

## CHAPTER V

### CONFRONTING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Profiling 'Asian looking' people at airports and removing individuals with 'Muslim sounding names' from airplanes because they make others uncomfortable is a clear indication of a growing biased fear and suspicion of Muslims. The publication and republication of cartoons in European media caricaturing the Prophet Mohammed in a way perceived by Muslims as deliberately insulting and defamatory but done, according to the publishers, in the name of freedom of the press, exposed a cultural divide that erupted into anger because of stereotyping.<sup>36</sup>

The horrific, criminal and unjustified terrorist acts of “9/11” in New York and “7/7” in London violently expressed the frustration and disappointment that are tormenting deep into the Muslims' soul towards the aggressions and discriminations committed against them by the West. Recognizing the importance of communication to clarify the mass of misunderstandings and negative feelings between the West and the Muslim world, the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference initiated in association with Wilton Park in London on May 2, 2006 the conference on 'Challenging stereotypes in Europe and the Islamic world: Working together for constructive policies and partnerships'.<sup>37</sup>

#### **Promoting integration - combating Islamophobia**

The principle of integration as '*a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States*' was adopted by the European Council in its Thessaloniki meeting in June 2003. The European Commission proposed to facilitate inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue at European level, and to develop the Commission's dialogue with religious and

---

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.oic-oci.org/journal/issue1/Islamophobia%20002.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

humanist organizations. At national level it proposed developing constructive intercultural dialogue.

A variety of Community measures, e.g. Action Program Combating Discrimination, many member States have also developed policies and initiatives to improve integration specifically directed at Muslims. Muslims in the member states of the European Union experience various levels of discrimination and marginalization and are also the victims of negative stereotyping by majority populations and the media. In addition, they are vulnerable to manifestations of prejudice and hatred in the form of anything from verbal threats through to physical attacks on people and property.

An Islamophobic incident against Muslim communities remains severely under reported and under-documented in the EU. There is a serious lack of data or official information on (1) the social situation of Muslims in member states and (2) on the extent and nature of Islamophobic incidents. As a reflection of this, policy makers are not well informed at both national and EU level about the specific situation of Muslims in the areas of employment, education and housing, as well as about the extent and nature of discrimination, incidents and threats targeted at Muslims. The EUMC finds that Member States need to develop, reinforce and evaluate policies aimed at delivering equality and non-discrimination for Muslim communities,

The EUMC believes that measures and practices which tackle discrimination, address social marginalization and promote comprehensiveness should be integrated policy priorities. In particular, the EUMC finds that accessibility to education as well as equal opportunities in employment need consideration. Access to housing and participation in civic processes are further key issues to be tackled, particularly at the local and regional level.

**EUMC proposes the opinions within a general framework of measures against racism, Islamophobia and related intolerances as following**

**Implementing legislation**

The EUMC calls on member states to fully interchange the race equality directive specifically with regard to religion, the employment equality and extend the protection against discrimination based on religion to other areas than employment, in particular with regards to education and access to goods and services. Member States in their fight against Islamophobia and intolerance and discrimination against Muslims should be guided in their enactment of legislation

**Recording Islamophobic incidents**

The EUMC urges Member States to establish mechanisms to record incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Furthermore, member states assuming their legal obligations should provide their specialized bodies with sufficient resources to monitor discrimination, support victims and carry out research

**Implementing social integration and inclusion policies for migrants and minorities**

The EUMC calls upon member states to implement support measures for migrants and minorities, including Muslims, in order to enhance their social situation, provide them with equal opportunities and prevent their marginalization and exclusion from mainstream society.

**Implementing community cohesion policies**

The EUMC calls upon member states to develop, where appropriate, community cohesion policies in order to prevent alienation and encourage a sense of

belonging for all communities by appreciating and valuing the diversity of the different cultures.

### **Promoting measures in employment**

The EUMC stresses the serious social consequences of unemployment, and particularly long-term unemployment, especially upon young Muslims.

