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# country report

Multilateral Dialogue Geneva



## Geneva Barometer

### Developments in the Geneva-based international organisations from the end of April to mid-July 2023

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The “Geneva Barometer” takes an occasional look at selected developments in the international organisations based in Geneva.

Traditionally, the months leading up to the start of summer are busy in international Geneva, with the World Health Assembly (WHA)<sup>1</sup>, the ILO's main annual conference, the International Labour Conference and a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council all taking place. Added to that, in early July, was the annual summit on artificial intelligence. Worrying figures were published by the UN Refugee Agency in its annual report, and alarming words also came from the WMO. Several organizations focused on the dramatic situation in Sudan. At the same time, preparations are underway for important milestones in the coming year: At the WHO, there was initial movement in the discussions on the pandemic treaty, and at the WTO, critical dossiers are progressing at different speeds with a view to the ministerial conference next year.

### Forced Displacement

#### Indictment on the state of our world – UNHCR's new global trends report

On June 14, 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) released its latest Global Trends Report which focuses primarily on developments in 2022: It saw the largest (measured) increase in a single year - 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced at the end of last year<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the recent fighting in Sudan, the UNHCR estimated 110 million people to be displaced by mid-June 2023. In addition to the massive refugee movements brought about by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the increase is also due to a correction in the numbers of refugees originating from Afghanistan in Iran and Pakistan. Prolonged or new wars and conflicts continue to be the main cause of forced displacement. While UNHCR faces an increasing number of emergencies, it, like other humanitarian organizations, is feeling greater financial pressure. By July 2023, only 36% of the funds needed had been received<sup>3</sup>, far less than at the same time the previous year. The situation in Sudan was of particular concern to UN High Commissioner Grandi.

#### Urgent and decisive action demanded after boat tragedy in the Mediterranean Sea

In the wake of the June 14, 2023, capsizing of a boat with more than 700 people on board, UNHCR and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reiterated in a joint statement<sup>4</sup> that search and rescue at sea is a legal and humanitarian duty to which both shipmasters and States are obliged. Given that the Mediterranean is the most dangerous migration route worldwide with the highest fatality rate, States need to come together and address the gaps in proactive search and rescue, quick disembarkation, and safe regular pathways,

<sup>1</sup> More about the WHA in our [Geneva Telegram](#).

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR's latest Global Trends Report can be found [here](#), a summary [here](#), and an account of recent trends, along with the largest contributors [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> An overview of UNHCR's financial situation [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> The joint statement can be found [here](#).

the organisations state. Saving lives and the human rights of migrants must be at the center of any response. At least 27,675 people (48%) of all migrants who have gone missing since 2014 lost their lives in the Mediterranean. Since the beginning of the year alone, at least 1931 people have died here, most of them on the central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy. This was also the route taken by the ill-fated ship on June 14. IOM currently estimates that at least 596 people died<sup>5</sup>. At the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council, a resolution tabled by Mexico was adopted by consensus, calling on states to bring their migration policies and practices in line with international human rights law and international refugee law<sup>6</sup>.

### New head of IOM

On May 15, Amy Pope of the United States was elected in a secret ballot as the new Director General of IOM. She received 98 votes from the 171 member states present and will thus be the first woman to hold the post, replacing the current incumbent António Vitorino (Portugal) after just one term on October 1. Vitorino was the official EU candidate and only the second non-American DG in the organization's history. Pope is currently deputy director general for management and reform. Some observers perceived the U.S. campaign for Pope as aggressive. On the EU side, Pope's candidacy was - unsurprisingly - not enthusiastically received, although according to some observers not all EU member states were immediately united in their support for Vitorino. Thus, under the Biden administration, the U.S. gained the leadership of another important Geneva-based organization after the ITU.

