

SECULAR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND
BLASPHEMOUS CARICATURES:
STRATEGIES FOR JUDICIOUS RESPONSE

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SECULAR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND BLASPHEMOUS CARICATURES STRATEGIES FOR JUDICIOUS RESPONSE*

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Abstract

[The campaign of denigration of reverend personalities of Islam, started recently from the publication of blasphemous caricatures in Western newspapers, has been steered into public sphere by the announcement of 'Everybody Draw Mohammed' contest. Despite strong protests by the Muslim countries and masses, the Western media, political leadership and a number of intellectuals seem to be bent on attacking the sensitivities of the Muslim World on the plea of defending the secular democratic rights, particularly the 'freedom of expression and press' and the Western 'norms of secularism'. This kind of discourse has influenced some segments in the Western public as well. An analysis of the past practices pertaining to human rights carried out by Western media and political governments as well as the laws of European Union and the individual States shows that the case of publication of blasphemous caricatures is not simply a matter of protecting Western norms against the extremism of 'radical' Muslims. The majority in the Muslim World perceives this campaign as an instance of psychological warfare waged against them. While the Western governments and people need to understand the lethality of such a campaign, the Muslims around the world also need to carefully study the phenomenon of Islamophobia, furthered consciously in the West, and channel their responses after developing a well-thought-out short term and long term strategy. – Eds]

Introduction

Facebook, one of the most famous social networking websites and used by billions of people around the globe, recently held "Everybody Draw Mohammed" contest and subsequently revived an important debate regarding the limits within which media in general and internet in particular should operate. The majority in the West presents it as a case of 'freedom of expression' whereas the Muslim World largely considers it blasphemous. This situation has engendered a number of controversies between the two. The controversial contest on Facebook gained further significance as it depicts the continuity of psychological offence against the very ethos of Muslim societies and is generally seen as a tool of neo-classical warfare between the West and the Muslim World.

* The paper is a revised version of an article originally written in Urdu and translated into English by A I Shafaq Hashemi, Sr. Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad. Some of the features of discourse and references have been updated with a view to substantiate current discourse on the subject.

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The Facebook issue came on the surface when a US cartoonist Molly Norris drew a moot cartoon, personifying different trivial objects as the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (pbuh), and uploaded it on Facebook along with a text, inviting people to celebrate first annual “Everybody Draw Mohammed Day” on May 20, 2010. According to Molly, her cartoon was a reaction to some radical Muslims’ threats to the producers of an American television show ‘South Park’, for showing some depictions of the Holy Prophet. She deemed these threats as an effort to subjugate the right to freedom of expression. Responding to her call almost immediately, a widespread campaign initiated on this website and served as the platform for the particular caricature contest. Afterwards though, Molly Norris in person detached herself from the event, the campaign continued on a large sphere leading to holding the contest on Facebook on the particular date.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims reckoned this drive as a direct assault on their religious sensitivities that has been repeated over and over again and stimulated an overpowering view that the blasphemous caricature competition on Facebook should not be seen and interpreted in isolation as a one-off occurrence or a mischief of a single person or group. In fact, neither the caricature controversy is new, nor are the supportive arguments for such an act different from several other such attempts including the publication of blasphemous cartoons in a Danish Newspaper named Jyllands Posten in 2005, led on later by other European newspapers. This persistence in the West has developed a popular perception among the Muslims that the caricature campaign is a part of a well-thought out western ideological, civilizational and military war-plan.

In contrast, the prevalent opinion in the West seems to endorse this caricature contest as fair and just, chiefly for three reasons namely freedom of speech, secularism and a reaction to the violence by Muslims that set them free from the taboos of depicting religious figures, particularly of Muslims in the contemporary context. Jon Wellington, the creator of Facebook page, ‘Everybody Draw Mohammed Day’ argued, “To me, this is all about freedom of expression and tolerance of other viewpoints ...”¹ Liam Fox of NewsJunkiePost.com was quoted in NPR as saying, “That's part of the freedom of speech. It's not always neat and clean. It's not always nice and smooth ... Sometimes it's a little ugly and a little bit dirty, but it's free speech.”² Supporting the Western stance, the opinion columnist of Washington Post, Kathleen Parker, writes, “The truth is that Americans love their free speech and have had enough of those who think they can dictate the limits of that fundamental right.”³ The Facebook information page itself says about the contest, “We simply want to show the extremists that threaten to harm people because of their Muhammad depictions that we're not afraid of them ... They can't take away our right to freedom of speech by trying to scare us into silence.”⁴

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1. Orr, “Creators of 'Everybody Draw Muhammad Day,’”
 2. Sydell, “Online 'Draw Mohammed' Campaign Triggers Protests.”
 3. Parker, “Freedom of Sketch.”
 4. Maqbool, “Pakistani Court Orders Facebook Blocked in Prophet Row.”

These overtures exhibit the preoccupation of major segment of western societies with their right to 'freedom of speech', while the notion of 'a little ugly and a little bit dirty' free speech contrasts the religious ethos of Muslims at large so much so that the controversy has transcended the boundaries of tolerance and entered into the domain of aggression and hostility on either side. Resultantly, this segment of the West is trying to counter the 'Muslim extremism' by taking part in "Everybody Draw Mohammed Day" Facebook contest as if it was the root cause of all problems; and the Muslims in general consider the campaign as a part of the Western strategy of hurting their sentiments, causing them discomfort and vexation. Such conflicting situation has kindled a series of war of words between them, bordering them on civilizational crusade.

The contentious issue of blasphemous caricatures started off with the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten's alarming campaign against the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the publication of a dozen blasphemous cartoons, depicting him as the source and symbol of terrorism. The scope and repercussions of this phenomenon makes it inevitable for members of international community in general and the Muslim World in particular to properly understand the broader context and nature of this campaign and the real motive behind it before taking corrective measures against such moves.

It is important to realize that these events should not be taken as isolated incidents of some over-jealous or over-reactive individuals from the West but part of a well-calculated campaign. The earlier the dangers lurking behind it are understood, the better it would be for the peaceful coexistence of different faiths, religious communities and the masses at large. The religious scholars, social scientists, and religious and political leaderships of both sides need to devise comprehensive long and short-term strategies keeping in view the actual target and objective of the campaign because emotional instantaneous reaction cannot be a substitute for a well-thought out response.