### **Promoting education and training measures**

The EUMC stresses the crucial importance of education and training measures in combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and related intolerances. Equal access to quality education for all is a critical foundation for integration and community cohesion.

### **Engaging political parties and civil society**

The EUMC calls on all political parties in Europe to sign and implement the “Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society” which sets out a clear code of conduct for the fight against all forms of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

### **Involving the media**

The EUMC recognizes that mainstream and minority media play a key role in shaping social attitudes and behavior. Further research is needed on both their content and the impact they have on society concerning racism, xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

### **Promoting research**

The EUMC encourages the Member States to initiate and support research projects that could inform social, economic and political integration policies aimed at Muslim communities in a comprehensive and reliable way.

Many reports focused on the situation in the member states in the European countries and tried to assess the more structural aspects of the discrimination. It concluded that many Muslims face unfair treatment in employment, education and housing in the EU countries. Particularly young Muslims meet barriers to social advancement: expression of Islamophobia within European societies has taken the form of endure prejudice, negative attitudes, discrimination and sometimes violence. It has also regretted in its reports the mistaken interpretation of Islam on the basis of aggressive stereotyping, the effect of which is to make this religion seem like a threat.

In order to meet the prejudices on a broader front, the education systems should offer more factual knowledge about Islam (and other religions). The importance of teaching about the religions of “the others” One positive example is some country where a special course is given to final year pupils on inter-faith dialogue and the human values of different religions. This is the spirit with which further efforts must be made to put an end to Islamophobia.

The United Nations also holding a seminar on anti-Semitism earlier in 2004, conceived as part of a series on “unlearning intolerance,”<sup>38</sup> the seminar aimed to confirm prejudices of the Islamic world toward the West, and especially the United States, as the sources of all Islam’s failure and weakness

The “Unlearning Intolerance”<sup>39</sup> aims to raise awareness by examining manifestations of intolerance and exploring ways to promote mutual respect and understanding among different cultures. Attended by more than 600 participants, the

---

<sup>38</sup> The "Unlearning Intolerance" in seminar series resumed at UN Headquarters in New York on 7 December 2004.

<sup>39</sup> “Unlearning Intolerance,” *UN Chronicle*, issue 2 (2004).

seminar devoted to '*Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding*' is the first of its kind held at the United Nations. The first seminar in the series on "Confronting Anti-Semitism" took place on 21 June 2004

Secretary-General Kofi Annan outlined a multi-dimensional strategy for effectively combating Islamophobia: limiting the influence of hate media, embracing laws, education, leadership, integration, interfaith dialogue, policy awareness and combating violence carried out in the name of religion.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University, traced the root causes of Islamophobia. He said four "myths" about Islamophobia needed to be dispensed. The first was that Islam was a monolithic whole—a presumption, often found in the Western media that disregarded the various schools of Islamic thought. Another illusion was that Islam wanted to rule over the Western world.

The Islamic world was not anti-Western in itself because, according to surveys, some 70 per cent of adolescents in Islamic countries were interested in studying in the West. Similarly, it was false to believe that Islam was against modernity or democracy, as it affirmed the inherent dignity of each human being. Finally, Islam was a religion of tolerance, he stressed. Over the centuries, Islamic countries had frequently shown more understanding towards non-Muslims accommodating Jews or Christians fleeing persecution—than Muslims generally had received in their societies.<sup>40</sup>

Mr. Nasr concluded that in combating Islamophobia it was important to take into account not only the role of extremism in Islam but also among Christians and Jews. The paradox was that many people afraid of Islam knew very little about it. Muslims needed to utilize the media and the role of education in fighting intolerance.

---

<sup>40</sup> "Confronting Islamophobia," *UN Chronicle*, December, 2004.

A number of speakers condemned 9/11, in particular the bad name it gave Islam, but several asked how long it would be necessary for Muslims to apologize. Is Islamophobia a problem? Certainly, but it was left to a questioner to ask who, exactly, are the Islamophobes, and wonder sensibly whether such people were inclined to hate pretty much everyone different from themselves.

