

EVENT REVIEW

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE THEMED “EMBRACING DIVERSITY: TACKLING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN 2024”

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On March 8-9, 2024 in the "Nizami Ganjavi" hall of the Fairmont Baku Hotel, the Baku International Multiculturalism Center (BIMC) and the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center) in partnership with the G20 Interfaith Dialogue



Forum organized the conference entitled "Embracing Diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024". Regarding to the fact that the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution on "International Day to Combat Islamophobia" on March 15, 2022, the conference dedicated to the 2nd anniversary of the International Day of Combating Islamophobia.

Over 130 representatives from 32 countries, including scientists, international organization experts, religious figures, and non-governmental organizations, participated in the conference. During the conference, participants discussed matters of intersectional approach in the fight against Islamophobia, conspiracy theories about Muslims, historical and contemporary perspectives on Islamophobia, joint cooperation in the fight against Islamophobia and the role of international organizations, building harmonious societies by promoting religious diversity and interfaith respect. It was not merely a gathering of minds, but a collective endeavor to understand the roots of Islamophobia, dissect its manifestations, and formulate strategies that pave the way towards a more tolerant and inclusive future. Hence, the second Islamophobia conference provided a platform for rigorous discussions, research presentations, and open dialogues surrounding the multifaceted issue of Islamophobia. Each panel consisted of 5-6 speakers and a moderator for 15 minutes and followed by Q&A.

The aim is clear: to nurture an environment where people of all faiths can coexist harmoniously, where diversity is celebrated rather than feared, and where the principles of justice and equality prevail.

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has addressed the participants of the international conference held in Baku on the topic of "Preserving Diversity: Combating Islamophobia in 2024." The text of the address was read by Hikmet Hajiyev, the Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan - Head of the Department of Foreign Policy Affairs of the Presidential Administration. The address drew attention to the increasing cases of Islamophobia in the world and the fact that Azerbaijan has also faced this negative trend. "Among the dire consequences of Armenia's 30-year long occupation of our lands was a deliberate destruction and annihilation of our cultural heritage of universal value, including the monuments associated with the Islamic faith. While initial estimates suggested that 65 mosques had been razed to the ground during the occupation, unfortunately, that number is steadily increasing as numerous new examples of Armenian vandalism against Islamic heritage continue to emerge."



The President also emphasized that respect for multicultural values is one of the priority areas of Azerbaijan's state policy. "We take pride in Azerbaijan being a multinational and multiconfessional country. Representatives of all religions and ethnic groups live here in peace as one family. Religious equality and inclusivity, safeguarded in our country as an asset, embody the way of life for the Azerbaijani people, serving as a source of strength."



In his opening remarks, Executive Director of the Baku International Multiculturalism Centre Ravan Hasanov said that the issues to be discussed at the conference can serve as a roadmap. According to him, discrimination, hate speech and isolationist policies are currently among the main problems of the world. Such cases are prevalent in Western countries. "Although it is possible to live together peacefully, these negative situations against Muslims continue."

The conferences included the address by Mr. Yousef M. Al-Dobeay, Assistant Secretary-General of Political Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Prof. Cole Durham, President of the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum.

Assistant Secretary-General of Political Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Yousef M. Al-Dobeay said that the designation of March 15 by the United Nations (UN) as the International Day to combat Islamophobia is a significant step in the fight against Islamophobia. "We have a great responsibility in this fight," he added. He mentioned that during these years, Azerbaijan has hosted various high-level events dedicated to the fight against Islamophobia, taking exemplary steps. Today's event also reflects Azerbaijan's strong commitment in this regard. "The OIC is looking forward to the results of today's conference," he added. The OIC Assistant Secretary General drew attention to the fact that provocative acts continue to be committed around the world, noting that people are being targeted because of their religious beliefs. Yousef M. Al-Dobeay stressed the need to take various measures to prevent oppression and discrimination against Muslims. "The OIC calls on international organizations and civil societies to unite and mobilize their efforts against these cases," the Assistant Secretary-General emphasized.

The conference featured plenary and breakout sessions including Plenary (A) Calling for global dialogue to promote tolerance, peace, and respect for human rights and religious diversity; Breakout sessions (B) Multiculturalism, Islam and the clash of civilizations theory: rethinking Islamophobia; (B1) Shaping Public Opinion: digital Islamophobia; (C) Confronting Islamophobia in the context of higher education; Plenary (D) Similarities and differences in the treatment of Muslims across Western Europe, basic human rights of the Muslim community; Breakout sessions (E) Anti-Muslim policies in France: Normalizing Islamophobia; (E1) Deliberate acts of destruction and desecration of Islamic cultural and religious heritage in non-Muslim countries; (F) The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women's Repression and Resistance, Gender and Society.



The plenary session on “Calling for global dialogue to promote tolerance, peace and respect for human rights and religious diversity” was moderated by Fariz Ismailzade, Vice-Rector for External, Government and Student Affairs of ADA University.

In his remarks, the Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Office Sheikhulislam Allahshukur Pashazade said that it had become a tradition for Azerbaijan to host international conferences on tackling Islamophobia. “Azerbaijan, a country where the environment of interreligious brotherhood prevails, always remembers its national, cultural and religious values. Azerbaijan’s multiculturalism is an example to the entire world. People living here are treated with the same respect, regardless of their religion or race,” he mentioned.

Ambassador, Director of the Center for Civilizational Dialogue at ICESCO Khalid Fathalrahman Omer Mohamed said that thanks to the purposeful policy of President Ilham Aliyev the Azerbaijani government is doing great things in combatting Islamophobia.

Head of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory Dodik Ariyanto underscored that Islamophobia had already become a global phenomenon. He described the adoption of the resolution of the UN General Assembly on the fight against Islamophobia as a progressive case, saying that such documents confirm the existence of Islamophobia at the global level.

Former Ambassador of South Africa to the U.S. and founder of World for All Foundation Ebrahim Rasool emphasized that over the past hundred years, the world has been witnessing negative manifestations such as wars, racism, and Islamophobia. "This level of hatred and gender-based violence is a serious concern," he added.

Secretary General of the World Muslim Communities Council Mohamed Bechari put forward proposals to prevent cases of Islamophobia, stressing the importance of holding seminars and forums. The Secretary General expressed his gratitude to President Ilham Aliyev for the excellent organization of the event.



Speaking at the event, Vice-chair of APPG British Muslim, Shadow Minister for Exports in Labour's Business and Trade Team Afzal Khan said: "Islamophobia is a form of racism that is more evident in the West. So, the cases of Islamophobia in the world have recorded a 335 percent increase in recent months. Moreover, 51 Muslims were killed in New Zealand."

The two-day conference culminated with the adoption of the Joint Communiqué.

Following the conclusion of the engaging two-day event hosted in Baku, an enriching excursion was arranged for the esteemed guests to explore Shusha, a vibrant cultural hub designated as the Islamic world's cultural capital for the year 2024.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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