



Organisation of The Islamic Conference



CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

OIC ISLAMOPHOBIA OBSERVATORY

MONTHLY BULLETIN – FEBRUARY, 2010

1. Negative Incidents

i) **France: Mosques Desecrated** – French police announced on Feb 1st that a complaint was lodged on Jan 31st after the discovery of Islamophobic graffiti on the night before on the walls of a mosque in the Crépy-en-Valois suburb of Paris (Oise). The cultural and religious Muslim association of Crépy-en-Valois, the owners of the place, lodged the complaint against unknowns.



On Saturday (Jan 30) night local residents discovered graffiti spray painted “Islam out of Europe”, “Islam out” on the walls of the hall and enclosure, together with the blue-white-red flag and a Celtic cross. An inscription “France to the French” was discovered on a wall in a nearby street where the worshipers usually park. The mayor denounced this ‘idiotic, heinous act’ which contrasts with the ‘peaceful atmosphere which reigns in Crépy-en-Valois between the different communities’.

In: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2010/02/01/01011-20100201FILWWW00182-inscriptions-islamophobes-dans-l-oise.php> retrieved on 02.02.2010

ii) **Australia: Opponents set to take on mosque** – Auburn residents upset at a mosque planned for the area are set to challenge the council’s decision in court. About 4000 residents signed a petition against the Australian Islamic Cultural Centre, which will be built on Harrow Rd in place of a disused fire station from the 1930s. That petition was dwarfed by the 22,000-signature petition that supported the project, with which Auburn Council sided last month.

But opponents, such as Barry Walsh, insist the fire station should be preserved for heritage reasons. He said: “We will challenge the council decision in the Land and Environment Court. We already have the funds to commence litigation. The petition has been a marvellous way to mobilise people who want to protect our heritage and oppose the mosque.” He wanted state heritage protection for the fire station and said once the council published its decision, his group would litigate.

Auburn Mayor Hicham Zraika was unfazed by the challenge. He stated: “People are entitled to express their views and opinions and if they want to take it further, they are entitled to. They seem very passionate about the reasons why they are supporting the heritage and opposing the mosque. But it’s not up to us anymore.” Mr. Zraika voted for the mosque on the basis of need because “It’s not just a place of community worship, but also a cultural centre and library.”

In: <http://parramatta-advertiser.wherelive.com.au/news/story/opponents-set-to-take-on-mosque/> retrieved on 06.02.2010

iii) **German doctor refuses to treat teen named Jihad** – the *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (in German), citing a local magazine, reported that an orthodontist in southern Germany has refused to treat a 16-year-old whose first name is Jihad, which is Arabic for holy struggle or holy war, because she took offense at his name. The name, popular among Muslims worldwide and even used by some Christians in the Middle East, has become controversial because militant groups often incorporate it into their names and use it as a rally cry. In retrospect, the doctor said she regretted her decision. She was quoted as saying: “He can’t help it if his parents named him so.”

In: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2010/02/muslim-world-german-doctor-refuses-to-treat-kid-named-jihad.html> retrieved on 07.02.2010

Related: However, the **discriminatory treatment that Cihad Celik faced, also affected his elder sister Nisa Celik**. Nisa Celik was following a vocational training in bakery, and was at an internship (apprenticeship) programme in the bakery section of a supermarket. Nisa Celik encountered questions by the customers about the incident regarding her brother Cihad Celik and this situation caused unease on the part of the Supermarket management. As a result her internship programme was terminated by the management of the Supermarket.

*** Information sent by the Turkish Consulate in Jeddah.**

iv) **French mosque vandalized with swastikas** – The French Council of the Muslim Faith said that swastikas and racial slurs have been painted on the walls of a mosque in the town of Saint-Etienne, adding that the vandalism took place on Monday (Feb 8) morning at the mosque in the Loire region, in the latest example of rising Islamophobia.



The Council said such vandalism has multiplied in France “in a very worrisome way” and repeated a demand for the government to create a parliamentary panel to study rising Islamophobia. Muslim leaders are among those saying that a debate in France on the face-covering veil and a national identity debate have stigmatised Muslims and fed anti-Muslim sentiment.

In: <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/french-mosque-vandalised-with-swastikas-20100208-nnin.html> retrieved on 09.02.2010

v) **US: ‘Muslims go home’ spray-painted on Nashville mosque** – State, local and federal officials in Tennessee were investigating vandalism discovered early Wednesday (Feb 10) at the Al-Farooq Mosque on Fourth Avenue South as a possible hate crime.



An Islamic woman goes to pray Wednesday (Feb 10) at the Al-Farooq Mosque, where vandals inscribed "Muslims Go Home" on the wall near the entrance

The words “Muslim go home” and several crosses were spray-painted in red on the exterior of the building, and an expletive and hate-speech filled note was left at the youth center, according to a board member of the mosque. Salaad Nur said the note contained the message that Islam is the enemy and that the religion is trying to destroy the United States and Israel. Members of the mosque planned to meet last night with law enforcement to discuss the crime. Nur said: “It was an unexpected thing, it kind of shook us.” Metro Police Sgt. Brooks Harris of the Specialized Investigations Division said his department would investigate because of the obvious sign that the vandalism could be classified as a hate crime. He said he notified the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation as well as the FBI, to see if federal laws were violated and look for potential similarities with vandalism late last year at a mosque site in Murfreesboro.

In: <http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100211/NEWS03/2110343/+Muslims+go+home++spray-painted+on+Nashville+mosque> retrieved on 13.02.2010

Related: Tennessee mosque vandalized after irresponsible local TV report on ‘homegrown jihad’ –

Last year, the right-wing Christian Action Network and PRB films produced a “documentary” called “*Homegrown Jihad: The Terrorist Camps Around U.S.*” It claims to expose 35 “Islamic terrorist training compounds” devoted to “radical Pakistani cleric, Sheikh Mubarak Gilani.” In February 2009, CBS News reviewed the film and dismissed it as nothing more than “sensationalistic” fear-mongering:

Officials describe the film to CBS News as “sensationalistic” and without any real foundation. According to one official, it is strictly designed to upset and inflame people and does not present a true picture of any so-called “homegrown Jihad” danger. No current intelligence exists to suggest any threat connected with this group, which officials describe as “wannabes” and not terrorists.

Nevertheless, a year later, the Nashville CBS affiliate (Channel 5) decided to give the film legitimacy by conducting an “EXCLUSIVE” investigation into a Muslim community in rural Tennessee called Islamville, which is featured in the movie. “Some believe it is a secret Islamic terrorist training camp,” reads the Channel 5 article. “Others have said that’s simply not true. In a News Channel 5 Exclusive Special Report, Nick Beres went looking for the truth.” What Beres found was a quiet community that willingly allowed him onto their property, although he made sure to point out that it’s built in “a clearing of trees” and is “very remote.” One person even joined Beres and Stewart County Sheriff John Vinson — who has said that there is no terrorist activity going on in Islamville — to show them around. What Channel 5 found:

Frankly, there was not much to see. ... There are single and double-wide trailers along with a few houses and a tent for the 40 or so people who live there. ... We saw children out playing. Driving, we saw a couple more youngsters walking home, and two women running. Others, we learned, were off working jobs in Dover and even Nashville. There is a mosque in the middle of the village, and they allowed us inside for a look around. It's a place of prayer, five times of day, and Sheriff Vinson believes that is the focus of what they do: pray, not train terrorists.

Beres added that he didn't go in every building, but they saw every corner of the community from the ground and the air and saw no evidence of terrorist activities. Nevertheless, that didn't stop the station from airing a two-part report and lending credibility to the dangerous claims of "Homegrown Jihad." *The Nashville City Paper* also reported that members of the mostly Somali congregation found a handwritten note "taped to the outside of their youth training building a few blocks away," with the words "The Enemy Is Islam" underlined at the top. The note "was filled with statements tying Muslims to Satan and the downfall of Western nations." Since the vandalism yesterday, Channel 5 has mentioned the crime several times, but only briefly as part of its news round-ups. Where's the two-part series on this incident?

In: http://www.reclaimthedia.org/media_justice/tennessee_mosque_vandalized_af1206 retrieved on 14.02.2010

vi) **UK: Michael Gove opposes mosque at centre of 'inflammatory' campaign** – A British Conservative frontbench spokesman, Michael Gove, has opposed plans to build a mosque in his constituency after it became the target of an "inflammatory and offensive" online campaign. The shadow schools secretary, who warned that the west was facing a "total war" from Islamists in his book *Celsius 7/7*, had initially refused to take sides in the dispute over proposals to build a mosque next to Sandhurst barracks in Camberley, Surrey. But this week he said he had been convinced that the strength of feeling was threatening the area's "good community relations" and called on local Muslims to withdraw the application.

He said: "The issue has become a flashpoint and people from inside and outside the community were making statements that I did not think would further community relations. It struck me that it was best to ask the Bengali Welfare Association to withdraw the application and to consider how to improve the facilities for worship for the Muslim community in a calmer environment."

A *Facebook* group set up to oppose the mosque has 6,834 "fans" and was criticized by one local organization opposing the mosque as "inflammatory and offensive". The *Facebook* group is supported by the far-right English Defence League. The local Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate, Alan Hiliar, said Gove had "lost all respect" over the issue, adding: "I reject Michael Gove's decision to ask the community to withdraw their application on the ground that it's 'divisive'. To ask the Muslim community to withdraw the application is simply kicking the issue into the long grass; it resolves nothing." The existing mosque is housed in a former school in a conservation area. The new mosque would replace that building. Gove said many people also felt that it was important not to demolish the school, which is a locally listed building.

In: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/feb/12/michael-gove-opposes-mosque> retrieved on 14.02.2010

vii) **Mosque attacked in France, probe ordered** – the eastern France local gendarmerie said, on Saturday (Feb 13), that young assailants twisted the metal crescent atop of a local mosque, adding it had launched an investigation. But it characterised the act, which took place overnight Friday, as one of vandalism rather than anti-Islamic, at a time of heightened sensitivities as the government mulls the banning of the full, face-covering Muslim veil. The gendarmerie said: "This appears much more like (an act) of immaturity rather than an act of Islamophobia". But the French Council of the Muslim Faith denounced the incident in a statement as "provocation and irrational hatred." The gendarmes said four youths aged around 20 had climbed the roof of the mosque in the Alsace town of Obernai and twisted its metal crescent, which is the Islamic symbol. By the time gendarmes arrived on the scene, the youths had fled. Attacks against Islamic edifices and symbols

are nothing new in France, home to Europe's largest Muslim community, estimated at between five and six million people.

In: http://www.qatar-tribune.com/data/20100214/content.asp?section=europa1_2 retrieved on 15.02.2010

viii) **Racist graffiti on French mosque for 6th time** – France's main Muslim group said a mosque has been defaced with racist graffiti in the sixth such incident this year. The head of the French Council of the Muslim Faith says racist words were painted over the weekend on the walls of the mosque in Sorgues, in the picturesque Vaucluse region. It is the sixth time this year that a French mosque has been tarnished by racist graffiti. Mohammed Moussaoui said that Muslims now have a right to ask about the "real objectives" behind these acts. He noted that his group has called numerous times for a parliamentary inquiry into Islamophobia, to no avail.