If Islamophobia was simply negative thoughts about Muslims, this was a wholly personal problem. Only when prejudice is translated into action does it become a social problem. Neatly framed in this way, the motives behind the UN seminar seem less about combating prejudice than not very slight thought control theology, history, and current relationship with politics, not least of which is terrorism? Or does voicing questions constitute Islamophobia?

Violence, incitement to violence, and dehumanizing characterizations do constitute Islamophobia, in the same way that they constitute any form of religious, racial, or ethnic prejudice. But intellectuals confirming the victim status of Muslims globally

The seminar had concluded that Islamophobia could not be eradicated without the participation of religious and political leaders, as well as the media and educators. The United Nations should provide leadership in building a modern notion of tolerance; UN mandates were based upon principles contained in the Koran, Muslims needed to support each other more, each person had to take personal responsibility for the conflicts they could influence and to promote a common vision. All groups needed to participate

As well as In Geneva, 8 August 2005: Pakistan, speaking on behalf of 57 Muslim nations, has called on the international community to stop defamation of all religions, especially Islam, through education and promulgation of laws in Western countries. Ambassador Masood Khan, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, told the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, meeting in Geneva that the phenomenon of Islamophobia was on the rise in the Western countries. He said that Muslim and Western leaders should demonstrate

leadership to reverse this trend and collectively promote tolerance and respect for all religions.

He drew the attention of the Sub-Commission that this phenomenon had led to verbal abuse, slurs, and hostility against Muslims. “ In one European country alone 1,200 suspected Islamophobic incidents have been recorded, out of which 269 fall into the category of religious hate crimes”, he told the Sub-Commission. He commended the efforts of the British Government to reach out to the Muslim communities to assure them that they would not be discriminated. The Sub-Commission is a permanent body comprising 26 independent members who meet in Geneva annually to develop and strengthen international human rights law.

Ambassador Masood Khan, who is the current chairman of the OIC Group in Geneva, speaking on behalf of the 57 Islamic countries, said that after the London bombings on July 7, 2005, one Muslim had been murdered in the UK. Elsewhere mosques had been attacked, vandalized and burnt, racial profiling had increased and discrimination had spread to work places and businesses.

‘A report from British Scotland Yard published on August 4, 2005 confirmed ‘a startling surge in crimes related to religious hatred’. Figures made public showed a 600% increase in faith-hate crimes since July 7, compared to the same period last year, affecting Muslim immigrants largely’ he said. Ambassador Masood Kan said that OIC countries had strongly condemned terrorist attacks in London and Sharm Al Sheikh as despicable criminal acts, which were repugnant to the tenets of Islam, a faith of peace, harmony and tolerance.

Masood Khan said that the forces that are opposed to Islam were attacking policies of multiculturalism, tolerance and diversity in Western Europe. ‘If we read the trends closely and connect the dots, it is obvious Muslims are being dehumanized. This is painfully evocative of the pre-World War II era. That dark chapter of history and pogroms must never be repeated, this time involving Muslims’ he asserted that the majorities of Muslims and Western societies wanted co-existence, not conflict.

“Islamophobia is a recipe to pit neighbor against neighbor, country against country, civilization against civilization”, he called on the Sub-Commission experts to play their role in arresting these Islamophobic trends by urging governments to prohibit dissemination of xenophobic ideas as well as discrimination on grounds of religion.

In continuation of the role played by the Islamic Thought Forum, launched by the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), to purify the image of Islam and correct the misperceptions about it, a lecture was held at OIC headquarters on December 12, 2006 by Islamic scholar and researcher, Dr. Mohammed Omarah, titled 'Facing Islamophobia'<sup>41</sup>. Dr. Omarah said that the West is not one thing but rather consists of three elements: human, knowledge and domination. ‘The main problem is with the western institution's domination,’he said. Dr. Omarah referred to the West's discourse about Islam and its community and civilization is not theoretical or abstract statements, instead it is a complex intellectual structure that formed through history to justify the West's domination over the East.

