

## **MITIGATING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE WEST: FOR A CULTURE OF GLOBAL PEACE**

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Fez – Islamophobia may be defined as the scapegoating of all Muslims as opposed to condemning or criticizing acts or practices of a Muslim individual. The rising signs of Islamophobia illustrate a common inadequate understanding of societies and cultures. Regarding Islamophobia as a mere post-9/11 phenomenon makes it easy for its supporters to make naive suppositions: end the terrorism and the Islamophobia will come to an end too. Chris Allen, author of *Islamophobia*, correctly discards this thesis as being extremely dangerous. This is because it ultimately legitimizes indolent stereotypes which describe all Muslims as terrorists, thus capitulating to racist people and parts of the media that choose this attitude.

Islamophobia was first instituted by intellectuals and missionaries like Ricoldo di Montecroce in the thirteenth century. Akin to anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred has become intensely entrenched in Western culture through religious discourse, music, art, and literature.

The media have, purposely or inadvertently, integrated a counter-terror strategy. The outcome is that in their reporting they both amalgamate Islam and all Muslims, thus viewing Islam virtually as a threat.

This kind of widespread anti-Muslim feeling can today be noticed across many countries; not just in America, but in Australia, Myanmar, and Europe also, where the leaders of Hungary, Check Republic, Poland and Slovakia openly declare Muslims unwelcome in their countries.

In Italy, the rise of the extreme right wing Five Star Movement and the League after March 5th elections, which share concern about the impact of immigration and refugees, also shows that Islamophobia can come with different political stripes.

Fear of Muslims and Islam emanates essentially from ignorance and propaganda. Between 1992 and 1995, Bosnian Muslims were victims of ethnic cleansing because they were identified as a ‘racial’ group by people who were physically, linguistically and culturally similar to themselves.

No European politician can overlook the explosion in anti-Muslim sentiment, certainly not Germany's Angela Merkel. The latter, frequently hailed as the custodian of Europe's liberal ideals, has been obliged to ban the burqa in order to curb the rise of the right-wing party AdF, whose recent electoral win has distressed the frail stability of German political alliance.

In Great Britain, attacks on mosques occur regularly once every two weeks, and their tempo rises strongly after terrorist attacks, as happened in Manchester and London. Consequently, British Muslims feel more exposed and in danger. Attitude surveys report that 77% of British people believe that "Islam has a lot of fanatical followers"; 68% judge it "to have more to do with the middle ages than the modern world", and 64% think that Islam "treats women badly".

A Pew Global Attitudes investigation established that even in the more liberal countries, like Germany, Holland, France, and Sweden, nearly half of respondents thought that some Muslims supported the Islamic State (IS).

In February 2017, a Chatham House report revealed that 55% of Europeans of the ten countries surveyed agree to stop all further migration from Muslim-majority countries.

Similarly, in Australia, Islamophobia is on the rise. Survey data alarmingly reveal that Australia is also an Islamophobic nation. While only 41 percent of Americans favor a provisional ban on immigrants from seven Muslim countries, nearly half of Australians (49 percent) are for a lasting ban on Muslims entering the country.

The predicament of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar is considered one of the world's worst contemporary refugee crises. More than half a million have fled persecution in the northern Rakhine province for bordering Bangladesh since August 2017. At least 6700 Rohingas were killed and 288 villages destroyed by fire since August 2017. The United Nations portrayed the attacks by troops and Rakhine Buddhists, which caused the mass departure, as a clear "example of ethnic cleansing".

Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people with the support of the US also provokes anger against the US, which sees Israel as an ally against terror. The most notorious example is President Trump's recent recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel. Profiling, segregating, repressing, and treating Muslims as if they were all terrorists is not the way to combat terrorism. The vicious cycle of Islamophobia is becoming worse, and it needs to be stopped before it is uncontrollable.

Islamophobia has changed how certain Muslims portray themselves to society. The wrong doings of certain individuals, who call themselves Muslims, greatly shapes societies' image of Muslims and Islam as a whole. Committing crime in the name of Islam and terrorizing others is unacceptable in Islam.

Muslims living in the West face so much prejudice, and veiled women encounter the most violence and harassment on the street because of the visibility and vulnerability factors. Islamophobia also reduces their chances to find jobs. According to Eurostat 2016's unemployment among young Muslim immigrants reached an average of 27% against 15% for native-born European nationals.

A recent report by Gallup reveals that more than half of people living in Muslim societies think that Muslims in the West are not treated fairly, and that Islamophobia has badly damaged Islam as a religion of peace, which plays right into the hands of extremists, reinforcing the terror groups' message that Muslims are unwanted in the West.

Interestingly, the latest polls prove that when people know someone who is a Muslim in person, the prejudice is much reduced. This corroborates the conclusion of Harvard scholar Gordon Allport in his prominent book *The Nature of Prejudice*: that meaningful contact with people from different cultures is central for attenuating hate.

The majority of 1.8 billion Muslims in the world broadly participate in the efforts to strengthen moderate Islam by collaborating with the governments. Muslim Europeans and Americans, for example, have already shown that they are often the first responders to radicalism. They can be of help to deradicalize the youth and to provide information and a positive image of Islam and Muslims.

Attenuating misapprehensions about Muslim, and other world cultures should also be viewed as an imperative stride in promoting a culture of global peace.