This paper discusses these controversies in the backdrop of the publication of blasphemous cartoons of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in different western newspapers, the religio-political dimension to the issue, debate of 'freedom of speech', and 'western secularism', and the strategies for judicious response from the Muslim World to these incidents.

The Background

The victorious western forces of the World War II (WWII) had expected that the post-war period would usher into an era of political supremacy, socio-cultural domination, civilizational ascendancy and economic hegemony of the United States and European nations. The view resultantly prevailed in the powerful capitals of the West that religion had lost its hold over the society and the secular western civilization was consequently the supreme power materially, militarily, and intellectually. The notion resulted into the western aspiration of taking the entire world

community into its sphere of influence. The Cold War phase between the United States and the Soviet Russia was a tug of war between two poles of the same civilization, and no sooner did it end with the dominance of the United States than the rise of liberal democratic trend, the marked feature of the US and the western free world, was observed in Russia. In the aftermath of the Soviet Russia's disintegration and demise of Communism, the US and western thinkers and policymakers were obsessed with the dream of supremacy and dominance of the western secular ideology and civilization. The road was clear for the realization of this dream other than the perceived threat of 'Political Islam' that the West imagined would be the greatest challenge to its dominance—in fact, greater than Communism they had just defeated. With this frame of mind, the struggles and movements against 19th and 20th Centuries colonialism were interpreted.

The movements, carried out and succeeded against western imperialism, were obviously launched in the name of freedom, nationalism, and the right of self-determination. For the Islamic world, however, Islam and the desire for implementing the Islamic political system at the national level have been the driving force behind these freedom movements. Western scholars and leadership expressed their concerns regarding this phenomenon sometimes openly and obliquely at other times. Wilfred Smith in his book 'Islam in Modern History' wrote:

“The driving force of materialism has become more and more religious the more the movement has penetrated the masses. Even where the leaders and the form and the ideas of the movement have been nationalistic on a more or less Western pattern, the followers and the substance and the emotions were significantly Islamic ... No Muslim people have evolved a national feeling that has meant loyalty to or even concern for community transcending the bounds of Islam.”⁵

The year 1979 that saw an extraordinary phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the 1979-1989 decade that witnessed the victory of Jihad in Afghanistan marked a virtual break from the past both for the West and the Muslim World. These two developments of far-reaching consequences infused a new spirit of Islamic resurgence and revival, the inspiration of Islamic movements to guard their ideological frontiers more resolutely and redraw the map of their community life according to their ideological values and ideals, whereas the western powers deemed the renewed Islamic tendency as a challenge to their secular civilization and culture and an impediment in the way of achieving their political goals. Their intellectuals, opinion makers, policymakers and experts, such as Henry Kissinger, Bernard Lewis, Samuel P. Huntington, Daniel Pipes, and Francis Fukuyama to name a few, played a key role in voicing concern against this supposed threat.

Resultantly, Islam has ignominiously been equated with 'Terrorism' and every Muslim is suspected to be a 'potential terrorist' in the aftermath of 9/11. Former US President George W. Bush Jr. and

5. Smith, Islam in Modern History, 75-77.

his administration also continued harping on the same line. In his State of the Union Address of January 2006, George Bush openly declared that 'Political Islam' alias 'radical Islam' were the real enemy he would have to 'defeat'.⁶ The thesis of 'clash of civilization' furthered by Huntington took the lead in this regard and has been cleverly injected in the minds of western policymakers:

"The underlying problem with the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power."⁷

Huntington's thesis, therefore, marks that the reason for the avowed clash of the two civilizations lies in the western notion of superiority of its own civilization and the desire to see it dominant in the world. The factor leading to such a clash and conflict is the concept of the West's right to use power for imposing its civilization, as its prerogative and obligatory to accomplish. There is no place for mutual respect and peaceful co-existence and cooperation between the two civilizations within its political philosophy and strategy for the world. Due to absence of the balance of power, weaker nations and countries are often compelled to take the course which is different from interaction among equals.

A series of actions has been initiated in pursuance of this ideological and civilizational offensive plan. The current waves of western blasphemous approach towards Muslims' sacrosanct personalities, beliefs and practices should be seen in this background. The scenario with regard to the caricature issue may be summed up as follows:

- Jyllands Posten of Denmark published 12 blasphemous cartoons on September 30, 2005 ... Reaction from the Muslim world was relatively lukewarm.
- Seemingly with a view to fomenting trouble and putting fuel to the dormant fire, 22 countries of Europe again published the indignant caricatures in 75 different newspapers and magazines in January 2006.⁸
- They were then telecast and broadcast over and over again by around 200 Radio and TV channels in the name of right to 'freedom of press' and 'secular democracy'.
- A minister of the Italian Government donned a tea-shirt depicting those cartoons and announced to promote it as a fashion-wear.⁹

6 . McDermott, "Text: 2006 State Of The Union."

7. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 217.

8. Some of the prominent names are: French newspapers *France Soir*, *Libération*, *Le Monde*, German newspapers *Die Welt*, *Die Tageszeitung*, *Tagesspiegel* and *Berliner Zeitung*, the Dutch papers *Volksrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *Elsevier*, Italy's *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera*, Spain's *El Periodico*, two Dutch-language newspapers in Belgium, and Britain's the *BBC*, *ITV* and *Channel 4*.

9. *BBC*, "Italy Cartoon Row Minister Quits," *BBC News*, February 18, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4727606.stm> (accessed May 28, 2010).

- The blasphemous caricatures were proliferated to outside Europe and published in the US, Australia, and even Indian newspapers with the pretext of referring to their publication in European press.¹⁰
- The issue entered into public domain with the 'Everybody Draw Muhammad Day' contest and common people were invited to take part in this abysmal campaign.

