

U.N. panel adopts stance on religious freedom

by [Kevin Eckstrom](#) in the [April 19, 2011](#) issue

U.S. officials praised a United Nations council for a new statement on religious freedom that sidestepped a divisive debate sponsored by Islamic countries over the "defamation of religions."

The UN Human

Rights Council on March 24 approved a resolution voicing concern about "emerging obstacles" to religious freedom and growing "religious intolerance, discrimination and violence."

The United States

supported the resolution, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called a "significant step forward" in global efforts to combat "intolerance, discrimination and violence . . . based upon religion or belief."

Annual UN resolutions sponsored by the Organization of the Islamic Conference against the "defamation of religions" have steadily lost support in recent years. The issue received heightened scrutiny after two government officials in Pakistan who opposed that nation's blasphemy laws were assassinated by Muslim radicals.

The

independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which has helped marshal opposition to the blasphemy resolutions in the UN, said the recent vote should prompt Pakistan to rescind its blasphemy law. "The resolution properly focuses on protecting individuals from discrimination or violence, instead of protecting religions from criticism," the commission said in a statement. —RNS