

# SPEAK FOR ALL RELIGIONS, INDIA TELLS UN

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The remarks were made at a "Culture of Peace" session organised by the UN General Assembly

India has asked the United Nations to expand its criticism of hatred and violence against religions beyond the three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

"At the outset, let me state that we fully agree that anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christian acts need to be condemned and India firmly condemns such acts. However, UN resolutions on such important issues speak only of these three Abrahamic religions together." First Secretary at India's Permanent Mission to the UN Ashish Sharma said on Wednesday.

"This august body fails to acknowledge the rise of hatred and violence against Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism also." Mr. Sharma's remarks were made during a "Culture of Peace" session organised by the UN General Assembly. The UN has organised such sessions each year since 1997.

"The shattering of the iconic Bamiyan Buddha by fundamentalists, the terrorist bombing of the Sikh gurdwara in Afghanistan where 25 Sikh worshippers were killed and the destruction of Hindu and Buddhist temples and minority cleansing of these religions by countries, call for condemning such acts against these religions also. But the current Member States refuse to speak of these religions in the same breath as the first three 'Abrahamic' religions," Mr. Sharma said.

The UN, however, has condemned such acts. For instance, in 2001, the General Assembly adopted a resolution without a vote condemning the Taliban for destroying cultural artefacts, including the Buddhist sculptures in Bamiyan.

"What we are trying to build here is an 'alliance of civilisations' not set up a clash. I call on the UN Alliance of Civilizations to act likewise and speak for all, not just a select few," Mr. Sharma said.

"Why is this selectivity? Overall, Hinduism has more than 1.2 billion followers, Buddhism has more than 535 million followers, and Sikhism has around 30 million followers. It is time attacks against these religions are also added to earlier list of the three Abrahamic religions when such resolutions are passed. Culture of peace cannot be only for Abrahamic religions," Mr. Sharma said.

On Wednesday, Mr. Sharma criticised Pakistan for its bigotry against "religions in India."

"If Pakistan changes its current culture of hatred against religions in India and stops its support of cross-border terrorism against our people, we can attempt a genuine culture of peace in South Asia and beyond," he said.

*(With inputs from Suhasini Haidar in New Delhi)*

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