In: http://www.etaiwannews.com/etn/news_content.php?id=1183349&lang=eng_news retrieved on 19.02.2010

ix) **French halal burger sparks appeal** – A French council has lodged a complaint against a fast food chain that serves only meat that conforms with Islamic dietary laws at a local branch. The mayor of Roubaix, in northern France, said the halal menu constituted "discrimination" against non-Muslims. The Roubaix branch is one of several restaurants at which the chain, *Quick*, took non-halal products and pork off the menu in November 2009. The move has triggered the latest row over France's Muslim minority. Several deputies from French President Nicolas Sarkozy's conservative UMP party have condemned the move, while Marine Le Pen, a vice-president of the far-right National Front, warned of "Islamisation". Their comments came ahead of regional elections in France next month, and against the backdrop of a debate over French national identity launched by Mr Sarkozy's government.

In Roubaix, Mayor Rene Vandierendonck, a socialist, called for a boycott of the *Quick* branch, and the town council has filed a complaint for discrimination with a regional court in Lille. He said: "I'm not bothered by the fact that there is a halal menu. But this is going too far because it is the only menu on offer and it has become discrimination." *Quick* decided to take a bacon hamburger off the menu at eight of its 350 branches, replacing it with a halal version that comes with smoked turkey. It said the move was designed to test the "commercial interest and technical feasibility" of introducing halal menus. The *Quick* manager responsible for the Roubaix branch said there had been a slight increase in business after the introduction of halal menus and that he had not received complaints from customers.

In: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8524056.stm> retrieved on 20.02.2010

x) **A Fascist Summit Meeting in Belgium** – on February 24 some European far right groups met in a VB-sponsored event in the Belgian city of Ghent featuring Frank Vanhecke of the Vlaams Belang (a European party promoted by "anti-jihad" bloggers such as Pamela Geller, Gates of Vienna, and Brussels Journal), Nick Griffin of the BNP (British National Party), Bruno Gollnisch of the National Front, and Andreas Molzer of the Austrian FPÖ.



The poster announcing the meeting is self-explanatory on the contents of the discussions.

In: <http://trueslant.com/charlesjohnson/2010/02/25/a-fascist-summit-meeting-in-belgium/> retrieved on 27.02.2010

xi) **Caplis and Silverman post ‘Obama-Islam’ missile defense logo** – The blogosphere is abuzz over conservatives' charges that a logo being used by the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency looks very much like a fusion of the Muslim crescent moon and star and the Obama campaign logo. Some folks even detected a similarity to the Iranian Space Agency logo.

In fact, it doesn't take much to stir the talk-radio pot. Anything having to do, of course, with President Obama and Islam will do the trick, no matter how unfounded or just plain silly. Today, right talkers and opinionators were concerned with a U.S. Missile Defense Agency logo, which is abstract and blue and red and swerve. Examining it, not only do the talkers see reference to Obama's 2008 campaign logo; they see references to Islam's crescent and star. Obama plus Islam equals scary!

Here's the formula, as presented at *Denver KHOW's Caplis and Silverman* conservative talk radio website on Feb 25:



The Missile Defense logo, the one at the bottom in the photo, was designed by TMP Government, a website management company. TMP manages the Missile Defense Department site. TMP is not strictly a design firm nor is it a political firm. In fact it designed the logo before the 2008 election. Neither the Obama administration nor the Obama campaign had any influence on the design.

Yet at Andrew Breitbart's right-wing Big Government website, security pundit Frank Gaffney wrote that the logo amounted to a tipped hand that revealed the Obama administration's soft accommodationist approach to Iran.

A just-unveiled symbolic action suggests, however, that something even more nefarious is afoot... Team Obama's anti-missile initiatives are not simply acts of unilateral disarmament of the sort to be expected from an Alinsky acolyte. They seem to fit an increasingly obvious and worrying pattern of official U.S. submission to Islam and the theo-political program the latter's authorities call Shariah... the new MDA shield appears ominously to reflect a morphing of the Islamic crescent and star with the Obama campaign logo... Watch this space as we identify and consider various, ominous and far more clear-cut acts of submission to Shariah by President Obama and his team.

The Missile Defense Agency's Richard Lehner laughed off the logical leap: "It's ridiculous. It isn't a new logo to replace the official logo. It's a logo developed for recruiting materials and for our public website. Also, it was used prior to the 2008 election and it has no link to any political campaign."

In: <http://coloradoindependent.com/48079/caplis-and-silverman-post-%E2%80%98obama-islam%E2%80%99-missile-defense-logo> and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/25/AR2010022505704.html> retrieved on 27.02.2010

1.1. On Geert Wilders:

i) **Geert Wilders' trial** – the latest developments are as follows:

- a) Geert Wilders claimed he would put Islam to trial, and therefore many Islam critics see this as a major event. It is believed that Wilders' trial is indeed a major event for the Netherlands. Wilders continued to say he was only critical of Islam, and not of Muslims. The court would have to decide whether that is possible. Wilders wanted to bring 18 expert witnesses: Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Wafa Sultan, Simon Admiraal, Hans Jansen, Robert Spencer, Andrew Bostom, Afshin Ellian, Mohammed Bouyeri, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, Theo De Ross, Bill French, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, Sam Solomon, Tom Zwart, Fawaz Jneid, Raphael Israeli, Andras Sajo, and Henny Sackers. He was allowed only three: Wafa Sultan, Simon Admiraal and Hans Jansen, and they would be heard behind close doors.
- b) Six Dutch Islam and Koran scholars wrote a letter to the court. The six scholars are Prof. Fred Leemhuis, Prof. Jan Michiel Otto, Prof. Gerard Wiegers, Prof. Pieter Sjoerd, Prof. Ruud Peters and Dr. Marlies ter Borg.

The main points contained in the said letter are the following:

The Koran has violent passages, but so does the Bible. Muslims suffer more than the West from Islamic terrorism.

Wilders claims that the Koran is a violent book and that religious Muslims only act based on the Koran, therefore it's impossible to practice Islam in the Netherlands. Wilders compares the Koran to Mein Kampf, but Mein Kampf only calls for war and for the elimination of Jews, while the Koran includes calls for peace and reconciliation.

Wilders brings only half quotes, which ignore those aspects of the Koran. He takes verses which talk about war and applies them to day-to-day life. Moderate Muslims use such passages to base their peaceful world view. Such Muslims do exist and participate in life in the Netherlands.

Religion is a whole composed of values, norms and writings. It is preached and followed by people. Violence is something which people do, not a religion. Therefore, a religion cannot be violent or peaceful. By calling a religion 'violent' you are actually calling its believers violent.

According to the six scholars, history shows that Islam is not more violent than Christianity. And the battles between Christians and Muslims caused far less suffering than the internal battles in both Christianity and Islam.

Both religions are past the time when religion was being spread by the sword. Extremists who do think so are an exception and are not representative of Islam.

In: <http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2010/02/netherlands-geert-wilders-trial.html> retrieved on 13.02.2010

ii) **Wilders goes for headscarf ban in The Hague** – Geert Wilders said a ban on headscarves for city council workers and in all institutions and clubs which get local authority money will be the most important point in the PVV's negotiations to join governing coalitions in Almere and The Hague. Speaking to RTL news, Wilders said the ban would be central to talks to form new local authority executives in the only two cities

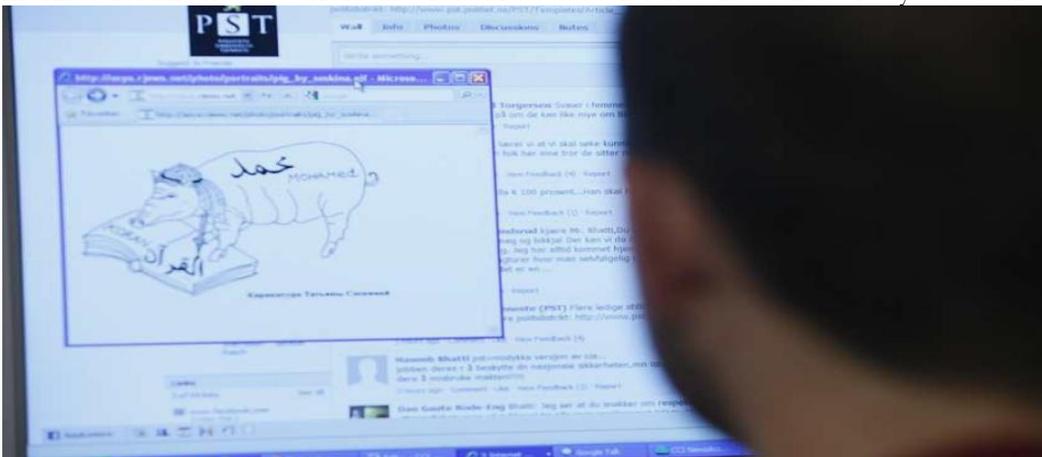
where the party is contesting the March 3 local elections. The ban, he said, would apply to “all council offices and all other institutions and clubs which get even one cent of council money”. The PVV is tipped to emerge as the biggest party in Almere and second biggest in The Hague.

Wilders brought up the ban again in a speech to supporters in Almere, where he entered the room to the Rocky theme tune *Eye of the Tiger*. The ban will not apply to other religious items such as Christian crosses and Jewish skull caps because these are symbols of our own Dutch culture, Wilders said in his speech, receiving a standing ovation from the crowd. The speech began with a “lengthy tirade” against the “arrogant Labour party”. He said: “If you translate the PvdA’s Arabic language election brochures they say ‘bring your family here. You get benefits, we pay for everything’. Almere must become the safest city in the Netherlands. There will be an end to subsidies for Turkish macramé and Arabic finger painting. Not just the Netherlands but all of Europe will look to Almere.”

In: http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2010/02/wilders_goes_for_headscarf_ban.php retrieved on 28.02.2010

1.2. On Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) Cartoons:

i) **Norwegian Security Services Facebook Promotes Muhammad Cartoons** – Earlier this week Abid Q. Raja (Norwegian Liberal Party) voiced his concern about a link on the PST (Police Security Service) Facebook page to a cartoon portraying Muhammad as a pig writing in the Koran. He said he received phone-calls from Muslims who were deeply and intensely insulted and sad about it. He said he himself, as a very liberal Muslim, felt the cartoon in his heart, spine and soul. He said it was a scandal the PST did not realize the explosiveness in this cartoon and was afraid that it could cause violence in both Norway and Pakistan.



Abid Q. Raja called on the PST heads and justice minister Knut Storberget to take complete responsibility for it and to apologize that the cartoon was available through the PST site. He said he was afraid of the consequences if they didn't, but that he and other liberal Muslims would do everything they could to calm down the community. But, he said, Norwegians shouldn't be naive. He said: “Think when this reaches the closed communities. Think when the mullahs see this. They'll tear out their beards.” He was skeptical about the fact that the PST is active on the site, and yet didn't remove the link. In response, PST said they remove all inappropriate content and whatever breaks their rules.

In: http://infidelsunite.typepad.com/counter_jihad/2010/02/norwegian-security-services-facebook-promotes-to-muhammed-cartoons.html retrieved on 07.02.2010

Related: Oslo: 1000 taxi drivers protest Muhammed cartoon – A thousand Muslim taxi drivers parked their cars in the center of Oslo Friday night (Feb 5), in protest of Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet's* printing of the Muhammad cartoon. On Wednesday (Feb 3rd) *Dagbladet* published a caricature of the prophet

Muhammad on its front page, as an illustration to a story about the PST linking to the controversial cartoons on its website.