There is a certain background to the publication of these 12 caricatures that cannot be discussed as an isolated incident. Flemming Rose, Cultural Editor of the Danish daily Jyllands Posten, started this ideological and civilizational offensive after careful planning. A year earlier before launching his cartoons, he went to the United States and held a meeting with Daniel Pipes on October 25, 2004.¹¹ Pipes has a history of anti-Islam, alias anti-'Islamism' campaign in the US in particular and West in general through his number of books, hundreds of papers, opinionated articles, interviews and speeches,¹² and openly advocated physical elimination of Palestinians militarily,¹³ because of which he enjoys a special place in the Zionist lobby.¹⁴ A Jewish seat of learning in New York, Yeshiva University, introduces him as "a leader in identifying the threat of 'militant' Islam to peace and harmony in the region and throughout the world."¹⁵ Then US President, George W Bush nominated him for the member of the board of directors of a congressionally funded think tank, the U.S. Institute of Peace to "discuss the road map proposal to Mideast peace."¹⁶

Although Pipes denies any role in the publication of sacrilegious cartoons,¹⁷ and dubs his meeting with Flemming Rose as a mere "half an hour" question-answer session for "a standard interview" in which he deplores on the European "bafflingly relaxed" attitude against "the challenge that Islam poses" and Islamist groups intimidating those who "insist on their freedom of speech";¹⁸ the subsequent much orchestrated notions of 'freedom of expression and press' or 'secular democracy' against the publication of these caricatures and European strict stance against 'Islamist extremism' make it important to examine their meeting and ensuing developments beyond the stated claims. Following his meeting with Pipes, Flemming Rose formally invited forty leading cartoonists and asked them to prepare cartoons making fun of Islam and its paramount personalities, similar to what they would do in respect of other ordinary objects. Out of the

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- 10 . Wordpress, Viewpoints, "Muslims Voice Anger Over Muhammad Cartoons," Wordpress, February 7, 2006, <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/2261.cfm> (accessed May 28, 2010).
 11. Pipes, "Those Danish Cartoons and Me."
 12. For details, visit Daniel Pipes website at <http://www.danielpipes.org/>.
 13. Blum, "Interview: 'I watch with frustration as the Israelis don't Get the Point'."
 14. Pipes was awarded an honorary doctorate from Yeshiva University, and he received the 'Guardian of Zion Award' by Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Israel.
 15. Shulman, "Daniel Pipes, Middle East Scholar and Author."
 16. Ibid. See also, Pipes, "Daniel Pipes and the U.S. Institute of Peace."
 17. Pipes, "Department of Corrections (of Others' Factual Mistakes about Me)."
 18. Rose, "Truslen Fra Islamismen [The Threat of Islamism]." See <http://www.danielpipes.org/3362/flemming-rose-interview-the-threat-of-islamism> (accessed June 22, 2010).

caricatures prepared by those cartoonists, twelve were selected and published in the newspaper's issue of September 30, 2005 under the title: 'The Painting of a Portrait of Islam's Prophet'.

In reaction, even the West was generally averse to these cartoons. The Washington Post described them as "a calculated insult."¹⁹ In spite of strong protests from the Islamic world and reservations of the saner elements of the West, the large majority of the media people and the political leadership of the West defended them in the backdrop of 'freedom of press', 'freedom of expression' and the creed of 'secular democracy'.²⁰ Instead of showing remorse and apologizing to the Muslims for hurting their feelings, they pose innocent as part of their strategy. Sticking to his position unabashedly, Flemming Rose claimed, "I do not regret having commissioned these cartoons."²¹ Similarly, when cartoonist Kurt Westergaard was asked by the British magazine Herald in a written interview on February 18, 2006, "whether he regretted drawing the cartoon or its publication, Mr Westergaard wrote a simple 'No' ... his inspiration for the cartoon had been ... 'Terrorism - which gets its spiritual ammunition from Islam'."²²

As evident from these developments, this is not just a matter of a few caricatures but is actually part of a broad-based move to denigrate Islam and create bitterness against Muslims. This brazen attack against the most sacrosanct personality of Islam was perceived by Muslims as a declaration of psychological warfare against Islam as a faith, civilization and culture, and an assault against the Muslim World's self-respect and honor with the weapons of demagoguery, insult, and innuendoes by the 'self-righteous' and arrogant West. Instantaneous protests, rallies, processions, diplomatic showdowns, political tensions, and economic boycotts were lodged to counter the Western offensive and in spite of being politically weak at international level, the Muslim masses registered their protest the world over.

Ambassadors from eleven Muslim countries went to call on then Prime Minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, to convey their governments' stand on the issue, but the Prime Minister refused to meet them.²³ Again when representatives of twenty-seven Muslim NGOs tried to call on him and submit a protest note signed by seventeen thousand Muslims, he declined to accept the note. The Danish PM repeatedly maintained his official position that the real issue was 'freedom of expression'.²⁴ In spite of mounting pressure from different quarters, neither the Danish government nor its Prime Minister were willing to see the reason, apologize to the Muslim people of their own country and elsewhere, and to put curb on such blasphemous acts in future. The editor of the Cairo's mass-circulated Al-Ahram Weekly addressed many questions to the Prime Minister of Denmark in this respect. His response remained, however, apathetic as he reiterated,

19. Editorial, "The Uses of Cartoons."

20. Editorial Board, "European Media Publish Anti-Muslim Cartoons."

21. Buchanan, "Cartoon Outrage Bemuses Denmark."

22. Miller, "In Hiding: But No Regrets."

23. Marshall, "The Mohammed Cartoons: Western Governments Have Nothing to Apologize For."

24. Belien, "Cartoon Case Escalates into International Crisis."

“Neither the government nor the Danish people can be responsible for what has been published.”²⁵

As if the attitude of arrogance and bias displayed by the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Denmark was not enough, those cartoons were subsequently carried by the newspapers of Norway, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the United States, adding fuel to fire and further enraging the Muslims the world over. While expressing sympathy with the Muslims, the President of the European Union also refused to condemn the act on the pretext of the right to freedom of press.²⁶ Former President of the United States, George Bush, and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, went a step ahead and called Rasmussen to express their support and solidarity in the matter,²⁷ which further encouraged him to assert, “Islamic world must realize, we are not isolated.”²⁸

It is thus evident that the publication of these caricatures was not a lonely act of mischief by a certain Danish newspaper, but part of a well-conceived campaign against Islam and the Muslims. The first positive outcome of protests and public rallies was a general realization in the West that those infamous drawings were not only offensive, they were also hurtful to the Muslims’ sentiments and insulting, to say the least, to their honor and dignity as a vibrant global community. This realization, nonetheless, did not deter the perpetrators the least from audaciously sticking to their stance chiefly on two pretexts: freedom of expression and secularism.

