

## **An Open Letter to Non-Muslims regarding the Anti-Islam Film and Cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)**

It is a centuries-old Islamic tradition to engage in debate, tolerate criticism and hear the critiques of others. But insults against Islam, such as those in the recent film and cartoons, are unacceptable provocations that cross a red line that no Muslim or decent human being would ever accept. As such we condemn them in the strongest possible terms, as we do any such insults against Islam and the symbols of our religion; especially those against the greatest man ever, the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

We do not condone the recent violence that has broken out in response, but the blood-stained track record of Western foreign policy and hypocrisy regarding free speech means that all right to take the moral high ground has been forfeited when arguing that violence is an unacceptable response to this provocation, or when arguing that freedom of speech is sacred.

We believe it is our duty as Muslims to counter the politically motivated propaganda, in particular about the man who has been slandered more than any other in history – the Prophet, peace be upon him - but also to be frank in pointing out injustice and hypocrisy where we see it.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney argued that the protests across the World against US embassies were nothing to do with US foreign policy. Does the White House really think that such protests can be de-contextualised from the backdrop of wars waged against Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan; the illegal imprisonment and torture of Muslims at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, Bagram and numerous other facilities; the use of rendition and torture in collaboration with the regimes of Hosni

Mubarak, Muammar Gaddafi, Bashar al-Assad and others; the continued killing of innocent men, women and children through Predator drones, most notably in Yemen & Pakistan? Only recently eight innocent women and children were killed by a NATO airstrike in Afghanistan, and in early September long-term Guantanamo detainee Adnan Farhan Abdul Latif died having been held without charge and subjected to torture for 10 years, despite being cleared for release in 2006.

It is disturbing that such news fails to shock anymore. However it is for these very reasons and many others that we see a persistent resentment to Western interference in Muslim countries, and so reaction to perceived insults will inevitably be strong.

At the same time many Western politicians and media commentators have stated that upholding "freedom", including the right to offend others, is a fundamental principle of liberal societies.

Yet such principles seem remarkably easy to set aside when it comes to the treatment of Muslims - women and girls in France are still unable to wear *hijab* (Islamic headscarf) in schools and universities, or *niqab* (face veil) in public places, and we have seen Muslims prosecuted (even jailed) in Western countries for simply expressing their views. In the United States Tarek Mehenna was jailed for 17 years, ostensibly for translating a readily available e-book that had been widely quoted in the media. America seeks the extradition of Babar Ahmed and Talha Ahsan for running a website that was legal in the UK, which updated news about the Chechen crisis. And recently a 20-year-old man in the UK was found guilty for posting an offensive message on Facebook regarding British soldiers in Afghanistan.

France claims freedom of expression is a 'fundamental principle'

of the republic. And yet *Charlie Hebdo*, the magazine printing the offensive cartoons while claiming to be a bastion of free speech – previously lambasted their own cartoonist Maurice Sinet for writing a biting article about Nicholas Sarkozy’s son which appeared to denigrate him for marrying a Jewish heiress for money. Sinet was subsequently sacked by his employers for refusing to apologise – their ‘fundamental principle’ set aside to appease domestic political sensitivities. Similarly, when the French Prime Minister stated that these cartoons are “expressed within the confines of the law and under the control of the courts”, he ought to have been reminded that the French senate passed a bill earlier this year outlawing denial of any genocide recognised by French law; a clear indication of the willingness to restrict expression under the law and through the courts for political reasons.

Let us be frank – this is not an argument about “freedom of speech”. Like all other mooted “freedoms”, it simply does not and cannot exist as an absolute, despite all the rhetoric. All countries have redline issues that limit speech depending on context, leading to variation in law - such as the criminalisation of holocaust denial in Germany for historical reasons, despite it remaining legal elsewhere. Every society has criminalised speech according to their belief and value system. In secular Western society, religion is largely unvalued so blasphemy is permitted. Whereas in Islamic society religion is the core value and so blasphemy becomes a redline issue, including insulting any of the Prophets of God, starting from the Prophet Adam, to Prophets Moses and Jesus to the Prophet Mohammad.

The cost to societal harmony from the ‘freedom to insult’ is rarely discussed. Western Europe’s moral and legal tradition stems from its Christian heritage, which has become routinely mocked and derided. This freedom to mock and deride, which we appreciate was born out of Europe’s particular dilemma of Church authority, opened the door to the growing disrespect

and anti-social behaviour in society – where rudeness is celebrated as a sign of assertiveness, courtesy undervalued as weakness, and all too many people do not respect each other or the law.

There are some who will look beyond the superficial images and clichéd analysis, sincerely wondering why people are so upset, asking why millions of Muslims in the UK and Europe seem not to have adopted the secular values they are surrounded by. They will inquire as to why Muslims have persisted on adhering to Islamic values despite relentless criticism and abuse - and are joined every day by others who are newly convinced of Islam. As the systemic decline in capitalism becomes increasingly obvious, people across the world are searching for new answers; many will find them in Islam.

A process of change in the Muslim world has been accelerated by the Arab spring, where a debate about the future of the region is growing. At present the emerging governments are weak, provide a fig-leaf for the old military authorities and insist on perpetuating a flawed secular, capitalist, nation-state model that is an aberration in terms of the history and values of the Muslim world.

As people ask *“Is this, the freedom to insult Prophets, what ‘freedom and democracy’ really means?”* the call for an Islamic model of government (the Islamic Caliphate) continues to grow in the region – one that is true to the principles of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his successors, which protects the security, property, honour and beliefs of all its citizens, regardless of creed, colour or gender. A state which obliges accounting political authority and intellectual inquiry, but prohibits making money from gossip and slander; which encourages trade yet circulates wealth; which allows private enterprise but shares the states natural resources with all; and which finally breaks the colonial grip on the Muslim world so that it can present a true

message of Islam.

Indeed, if a government in the Muslim world had taken a robust stand on the international stage using all diplomatic means at its disposal in order to arrest the on-going insults to the Prophet, peace be upon him, we would not now be seeing tens of thousands of demonstrators taking to the streets due to the lack of a political leadership at a state level that reflects their deeply held beliefs.

Surely there is too much that needs to be understood, which requires a mature debate and intellectual discussion rather than insults and lies and we would invite others to engage with us in that discussion.

Regards

*Dr Reza Pankhurst* - [Reza.Pankhurst@hizb.org.uk](mailto:Reza.Pankhurst@hizb.org.uk)

*Dr Abdul Wahid* - [Abdul.Wahid@hizb.org.uk](mailto:Abdul.Wahid@hizb.org.uk)

*Taji Mustafa* - [t.mustafa@hizb.org.uk](mailto:t.mustafa@hizb.org.uk)

4 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1433  
20 September 2012