

Hate speech paves the way for harmful social movements' Saudi Gazette

By SAMAR FATANY



On December 19, 2011, U.N. Resolution 16/18 was finally passed against religious intolerance “condemning the stereotyping, negative profiling and stigmatization of people based on their religion.” **Maybe now Muslim countries can hope for more global justice and less of the discrimination that has endangered the lives of innocent Muslims in many parts of the world.**

The world recognizes the U.N. as a world body that has the power to enact international laws. Without international laws universal justice cannot be achieved, and it would be difficult to maintain peaceful coexistence in the world.

It is unfortunate that most Western democracies voted against the U.N. “religious intolerance law”. They view it as a threat to free speech.

They claim that the “anti-blasphemy” resolution is not to protect religion but to clamp down on freedom of expression. They reject the definition of “defamation of religion” supported by the 56 members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation which includes satirizing Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) in a newspaper cartoon or a YouTube video, criticism of Shariah law and security check profiling. However, today all governments are expected to respect the law that has been passed by the global legislative institution.

Meanwhile, there are positive developments that can put an end to hatred and incitement against Muslims. The convicted California con-artist who was behind the blasphemous anti-Islam film that enraged Muslims and instigated riots and protests against the United States and Europe across the Muslim world was sent back to jail for a year over probation violations stemming from his role in the video.

More recently Channel 4 in Britain was forced to cancel a screening of a distorted documentary titled “Islam: The Untold Story”, after the historian Tom Holland received threats and warnings on Twitter.

Holland claimed in his film that there is little written contemporary evidence about the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) and suggested that Islam is a “made-up” religion. He also stated that the holy city of Mecca, was not mentioned in the Qur’an and argued that there is no evidence that Islam began in the 7th century. The film is clearly biased and historically inaccurate. The writer or researcher blatantly ignored the works of reputable scholars and paid no respect to the scholarly references of previous historians and academics.

Criminalizing offensive speech and acts of hate is needed to deter those who instigate violence against people of different ethnicities. History has proven that major genocides of the 20th century, such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide of 1994, were instigated by hate propaganda that dehumanized the intended victims.

According to Professor Alexander Tsesis of Loyola University, Chicago, School of Law, “The German experience contradicts the view that only speech posing an immediate threat of harm is dangerous enough to warrant statutory censure. To the contrary, the most dangerous form of bigotry takes years to develop, until it becomes culturally acceptable first to libel, then to discriminate, and finally persecute ethnic groups.”

The professor has written many books and essays about issues involving constitutional law, civil rights, and hate speech legislation. In his book “Hate speech paves the way for harmful social movements”, Tsesis explains that “when hate speech and propaganda are left unregulated they can spread animosity and criminal behavior. Hate speech in Germany played a major role in the creation of Anti-Semitic academics, scientists, and laymen who blamed Jews for Germany’s social, economic, and moral troubles”. Professor Tsesis uses historical examples of human rights violations against German Jews and Native and African Americans.

Hitler and Joseph Goebbels used the powers of radio and film to influence the masses. The propaganda film , “Jud Suss” is what instigated some viewers to leave Berlin cinemas “screaming curses at the Jews: ‘Drive the Jews from the Kurfurstendamm! Kick the last Jews out of Germany!’”

Goebbels recognized the influence of radio and film. He described them as the most influential and scientific means of influencing the masses. While they did not directly call for the murder of Jews, yet they incited the German people to do so.

Some current European political and civil laws discriminate against Muslims based on cultural beliefs and traditions. They need to be addressed to counter the bigotry and animosity that is directed at Muslims. Islamophobia is rampant in Europe and Western misconceptions continue to fuel hatred against Islam.

The lack of global consensus on contemporary human rights issues is detrimental to peace and does not serve humanity.

Governments are called upon by faith-based organizations to amend laws, apply unified public policies, and establish effective institutions to implement justice for all.

Media organizations should be held accountable for unleashing a cycle of suspicion and distorted information to defame our culture and Muslim identity. Films, cartoons and other damaging stereotypes that instigate hostility and contempt for Islam in Europe are ruining relations between the Muslim world and Europe.

And finally lawmakers must strive to integrate universal human rights and national constitutional guarantees of equality in order to provide opportunities for all ethnicities. Policy makers must show more support for global organizations that acknowledge Muslim contributions and exhibit genuine good will toward Islam and Muslims.

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