the United Nations General Assembly Tuesday to call for a legally-binding, global anti-blasphemy protocol.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his Pakistan counterpart, Asif Ali Zardari, both argued that insults against Mohammed, Islam’s prophet, incite violence and are not legitimate free speech.

Yudhoyono noted that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says the exercise of rights and freedoms is subject to “the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.”

“Freedom of expression is therefore not absolute,” he told the annual high-level gathering in New York.

Arguing that religious “defamation” persists – and citing *The Innocence of Muslims*, a video clip posted on YouTube that disparages Mohammed – Yodhoyono called on member states to adopt a legally-binding instrument banning blasphemy, to serve as “a point of reference that the world community must comply with.”



Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono addresses the U.N. General Assembly session in New York, on September 25, 2012. (UN Photo by Marco Castro)



Alongside a framed picture of his slain wife, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari delivers an address to the U.N. General Assembly in New York, on September 25, 2012. (UN Photo by J. Carrier)

When Zardari mounted the UNGA podium later in the day he began his address by voicing “the strongest condemnation for the acts of incitement of hate against the faith of billions of Muslims of the world and our beloved prophet, Mohammed (peace be upon him).”

“Although we can never condone violence, the international community must not become silent observers and should criminalize such acts that destroy the peace of the world and endanger world security by misusing freedom of expression.”

Zardari urged the U.N. to act “immediately.”

The Mohammed video was mentioned by a number of other speakers on Tuesday, including [President Obama at some length](#). Afghan President Hamid Karzai, whose country has seen the largest number of deaths in violent protests linked to the issue over recent weeks, called those behind the film “fanatics.”

“As we speak today the world is shaken by the depravity of fanatics who have committed acts of insult against the faith of over 1.5 billion Muslims,” he declared. “We strongly condemn these offensive acts, whether it involves the production of a film, the publication of cartoons, or indeed any other acts of insult and provocation.”

Karzai went on to deplore “the menace of Islamophobia,” saying it threatened peace and co-existence among cultures and civilizations.

“I call upon leaders in the West, both politicians and the media, to confront Islamophobia in all its many forms and manifestations.”

‘A contemporary form of racism’

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are among Muslim leaders yet to speak in New York who are also expected to broach the subject in their speeches.

The 56-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and 22-member Arab League earlier [signaled their intention to revive](#) a longstanding

but temporarily suspended initiative at the U.N. aimed at outlawing religious “defamation” globally.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa told the *Jakarta Post* on the sidelines of the UNGA session that his country’s push for a legally-binding instrument came after non-binding measures such as previous U.N. resolutions had proved ineffective, as seen in the current episode.

“Despite the repeated concerns voiced by numerous international forums, [such actions] keep re-occurring,” he said. “Hence, a stronger instrument is absolutely necessary.”

Critics say the OIC-led religious “defamation” campaign impose undue limitations on freedom of expression, amount to legalized discrimination against religious minorities, and are an attempt to extend blasphemy law-like restrictions beyond the Islamic world.

Pakistan boasts arguably the Islamic world’s most controversial [blasphemy laws](#), where disparaging Mohammed or defiling the Qur’an carries the death penalty.

On the same day as Yudhoyono and Zardari made their appeals in New York, a session of the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva also heard speaker after speaker criticize *The Innocence of Muslims*.

Pakistan’s envoy, speaking on behalf of the OIC, called for Islamophobia to be treated in law in the same way as anti-Semitism is in some parts of the world.

“We are all aware of the fact that laws exist in Europe and other countries which impose curbs on anti-Semitic speech, Holocaust denial or racial slurs,” he said. “We need to acknowledge, once and for all, that Islamophobia in particular and discrimination on the basis of religion and belief are contemporary forms of racism and must be dealt with as such.”

On Monday, U.S. ambassador to the HRC Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe in remarks to the council defended freedom of expression, even when it offends.

“The potential unlawful reaction of an offended listener should not get a veto over the right of the speaker to express his or her beliefs,” she said. “This is not because we are insensitive to the feelings of the listener, but because we know from experience that the price of restricting expression is too high

“We believe that offensive ideas will fall of their own weight when countered by other arguments in a vibrant marketplace of ideas,” Donahoe added.