### WMO sounds alarm

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) will also be headed by a woman as of January 1, 2024: Prof. Celeste Saulo from Argentina, who was elected with a large majority, will replace Petteri Taalas from Finland after his second term as Secretary General has expired. She received 108 of 193 votes in a secret ballot, beating Wenjian Zhang

(China, 37 votes), Elena Manaenkova (Russia, Switzerland, 7 votes) and Albert Martis (Curaçao, 4 votes). In her inaugural speech, Saulo outlined, among other things, her commitment to let the voice of all members be heard equally and prioritizing the most vulnerable to climate change.

In the first week of July, the organization was confronted with the highest global temperatures ever recorded (0.3°C above the previous record of 2016). The dramatic record-breaking North Atlantic temperatures of 1.5°C above average were currently a key driver of extreme weather in Europe, according to the WMO, and marine ecosystems were also being significantly impacted. Due to the re-emergence of the El Niño effect, the 1.5°C target will most likely be exceeded in the next 5 years. The ice melt in the Antarctic by 1.5 km<sup>2</sup> compared to the previous year is also unprecedented and worrisome. Compared to the Arctic, the Antarctic was previously considered relatively stable. As data continues to be collected, the melting in the coming years will presumably also be attributed to climate change<sup>7</sup>. The extreme weather had a major impact on human health, ecosystems, economies, agriculture, energy and water supplies and will unfortunately become the new normal, according to Taalas.

### Situation in Sudan in focus

#### Huge underfunding in spite of donor conference

Since the outbreak of fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum on April 15, the situation in Sudan has been the focus of several Geneva-based organizations. As of July 18, IOM counted some 2.6 million newly internally displaced persons (in addition to more than 3.7 million people previously displaced within their own country) and more than 757,230 people fleeing outside Sudan's borders, primarily to Chad and Egypt (ca. 260.000 each) as well as to South Sudan, but also to Ethiopia, the Central African Republic, and Libya<sup>8</sup>. In total, 24.7 million people, just over half of Sudan's population, are in need of humanitarian assistance, 57 per cent more than the

<sup>5</sup> More [here](#), in IOM's Missing Migrants Project, more on the June 14 boat [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> Resolution A/HRC/53/L.18 on human rights of migrants in transit can be found [here](#).

<sup>7</sup> WMO press conference on July 10, see [here](#), [here](#) or [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), see [here](#).

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) projected earlier this year. At a high-level donor conference in Geneva on June 19, pledges totalled only \$1.52 billion from a total of 31 donors, out of a total need of \$3.1 billion. Co-organizers included the UN, the EU and the African Union, as well as Germany, Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia<sup>9</sup>. Currently, the humanitarian response plan is only 23% covered and the refugee response plan is only 17% covered.

### 36th Special Session of Human Rights Council on Sudan

In addition to humanitarian organizations, the situation in Sudan was also debated, among others, in the UN Human Rights Council, which convened for its 36th special session on May 11 at the request of the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany and Norway<sup>10</sup>. Apart from Kyrgyzstan, the session was not supported by any other state in the African or Asia-Pacific groups. Citing the lack of support and the potential negative impact on negotiation efforts, Sudan called for a vote on a text that would strengthen the mandate of the designated expert on Sudan, Radhouan Nouicer. The establishment of an investigative mechanism, as demanded by NGOs, had already been abandoned<sup>11</sup>. By a narrow majority of 18 to 15 with 14 abstentions, Nouicer was tasked with detailed monitoring and documentation of all allegations of human rights violations and abuses since 25 October 2021, including those arising from the current conflict with a specific focus on prevention. During the 53rd regular session, the lack of consensus around his mandate extension was again criticized. However, the focus was on the worsening situation, including indiscriminate airstrikes, targeted attacks on civilian infrastructure including hospitals and certain ethnic groups in West Darfur, mostly the Masalit community, sexual violence against women and girls, enforced disappearances, torture, summary executions and the use of children in the conflict. UN High Commissioner Türk condemned the blatant disregard for

international humanitarian and human rights law, called for the establishment of humanitarian corridors and stressed his willingness to talk to both sides. By mid-June, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimated that at least 958 people had been killed and 4746 injured.