Freedom of expression is stated to be the distinguished feature of the Western societies and polity and hence no socio-religious taboos, sanctity of religious personalities and feelings of certain group or community can become a bar against an inherent right of their individuals and organizations. The second plea, secularism, forms the basis of western civilization that is in sheer contrast to religious approach and outlook of the Muslim world. Making fun of religion and religious personalities is considered no taboo in a secular society, whereas the Muslims are not just used to this ‘openness’ as perceived by the supporters of secularism, resulting in leading the whole issue to clash and conflict. According to western mindset, this is a case of two divergent attitudes and difference of approaches. The western demagogues, therefore, assert that since a secular society is free from such taboos, it is for the Muslims to better adapt themselves to the ways, outlook, and approach of a secular social set-up.

25. El-Kersh, “No Laughing Matter.”

26. European Commission, “EU Commission President Barroso’s Statement on Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad,” European Union @ United Nations, Reference: EC06-060EN, February, 15, 2006, https://www.eu.un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_5696_en.htm (accessed May 22, 2010).

27. *Jyllands-Posten*, “Cautious Optimism Despite Continued Unrest,” February 7, 2006, <http://jp.dk/uknews/article177283.ece> (accessed May 22, 2010); and Trembath, “Iranian Newspaper Encourages Holocaust Cartoons Following Muslim Outrage.”

28. *SPIEGEL Online*, “A Scene in the Wrong Movie,” February 13, 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,400526,00.html> (accessed May 26, 2010).

The element of violence that entered in public protests in certain Muslim countries is yet another aspect to which the West refers with relish as something representative of the Muslims' temperament and which it cannot accept.²⁹ The threat of economic boycott by Muslim countries was also no plausible form of protest and the European Union threatened to seek redress from the WTO in the event of such a boycott.³⁰

It may be pertinent to examine these three aspects of the western standpoint in detail and intellectually pursue their scholars, writers, journalists, and political leadership.

Freedom of Expression

It may be noted here that freedom of expression is a legacy of human civilization and has always been cherished by every civilized human society. The western society and civilization can claim neither the monopoly over it nor it be their invention. It also remains an undeniable fact that the West itself ruthlessly has put curbs too often on the freedom of expression and press.³¹ It, in fact, goes to the credit of Islam and the Islamic civilization that the right to the freedom of expression was acknowledged by Islam since day one as the fundamental human right of every individual. Allah created man free from all bondages and he is free to accept or reject even his own Creator. In both cases, the man himself is responsible for the eventual consequences of his acceptance or rejection, and no one can force him to change his opinion. The West feels proud of the statement attributed to Rousseau, "Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains," but the fact of the matter is the concept of man's position in the universe as a free-born noblest creation of the sublime Creator was comprehensively articulated in the Holy Qur'an fourteen centuries ago. It was also succinctly expressed and explained by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his history-making Khutbah Hajjat al-Wadā' (Farewell Pilgrimage Address) on 9 Dhul Hajjah, 10 AH/632 CE. The address is the humanity's first ever charter of human rights. The concept was also expressed by the Holy Prophet's Companion and Second Caliph of Islam, Umar bin al-Khattab, in his following oft-quoted statement, "Since when did you take people as slaves when their mothers gave birth to them free."³²

The Qur'an enjoins its followers and through them the whole of mankind: "Believers, fear Allah and speak the Truth."³³ The Qur'an thus confirms freedom of expression as a constitutional right of the whole human race and makes it obligatory to always say what is true and shun falsehood. The Holy Book also acknowledges the legal and moral position of the principle of religious tolerance

29. European Commission, "EU Commission President Barroso's Statement on Cartoons of Prophet Muhammad."

30. DW Staff, "EU Defends Freedom of Expression Amid Danish Cartoon Anger," DW-World, January 01, 2006, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,1877820,00.html> (accessed May 26, 2010).

31. Jenson, Citizens of the Empire.

32. Ibn al-Jawzi, Sirat wa Manaqb Amir al-Mu'minin Umar Ibn al-Khattab, 89.

33. Al-Quran, Al-Ahzāb, 70.

and genuine plurality when it declares, “There is no compulsion in religion.”³⁴ When the Qur’ān says “Who conduct their affairs by consultation;”³⁵ it virtually reaffirms the right of democratic dissent and introduces in it the element of mutual consultation to resolve a particular issue. It formally decrees: “and then if you were to dispute among yourselves about anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger.”³⁶ Therefore, when the western world was persecuting its inhabitants for speaking the truth before and after the advent of Islam, for instance Socrates in Greece and Galileo in Italy, the Quran were enjoining them to speak the truth even at gallows.

There are three questions that naturally arise in this context for the western advocates of freedom of expression: i) What do they mean by ‘freedom of expression’? ii) What are the parameters of this freedom? iii) Can this freedom be a ‘free-for-all’ affair? Unless the blessing of freedom has well-defined parameters, it is bound to degenerate into high-handedness and slavery of one’s self-will, as one of the eminent American jurist, OW Holmes Jr., puts forth in his words of wisdom, “The right to swing my fist ends where the other man’s nose begins.”³⁷ This is the reason why every civilized society has known the difference between freedom and anarchy because when freedom transgresses its bounds, it becomes anarchy and results in trampling the rights of others. Responsibility and the obligation to respect others’ rights are the basic components in the domain of freedom. Since freedom can only be effective within the framework of respect and security for life, property, and honor of other people, every social order tried to bridle freedom with the reins of legal, moral, and national security considerations to counter the tendency of ‘negative freedom’. Every legal system has, therefore, a provision for the imperatives of national security, safeguards of fundamental values, and respect for personal life and honor. The UN Charter of Human Rights similarly does not delink freedom and respect as basic rights from the legal codes and human values of nations and societies.