Muslim taxi drivers in the capital responded harshly to the newspaper's reprinting of the cartoon. A warning was given of the spontaneous demonstration on Friday evening (Feb 5), and the initiators called on taxi drivers to stop their cars from 2AM to 4AM. At 3AM, close to a thousand taxi drivers followed the request. Rashad Munir, one of the taxi drivers who demonstrated, told the local press: "We're reacting to the abuse of freedom of speech. What we're doing isn't any violent planning, but we want to show that we're against our values being abused," adding that taxi drivers with an Islamic affiliation from both Oslo and Akershus participated in the protest, and also drivers who weren't working. The protest proceeded peacefully and the police were content to call the drivers to ensure free passage for emergency vehicles.

In: <http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2010/02/oslo-1000-taxi-drivers-protest-muhammed.html> retrieved on 07.02.2010

Related: Turkish hackers down *Dagbladet.no*, Possible links to Prophet Mohammed caricatures – *Dagbladet's* Internet paper was hit by hackers on Feb 10, crippling the site for about 1½ hours. There were suspicions that the denial of service (DDOS) offensive that started at about 19:30, when several IP addresses from Turkey started downloading the paper's front page about 5,000 times each in a short space of time was linked to this Norwegian publication of Prophet Muhammad cartoon. Many Norwegian Muslims have reacted to *Dagbladet's* decision to reproduce a controversial cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed on the front page of their paper edition last week, portraying the prophet as a pig. *Dagbladet* has also reprinted Danish Kurt Westergaard's controversial Prophet Mohammed cartoon.

Dagbladet's reprinting of the cartoon has had repercussions. Early on Saturday (Feb 7) morning approximately 1,000 Muslim taxi drivers from Oslo and Akershus parked their vehicles in protest, causing traffic chaos in the centre. Last month, also *Aftenposten* was heavily criticised for reproducing Westergaard's cartoon.

In: <http://theforeigner.no/pages/news/turkish-hackers-down-dagbladetno/> retrieved on 13.02.2010

ii) **Cartoonist: Mohammed drawing not Mohammed** – Although it gained infamy as 'the Mohammed cartoon', Kurt Westergaard said drawing was not of Mohammed. The cartoon that caused international uproar and rioting among Muslims was apparently not what it seemed. In 2005, *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper ran its now infamous feature with several different artists' drawings under the heading 'Faces of Mohammed' – the most well-known being Kurt Westergaard's contribution depicting a man with a bomb in his turban.

But according to Westergaard, the drawing was not the prophet Mohammed, to which it is commonly referred, but is instead a would-be terrorist. He told the Danish newspaper *Politiken*: "The drawing shows that there are terrorists who use aspects of Islam as their spiritual ammunition. That's what the drawing shows and that's what I've always said it showed." But although it was *Jyllands-Posten* that gave the cartoon series its title, Westergaard blames many imams for creating the inflammatory situation that arose from the drawings' publication. Westergaard admitted: "The overall theme of the series was Mohammed. But many of the other drawings also depicted things other than Mohammed. I just chose to draw a terrorist. But it was a perfect opportunity for imams and other Islamic authorities, who operate using hate as the fuel to arouse common feelings, to say it was Mohammed."

Westergaard said that the fate of the drawing's interpretation was well out of his hands not long after it was published. He said: "The interpretation problem will always be there now, so you have to see it however you want. But I don't know whether that's a misunderstanding or not. Terrorists often have Islam and Mohammed as their religion." And Westergaard isn't apologising for his views or for the drawing and he criticised artists and writers who have not supported the publication of the drawing. He said: "These comments don't mean that I'm sorry about the drawing. It shows how terrorists are inspired to kill. And I've

been proven right on that account, because someone tried to kill me for making the drawing. It's unfortunate that so many creative minds have decided to take exception to it, because if they don't champion freedom of expression, who will?"

In: <http://www.cphpost.dk/component/content/48193.html?task=view> retrieved on 13.02.2010

iii) **2,500 protest Muhammad cartoon in Norway** – About 2,500 people marched through downtown Oslo in a protest Friday (Feb 12) against a Norwegian newspaper that printed a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad. The demonstrators chanted "God is great" in Arabic and waved placards calling for a boycott of the *Dagbladet* daily. On Feb. 3, the newspaper published a photograph showing a man in front of a computer screen with a depiction of Muhammad as a pig. The picture accompanied an article that said users were posting offensive material about Muslims and Jews on the *Facebook* page of Norway's security police.

Dagbladet's acting editor-in-chief, Lars Helle, told *The Associated Press* that he didn't regret printing the offending image and that he welcomed Friday's protest. He said: "It was a test for Norwegian society - whether this would be a peaceful protest or not." He also said *Dagbladet* had not received any direct threats since it published the caricature. A hacker attack originating from Turkey brought down the newspaper's Web site for two hours Wednesday (Feb 10) evening, but Helle said it was unclear whether that attack was connected to the caricature.

Protesters said they wanted to show Norwegian media how hurtful such images are to Muslims. Naradim Muhammad, a 43-year-old school teacher who helped organize the demonstration, said: "We have done nothing to anybody. We want to live here in peace. Norway is our home. Our children live here. Why should they (Norwegian media) hurt us like this?". The demonstration was peaceful, Police spokesman Joern-Kristian Joergensen, said the protest concluded without incidents.

In: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/12/AR2010021202857.html> retrieved on 13.02.2010

iv) **Joint press release about the Prophet Mohammed Cartoon Drawing** – Issued by Mr. Toger Seidenfaden, Editor-in-Chief, on behalf of Politiken and Mr Faisal A.Z. Yamani, attorney-at-law, on behalf of his clients.

The Danish national daily newspaper *Politiken* and the directors of 8 organizations in Egypt, Libya, Qatar, Australia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Palestine that have 94,923 members, who are descendents of the Prophet Mohammed (the "Organisations") have reached an understanding and settlement in the dispute between the Organisations and Politiken that arose out of Politiken's reprinting of the cartoon drawing of the Prophet Mohammed (the "Cartoon Drawing"), created by Mr. Kurt Westergaard, and originally published by the newspaper Jyllands-Posten on 30 September 2005 together with 11 other drawings of the Prophet Mohammed (the "Dispute").

These drawings, and in particular Mr. Westergaard's Cartoon Drawing, gave rise to civil unrest and demonstrations in many countries across the world, and in particular in Arab and Islamic countries, where the Cartoon Drawing was perceived as being defamatory of Islam and specifically of the Prophet.

Politiken reprinted Mr. Westergaard's Cartoon Drawing as part of the newspaper's news coverage and has never intended to offend Muslims in Denmark or elsewhere.

In a statement that is to be printed in Politiken's print and online editions, Politiken recognizes and deplors that the reprinting of the Cartoon Drawing offended Muslims in Denmark and in other countries around the world and apologizes to anyone who was offended by the reprinting of the Cartoon Drawing.

The Organisations and clients represented by the Law Firm of Ahmed Zaki Yamani by attorney-at-law Mr. Faisal A. Z. Yamani, of Saudi Arabia, noting Politiken's statement, confirm that the Dispute is settled, and agree not to pursue any legal or administrative action against Politiken. Both parties express their satisfaction with this amicable understanding and settlement, and express the hope that it may in some degree contribute to defusing the present tense situation. Both parties express their hope and conviction that the agreement may help improve the relationship between the Muslim world and Denmark and in particular the Danish media, and hope that other acts of dialogue and reconciliation may follow.

In: <http://politiken.dk/debat/fakta/article910932.ece> retrieved on 27.02.2010

Related: Statement published by *Politiken* - As part of *Politiken's* news coverage of Mr Kurt Westergaard's cartoon drawing of the Prophet Mohammed ("the Cartoon Drawing"), first published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005, *Politiken* reprinted the Cartoon Drawing.

Politiken has never intended to reprint the Cartoon Drawing as a statement of editorial opinion or values but merely as part of the newspaper's news coverage. It was never *Politiken's* intention to offend Muslims in Denmark or elsewhere with the reprinting of the Cartoon Drawing.

However, *Politiken* recognizes and deplores that our reprinting of the Cartoon Drawing of the Prophet Mohammed has offended Muslims in Denmark and in other countries around the world. We apologize to anyone who was offended by our decision to reprint the Cartoon Drawing.

In: <http://politiken.dk/debat/fakta/article910939.ece> retrieved on 27.02.2010

Related: OIC welcomes apology by Danish newspaper for publication of blasphemous cartoons – A spokesman of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory on in Jeddah today in a statement welcomed the apology made by the Danish daily newspaper "Politiken" over the publication of the blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The spokesman said that the action taken by the daily "Politiken" should have been taken immediately after the first publication of insulting caricatures in 2005 as a demonstration of the Danish society's respect for tolerance and respect for the sentiments of 1.5 billion world Muslims who felt humiliated, insulted and deeply hurt by the publication of the cartoons.

The spokesman said that the apology issued by the "Politiken" yesterday would be seen by Muslims as a development towards rectification with regard to the hurt and insult caused to them by the publications of the cartoons. The spokesman hoped that the action taken by "Politiken" newspaper would be replicated by other newspapers that had published the cartoons as well by the cartoonist himself. He added that OIC is strongly committed to freedom of expression but believes that it should be exercised responsibly so as not to create incitement and provocation leading to social unrest and disturb interfaith harmony.

In: http://www.oic-oci.org/topic_detail.asp?t_id=3399 retrieved on 28.02.2010

Related: Press freedom uproar as *Politiken* apologises for Mohammed cartoon – A Danish newspaper was accused on Feb 26 of betraying press freedom after it apologised to Muslims for offence caused by its reprinting Westegard's cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed. *Politiken*, a leading Danish newspaper, had printed the cartoon as a gesture of solidarity after three people were arrested for planning to kill the cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard. It broke ranks with its rivals to issue the apology after settling with a Saudi lawyer who is representing eight Muslim groups that complained after the cartoon was reprinted by 11 Danish newspapers.

Outrage at the move was led by Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, Mr Westergaard – who survived an alleged attempt on his life by Somali at his home last month – and by other newspapers including

Jyllands-Posten, which first printed the cartoon. Jorn Mikkelsen, the editor-in-chief of *Jyllands-Posten*, which is owned by the same media company as *Politiken*, said: “*Politiken*’s pathetic prostrating before a Saudi lawyer takes the first prize in stupidity. It is a sad day for Danish media, it is sad for freedom of expression and it is sad for *Politiken*.” The Prime Minister expressed surprise at *Politiken*’s move, saying he was worried that the Danish media was no longer “standing shoulder to shoulder” on the issue. Mr Westergaard, 74, who has round-the-clock security, added: “I fear this is a setback for the freedom of speech.”

Mogens Blicher Bjerregard, the head of the Danish Union of Journalists, said that *Politiken* was “kneeling before opponents of the freedom of the press”. The apology was welcomed, however, by Muslim leaders in Denmark. “It is beyond any doubt that they have offended some people. It is a nice and human gesture that the newspaper apologises,” said Abdul Wahid Petersen, a moderate imam.

The Saudi lawyer, Faisal Yamani, who is representing the Muslim groups, has demanded apologies from all 11 Danish newspapers that reprinted the cartoon. *Politiken* is the only one so far to have reached a settlement.