This discourse has penetrate the minds of some Muslim intellectuals who adopted these Western views of Islam and its culture, He points to the suffering of Muslims living in the West as a consequence of this hate-filled and discriminatory discourse. So that there is a need to have a dialogue with the West as a duty, the dialogue has to be based on the logic understood by the West with a need to place a scientific work schedule consisting of rules and standards that guarantee mutual respect for dialogue with the other.

He called for using Western testimonials that were fair to Islam and better preparation of Muslim debaters. Dr. Omarah said that antagonism against Islam has caused the increase in this wave of Islamophobia, but despite that thousands are converting to Islam in the US and Europe. Therefore, he sent a message to the Pope,

---

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.oic-oci.org/>.

‘The solution is not in hostility towards Islam but in learning from it.’ In order for this seminar and others to better serve Islam and Muslims, Dr. Mohammed Habeeb ibn Alkhoja, Secretary General of IIFA announced that the IIFA is forming a scientific committee to coordinate with the Islamophobia Observatory in the OIC for researching this phenomenon and putting the necessary plans to combat it.

### **Conclusion**

When the world was compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread prejudice that was a sad and troubling development such was the case with Islamophobia. Today, the weight of history and the fallout of recent developments had left many Muslims around the world feeling aggrieved and misunderstood, concerned about the erosion of their rights and even fearing for their physical safety.

There was a need to learn the stereotypes that had become so invaded in so many minds and in so much of the. Some claimed that Islam was unable to get along with democracy, or permanently hostile to modernity and the rights of women. And in too many circles, disparaging remarks about Muslims were allowed to pass without censure, with the result that prejudice acquired a surface of acceptability.

There was also a need to learn the habit of Islamophobia. People were not hard-wired for prejudice. In some cases they were taught to hate. Others were influence into it, by leaders who exploited fear, ignorance or feelings of weakness. The pressures of living together with people of cultures and beliefs different from one’s own were real, especially in a world of intense economic competition, in which there had been sudden influxes of immigrants, as had happened in Europe over the last generation or two.

But that could not justify demonization or the deliberate use of fear for political purposes. That only deepened the spiral of suspicion and alienation.

The strategy to combat Islamophobia must depend heavily on education not just about Islam, but about all religions and traditions. It was important to prevent the media and internet from being used to spread hatred, while safeguarding freedom of opinion and expression. There was also a crucial need for leadership. Public authorities should not only condemn Islamophobia, but ensure that law enforcement and other practices followed through on pledges of non-discrimination.

Efforts to combat Islamophobia must also contend with the question of terrorism and violence carried out in the name of Islam. Islam should not be judged by the acts of extremists who deliberately targeted and killed civilians.

Muslims themselves, especially, should speak out, as so many had following the 11 September attacks on the United States, and show a commitment to isolate those who advocate or practiced violence and to make it clear that those were unacceptable distortions of Islam. Indeed, it was essential that solutions came from within Islam itself perhaps in the Muslim tradition of 'jihad', or free interpretation. Such open inquiry, such openness to what was good and bad in their cultures and others, could well offer a very useful path.

Islamophobia was at once a deeply personal issue for Muslims, a matter of great importance for anyone concerned about upholding universal values, and a question with implications for international harmony and peace, one should not underestimate the hatred and sense of injustice felt by members of one of the world's great religions, cultures and civilizations. Re-establishment of trust among people of different faiths and cultures must become the highest priority. Otherwise, discrimination would continue to taint many innocent lives, and distrust could make it impossible to move ahead with an ambitious international agenda of peace, security and development.

'We live in one world we need to understand and respect each other, live peacefully together and live up to the best of our respective traditions, that is not as

easy as we might like it to be. But that is all the more reason to try harder, with all our tools and all our will.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup>Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, Addressing Headquarters Seminar on Confronting Islamophobia, Stresses Importance of Leadership, Two-Way Integration, Dialogue, “Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding,” *United Nations Press Release*, December 7, 2004.