There is no right of freedom of expression without limits. The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) delimits this freedom in clear terms with the following three things: “maintenance of public order, health, and morals.”³⁸ Every country is expected to frame its own laws for the implementation of this Convention. Additionally, there are some significant conventions and rules in this respect on global level, which are duly ratified by most of the UN member states and these form part of the International Law. In this context, the “International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” is particularly worth mentioning. Under this Convention, promotion of all forms of racial pride, hatred, and ethnic discrimination has been banned and it has been made obligatory for every country to punish those found guilty of

34. Al-Quran, Al-Baqarah, 256.

35. Al-Quran, Al-Shūrā, 38.

36. Al-Quran, Al-Nisā’, 59.

37. Holmes, *The Path of the Law and the Common Law*, 431.

38. OHCHR, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/ccpr.pdf> (accessed June 8, 2010).

spreading ethnic and racial disrespect and discord.³⁹ A Committee namely “Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination” (CERD) has also been constituted to look after proper implementation of the Convention. Relevant guidelines of the Committee (XV of CERD) are:

“Article 4 (a) requires States parties to penalize four categories of misconduct: (i) dissemination of ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred; (ii) incitement to racial hatred; (iii) acts of violence against any race or group of persons of another color or ethnic origin; and (iv) incitement to such acts ... any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.’ [Such penalization] ‘is compatible with the right to freedom of expression’. ... To satisfy these obligations, States parties have not only to enact appropriate legislation but also to ensure that it is effectively enforced...”⁴⁰

Similarly, there is the Human Rights Committee (HRC), which is responsible for preparing a number of reports, including the ones concerning the right of freedom of expression. It has identified the parameters of this freedom in light of the CCPR’s relevant article:

“The citizen’s exercise of this right [freedom of expression] carries special duties and responsibilities, specified in article 29, paragraph 2, of the Universal Declaration...”⁴¹

The HRC’s ruling in respect of the famous court order regarding *Faurisson vs France* was:

“Since the statements made by the author...were of a nature as to raise or strengthen anti-Semitic feelings, the restriction served the respect of the Jewish community to live free from fear of an atmosphere of anti-Semitism. The Committee therefore concludes that the restriction of the author’s freedom of expression was permissible under article 19, paragraph 3 (a), of the Covenant.”⁴²

Likewise, the following ruling of the European Court of Human Rights is also important:

“Freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of such a society ... it is applicable not only to ‘information’ or ‘ideas’ that are favorably

39. OHCHR, “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,” The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/cerd.pdf> (accessed June 8, 2010).

40. OHCHR, “General Recommendation XV: Organized Violence Based on Ethnic Origin (Art. 4),” High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), March 23, 1993, <http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/%28Symbol%29/e51277010496eb2cc12563ee004b9768?Opendocument> (accessed June 8, 2010).

41. Ibid.

42. Bhagwati, “Communication No 550/1993: France. 12/16/1996.”

received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population. Such are the demands of that pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness without which there is no 'democratic society'."⁴³

In yet another famous case, a European court came out with the following ruling:

"The respect for the religious feelings of believers as guaranteed in Article 9 (art. 9) can legitimately be thought to have been violated by provocative portrayals of objects of religious veneration; and such portrayals can be regarded as malicious violation of the spirit of tolerance, which must also be a feature of democratic society.

"...the manner in which religious beliefs and doctrines are opposed or denied is a matter which may engage the responsibility of the State, notably its responsibility to ensure the peaceful enjoyment of the right guaranteed under Article 9 (art. 9) to the holders of those beliefs and doctrines.

"This being so, as a matter of principle it may be considered necessary in certain democratic societies to sanction or even prevent improper attacks on objects of religious veneration...Thus, the court would be entitled to impose on any individual expressing such views (opposing or denying religious beliefs) a positive obligation 'to avoid as far as possible expressions which are gratuitously offensive to others'."⁴⁴

The same principal was elaborated further by the same Court in a different case as:

"Violent and provocative portrayals of objects of religious veneration may violate the rights under Article 9. The State is under a positive obligation to protect minorities with strongly held beliefs from attack. It is legitimate for the state to regulate the exercise of any right which interferes with an individual's manifestation of belief. There may be an obligation on the part of the state to secure respect for freedom of religion in the sphere of relations between individuals as well as individuals and public authorities. It is in developing this duty that the (European)

43. European Court of Human Rights, "Case of Handyside v. The United Kingdom: (Application no. 5493/72)," European Court of Human Rights, December 7, 1976, <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?action=html&documentId=695376&portal=hbkm&source=externalbydocnumber&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649> (accessed June 12, 2010).

44. European Court of Human Rights, "Case of Otto-Preminger-Institut v. Austria: (Application no. 13470/87)," European Court of Human Rights, September 20, 1994, <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=1&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=Austria%20%20%22FREEDOM%20OF%20EXPRESSION%22%20%20respect%20%20for%20%20religious%20%20feelings%20%20of%20%20believers%20%20as%20%20guaranteed%20%20by%20%20Article%20%209&sessionId=57133949&skin=hudoc-en> (accessed June 12, 2010).

Convention may come to play an important part in promoting minority religions in the UK. The respect for the religious feelings of believers as guaranteed in Article 9 can legitimately be thought to have been violated by provocative portrayals of objects of religious veneration and such portrayals can be regarded as malicious violation of the spirit of tolerance, which must also feature in a democratic society.”⁴⁵

The International Law and rulings by world courts are quite clear in terms of the individuals’ right of freedom of expression. Accordingly, no country that claims to be democratic has the right to exploit this freedom and spread religious hatred, denigrate and make fun of the sacrosanct personalities of a religion, or target religious, cultural or linguistic sensitivities of a people and play with their sentiments. The matter does not simply call for self-censorship; It is actually the responsibility of a state to guarantee protection of fundamental human rights of every individual, group, and community living within that state or elsewhere.