In: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/press-freedom-uproar-as-politiken-apologises-for-cartoon-of-mohammed-with-bomb-turban/story-e6frg6so-1225835032481> retrieved on 28.02.2010

2. Positive Occurrences

i) **Obama Taps Envoy to Islamic Group to Improve Ties** – President Barack Obama named a new special envoy to the world’s largest Islamic organization in a bid to forge closer ties with the Muslim world. Rashad Hussain, who currently serves as White House deputy associate counsel, will be special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Obama announced in a video message to the seventh annual U.S. Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar.

Obama said: “The U.S. and Muslims around the world have often slipped into a cycle of misunderstanding and mistrust that can lead to conflict rather than cooperation,” calling for a “new beginning” in relations. Obama’s message, leading off the three-day forum, reflects administration efforts to reinforce his maiden speech to the Muslim world June 4, 2009, in Cairo, where called for “a new beginning” among people to break what he called then a “cycle of suspicion and discord.” The US administration’s goal is to lift U.S. standing with Muslims as the White House is trying to renew the Middle East peace process, wage war against Islamic insurgents in two countries, and battle to choke off support for al-Qaeda and other terrorists.

In the video message, Obama said his administration has “made a sustained effort to listen” to Muslims, and that he’ll do that again next month when he visits Indonesia. To forge economic ties worldwide, and promote innovation and job creation, Obama said he plans to hold a summit on entrepreneurship in Washington in April with business leaders from Muslim communities around the world.

Mike Hammer, a spokesman for the White House National Security Council, said that the appointment of a special envoy “is an important part of the president’s commitment to engaging Muslims around the world based on mutual respect and mutual interest.” “None of this will be easy,” the president said in the video message. “The new beginning we envision will take a long-term commitment, but we have begun.” He pledged to write “the next chapter in the ties between us, with faith in each other on the basis of mutual respect.”

Hussain’s job is to strengthen cooperation between the U.S. and the Islamic Conference in such areas as education, entrepreneurship, science and technology, health and opposition to violence and extremism “in all its forms,” Hammer said in an e-mailed statement. The White House stressed it already had worked with the conference to eradicate polio, a scourge in three Muslim-majority countries -- Afghanistan, Nigeria and

Pakistan -- and also in India. Hussain has been a U.S. Justice Department lawyer and served as a legislative assistant on the House Judiciary Committee. He holds a master's degree in public administration and in Arabic and Islamic Studies from Harvard University and a law degree from Yale Law School, according to the White House. At the White House, Hussain's portfolio includes national security, new media and science and technology issues and developing partnerships with the Muslim world.

Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah, Qatari deputy prime minister and energy minister, said at the forum: "It's a very good move. We need a very clear understanding. Islamophobia is becoming a nightmare." The forum in Doha was organized by the Washington-based Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy and Qatar government.

In: <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-02-13/obama-taps-envoy-to-islamic-group-to-improve-ties-update1-.html> retrieved on 14.02.2010

Related: CAIR Welcomes Appointment of U.S. Envoy to World Muslim Body – on Feb 15 Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) welcomed President Obama's appointment of Rashad Hussain as special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). CAIR said Hussain, who is currently a deputy White House counsel, will be in a position to strengthen positive outreach to the Islamic world and will be able to provide the president with direct access to the views and concerns of Muslims worldwide.

CAIR National Executive Director, Nihad Awad, said: "The appointment of such a respected and experienced member of the American Muslim community as OIC envoy sends the message that President Obama is serious about constructive engagement and cooperation with Muslim nations."

In: Sent to Observatory's email.

3. Muslims in the United Kingdom

i) **UKIP Teenager Quits Over Burka Ban Row** – A teenage political activist has quit the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in a row over Islamophobia. Alex Ellis-Roswell, from Bridge, joined the Canterbury branch of the party last year but left after becoming uncomfortable with the anti-Islamic views from some UKIP members. UKIP leader Lord Pearson said the veils worn by some Muslim women should be outlawed to help improve British security and to avoid dividing communities. The teenager, who hopes to become the country's youngest councillor in next year's UK local elections, has now joined the Libertarian Party. He said: "I left because of the movement of the party towards the far-right and Islamophobia. I became ashamed of belonging to an organisation like that." In an email to the *Times* Canterbury's UKIP candidate, Howard Farmer, said he had disagreed with Alex because the 16-year-old did not see why Islam should be banned. He wrote: "Alex is very much pro-immigration and sees no point in having borders, or why we should ban Islam and the burka, I beg to differ strongly on that."

In: <http://www.thisiskent.co.uk/whitstable/UKIP-teenager-quits-burka-ban-row/article-1786068-detail/article.html> retrieved on 02.02.2010

ii) **Ireland: Muslim Group Welcomes Tax Changes Complying with Sharia** – The Irish Council of Imams, a group which represents Muslims living in Ireland, has welcomed the proposed tax changes to attract businesses from the Islamic world, which are included in the *Finance Bill*, published in the first week of February. The Bill proposes the introduction of new measures designed to accommodate transactions that comply with Sharia law, based on principles contained in the Koran.

However, Mr Selim, the Council's Secretary General, repeated the council's call to financial institutions to launch Sharia-compliant financial services so that Muslims living here do not contravene religious teachings. He said: "There are about 50,000 people in the Muslim community in Ireland and it is a community that is continuing to grow. Many Muslims want to make investments here but cannot do so at present. No institution has taken steps to introduce a product that Muslims living here can avail of, despite the fact that in

the UK, moves have been made to do this, not only in terms of offering mortgages for houses but also Sharia-compliant business loans.”

In: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0206/1224263887684.html> retrieved on 07.02.2010

iii) **Wales: Plan for anti-Muslim march blasted** – five men have been arrested after a *Facebook* site was set up declaring “all Muslims should be thrown out of Wales”. Around 150 people joined the group on the social networking site claiming they would march through the Rhondda Valleys to make their feelings known.

The proposed march has been described as “mindless bigotry” by racial equality groups. But South Wales Police have now stepped in and arrested five men for religiously aggravated public order offences. It was one of the first occasions people have been arrested over comments posted on *Facebook*. The group has also been removed from the site. Police now believe the march will not go ahead, but they will be on standby in case anyone turns up. Members of the group, which was entitled Rhondda March, said they would walk from Treherbert down to Pontypridd on February 28.

In: <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2010/02/07/plan-for-anti-muslim-march-blasted-91466-25778280/> retrieved on 08.02.2010

iv) **First Muslim scout group in the city of Bradford** – The first Muslim Scout group has been set up in Bradford to be based in one of the city’s mosques. More than 50 youngsters attended an open day in Manningham on Feb. 8 to sign up as members of the new group. Two leaders from the Camden Terrace Mosque – Ghazanfer Bhatti and Mohammed Mushtaq – will run the Cubs section of the group with the help of other volunteers from the community.

Derek Dodkins, ethnic diversity manager of the Scouts movement in West Yorkshire, said: “The men and women of Camden Terrace were looking for something for their young people to do. They thought the ideal thing would be to start a Scout group. We had the open day on Saturday so we could introduce scouting to the rest of the community. We want to open Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorer Scouts. It was a positive response. We are hoping to start the Cub pack in about a month.”

In: http://www.asianimage.co.uk/northofengland/4993584.City_to_get_first_Muslim_scout_group/ retrieved on 09.02.2010

v) **Muslims should get politically active says MP** – Mohammed Sarwar, the UK's first Muslim Member of Parliament and the first MP to swear his oath of allegiance on the Quran, said, during a visit to Manchester, that young Muslims needed to get involved in the UK political system if they want to see change advised. He added that young Muslims who were angry about what was happening in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine needed to channel their frustration in a positive way.

He said: “Understandably they are angry when they see the unjust that happens in Muslim countries with the international community turning a blind eye. They are frustrated but they need to take that energy and do something positive. To see change and to make change they need to get actively involved in their local political parties. Many young people tell me that they're not happy about our foreign policy but many don't even know that the UK government supports a two-state solution in Palestine. And then they ask me how this can be achieved? I tell them to be part of the political process. We need people to work together and to get involved so that we can bring about a just and peaceful society.”

Mr Sarwar also spoke about the challenges facing British Muslims. He said: “There are many misunderstandings about Muslims in the UK but we need to work towards changing negative perceptions. The Muslim Heritage Centre is key in this. By opening its doors to the public soon it will engage the local community from all backgrounds, race and faiths to break barriers and find common understanding between everybody.”

In: http://www.theasiannews.co.uk/news/s/1191733_muslims_should_get_politically_active_says_mp retrieved on 09.02.2010

v) **Muslim communities should do more against terrorism, warns chief constable** – Sir Norman Bettison, the head of West Yorkshire Police, said that Britain is facing another 20 years of having to deal with the threat from radicalised home-grown extremists. He said there was a fine line between winning the support of the Muslim community and alienating it, but he believed that Muslims needed to do more to tip off police. He stated: “I’m looking for the community to work much more closely with the police in identifying young people that they have concerns about in terms of the people that they’re mixing with, the sort of websites that they’re going on to and the material that they’re reading. That information can only come from the community itself.”

Sir Norman, who is the Association of Chief Police Officer’s spokesman on preventing violent extremism, compared radicalisation to a disease and added: “I think it’s a generation of treatment to prevent the infection spreading and I think that will take us probably 20 years.” Sir Norman’s comments came on a BBC documentary about *Generation Jihad*. He told the programme: “I think we have to be alert and conscious of the risk that’s ever present and prepared to interdict and prepared to share information. So the community as a whole could do more and the Muslim community is a part of that.”

In: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/7182966/Muslim-communities-sould-do-more-to-tackle-potential-terrorists-a-chief-constable-warns.html> retrieved on 09.02.2010

vii) **MP calls for points deduction for racist fans** – according to a report submitted by the FA (English Football Association)’s anti-racism taskforce, a point deduction is one of the penalties English football clubs should be face if they do not taken sufficient action to combat racism and bigotry. That is the recommendation of John Mann MP, the chairman of the group *Tackling antisemitism and Islamophobia*. The report raises concerns that racist behaviour or risk further erosion of the English game’s “moral authority”. Noting that the penalty “should be implemented with immediate effect”, Mann wrote: “This has been used boldly in Europe – its lack of implementation by the FA reduces our moral authority at international levels and within the wider Fifa network.” He raised calls for a more “diverse representation of the football community” in the FA’s internal structures.

In: <http://www.thejc.com/sport/sport-news/27082/mp-calls-points-deduction-racist-fans> retrieved on 13.02.2010

viii) **Islamophobia is behind these attacks on student rights** – Muslims at universities are being attacked as the government and media ramp up rhetoric that they are “hotbeds of extremism”. Students at the college where the failed “Christmas day bomber” studied have come under particular pressure. Police requested the membership list for the Islamic Society (Isoc) at University College London. The student union, instead of protecting students, handed over the details of all 800 Isoc members. The police are now planning to interview every one of them.

It was also revealed this month that Special Branch forces will be deployed on campus to monitor “extremist” Islamic societies. This is aimed at demonising the Muslim community. It is in this atmosphere that some students at Staffordshire University had the confidence to try and remove student union president Assed Baig. A campaign by anti-fascists on campus succeeded in saving Assed, a prominent anti-Nazi and anti-war campaigner. During the vote, swastikas and racist graffiti were scrawled on campus. “Combating extremism” is really fuelling this racist tide.

