



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 9

**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2013]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **The need for renewed attention to the Islamophobia phenomenon**

Islamophobia can be described as enmity and hatred towards them or illogical fear from Muslims. This definition includes discrimination against Muslims in the form of rejecting them from political, economic, social and public life, believing in the subjugation of Islam and Muslims towards the West and the assumption of Islam being a political and violent ideology and not a religion.

In 1996, An independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society, Runnymede Trust published "Islamophobia: A Challenge for us all" in which as well as the above definition of Islamophobia, it also puts discrimination against Muslims in the form of depriving them from a natural economic, social and public life in this circle.

Although Islamophobia is not a very new phenomenon, but since the early 00s most western societies have been witness to the noticeable expansion of Islamophobia, and many deem the turning point was the 9/11 attacks and a general increase in hating immigrants in these societies. Nevertheless, the influence of Islamophobic networks in public decision making processes and mainstream media, wrong policies and literature of some western governments towards Muslims, relative use of Islamophobic mentalities in the western media (in comparison to other forms of xenophobia), and historical negative views of Islam and Muslims all have played important roles and created an environment of anti-Islamic sentiments in these societies.

For example according to a poll in 2010, only 37 percent of Americans had positive views of Islam,<sup>1</sup> and according to another poll in the same year around one third of American voters believed that Muslims should not be allowed to run for president.<sup>2</sup> This trend is on the rise in America, to an extent that in 2011 Americans' positive views towards Islam has dropped to 30 percent.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, regarding intolerance, prejudice and discrimination in Europe also, often times Europeans do not have positive views of Muslims and Islam, a trend that is stronger in Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, with France, Britain and the Netherlands ranking next.<sup>4</sup>

This negative view has resulted in the formation of extremist groups in America and Europe, who have been campaigning to increase pressure on Muslims and also justify their aggressive policies. According to a report called "The Right Wing Playbook on Anti-Muslim Extremism", these groups in America use the following eight guidelines to create suspicion against Islam as a religion and the Muslim community in America:

- Strategy One: Frame Muslim-Americans as dangerous to America
- Strategy Two: Twist statistics and use fake research to “prove” the Muslim threat
- Strategy Three: Invent the danger of “creeping Sharia”
- Strategy Four: “Defend liberty” by taking freedoms away from Muslims
- Strategy Five: Claim that Islam is not a religion

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<sup>1</sup> [http://a.abcnews.go.com/images/US/ht\\_cordoba\\_house\\_100908.pdf](http://a.abcnews.go.com/images/US/ht_cordoba_house_100908.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2011799,00.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/24/muslim-america\\_n\\_935685.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/24/muslim-america_n_935685.html)

<sup>4</sup> <http://europenews.dk/en/node/50157>

- Strategy Six: Maintain that Muslims have no First Amendment rights under the Constitution
- Strategy Seven: Link anti-Muslim prejudice to anti-Obama rhetoric
- Strategy Eight: Claim an “unholy alliance” exists that includes Muslims and other groups targeted by the Right Wing<sup>5</sup>

Overall Islamophobia can be defined as a world view with a view based on unreasonable hatred of Islam and Muslims which ends in rejection, deprivation, discrimination and written, spoken and practiced violence against them. The roots of these attitudes existed prior to the 9/11 attacks, and the assumption of Islamophobia being solely a product of these attacks is unrealistic. Just as reducing it to racist tendencies of west's extremists groups is not credible.

Nonetheless, Islamophobia turned more visible and aggressive following the 9/11 attacks and it was during this period that the terms "Islamic terrorism" or "Jihadist terrorism" found new places. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) the 9/11 attacks gave a new life to enmity towards Muslims, and increased hatred and violence, violence that went farther than just physical violence, and in a more extensive form and in the form of a bad image, verbal abuse and appears in an atmosphere of created fear. The findings of this report stresses on the "deep and rooted nature of Islamophobia and Xenophobia" and shows that anti-Islamic trends have numerous resources and have different outwardly examples.

But alongside Islamophobia there is another creeping disaster called sectarian tensions on the rise, especially in the Middle East region, a clear example of which is the rise in Salafist ideology. This has resulted in a rise in the last few months in the number of sectarian attacks in unrest regions such as Syria, Iraq or Egypt against Christian and particularly Shia minorities by religious extremists. In fact after years of historical efforts to marginalise the Shia in the regional countries, after years of international organizations turning their blind eyes, have now turned into official policies of religious extremists, and a number of ME regional governments such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. For example during its years of rule in Iraq, the Baathist regime - despite being secular - had turned the Shia majority population of the country to a marginalised community. Discrimination against the Shia escalated when following the 1991 uprising, the Saddam Hussein regime began its organized crackdown on the Shia. Following the fall of Saddam, Al Qaeda and its regional backers, with the reasoning that the Shia government of Iraq cooperates with Washington, they turned it into a part of their anti-American war. As a result bombings began in Shia towns in Iraq began, and the Shia holiest shrines and hundreds of their pilgrims became victims of Al Qaeda and its regional supporters' violence in such way that the Shia turned into the main victims of sectarian violence in Iraq.

Pakistan is another country that has witnessed a gradual rise in sectarian tensions over the last two decades. Over the recent years the killing of Shias has taken a new form and routine. Some of the examples of the killing of the Shia in Pakistan is the bombing in 2008 that left 45 dead, the 2009 Karachi bombing that left 46 dead, the 2010 bombing of a religious ceremony that left 49 dead, the Kowaitoh bombing in 2010 on Quds Day that left 80 dead, the suicide bombing in Pachenar in 2012 that left 50 dead. It is clear that the terror attacks against the Shia which is a noticeable minority in the country takes place on a daily and weekly basis, and the aforementioned only include the big terror attacks.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pfaw.org/rww-in-focus/the-right-wing-playbook-anti-muslim-etremism>

The Shia minority in Saudi Arabia who live in the biggest province (Al-Sharqia) of the country, have almost all the country's oil in their regions; a wealth that in comparison to non-Shia citizens they benefit less from. The Shia sect in Arabia, which is one of the oldest sects in the country is not even recognised as an official Islamic sect by the Saudi rulers, and therefore the Shia are deprived from the benefits of other monotheist religions (Judaism and Christianity) in the country, and most often are deemed Kafirs (infidels) by the Wahabi religious leaders who have the official religious body under their control and consult and advise the king.

Another important regional country that has sectarian tension on the rise is Bahrain, a country with a majority 80 percent Shia population under the rule of the Al-Kahalifa Shia minority and discrimination takes place in various forms. The Sunni minority in Bahrain has all regime high political positions in its hands, and the Shia are only hired in the lowest echelons of power. The security and military forces of the country is in the hands of the minority. Under these conditions political crackdown turns into sectarian crackdown, and the majority are marginalised and alongside being deprived of the benefits of the minority, are cracked down and do not have the right to any form of dissent.

Therefore with a brief review of the political and regime situation in the Middle East the high potentials for sectarian tension among the people of the region can be noticed. The ODVV believes that if international human rights bodies had timely intervened and taken proper measures against religious extremism, the roots of most of these problems would have been dried both in the Middle East and the West. The United Nations failure in timely and genuine concentration on the subject of dialogue among civilizations and religions, and also failure in serious confrontation with any form of insulting individuals religions, and failing to clarify the boundaries between freedom of expression and defamation have all resulted in most of these dormant processes to rejuvenate again.

Our NGO believes that if the Human Rights Council does not take resolute action that is away from political observations and tendencies against these evil phenomena, in the coming years cases of human rights violations due to sectarian and religious tensions will take the number one spot at the Council.

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