Even the Danish law is not indifferent to this aspect. Since centuries, Denmark has its ‘Blasphemy law’ that provides safeguards to religious beliefs, sacrosanct symbols of a religion, and its personalities. It has similarly enacted the ‘Law of Libel and Slander’ to protect the honor and respect of every individual. Furthermore, according to the penal law of Denmark, all acts of public offence and injury to others’ feelings and sentiments are liable for punitive action. Article 140 of the Danish Criminal Code lays down:

“Those who publicly mock or insult the doctrines of worship of any religious community that is legal in this country, will be punished by a fine or incarceration for upto four months.”⁴⁶

Similarly, Article 266-B of the Criminal Code declares:

“Any person who publicly or with intention of dissemination to a wide circle of people makes a statement or imparts other information threatening, insulting or degrading a group of persons on account of their race, colour, national or ethnic origin, belief or sexual orientation, shall be liable to a fine, simple detention or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.”⁴⁷

This is the law of the land in a country which was engaged in a foul play since 2005 against its own Muslim community, which happens to be a global community as well. Surprisingly, even the

45. EHRR, “Dubowska and Skup vs Poland: (Appl. nos 33490/96 and 34055/96).”

46. “Straffeloven kap. 15,” Juraportalen Themis, http://www.themis.dk/synopsis/docs/Lovsamling/Straffeloven_kap_15.html (accessed June 17, 2010).

47. “Straffeloven kap. 27,” Juraportalen Themis, http://www.themis.dk/synopsis/docs/Lovsamling/Straffeloven_kap_27.html (accessed June 17, 2010).

intellectuals and political leadership of the West did not apparently feel the pinch of its conscience while defending such heinous acts of gross human rights violation by a section of its societies.

The editor of the same newspaper, Jyllands Posten, had refused point blank to publish a blasphemous cartoon of Jesus Christ (pbuh) in 2003 on the plea that it would offend the sentiments of its Christian readership and evoke resentment and wide spread protests.⁴⁸ When a similar wave of protests shook the West following the publication of blasphemous caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Iran challenged the Danish daily to publish cartoons making fun of the Holocaust. Accepting the challenge, no sooner did its Cultural Editor Flemming Rose tell the CNN in an interview that he would soon publish cartoons on Holocaust than he was sent on a forced long leave and the newspaper's Editor-in-Chief published a denial.⁴⁹

As things stand today, at least seven European countries have put a ban legally forbidding publication of anything that could be construed a challenge to the much trumpeted Jewish charge of Holocaust against the Nazi Germany. Interestingly, Austria sent a leading professor of history, David Irving, to prison on a three-year term as he had disputed the facts and figures generally advanced by the Jews regarding the Holocaust.⁵⁰ Although he subsequently clarified in the court that he made the statement due to some misunderstanding and announced to formally withdraw it, his 'crime' was taken as being unpardonable and he merited no reprieve.⁵¹ Irving was not even a citizen of Austria, but he was not spared by its court. According to an Israeli legislation, any person challenging the Holocaust anywhere in the world could be abducted 'lawfully' by Israel to punish him in terms of its own penal code.⁵²

It is also important to note here that protesting against such defamation of honorable personalities of a faith, race, or society is not only limited to Muslims as a London based newspaper, The Independent, published a caricature on January 27, 2003 showing then Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, "biting off the bloodied head of a Palestinian child as helicopter warships hovered overhead blasting out 'Vote Sharon' from loudspeakers as its 'Cartoon of the Year'"⁵³ and the Diaspora and Israeli Jews raised much hue and cry and the newspaper faced severe pressure from international Jewry.⁵⁴ Similarly, massive protests erupted in France against the film 'The Last Temptation of Christ' that contained blasphemous references against Jesus Christ (pbuh). The protests went violent, "screens were torn, theaters were ransacked, stink bombs were released,

48. Fouché, "Danish Paper Rejected Jesus Cartoons."

49. Juste, "No Holocaust Cartoons in Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten."

50. msnbc.com, "Scholar Who Denied Holocaust Jailed for 3 Years," February 20, 2006, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11455196/> (accessed June 17, 2010).

51. Naughton, "Irving Jailed for Three Years, Despite Holocaust U-turn."

52. Gilbert, "Holocaust Denial may be Under Israeli Jurisdiction," 6. For online access to complete article, visit "The First Step is Underway, Holocaust Denial Overseas will be a Crime in Israel." Signs of the Times, <http://www.sott.net/signs/signs20040720.htm> (accessed June 17, 2010).

53. Shuman, "'Sharon Eating Babies' Cartoon Wins British Prize."

54. Byrnes, "Defending the Danish Cartoonist."

and one movie house was consumed by a fire that sent several people to hospitals.”⁵⁵ Today’s Europe has imposed restrictions on loud music in homes because that may disturb peace of the neighborhood.⁵⁶ Honking is prohibited on the roads and similarly raising volume of music in cars is also not permitted.⁵⁷ Such civilized laws are not deemed to violate one’s privacy and a person’s freedom of action.

Contradictorily, the same Europe becomes oblivious to its civilizational and cultural obligation when it comes to such outrageous acts of blasphemy as are being committed in its various parts against the most hallowed and sacrosanct personality of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It has no sense of remorse on willfully injuring the religious sentiments of 1.5 billion Muslims of the world by defending those dirty drawings in the name of freedom of expression. None can endorse such scandalous ‘unchartered form of freedom’ as conforming to the civilized norm of freedom that seems to be synonymous to the freedom of libel and slander, bordering on the ‘sophisticated’ form of fascism. Therefore, the advocates of holding up the sanctity of ‘freedom of expression’ at the expense of insult, defamation and targeted assault on the most reverend personalities of other faiths and religion need to revisit the very idea and philosophy of freedom before sermonizing the victims to show patience and tolerance.

Secularism

These calumnious cartoons are being justified on secular grounds as well which is as ridiculous pretext as the bogey of freedom of expression. There can be nothing more illogical and absurd than to say that by being secular in their outlook and approach the European societies are free to make fun or cast aspersions against anything religious. This is in fact the best way to distort the image of secular democracy. No sane person can give license to secularism for promoting and patronizing acts of libel, sacrilege, and blasphemy against established religious orders and the most inviolable and sacrosanct personalities of other faiths. These are the eternal ethical values that every civilized society cherishes the most and no vote of dissent can ever make any difference concerning these.