In: <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=20310> retrieved on 18.02.2010

ix) **UK firm eyes first Halal industrial park** – Mahesh Jayanarayan, chairman of Halal Industries, said that his firm was raising funds to launch Europe’s first industrial park for Islamic goods, tapping an under-served market worth up to 4 billion pounds (\$6.27 billion) a year in Britain. The Super Halal Industrial Park (SHIP) will be based in South Wales and will take three to five years to launch, Wales was chosen for the project because of its meat industries and affordable land prices. The cost of the project would be 150 million pounds

-- a sum he plans to raise in the capital markets, by sourcing government grants and by finding anchor-partners like supermarket chains and multinational food manufacturers to “cement the deal”.

He said at the Reuters Islamic Banking and Finance Summit in London: “If you look at some figures, the halal sector in the UK is worth between 2 to 4 billion pounds, the majority of that is imported. You have 2.5 billion people on the planet eating halal food, directly or indirectly ... This halal market is not going away, it is not some fad. The global industry is worth an estimated \$2.1 trillion, and is expected to grow as the Muslim middle class grows richer. Europe has no Halal industrial parks, despite being home to millions of Muslims. SHIP will help to make the UK a landmark Halal center for the region, Jayanarayan said. A successful first project could lead to further launches across Europe, possibly France and Germany and emerging Europe.

In: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61F3MS20100216> retrieved on 19.02.2010

x) **UK Churches Fight Islamophobia, Racism** – Defying rightists speaking in the Christian voice against Islam, a major British church has set up a new project to fight racism and anti-Muslim sentiments in Britain. The Rev Vernon Marsh, chairman of the Sheffield Methodist District, told *The Times* on Saturday, February 27: “The root of the project is the recent relative success of the BNP [British National Party] and the English Defence League”. The BNP, a far-right and whites-only political party, is notorious for attacks against immigrants and British Muslims, estimated at nearly two millions. The EDL is also playing anti-Muslim rhetoric to draw support in Britain, leaving Muslims at the focus of unprovoked attacks by rightists.

Marsh said: “There is a high percentage of the Muslim population in our part of the world, and because the BNP is specifically targeting Islam they try and take the right of speaking as a Christian voice against Islam. But as Christians we live in a multi-cultural, multi-faith part of the world and we enjoy good relationships with other faiths and want to build on these relationships and work together against those who won’t do that.” The project, set up by the church in partnership with the Methodist district of Sheffield, aims to challenge racism and bring together groups that don’t ordinarily mix. He added: “A lot of the work to be done is in communications, to try over time to get good stories into the media. We also want to create faith spaces where people can talk about the things that attract them to parties like these.” He also said the project also aims to delve into the root causes pushing people to the far-right parties because “We know it is affected by what is happening economically and by messages in the media. But its no good berating people without talking to them”.

The church project also eyes support of British Muslims to stand up against rightists. Abdool Gooljar, president of the Sheffield branch of the Islamic Society of Britain and is on the steering group that will run the project, said: “This project will need selling to the Muslim community to get them on board, and I hope I can do that. I hope it will be successful, especially in the wake of successes by the far Right in elections. People are worried if they put themselves forward that they might be targeted in some way. There is real lack of trust here now, everyone feels under the microscope.”

In: http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1235339917921&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout retrieved on 28.02.2010

4. Muslims in US and Americas

i) **Airport body scanners violate Islamic law, Muslims say** – The Fiqh Council of North America – a body of Islamic scholars that includes some from Michigan – issued a fatwa on Feb 09 that said going through the airport scanners would violate Islamic rules on modesty. Muslim-American groups are supporting this “fatwa”, and are encouraging Muslims to avoid going through the scanners at airports. The fatwa also read: “It is a violation of clear Islamic teachings that men or women be seen naked by other men and women.

Islam highly emphasizes haya (modesty) and considers it part of faith. The Quran has commanded the believers, both men and women, to cover their private parts.”

The decision could complicate efforts to intensify screening of potential terrorists who are Muslim. After the Christmas Day bombing attempt in Detroit by a Muslim suspect from Nigeria, some have called for the use of body scanners at airports to find explosives and other dangerous materials carried by terrorists. Some airports are now in the process of buying and using the body scanners, which show in graphic detail the outlines of a person’s body. But Muslim groups said the scanners go against their religion. One option offered to passengers who don’t want to use the scanners would be a pat down by a security guard. The Muslim groups are urging members to undergo those instead.

In: <http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100211/NEWS05/100211044/1318/Airport-body-scanners-violate-Islamic-law-Muslims-say&template=fullarticle> retrieved on 13.02.2010

ii) **America’s First Muslim College** – Muslims are turning their sights to the Zaytuna College in California to see if America’s first ever Muslim college will live up to the high expectations. Imam Zaid Shakir, a scholar-in-residence and lecturer at Zaytuna Institute and a co-founded of the college, told *IslamOnline.net* in an exclusive interview: “We’ve been waiting for this time. It’s been a long road to get here, Alhamdulillah, and to know that we’re in this final part to getting freshman class set is very exciting.”

Zaytuna College, a brainchild of Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, Imam Shakir and Professor Hatem Bazian, will stop accepting applications for its first freshman class of 2010 on March 1. With the application process coming to a close, a committee is readying to study the applications and admit between 20-25 students as incoming freshmen. And although the college is seeking Muslim students, it is not exclusive to Muslims. There will be no gender separation at the college and academic pursuits and freedom will be paramount. Course subjects have been decided on, but educators are now writing syllabi and mapping out teaching methodology for the subjects. Currently only two majors are being offered: Arabic language and Islamic law and theology. As the class size increases and more educators are hired, other majors will be offered, Imam Shakir said.

Zaytuna College is in the rigorous process of seeking accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, a process that will take a number of years and one that Imam Shakir hopes will be completed by the time the freshman class graduates. He noted that they have been able to achieve the goal of raising nearly \$4 million needed for its temporary location at Berkeley. Now they face the challenge of raising upwards of \$65 million for an endowment fund that will ensure a consistent monetary support and alleviate the need for constant fundraising. Along with that comes a move in the near future to a permanent location in Northern California.

In: http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1235339847681&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout retrieved on 24.02.2010

iii) **Detroit unveils gallery of Islamic art** - On Sunday (Feb 28), the Detroit Institute of Arts opened its new permanent gallery of Islamic art. Five years in the making and costing \$750,000 US, the 3,350-square-foot gallery on the institute’s first floor includes pieces from the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Central Asia and India that go all the way back to the seventh century AD. Many of the pieces were already in the museum or its archives. The museum, known as the DIA, is located in the heart of the largest concentration of Muslims in the U.S., and director Graham W.J. Beal said the time had come to display the DIA’s collection more prominently. He told *The Associated Press*: “The Arab and Islamic community is significant enough that it needs to see itself in the museum.”

Among the treasures in the DIA’s collection is a pair of Ottoman mosque candlesticks, the largest known, dating from about 1500 AD, and a 15th-century leather-bound Qur’an that belonged to Timur, one of the

Mongol conquerors of the Middle East. Gaps in the collection have been filled by works of art on loan from nine public and private collections. The majority of the works on exhibit are secular.

Heather Ecker, the institute's curator of Islamic art, said: "We have fabulous carpets, some beautiful ceramics and even household goods from the Middle Ages." Ecker noted in an interview with the *Detroit Free Press* that the works in the new gallery are not predominantly from the Arab world. She said: "It takes the view of the Islamic world quite broadly. If I can acquire a beautiful Qur'an from Malaysia, I'll do it ... Arab art is a subset of Islamic art. The most populous Muslim countries in the world are Indonesia and India. We want people to see the connections between the Islamic world and almost every other culture." According to Ecker, interest in Islamic art has risen since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Before then, Islamic art was often included in exhibits of European and American art and played a supporting role.

In: <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/windsor/story/2010/02/26/detroit-islamic-art.html#ixzz0goDZh6Ez> retrieved on 28.02.2010

5. Muslims in Europe

i) **Denmark: Muslims feeling less religious, more Danish** – researchers claim there are fewer strictly religious immigrants in Denmark, and more who feel Danish. The distance between the political debate and reality is increasing. According to new data from the Catinét Analysis Institute, while the government is dealing with the burka ban which had come to notion and is increasing requirements for foreigners who want permanent residence in Denmark, integration is going ahead, which researched a big group of refugees and immigrants regarding their relationship to religion and Danishness. It also showed that religion is taking up less space, and the percent of immigrants who feel Danish is increasing.

Professor and integration researcher Ulf Hedetoft of Copenhagen University thinks that the distance between the political debate and reality among immigrants is increasing. Ulf Hedetoft, who is also head of the Nordic Migration Research, an association for researching immigration to the Nordic countries, said: "There is a very weak link between reality and the very marginalizing debate, in politics and in the media. Often with an unbalanced focus on individual cases".

According to the study, the percent of immigrant who don't feel Danish at all, dropped from 30% in 2005 to under 20% in 2009. More and more feel both Danish and foreign or mainly Danish. And regarding religion - about 80% of the participants were Muslims - the percentage who describe themselves as "most possibly religious" dropped from 19.8% to 10% in that period. At the same time, the groups of "least possibly religious" and "only a bit religious" grew.

In: http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2010/01/denmark-muslims-feeling-less-religious.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+IslamInEurope+%28Islam+in+Europe%29 retrieved on 01.02.2010

ii) **Cultural Open Days Introduce Islam to Spain** – Spanish Muslims are opening mosques and Islamic centers across the European country to non-Muslims to build bridges with the mainstream society and clear misconceptions about their faith. Dr. Alaa Said, chairman of the Islamic Union of Imams and Preachers in Spain (IUIPS), told IslamOnline.net: "The Cultural Open Day is the most important window for many mosques and centers to communicate with the mainstream society [and] It has drawn a successful and positive response from the public".

Mosques and Islamic centers hold Open Days to educate the Spanish public about the Muslim culture and traditions. The Day sees discussions about Islam's position on different issues such as co-existence and pluralism. It also witnesses exhibitions featuring traditional Muslim clothes and foods and art activities. During the Day, Muslims hold outdoor prayers to give the public a glimpse about their rituals.

In: http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout&cid=1264249961972 retrieved on 03.02.2010

iii) **Germany: Town authorizes call to prayer** – the German social-democrat mayor, Andreas Breitner, said, Tuesday (Feb 2nd), outside the mosque, that the German town of Rendsburg authorized the call to prayer of the muezzin by loudspeaker from the minaret of the mosque, despite protests from some people. He added that there were no legal grounds for a possible ban.

The project advocated by the Islamic Center, which runs the mosque, caused strong protests from some people, who came out against the noise pollution caused by calling five times a day to invite the faithful Muslims to prayer. A petition by the group "No public call to prayer" collected 800 signatures. But, according to the mayor, a study of possible noise pollution showed that this call wouldn't exceed 40 decibels, which is the sound level of a radio or birds, he said. He said: "Skin color, origin, gender or different religions do not play any role [in such decisions]," adding that it's good as it is. The mosque of this town of more than 28,000 residents, 100km from Hamburg, is the biggest in the Schleswig-Holstein region, with two minarets 26m high. It was inaugurated in the fall of 2009.

In: <http://www.la-croix.com/afp.static/pages/100202173107.njhbub7p.htm> retrieved on 06.02.2010

iv) **Why do Dutch people convert to Islam?** – Jacob van Blom, a born and bred Rotterdamer, has bright blue eyes and a full red beard. He is a Feyenoord supporter and runs his own business. Eleven years ago, he converted to Islam. He said people falsely view Islam as a "foreign culture" that has nothing to do with the Netherlands, but "if you separate the core belief from the cultural aspects, you're left with a beautiful belief that is true for everyone".