## Human Rights

### 53rd session of the Human Rights Council: Quran burning and women's rights in focus

Special attention during the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council from June 19 to July 14 was given to an urgent debate requested by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the recent Quran burning in Sweden<sup>12</sup>. This represented an attempt to put back on the Council's agenda an old debate on defamation of religion, which had only been settled in 2011 with Resolution 16/18, the Rabat Plan of Action and the Istanbul Process, on its implementation. The Action Plan includes, among other things, a threshold test with six concrete steps to consider before freedom of opinion and expression may be restricted under Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With 28 votes in favour, 12 against and 7 abstentions, the Pakistani resolution was adopted after Belgium called for a vote<sup>13</sup>. In addition to the EU states represented in the Council, Montenegro, Costa Rica, the US and the UK also voted against the text. Among other things, it calls for stricter laws, policies, and law enforcement frameworks and accountability in the context of religious hatred. High Commissioner Türk, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Nazila Ghanea, and mainly Western states raised the delicate balance between the right to freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of religion<sup>14</sup>. General blasphemy laws were not compatible with the ICCPR. Ghanea had requested a visit to Sweden, which was granted. OIC Secretary General Hissein Brahim Taha was also invited to Sweden.

<sup>9</sup> More information on the donor conference can be found [here](#) and [here](#), and a map with the donors can be found [here](#). The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) on Sudan can be found [here](#) and the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) [here](#). Funding to the HRP can be tracked [here](#) and to the RRP [here](#).

<sup>10</sup> More on the special session as well as the resolution can be found [here](#) and on its supporters in the [Map of the Month May](#).

<sup>11</sup> The letter by NGOs can be found [here](#).

<sup>12</sup> The letter by Pakistan can be found [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> The resolution and voting results can be found [here](#) and in the [Map of the Month July](#).

<sup>14</sup> The speech of the High Commissioner can be found [here](#), the one of Nazila Ghanea [here](#) (from 15:00).

The June session also showed the increasing strength of the OIC, but also of China and the African Group in the Council through further debates on the total of 30 adopted resolutions: There were again numerous amendments to texts on gender issues and the rights of women and girls, which are traditionally the focus of the June session. Also discussed was the situation in Afghanistan, the worst in the world for women and girls, who suffer gender-based persecution that amounts to crimes against humanity and can even be characterized as "gender apartheid," according to Special Rapporteurs Bennet and Estrada-Tanck of the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls<sup>15</sup>. The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Iran, established in November, also spoke for the first time. In the context of the protests, they pointed to a government figure of 22,000 pardoned demonstrators, which suggests a much higher number of arrests and increasingly includes women and girls who defy the veiling laws. Among other things, the use of facial recognition technology is a cause for concern. A total of 26 people have been executed so far in connection with the protests over the death of 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini, and dozens more face the death penalty.

Among the resolutions adopted was a text on the right to development, reintroduced by China, which adopts a development-based approach to human rights instead of a human rights-based approach to development. The Council also extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Belarus, the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea, and mandated Türk to appoint an independent expert on Colombia. OHCHR was also mandated to report on their work in Ukraine at each Council session<sup>16</sup>. An innovation was the adoption of the first resolution on a human rights-based approach to artificial intelligence (AI). This entrusts OHCHR with, among other things, the preparation of a report on gaps and challenges in the work of human rights mechanisms to date, and multi-stakeholder consultations on the application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to AI.

Although the resolution was adopted by consensus, China dissociated itself from the consensus and India from a paragraph<sup>17</sup>.

## Global Health

### Pandemic agreement – 5th INB meeting

The resumed session of the fifth meeting of the WHO Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) to develop a global pandemic agreement took place from June 12-16, 2023, behind doors most of the time closed to the public.