The West is actually making a calculated move of ‘cultural apartheid’ against Muslims and the Islamic world. The same West that speaks in favor of personal freedom almost religiously is now up against the Muslim women’s scarf, which is a symbol of her self-respect and dignity and an expression of her right of freedom of choice and personal freedom. The West is now also showing

55. Grace, “Hollywood under Siege: Martin Scorsese, The Religious Right, and the Culture Wars.”

56. Sikora, “Loud Music Banned after 10 pm.” See also Turner, “‘Tinnitus Time Bomb’ Warning for the Loud-Music Generation.”; and Huseynov, “Noise and Light Pollution.”

57. Environmental Protection UK, “Noise Pollution,” Environmental Protection UK, <http://www.environmental-protection.org.uk/noise/environmental-noise/noise-pollution/#wa489> (accessed June 17, 2010). See also European Commission, “Section 9 – Noise Legislation.” and Rahner, “Honking Horn not constitutionally Protected.”

intolerance even against minarets, which are the hallowed symbols of the Muslims' places of worship.

Religious plurality and tolerance are often claimed to be the pillars of secularism. To launch a concerted campaign of mockery and defamation against a particular faith and its followers is, however, no secularism but fascism and chauvinism. The western attitude against Islam and the Muslim Ummah in the name of secularism is, in fact, a negation of the basic principles of secularism.

Some well-meaning intellectuals and writers of the West are rightly dismayed and disturbed over the current trend. Well known political analyst and commentator, Robert Fisk, in his article published in The Independent of London, described the Danish cartoons as "provocative and perverse". Fisk observed:

"This is not an issue of secularism versus Islam. For Muslims, the Prophet is the man who received divine words directly from God. We see our prophets as faintly historical figures, at odds with our high-tech human rights, almost caricatures of themselves. The fact is that Muslims live their religion. We do not. They have kept their faith through innumerable historical vicissitudes. We have lost our faith ever since Matthew Arnold wrote about the sea's "long, withdrawing roar". That's why we talk about "the West versus Islam" rather than "Christians versus Islam" - because there aren't an awful lot of Christians left in Europe. There is no way we can get round this by setting up the other entire world religions and asking why we are not allowed to make fun of Mohamed."⁵⁸

Martin Burcharth, the US correspondent of the Danish newspaper Information, referring to the debate over the Danish cartoons said, "It can be seen only in the context of a climate of pervasive hostility toward anything Muslim in Denmark." Burcharth went on to say:

"There seems to be some surprise that the Danish people and their government are standing behind the Jyllands-Posten newspaper and its decision to publish drawings of the Prophet Muhammad last fall. Aren't Danes supposed to be unusually tolerant and respectful of others?...We Danes have grown increasingly xenophobic over the years. The publication of the cartoons had little to do with generating a debate about self-censorship and freedom of expression. It can be seen only in the context of a climate of pervasive hostility toward anything Muslim in Denmark.

"There are more than 200,000 Muslims in Denmark, a country with a population of

58. Fisk, "Don't be Fooled, This isn't an Issue of Islam Versus Secularism."

5.4 million. A few decades ago, Denmark had no Muslims at all. Not surprisingly, Islam has come to be viewed by many as a threat to the survival of Danish culture. For 20 years, Muslims have been denied a permit to build mosques in Copenhagen. And there are no Muslim cemeteries in Denmark, so the bodies of Muslims have to be flown back to their home countries for proper burial.”⁵⁹

The comments contributed by Robert Wright of the New York Times were also forthright and should serve as caution:

“The American left and right don't agree on much, but weeks of demonstrations and embassy burnings have pushed them toward convergence on one point: there is, if not a clash of civilizations, at least a very big gap between the ‘Western world’ and the ‘Muslim world.’ When you get beyond this consensus — the cultural chasm consensus — and ask what to do about the problem, there is less agreement. After all, chasms are hard to bridge. Fortunately, this chasm's size is being exaggerated. The Muslim uproar over those Danish cartoons isn't as alien to American culture as we like to think. Once you see this, a benign and quintessentially American response comes into view.

“Even many Americans who condemn the cartoon's publication accept the premise that the now-famous Danish newspaper editor set out to demonstrate: in the West we don't generally let interest groups intimidate us into what he called “self-censorship.

“What nonsense. Editors at mainstream American media outlets delete lots of words, sentences and images to avoid offending interest groups, especially ethnic and religious ones. It's hard to cite examples since, by definition, they don't appear. But use your imagination.

“Hugh Hewitt, a conservative blogger and evangelical Christian, came up with an apt comparison to the Muhammad cartoon: “a cartoon of Christ's crown of thorns transformed into sticks of TNT after an abortion clinic bombing.” As Mr. Hewitt noted, that cartoon would offend many American Christians. That's one reason you haven't seen its like in a mainstream American newspaper.”⁶⁰

Robert Wright straightaway dismissed the objections raised by a section of western intellectuals regarding the alleged element of extremism in the Muslim world's reaction and protests against

59. Burcharth, “Denmark's Problem with Muslims.”

60. Wright, “The Silent Treatment.”

those cartoons. It would be too simplistic, however, to dismiss the ground realities of the human world so disdainfully. Wright said in this context:

“But the more we learn about this episode, the less it looks like spontaneous combustion. The initial Muslim response to the cartoons was not violence, but small demonstrations in Denmark along with a lobbying campaign by Danish Muslims that cranked on for months without making it onto the world's radar screen.

“Only after these activists were snubbed by Danish politicians and found synergy with powerful politicians in Muslim states did big demonstrations ensue. Some of the demonstrations turned violent, but much of the violence seems to have been orchestrated by state governments, terrorist groups and other cynical political actors...Besides, who said there's no American tradition of using violence to make a point? Remember the urban riots of the 1960's, starting with the Watts riot of 1965, in which 34 people were killed?

“In Gaza much of the actual fuel came from tensions with Israelis, in Iran some fundamentalists' nursed longstanding anti-Americanism, in Pakistan opposition to the pro-Western ruling regime played a role, and so on.