Why do Dutch people convert to Islam? And why do others view them with hatred and suspicion? "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet," as Jacob recites the Muslim profession of faith, his eyes shine with love. "I was raised as a Christian, but I always had my own ideas. In Islam, I discovered a theory for what I had always believed. It fitted perfectly with what I thought about God."

Jacobs's wife Stefanie Danopoulos also grew up in Rotterdam. Her Dutch mother and Greek father raised her in the Greek Orthodox Church. Initially, she wasn't at all happy that her husband had converted to Islam, but eventually she converted as well. Stefanie said: "When my husband announced that he was converting, I thought that he'd gone mad. You only hear bad things about Islam from the media, so that's how I thought as well. But then I started learning more about Islam and that changed how I feel." Stefanie's family is gradually coming to terms with her, "They were extremely negative at first, but after a few years they realised that I hadn't changed that much. I'm just a bit calmer now than I was before. Greek Orthodox people are extremely religious and some of them are just happy because I do at least believe in God."

However, society at large isn't as understanding. After the 9/11 attacks on the United States, Stefanie, who wears a headscarf, was spat at several times. Despite that, they both feel that it is important that their clothing reflects their faith. She said: "I don't care if people stare at me in the street. I am a true believer and people can see it in the way I dress." Jacob said he knew that conversion to Islam makes some people frightened or anxious. He stated: "Dutch people have been living on this bit of the planet for centuries and have developed a rich society and culture. I can imagine that people aren't too happy if a dominant culture suddenly takes root in the middle of all that." Jacob said the fear of Islam was primarily due to a lack of information, considering that "here in the Netherlands we just don't know the simple basics about Islam. That's also true within the government and the police and security services. I think that's so sad. That's how you make people afraid."

In: <http://www.nrw.nl/english/article/why-do-dutch-people-convert-islam> retrieved on 06.02.2010

iv) **France: PM unveils national identity measures** – as part of national identity measures announced by the French government on Feb 8, French children are to be given a "citizen's handbook" to teach them to be better republicans. Schools will be ordered to fly the French flag and to have a copy of the 1789 Declaration

of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in every classroom. The measures, announced by the French Prime Minister, François Fillon, are the first to emerge from the country's controversial debate on national identity.

Under new rules, immigrants who come to live in France, who since 2007 have had to sign a contract of welcome and integration, will have to take part in a more solemn ceremony to become French citizens. They will also be expected to demonstrate a better command of the French language and a greater knowledge of the “values of the republic”. All candidates will be required to sign a “charter” outlining their rights and responsibilities. Lessons for immigrant parents, currently being tested in 12 regions, will be introduced across the country from next September. Fillon said: “The emphasis will be put on the respect for the values of the republic ... notably the principle of equality between men and women ... and the level of knowledge of the French language.”

The debate on national identity, which Fillon described as a “popular success”, has been fiercely criticised as xenophobic. Critics say it is playing to voters on the extreme right of the political spectrum in the run-up to regional elections next month. However, Fillon said it would continue throughout the rest of the government’s term, which ends in 2012.

More than 58,000 French people have contributed on a site set up to encourage ideas and comments. Fillon said: “The subject has been dodged for too long. The question of national identity needs to be debated in the long time and in a natural, calm and non-partisan way because nothing is worse than silence. Nothing is worse and damaging than things unspoken and stigmas that we know have always played into the hands of extremists.”

In: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/08/france-citizen-handbooks-identity-debate> retrieved on 09.02.2010

v) **Anti-Islam book launch cancelled** – A conference centre in The Hague has cancelled the launch of a book criticizing Islam. The book launch was scheduled for Thursday (Feb 18) at The World Forum, but was cancelled because the director of the venue did not believe he could guarantee the safety of his guests. The book in question is *Islamofobie? (Islamophobia?)*, written by Islam critic and PVV supporter Frans Groenendijk. The PVV, or Freedom Party is an anti-Islamic opposition party led by Geert Wilders. Green Left party member Tofik Dibi, who was to receive the first book at the launch, said he regretted that the conference centre acted out of fear. The venue said it had not received any threats.

In: <http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/anti-islam-book-launch-cancelled> retrieved on 18.02.2010

vi) **Norway: Immigrants, Muslims portrayed negatively in the media** – The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDI) published a report on Tuesday (Feb 23) titled “*Immigrants in Norwegian media: Media caused Islam fear and invisible day to day life*”, a detailed account on how immigrants are portrayed in Norwegian media.

The report showed that in 2009 there were just as many reports about Islam and Muslims (77,000) as there were about PM Jens Stoltenberg, and more than about the swine flu (74,000). 71% of all media reports focusing on immigration or integration were assessed as problem-oriented. There was increased attention to religion, and especially to Islam, and large focus on people from Somalia. Less visible in the media were the part of the integration efforts which are going well. Somalis were the immigrant group most talked about, and that was often linked to crime, cultural practices and ‘lacking integration’. Muslims and Somalis were portrayed particularly biased and negatively.

The conclusion showed that these immigrant groups experience the most discrimination. 80% of those who have lived in Norway for a long time said they felt integrated, but 50% also felt discriminated. IMDI said that when talking of immigrants who did anything criminal, their immigrant background was often brought up.

Immigrants who do well in sports or culture were, on the hand, described as ‘Norwegian’. The report said that while most of the government’s integration effort were directed at getting immigrants to learn Norwegian and economically independent. The media coverage rarely corresponded to what the government thought was important for good integration. “Immigrants” and “Norwegians” were often used as opposites. Since the media is the most important source for information about immigrants, IMDI was critically questioning the media and its work.

Asmund Kalheim of IMDI thought the report warned that a negative media picture of a group of a nationality over time contributed to creating negative attitudes which could lead to increased discrimination. Kalheim said he was surprised that Islam was more important for the media than swine-flu, education, children’s welfare and environmental and climate issues. Even Obama and the Nobel Peace Prize didn’t reach that level, he said. But, he added, he was not surprised that the media logic focused on sensation, dramatics and showing the most extreme on every side of the debate. Kalheim said they saw a change in the media coverage. While in the past they focused on where people came from, now there was more focus on their religion. He said: “There’s much pointing to the fact that this is an international trend. That there’s increased attention to Islam and Muslims, and that this attention is mostly negative.”

Trude Ringheim, *Dagbladet* commentator, said: “Firstly, it must be a little sad for Jens Stoltenberg [Norwegian PM] that Islam and Muslims are named more than him. He should be present more in the integration debate.” She agreed that the press was occupied by hijab and Islam. She said it was negative and stigmatizing in several ways, but that she also thought there had been a lot of good informational pieces in the past year.

The report said that more than 70% of the articles were conflict-oriented. Kalheim said only a small percentage of the reports were resource-oriented or neutral (11%). The report was published with help from representatives of academia, media and people of immigrant background.

In: <http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2010/02/norway-immigrants-muslims-portrayed.html> retrieved on 27.02.2010

viii) **Stockholm gives go-ahead for new mosque** – Swedish local politicians are in agreement that a mosque should be built in Rinkeby, a suburb in western Stockholm. The Muslim population in Rinkeby, an area where many immigrants have congregated, has long requested the construction of a mosque, and Stockholm has now identified a suitable location. Representatives of six Swedish political parties published a joint editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) newspaper on Saturday (Feb 27) in support of the new house of worship.

The six politicians hope that a mosque might stimulate the local economy and increase security in the area, pointing to the mosque built in Södermalm in the 1990s as an example of a similar success story. They also emphasize it is important for the parties to maintain a broad coalition to stand behind the mosque construction in order to combat prejudice. They wrote in DN: “The mosque will be built on the site where the former administrative building for Rinkeby stood. During the spring, the City of Stockholm...will earmark this site as a location for the Swedish Islamic Association (Islamiska förbundet) to build a mosque. It is a positive addition to Rinkeby and to Stockholm”.

In: <http://www.thelocal.se/25252/20100227/> retrieved on 28.02.2010

5.1. On Swiss Anti-Minarets’ Referendum:

i) **Germany’s Very Own Minaret Debate Turns Nasty** – A small Muslim community in a western German town would like to build a minaret on its mosque. But the plan has triggered passionate opposition from locals, many of whom rely on rhetoric from the extreme right in railing against the “symbol of Islam’s quest for power.”

In the small town of Völklingen, particularly in the quarter known as Wehrden, Muslim immigrants may not feel quite as welcome. A small mosque on the banks of the Saar River there has applied for a permit to build a small minaret on its roof, triggering a wave of at-times vehement protest reminiscent of the fuss surrounding the November 2009 referendum in Switzerland to ban minarets in the country. A message, posted by 'Tommy' on the Web site of the local paper *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, reads: "I am against the Islamification of our fatherland!" and "Islam is the greatest threat facing humanity."

In a town meeting held on the subject in late January, a number of locals came out against the minaret plan. According to Berlin daily *Die Tageszeitung*, several expressed fears that Germany was being "infiltrated" by "the Turks." The plan foresees a minaret stretching a mere eight meters (26 feet) above the roof. The head of the Turkish-Muslim community planning the minaret, Adnan Atakli, has assured locals that there were no plans to broadcast calls to prayer from the minaret and that he merely saw it as an "ornament."

And not everyone has come out against the plans. Many have pointed out that such an adornment would only improve the not-terribly-attractive quarter where the mosque is located. Furthermore, almost 10 percent of the Völklingen population is made up of immigrants, many of them Muslims. Some say it only makes sense that they be allowed to build a small minaret. Still, politesse has hardly characterized the debate in Völklingen. Indeed, the back and forth is reminiscent of the campaign in Cologne in 2008 to block the construction of a mosque there. The campaign was led by a group called Pro-Cologne, a group that doesn't shy away from far-right rhetoric. Similar debates have taken place in numerous European countries as the right wing seeks to tap into widespread skepticism toward Islam.

The debate in Völklingen is once again showing how quickly right-wing rhetoric can cross over into the mainstream when it comes to debates on Islam in Europe. Local right-wing extremists -- two of whom are in the Völklingen city council -- have argued that minarets are "symbols of Turkish dominance." They point to a speech given by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in February 2008 in Cologne. In it, he said that "mosques are our barracks, minarets our bayonets, the domes our helmets and the believers are our soldiers." The Völklingen mosque belongs to the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), which has close ties to Turkey. "We are being quietly infiltrated by the Turks!" said one participant at the late January town meeting, according to *Die Tageszeitung*. The local news paper, however, has used the exact same rhetoric on its editorial pages. "This minaret should not be built," the *Saarbrücker Zeitung* wrote in late January. "It symbolizes Islam's quest for power and is nothing less than a provocation. In the course of the Muslim conquests, minarets were first used as watch towers and only subsequently as religious symbols. Following the violent seizure of new territories, minarets were built as manifestations of Muslim rule." Minaret opponents are now looking into the possibility of holding a referendum on the issue in Völklingen. Yet another one. In: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,676156,00.html> retrieved on 06.02.2010

ii) **Libya's Gaddafi urges jihad against Switzerland** – Gaddafi said during a meeting in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi to mark the Prophet's birthday: "Any Muslim in any part of the world who works with Switzerland is an apostate, is against (the Prophet) Mohammad, God and the Koran. The masses of Muslims must go to all airports in the Islamic world and prevent any Swiss plane landing, to all harbors and prevent any Swiss ships docking, inspect all shops and markets to stop any Swiss goods being sold."