Members discussed the so-called "Bureau's Text"<sup>18</sup>, which is based on informal and formal proposals from various countries and includes options for controversial clauses. The member states of the WHO African Region and civil society organisations expressed concerns about the weakening of some passages on equity compared to the previous "zero draft", which had met with considerable criticism from the industrialized countries in this respect. The newly formed "Group for Equity"<sup>19</sup> supported the claims relating to financing, technology transfer and the development of production capacities. Germany regretted that parts of the EU proposal were not included in the options.

The final report was purely procedural and silent on the content of the negotiations. This time, the INB opted for informal negotiations in which differing views were discussed more explicitly rather than only exchanging well-known positions. In some cases, the rigid bloc formation was broken through: For example, not all developing and emerging countries consider the softening of patent protection a goal that must be achieved at all costs. The first informal exchange focused on Article 9 of the draft (research and development, R&D) with Mexico and Norway as co-facilitators. In addition to R&D, access to pathogens and benefit-sharing (Article 12) and distribution of medical countermeasures (supply chains and logistics, Article 13) are also on the agenda. Furthermore, Ar-

<sup>15</sup> More on this and the report on Afghanistan, [here](#).

<sup>16</sup> More on this also in our [Maps of the Months July](#).

<sup>17</sup> Resolution A/HRC/53/L.27/Rev.1 on new technologies and an overview of all other resolutions and voting results can be found [here](#).

<sup>18</sup> The current draft text of the INB can be found [here](#).

<sup>19</sup> An overview of the participating countries can be found [here](#).

ticle 11 (Joint development and transfer of technology and know-how) is also considered particularly sensitive.

The Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU welcomed the new informal process and proposed an inclusive implementation format (hybrid) and the involvement of experts, particularly to take greater notice of the capacities of smaller delegations. The next INB meeting will be held July 17-21, 2023. Although some movement is beginning to emerge in the discussions, many diplomats continue to view the official deadline - an agreement by the 77th World Health Assembly in May 2024 - as extraordinarily ambitious.

### **Launch of the platform for Investment in Health**

Three multilateral development banks and WHO launched the Health Impact Investment Platform in Paris on June 23, 2023. The platform provides €1.5 billion in low-interest loans and grants to low- and middle-income countries to expand primary health care on the ground. The African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and WHO are founding members. The platform aims to expand the reach and scope of health services, especially for vulnerable populations. WHO will serve as policy coordinator to align funding decisions with national health priorities. The platform aims to promote the development of primary health care, create more resilient systems, and mobilize further investment. The long-term goal is to improve access to health services and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for health.

### **Turmoil over withdrawal Gavi CEO-designate**

Six weeks before he was scheduled to take office, the global vaccine alliance announced that Dr Muhammad Pate was no longer available to serve as CEO. In Pate's place, David Marlow, Gavi's chief operating officer, was named interim CEO. Pate plans to take a position in Nigeria instead. And so, the hiring process will resume. At the same time, the Gavi Board of Directors discussed the use of a \$2.6 billion surplus COVAX fund: Nearly one-third is to be used to continue the COVID-19 vaccination program for high-risk groups. The remaining funds

are to be used for pandemic preparedness and response, including strengthening vaccine production capacity in Africa. Concrete options are to be developed and decided at the Gavi Board of Directors later this year.

### **111th International Labour Conference**

The 111th International Labour Conference (ILC), which annually brings together Member States, employers' and workers' representatives on current developments in labour, was held from 5 to 16 June 2023. This ILC was eagerly anticipated for several reasons: First, it was the first ILC chaired by the new ILO Director-General Gilbert Houngbo. On the other hand, several delicate dossiers had to be dealt with, including the ILO's draft program and budget, but also some controversial political dossiers. In his opening speech, the new Director-General set initial priorities, emphasizing the need to firmly integrate the "social agenda" into international, regional and national policies, and the importance of his Global Coalition for Social Justice, which will bring environmental, economic and social aspects into the global dialogue.

