**JOINT STATEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OR BELIEF ALLIANCE**

**45th SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

Madam President,

We are proud to address the Human Rights Council on behalf of member countries of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance who have signed this statement.

The Alliance is a network of like-minded countries committed to advancing freedom of religion or belief for all around the world. Launched in February 2020, this growing group of 31 states from different regions bring together a diversity of faiths and beliefs. The Alliance also includes as a part of its council of experts religious and belief leaders and civil society representatives. It is pleased to count on the expertise of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Dr Ahmed Shaheed.

The promotion of freedom of religion or belief, together with other human rights, is central to our countries. We firmly believe that everyone has the right to have or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice, and has the freedom to manifest his religion or belief. We stand ready to turn that conviction into action, complementing existing work of the UN and other competent international organizations.

Working together to advance freedom of religion or belief proves more important than ever in a world facing growing challenges that affect this right and other intertwined human rights, such as the rights to freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly.

Around the world, freedom of religion or belief is remarkably threatened or denied entirely and discrimination, violence and persecution of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities is rising. We are committed to fighting intolerance, discrimination and violence based on religion or belief against individuals, communities and minorities. All human beings should be free to worship and practice their faith or belief, or to profess no faith at all.

The Alliance invites members of the Human Rights Council who are committed to upholding the freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief to join us in our fight against persecution and hatred. To strive for a world where respect to other people’s religion and spirituality can contribute to the promotion of the inherent dignity and worth of all, as well as to foster a worldwide culture of peace and understanding.

Thank you.

**SIGNED BY:**

ALBANIA, ARMENIA, AUSTRALIA, AUSTRIA, BRAZIL, BULGARIA, COLOMBIA, CROATIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, DENMARK, ESTONIA, GREECE, HUNGARY ISRAEL, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, MALTA, NETHERLANDS, SENEGAL, SLOVENIA, TOGO, UNITED KINGDOM and UKRAINE.