The Swiss Foreign Ministry said it had no comment on Gaddafi's remarks. Libya's relations with Switzerland broke down in 2008 when a son of Gaddafi was arrested in a Geneva hotel and charged with abusing domestic servants. Gaddafi accused Switzerland of being an "infidel, obscene state which is destroying mosques," in reference to a Swiss referendum verdict barring construction of minarets. He called for a "jihad against it with all means." Gaddafi was speaking before leading prayers in a Benghazi square in the presence of envoys from dozens of Muslim countries. In: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61O53820100225> retrieved on 27.02.2010

Related: EU, UN Condemn Gaddafi's Call For Jihad Against Switzerland Over Minaret Ban – The United Nations and the European Union on Friday (Feb 26) condemned Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's call for jihad against Switzerland for banning minarets. UN Director-General Sergei Ordzhonikidze said the jihad call made Thursday by Gaddafi in a speech marking the birthday of Prophet Muhammad in Benghazi was "inadmissible". A spokesman of the EU's foreign affairs chief labeled the call as "unfortunate". France also branded the jihad call as "unacceptable".

In:

<http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7017948127?EU,%20UN%20Condemn%20Gaddafi's%20Call%20For%20Jihad%20Against%20Switzerland%20Over%20Minaret%20Ban> retrieved on 28.02.2010

5.2. The Proposal of Banning Burka in France

i) **We must respect Muslim rights if we want Islamic countries to respect our rights, warns French Catholic Church as it speaks against burka ban** – The French Catholic Church warned Paris on Feb 1st against banning Muslim full-face veils. It said France must respect the rights of its Muslims if it wanted Islamic countries to do the same for their Christian minorities.

Bishop Michel Santier, the top French Catholic official for inter-religious dialogue, said very few women in France wore full veils and Muslim leaders agreed it was not obligatory in Islam. In a statement calling for distinctions between the majority of peaceful Muslims and a minority of radicals, Santier said if Paris passed a law, "the result could be the opposite of what is desired and lead to a reaction that increases the number of women wearing this garment. The French, including the Catholics among them, should not let themselves be gripped by fear or a 'clash of civilisations' theory." He added: "If we want Christian minorities in Muslim majority countries to enjoy all their rights, we should in our country respect the rights of all believers to practice their faith. A dialogue in truth among believers will help us go beyond mutual mistrust. The path will be long and hard."

The Vatican has long pointed to the rights of Muslim minorities in Western countries when pressing Muslim countries to allow more religious freedoms for Christian minorities there. French Jewish leaders have also expressed concern about a veil ban and Santier regretted that the parliamentary commission did not invite Christian or Jewish leaders to give their views during the six-month-long hearings, which ended in December.

Meanwhile, Claude Gueant, a top aide to President Nicolas Sarkozy, said on Sunday (Jan 31) he doubted a total ban would be legally possible. French police say about 1,900 women wear the full veils, known as burqas although almost all are Arab-style niqabs showing the eyes. Critics say they must be outlawed as an insult to women's rights and a sign of Islamic radicalism.

In: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1247755/We-respect-Muslim-rights-want-Islamic-countries-respect-rights-warns-French-Catholic-Church-speaks-burka-ban.html#> retrieved on 02.02.2010

ii) **France denies citizenship to Moroccan man who forces wife to wear full veil** – the French Immigration Minister, Eric Besson, said on Feb 2nd that France was to refuse to grant citizenship to a Moroccan man who allegedly forced his wife to wear the full veil, arguing that his adherence to a strict strand of Islam was incompatible with the country's values, adding that he had signed a decree explaining that the man, whose identity was not made public, was being denied citizenship because his behaviour towards his French wife contravened secularism and women's rights. Besson said in a statement: "It emerged during the inquiry and the interview process that this person forced his wife to wear the full veil, deprived her of freedom of movement with her face exposed and rejected the principles of secularism and equality between men and women."



According to *Le Figaro*, which obtained a copy of the ruling handed down by the council of state, France's highest legal body, the man behaved towards women in a way which made him "incompatible" with the values of France. The ruling read: "Monsieur X displays in an everyday manner a discriminatory attitude towards women, going as far as refusing to shake their hands and advocating the separation of boys and girls including, at home, of brothers and sisters. The lifestyle he has chosen may be justified by religious precepts but is incompatible with the values of the Republic, notably the principle of equality of the sexes."

Meanwhile, the French Interior Minister, Brice Hortefeux, echoed her sentiments, saying that allowing supporters of the full veil into "the national community" was not a "desirable" course of action. He also said: "Nothing would be more normal than to systematically refuse access to residency permits to the person wearing the veil and to her husband."

In: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/02/france-values-republic-veil-women> retrieved on 03.02.2010

iii) **Veil-wearing French policewoman to face panel** – A female surveillance officer in charge of circulation in Paris, who was suspended for wearing the Islamic veil on duty, will face a disciplinary committee for continuing to go into work wearing her veil, sources close to the investigation told Agency France Press (AFP) Wednesday (Feb 3rd).

In November 2009 the Paris prefecture of police suspended Nora B, who was to appear before the committee on Thursday (Feb 4), for contravening her neutrality obligations while on duty. B. refused to sign the suspension order and "provoked tensions" by continuing to go into work wearing her veil. The French interior ministry told AFP the "decision" had been taken by the Paris prefecture, "using its powers as municipal police" in the French capital. B faced a similar procedure in 2004 but agreed to remove her veil after meeting with the police prefect at the time, Jean-Paul Proust. France's secular charter from 2007 asks civil servants not to display their religious beliefs while on duty.

In: http://www.expatica.com/fr/news/local_news/Veil_wearing-French-policewoman-to-face-panel_59315.html retrieved on 06.02.2010

iv) **Ireland: Muslim Group Urges Acceptance of Niqab** – the Irish Council of Imams, a group which represents Muslims living in Ireland, has spoken out against attempts to ban the niqab elsewhere in Europe and called on members of the religion to contribute positively to the societies in which they are living. The council said that a ban on the niqab violated personal freedoms guaranteed by democratic systems. It added that such bans also constitute an obstacle to multiculturalism, integration and human rights. Its comments

came following moves by governments in several countries to restrict the wearing of niqabs. The council's secretary general Ali Selim told *The Irish Times* the decision to issue a statement on the wearing of the niqab followed on from widespread media attention on the issue. He stated: "While there is no problem with the niqab in Ireland, it is something which is being debated in many places right now."

The Irish Council of Imams, representing 14 imams both from Sunni and Shia traditions, also called on Muslims living in Europe, and in particular in Ireland, to contribute to the societies where they lived and seek to integrate in a way that enabled them to preserve their identity. In addition, it urged Muslims to refrain from violence and instead tackle problems through constitutional and democratic means.

In: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0206/1224263887684.html> retrieved on 07.02.2010

v) **Newcomers to France should sign 'no-burqa' clause, says Families Minister** – French Families Minister, Nadine Morano, said on Sunday (Feb 7) that foreigners who come to live in France should sign a contract recognising that the wearing of the full Islamic veil is banned, adding that the "no burqa" clause and a second provision rejecting female genital mutilation should be added to the "integration contract" that newcomers have been asked to sign since 2007.

The French government is drafting legislation to restrict the wearing of the face-covering veil after a parliament report last month called for a burqa ban in all schools, hospitals, government offices and public transport. Morano said the newcomers' contract currently states that forced marriages and polygamy are not allowed in France because "equality between men and women is a fundamental principle of French society." The minister also said that the clause – "the same applies to the full veil" -- should be added to that provision.

She said: "I also want to add that female genital mutilation is strictly prohibited." Morano plans to propose the changes at a conference on Monday (Feb 8) called by the government to take stock of its three-month debate on national identity that has exposed fears about immigration and Islam.

In: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/Newcomers-to-France-should-sign-no-burqa-clause-says-Families-Minister/articleshow/5546615.cms> retrieved on 08.02.2010

vi) **French burka ban minister denies planning to convert to marry secret Muslim lover** – The architect of France's burka ban has been forced to deny claims he will convert to Islam to marry his secret Muslim girlfriend. Eric Besson, the France's 51-year-old Immigration Minister, has admitted the relationship with Yasmine Tordjman, a Paris art student less than half his age. But the hardline conservative threatened legal action when a website suggested the pair, who has set up home together, might marry, which under Islamic law means he would have to convert.

The Moroccan-born minister has released a statement stating that he "deplores having to deny a conversion to a religion which I otherwise respect, I am very attached to the secular character of our Republic." He said he was considering suing news website *Bakchich Info*, on which the claims about converting appeared.

In: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1249892/Eric-Besson-Frances-immigration-minister-accused-planning-convert-Islam-marry-Muslim-girlfriend.html###ixzz0fP99VrEv> retrieved on 13.02.2010

vi) **Election candidate in headscarf causes uproar in France** – Ilham Moussaid, a 21-year-old Muslim woman who describes herself as "feminist, secular and veiled", is running for the far-left New Anti-Capitalist party (NPA) in the south-eastern region of Avignon. But, despite her insistence that there is no contradiction between her clothing and her political role, Moussaid's candidacy in the regional vote due in March has angered other feminists and politicians.

In an echo of the controversy raised by recent moves to ban the full, face-covering veil in public places such as schools, hospitals and buses, critics have said that the young activist's headscarf, which conceals only her hair, goes against values of *laïcité* – secularism – and women's rights. On Feb 10, in a sign of how deep concerns are running, a leading feminist group announced it would file an official complaint against the NPA's list of candidates in the Vaucluse département to protest against what it called an "anti-secular, anti-feminist and anti-republican" stunt.

In: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/10/french-election-headscarf-candidate> retrieved on 13.02.2010

vii) **Belgium: Headscarf woman appointed to Equality Commission board** – A veiled woman, Fatima Zibouh, became part of the board of the Belgian Center for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (CGKR). She was nominated by Ecolo (Greens) as a replacement. Zibouh succeeded Zakia Khattabi, who has become a community senator. Zibouh has been a researcher for the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies (CEDEM) at the University of Leuven since 2007. "Fatima Zibouh was selected on the basis of her abilities," explained the party spokesperson, who said that no other considerations influenced the choice.

Senator Alain Destexhe (MR) announced he regretted Ecolo's decision of a veiled woman. According to him, such a decision could not be reconciled with the neutrality requirements of a public service and the Greens were thereby contributing to strengthening religious elements in the public sphere. Polemicist Claude Demelenne accused her of having links to radical Muslims.

Fatima Zibouh responded in surprise to the reactions which followed her appointment. She said: "My choice of clothing has absolutely nothing to do with my appointment. I don't know if everybody understands that the demographic configuration in Belgium and Brussels has changed. It's simply normal that people who 'themselves are part of the diversity' should be able to reach certain levels." She also denied that she signed a petition that asked to remove Hamas from the list of terrorist organization, as Demelenne accused her of doing. Also the allegation that she was part of a racial Muslim organization is taken out of thin air. She concluded by stating: "I'm not a member of a structured Muslim organization, it's more a think-tank which attempts to build bridges with non-Muslims. I have enough of the climate of insinuations in which it's assumed that every Muslim organization is a sleeper terrorism cell." The parliamentary fraction leader of Ecolo, Murier Gerken, earlier condemned the statements made about Zibouh. She repeated that her party nominated Zibouh on the basis of her capabilities and nothing else.