The Qatari Minister of Labor, Samikh Al-Marri, was elected president of the 111th International Labour Conference (ILC). This election had caused some concern on various sides, including the trade unions - particularly in view of the criticism of labour standards in the run-up to the 2022 Men's World Cup. One reason for the election: due to rotation the right of nomination lay with the Arab states - and as was heard from the ILO, Qatar is actually one of the pioneers (!) within the group. A concession to the criticism, especially from the workers' representatives, was that a visit to Qatar is to take place in the summer to review the progress promised by the government.

For the first time in the history of the organization, the ILO's draft program and budget had to be put to the vote during the conference<sup>20</sup>. The reason for this was the language on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in the draft, which had already been used in previous drafts without leading to similar protests<sup>21</sup>. A coalition of African

<sup>20</sup> Voting patterns of the delegations are shown [here](#).

<sup>21</sup> The disputed clause required the ILO to assist those "affected by discrimination and exclusion, including on the grounds of

states and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) opposed ILO's support for disadvantaged groups, including LGBTIQ, in this framework. Despite the compromise that was ultimately reached, it is worth noting that the budget could have failed on a human rights and thus political value issue.

The resolution on serious violations of labor rights in Belarus was adopted by 301 votes to 54, with 108 abstentions<sup>22</sup>. It calls on Belarus to release trade union leaders, end repression of trade unions and allow a tripartite ILO mission (i.e. made up of representatives of member states, workers and employers) to review the situation in the country. This exceptional measure (there has been only one precedent of a comparable nature to the situation in Myanmar) allows the Governing Body to recommend to the Conference any appropriate action to ensure that a member complies with the recommendations (Article 33 of the ILO Constitution).

## Trade

### **Intellectual property: creeping expansion of the TRIPS discussion?**

WTO members met for the TRIPS Council in mid-June to discuss a possible expansion of the COVID-19 vaccine patent waiver onto diagnostics and therapeutics. There was no noteworthy progress in the discussions. South Africa - one of the biggest supporters of the suspension of COVID-19 patent rights - suggested that similar discussions should also take place in the context of the Work Programme on E-Commerce. In general, calls to loosen intellectual property rules are becoming increasingly frequent across various Geneva organisations. The demands are often tied to questions of equity, such as the fair distribution of vaccines (WHO) or the right to development through knowledge transfer of patent-protected technologies (WTO).

### **Agreement for investment facilitation on the horizon**

On July 6, the co-organisers - Chile and South Korea - together with WTO Director-General Ngozi

Okonjo-Iweala, announced the conclusion of negotiations for an 'investment facilitation for development (IFD)' deal. With 114 members, this plurilateral initiative brought together more than two-thirds of the total WTO membership<sup>23</sup> and included over 70 developing countries and 20 least developed countries. The negotiations for this initiative started in 2017 and were originally expected to conclude by the end of 2022. The IFD participants' goal now is to convince the remaining members to adopt the text as a stand-alone WTO agreement whose scope will cover all sectors, and which will be open to all members. The agreement is primarily concerned with transparency obligations to facilitate and strengthen investment flows, and to increase the attractiveness of developing markets in particular.

The negotiations ahead of the next ministerial conference in February 2024 in the United Arab Emirates will be a gauge of how amenable opponents of plurilateral initiatives (especially India and South Africa) are to incorporating the proposed text into the WTO rulebook and what concessions these players might demand in return. This is also significant with regard to other plurilateral initiatives, such as the Joint Statement Initiative on E-Commerce.

### **WTO Fisheries Agreement**

As of today, the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies of June 2022 has been ratified by 40 members (13 members + 27 EU member states)<sup>24</sup>. The agreement must be ratified by two-thirds of all WTO members (approx. 110) to enter into force.

### **U.S. Statement on WTO Dispute Settlement**

On July 5, the U.S. Representative commented on the current informal reform discussions of the dispute settlement system in a written statement. The note emphasizes that the advisory function of the organization should be strengthened and not weakened by an "overreaching" arbitration body, including through the prompt resolution of proceedings. Furthermore, arbitration decisions should not lead to the modification of obligations that follow from WTO agreements. In general, an

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race, sexual orientation and gender identity" and to "implement measures to promote equal opportunities and treatment." Ultimately, a note was added to the text noting the differences.

