

WORLD: States should not use religious beliefs to justify women and LGBT+ rights violations

OHCHR (02.03.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2TEwt0u> – States should repeal gender discriminatory laws grounded on religious beliefs and must address gender-based violence carried out in the name of religion by non-State actors, said a UN expert in a report presented to the Human Rights Council today.

“I firmly reject any claim that religious beliefs can be invoked as a legitimate ‘justification’ for violence or discrimination against women, girls or LGBT+ people. The right to freedom of religion protects individuals and not religions as such,” said Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

In his report, the UN expert urges States to repeal gender-based discrimination laws, including those enacted with reference to religious considerations that criminalize adultery; criminalize persons on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; criminalize abortion in all cases; and facilitate religious practices that violate human rights.

“Women and LGBT+ people experience discrimination and violence inflicted in the name of religion by State and non-State actors that impedes their ability to fully enjoy their human

rights, including their right to freedom of religion or belief,” Shaheed said.

The Special Rapporteur also expressed deep concern at the rise in political and religious campaigns, which invoke religious freedom to seek to rollback human rights that are fundamental to gender equality, at both national and international levels.

“Religious communities are not monolithic. In many religions, a plurality of self-understandings exists, some of which may be more committed than others to advancing gender equality and non-discrimination,” the UN expert said.

“While religious organizations are entitled to autonomy in the administration of their affairs, such deference should be extended within a holistic conception of rights grounded in the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and inalienability of all human rights.

“States have an obligation to guarantee to everyone, including women, girls and LGBT+ people, an equal right to freedom of religion or belief, including by creating an enabling environment where pluralist and progressive self-understandings can manifest,” Shaheed said.

The Special Rapporteur also presented reports on his recent country visits to the Netherlands and Sri Lanka to the Human Rights Council.