In: <http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2010/02/belgium-headscarf-woman-appointed-to.html> retrieved on 13.02.2010

viii) **Norway: Education minister against hijab in elementary school** – Norwegian Education Minister Kristin Halvorsen (SV, Socialists) wants hijabs out of elementary schools. Halvorsen told Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*: "I think children-hijab are absolutely undesirable, because it hampers the children's development and their chances of making independent choices."

The SV leader and education minister made it clear that she was reticent about a ban, but didn't hide that she was against the Muslim head-dress. She said: "Hijab in elementary school in Norway is something that appeared in recent years. I see it as coercion of small children, and it hinders them from participating equally with other children in Norwegian schools." She said that she has travelled a lot in Muslim countries and that hijab for little girls was in no way common there. She added: "I can't see that there's any religious reason for putting hijab on little girls. Neither is it a tradition in Muslim countries to treat little girls like adult women."

In: <http://islamineurope.blogspot.com/2010/02/norway-education-minister-against-hijab.html> retrieved on 27.02.2010

6. Interfaith Dialogue and Events Related to It

i) **Priest bridges religious divide by funding Germany's biggest mosque** – In Germany, two people have taken a stand to promote a dialogue that goes far beyond symbolics. Not long ago, the Rev. Franz Meurer, a Roman Catholic priest in a rough Cologne neighborhood, led his parish to raise funds for the construction of a controversial mosque there, slated to be Germany's biggest in a city most famous for its Catholic cathedral. And when Navid Kermani, a prominent Iranian-born writer from Cologne, received a national award for his efforts to promote inter-religious dialogue in Germany recently, the Muslim writer reciprocated in kind. At the prize award ceremony, Mr. Kermani announced he would give his share of the €45,000 (US\$67,738) award to Father Meurer.

Kermani, who shared this year's German Culture Prize with Catholic Cardinal Karl Lehmann; Peter Steinacker, former head of the Lutheran Church in the Hessen region; and Salomon Korn, vice president of the German Jewish Council, said: "You not only had a Catholic church tolerating Muslims who want to build a mosque ... but you also had [Catholic] parishioners giving money so that people from another faith could also practice their religion in their own place of worship". Unthinkable a decade ago, the cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims illustrates just how far Germany has gone in accepting its booming Muslim minority, said Kermani when receiving the Culture Prize last fall.

Every year, the prize honors an artist's special contribution to German culture. This year, the jury took a different approach, looking for individuals who had worked toward promoting "the peaceful coexistence of the three great Abrahamic religions – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam," said Hessen Prime Minister Roland Koch. With the award, he said, the state of Hessen wanted to "point out that religion is a crucial part of the cultural life of a free society."

In: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2010/0202/Priest-bridges-religious-divide-by-funding-Germany-s-biggest-mosque> retrieved on 06.02.2010

ii) **US: Muslims and Jews Study Religious Texts Together in San Francisco and Burlingame** – Beginning March 16 Muslims and Jews will study their religious texts together: comparing and contrasting the central messages and themes of the Torah and Quran and Post-Canonical Sources with Rabbi Yoni Jaffe of Congregation Emanu-El and Yusuf Torprak of the Pacifica Institute. Since the days of Isaac and Ishmael, Jews and Muslims have lived side by side, influencing each other's practices and theology.

The organizers hope to continue this tradition by bringing together Jews and Muslims to study their key religious texts in a spirit of mutual respect and appreciation. Rather than focus solely on their differences, they hope to highlight the many fundamental aspects which connect these two great religions and to foster an open dialogue on what it means to be religious in the modern world. That is not to say that they will avoid their dissimilarities entirely.

Rather, through knowledge and shared perspective, they hope to investigate and expand upon the more divergent aspects of their religions as well. Sessions will include presentations from both the Muslim and Jewish perspective before opening up the class to interfaith dialogue and discussion.

Topics will include:

- Theology and Core Beliefs
- Divisions and Interpretations
- Views of the Other
- Core Stories and Narratives
- Religious Law

- Rituals and Liturgy
- Gender and Modesty
- War and Peace

In: <http://www.sanfranciscosentinel.com/?p=58671> retrieved on 06.02.2010

iii) **Christians and Muslims unite against extremism** – Christians and Muslims in Wales are joining to discuss how to prevent “religious extremism” and “intolerance created by extremist parties”. Members of the Church in Wales and the Muslim Council of Wales were among those at a conference in Hawarden, Flintshire, over the weekend of Feb 6-7. They examined improving "community cohesion" in the latest of a series of events, *Finding A Common Voice*.

Saleem Kidwai, of the Muslim Council of Wales, said: “We are one nation.” The group said they wanted to “prevent intolerance, isolation and marginalisation created by extremist parties, such as the BNP and Welsh Defence League (WDL)”. Mr Kidwai, who is secretary general, added: “Community cohesion in Wales, generally, and north Wales, especially, was highlighted as an issue when the Welsh Defence League made an attempt in Wrexham to create disunity among the communities. The manner in which all communities stood together as one gave a clear message to WDL that in Wales we are one nation and together we stand. The same was demonstrated by the communities in Newport and Swansea. This is something we must hold on to.”

The Reverend Canon Robin Morrison, bishops’ adviser on church and society, said it was important the conferences asked awkward questions and tackled controversial issues. He said: “The aim of this event is to explore in greater depth the implication of social cohesion policies for these two faith communities in Wales.”

The conference was held at St Deniol’s library, which was founded in 1889 by William Gladstone, the former Liberal prime minister. Mr Morrison said it was an appropriate venue for the talks as it has an Islamic section and is developing its Islamic studies. He said: “Gladstone would have approved of attempts to bridge the gap between Islam and Christianity and encourage an open and inclusive dialogue about difficult social issues.” The event was the eighth in a series of special consultations organized by the Church in Wales in partnership with the Muslim Council of Wales, the Welsh Centre for International Affairs and St Deiniol’s Library, supported by the assembly government. Issues previously addressed have included the role of women in religion; religious stereotypes; school projects to tackle religious prejudice; citizenship; and global challenges.

In: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/8501518.stm retrieved on 07.02.2010

iv) **Obama’s bid to boost ties with Muslims heads for Qatar** – US President Barack Obama’s charm offensive on Muslim states comes to a weekend forum in Qatar where he will send a video message and his chief diplomat will give a speech. The Brookings Institution, involved in organizing the event, said Obama will deliver his message to the *Seventh Annual US-Islamic World Forum* in the Qatari capital, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will attend Sunday with other senior US officials.

Brookings President Strobe Talbott said in a statement that the gathering organized by the think-tank’s Saban Center for Middle East Policy and Qatar’s foreign affairs ministry brings “leaders from across the Muslim world for an intensive three-day dialogue with key US officials, societal leaders and policy experts. With President Obama determined to turn the page in America’s relations with Muslim communities around the globe, this year’s Forum will examine how to craft more robust partnerships that can help repair the deep divisions our societies.”

Talbott, who was a key diplomat in president Bill Clinton’s administration, is also due at the forum, along with Richard Holbrooke, the US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan and Senate Foreign Relations Committee

chairman John Kerry. Brookings said Clinton will join Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani, the Prime Minister of Qatar who doubles as foreign minister, in delivering a speech, but no further details were immediately available.

In: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iKIS413yN1sTDb9UIW6kontBMz4A> retrieved on 13.02.2010

Related: Receb Tayyip Erdogan: Islamophobia is as dangerous as anti-Semitism – Turkish Prime Minister Receb Tayyip Erdogan during his speech at the US-Islam World Forum in Doha, Qatar, said: Taking Muslims as a target while combating terrorism will mar this struggle”. Erdogan equaled islamophobia to discrimination and anti-Semitism. “Islamophobia is a kind of discrimination. All who have sense and conscious must struggle against islamaphobia. No terror acts are being linked to religious faith of those persons or organization. However, after several terror acts seen recently 1,5 billion Muslims in the world have been under the target”, Turkish PM said.

In: <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=116045> retrieved on 14.02.2010

7. General Issues

i) **Clinton introduces US special envoy to OIC’s İhsanoğlu** – US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton introduced the newly appointed US Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Rashad Hussain to the secretary-general of the 57-nation organization. Clinton met with OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu on Tuesday (Feb 16) in Jeddah at the headquarters of the world’s largest Islamic organization and introduced Hussain, who most recently served as White House deputy associate counsel.

Feb 16’s visit was the first visit by a US secretary of state to the OIC’s headquarters in Saudi Arabia. Clinton told reporters after the behind-closed-doors meeting that they had agreed on a plan to support joint action between the United States and the OIC. The Turkish head of the organization, meanwhile, noted that several issues concerning the Islamic world topped the agenda of his meeting with Clinton. “I believe that relations between the United States and OIC will deepen. I hope that we will be able to work together with Hussain to resolve several issues,” he added.



OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu (L) met with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (C) at the Organization of the Islamic Conference headquarters in Jeddah on Tuesday.

US President Barack Obama over the weekend named Hussain as US special envoy to the OIC, as part of an effort to forge closer ties with the Muslim world. Obama made the announcement

concerning Hussain’s appointment in a video message to the seventh annual US-Islamic World Forum in Doha, Qatar, which was attended by Clinton. As his liaison to the OIC, the president said, Hussain will continue working to repair US-Islamic relations and develop the types of partnerships Obama called for when he addressed the Muslim world during a speech in Cairo last June.

US relations with the Muslim world became strained after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the video address, Obama said he called in Cairo for the US and Muslims to start anew “based on mutual interest and mutual respect” because the relationship had “slipped into a cycle of misunderstanding and mistrust that can lead to conflict rather than cooperation.” He said he looked forward to continuing the dialogue next month when he visits Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim country. Obama spent several of his childhood years living in Indonesia with his mother and stepfather. In April 2009, during his visit to Turkey, his first visit to a Muslim nation as president, Obama declared that the United States “is not and will never be at war with Islam.”

In: <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-201836-100-clinton-introduces-us-special-envoy-to-oics-ihstanoglu.html> retrieved on 19.02.2010

ii) **Azerbaijan Bans Koran, Islamic Symbols in Government Offices** – a source in Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Internal Affairs told *EurasiaNet* that following violent clashes between police and Islamic activists in Baku in mid-February, the government has ordered all state employees to remove Islamic symbols from their offices. Religious items such as the Koran and ayahs increasingly have shared space in government offices with the Azerbaijani flag and portraits of President Ilham Aliyev and his father, the late president Heydar Aliyev.

A source in the Ministry of Internal Affairs who did not want to be named stated that officials have been ordered to remove such religious items from government offices, explaining that "Azerbaijan is a secular state and religion [ought to be kept] separate from the state." The government has not yet commented officially on the issue.

The reported decision follows unexpected clashes on February 13 between about 100 Islamic activists and police in Baku that resulted in several injuries. Four activists who were detained have been charged with hooliganism and resisting police. Rally organizers, members of the banned Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, a group widely perceived as pro-Iranian, claimed that the demonstration was staged to commemorate the anniversary of the death of the Prophet Mohammad. The city did not issue a permit for the demonstration. Azerbaijan’s State Committee for Religious Affairs called the February 13 incident "a planned action aimed to raise confrontation in society and to undermine tolerance." Three days later, Allahshukur Pashazadeh, head of the semi-official Caucasus Muslim Board, echoed that stance, condemning police violence against the group, but acknowledging the need for a rally permit.

In: <http://www.eurasiareview.com/2010/02/32014-azerbaijan-bans-koran-islamic.html> retrieved on 28.02.2010

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