<sup>22</sup> The resolution can be found [here](#).

<sup>23</sup> The initiative is open to all WTO members.

<sup>24</sup> More can be found [here](#).

important role was given to the sovereign rights of members (e.g. to protect workers, human rights and health). Thus, while WTO members had demanded a positioning of the U.S. on the matter, Washington's substantive positions were met with a very reserved response.

### Termination of the Black Sea Grain Deal

The WTO Director-General released a statement on July 18 about Russia's termination of the Black Sea Grain Deal on July 17, 2023. She called for global food security not to become a scourge of war and to mitigate the already enormous impact of Russia's war of aggression on populations in the world's poorest countries. She further invited "all parties" (in an effort not to mention Russia) to come back to the negotiating table.

## Digital Affairs

### AI for Good Summit: The robots are loose in Geneva

On July 6-7, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) hosted its AI for Good Summit in Geneva. Held annually since 2017, the meeting has tended to bring together political actors from government, civil society, and UN circles to discuss the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This year, however, the summit took place under new auspices: ChatGPT and generative AI have come into the spotlight in recent months, creating new momentum and great interest for ITU discussions around ethical issues of AI as well as exploring new fields of application. UN Secretary-General Guterres and ITU Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin pointed out that – now already - the use of AI applications is essential to achieving the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals<sup>25</sup>. The Secretary-General also noted that the global community is at a critical juncture. It is a matter of setting global rules and governance frameworks that on the one hand promote innovation and on the other address guardrails for ethical, security-related concerns. Another important point is the question of accountability.

In addition to many regulatory approaches, such as the EU's AI Act, guests and panellists repeatedly referred to the UNESCO recommendation of AI ethics<sup>26</sup>, the only and universally applicable standard for ethical AI to date. Themes around AI in global health, the regulation of AI, and community benefit to find answers to the global problems of our time – such as climate change and the increasing number of conflicts - were core topics and thus the common thread of the summit. The realisation that some of the world's problems can only be solved with the help of AI was omnipresent. However, many experts noted in the panel discussions that AI expertise alone was not enough and that experts from other fields are needed to further the development of responsible AI. In very open debates, most of the participants expressed hope that some of the negative AI-related trends could still be brought under control and that the potential of AI could thus be used for positive purposes.

This year's edition of the meeting also stood out for the participation of many well-known AI manufacturers, such as Boston Dynamics, Sophia (one of the first humanoid robots) and a number of assistance robots (e.g. nurses). The conference also featured, among other things, a world premiere: A press conference given by AI-powered robots<sup>27</sup>.

## Peace and Security

On June 27, Germany took over the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament from France, which it will hold until the end of August. Following a retreat of delegates in mid-June in Montreux, Switzerland, a report from the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) is expected, among other things, which will make proposals for a better and more effective functioning of the conference, especially in the areas of organizational structure, membership and participation, operational work, but also on the disarmament machinery in general. Other priorities in the work program include conversations with young people, artificial intelligence, the new agenda for peace, and verification mechanisms for nuclear disarmament.

<sup>25</sup> Already, more than 40 UN organizations are involved in the AI for Good platform and use it for mutual support and networking.

<sup>26</sup> More can be found [here](#).

<sup>27</sup> More can be found [here](#).

## Analysis

For about one and a half years, many Geneva organisations (WHO, Human Rights Council, ILO, etc.), African and Arab countries - although not exclusively - have increasingly rejected formulations that contain passages on sexual orientation or gender identity. The crisis over the ILO budget is just another chapter here. These reservations are not new, but they are now being expressed more consistently and with greater virulence.

How the adopted resolution on co-incarceration will affect future discussions in the Human Rights Council is not yet foreseeable. However, the question of the balance between freedom of expression and freedom of religion could be on the agenda more often in the future.

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