“This diversity of rage, and of underlying grievance, complicates the challenge. Apparently refraining from obvious offense to religious sensibilities won't be enough. Still, the offense in question is a crystalline symbol of the overall challenge; because so many of the grievances coalesce in a sense that Muslims aren't respected by the affluent, powerful west (just as rioting American blacks felt they weren't respected by affluent, powerful whites). A cartoon that disrespects Islam by ridiculing Muhammad is both trigger and extremely high-octane fuel...

“What isn't a big difference is the Muslim demand for self-censorship by major media outlets. That kind of self-censorship is not just an American tradition, but a tradition that has helped make America one of the most harmonious multiethnic and multireligious societies in the history of the world.”⁶¹

In light of the foregoing observations, it is obvious that western claims of upholding the freedom of expression and the norms of secular democracy are hollow and in sheer contrast to their approach of executing these two important facets towards other communities and faiths. Besides these two oft-parroted features, the advocates and defenders of blasphemous caricatures also assert that these infamous drawings are a form of reaction to the Muslims' extremism and fundamentalism that, they believe, is further evident from the Muslims' violent response to these caricatures. It is,

61. Ibid.

therefore, pertinent to streamline the counter-measures and mechanism of response to this issue by the Muslim Ummah as a whole. There is no denying the fact that the Muslims' response to this outrage must not be a temporary affair, limited only to occasional emotional outbursts. There is a need to draw both an emergency plan and a far-reaching long-term strategy after carefully examining every aspect of the issue.

Muslims' Response

Spontaneous protests on any such incident are the need of the time and those must continue in a peaceful and lawful manner. Following three formats may be used for the purpose:

- (i)** World-wide expression of resentment and resolve of the Muslim masses must continue as a show of their well-determined peaceful struggle in defense of their faith and self-respect as the leading global community.
- (ii)** To exert economic and diplomatic pressure is another form of protest. This is a well known and well acknowledged instrument of national as well as international politics. It is significant to note that only a little economic pressure resulted in putting Denmark's trade worth seven billion dollars in jeopardy and led its trading companies to exert pressure on their government to change its absurd attitude.⁶² This pressure must continue.
- (iii)** Planned action on the domestic front is the third form of protests. The Muslim masses should also keep in mind how to motivate and mobilize their ruling elite to stand up and take counter measures against such sinister moves by the international forces involved in damaging Islam and the Islamic heritage. It cannot be over-stressed that the Muslim rulers in general are not very sensitive to the issues of their subjects and they have their own interests and priorities, which also include remaining in good books of the West. Resultantly, it becomes all the more important to continuously put political pressure on the leaderships to change their reckless and self-centered approach.
- (iv)** There is also a need to carefully study the phenomenon of Islamophobia, furthered consciously in the West, and rebut it through scientific and well-written exposés, features, newspaper articles, seminars and symposia.
- (v)** The OIC and the political leaderships of the Muslim World would have to earnestly work on a legal document and get it implemented as a global treaty and part of International Law in the same way as the laws have been framed and enacted by the Zionist lobby on anti-Semitism.

62. Watt, "Danish Paper Sorry for Muhammad Cartoons."

Additionally, there is also an urgent need to take cognizance of the long-term objectives that the Muslim World must keep in mind to regain a respectful standing in the comity of nations. A few significant steps may be examined in this regard:

- (i) The Muslim World cannot expect equal status and treatment in the comity of nations until and unless it rises above its present chaotic scenario of socio-economic backwardness, yawning gap between the rulers and the ruled, lack of the spirit of competition in the realm of science and technology, and weakness on the civilizational front. It is quite understandable that the rival forces would take advantage of these multifarious weaknesses and apathy. The wave of anger and protests against the Western policies has created a reawakening among the Muslims about the need for the unity and cohesiveness of Islamic world. This is a sign of its inherent strength as a moral and ethical force. This wave must be turned into a well coordinated move for Islamic upsurge and the humanity's emancipation.
- (ii) Secondly, there is an urgent need to be cautious and conscious about letting this struggle degenerate into a 'clash of civilizations'. There are some obvious forces in the West that are trying their best to trap the Muslim World into such a conflict, in which they see themselves as the eventual winner due to the political and military weakness and backwardness of the Muslim societies in general in the field of science and technology. The plurality and diversity of cultures and civilizations is the beauty of human race and the idea of 'clash of civilizations' is the product of intellectual impoverishment and fascism. The path of global harmony and peace passes through genuine and authentic pluralism, which provides space to everyone to live according to one's own socio-cultural moorings and with a sense of understanding and amity for each other.
- (iii) The third aspect to which attention needs to be focused is that the position taken by certain countries of the West and some segments of their population is not related to their right of freedom of expression and press or with secularism. It is not a manifestation of 'clash of civilizations' either, but of a conflict between civilization and anti-civilization, justice and tyranny, right and wrong, humanness and fascism. It is not a conflict where all Muslims may be deemed to be on one side and the Western communities on the other. A considerable majority of intellectuals and writers of the West do not consider this a war between two civilizations but a war against civilizations. Religions of the world and respect for their sacrosanct personalities are the humanity's common legacy. The Holy Qur`an has forbidden even to abuse untrue deities, because this may unnecessarily lead the other side to abuse, out of their sheer ignorance, the True God. How much sacrosanct Islam holds the human life may well be measured by this verse of the Holy Qur`ān: "...He who slays a soul unless it be (in punishment)

for murder or for spreading mischief on earth shall be as if he had slain all mankind.”⁶³

The prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who has been portrayed by a section of Western media as a symbol of terrorism, has been praised in prose and verse by a variety of people, be they Muslims or otherwise. It may be undesirable and uncalled for, therefore, for the Muslim scholars and intellectuals to fall into the trap laid down by a few predators from the West and jump into the fray being fueled in the name of the so-called clash of civilizations. Every individual belonging to the World of Islam is required to stand steadfast as an upholder of Islamic virtue and goodness in the wake of this burning fire of hatred and hold fast to his own religion, and the common interests of his community. Islam is the fastest growing religion of the world. Calumnious campaigns like these have failed to deter its peaceful forward march. Such sad incidents should, therefore, be taken as opportunity for the Muslims to present the true peaceful message of Islam and turn the tide of current wave of opposition and hatred into possibilities and opportunities.

- (iv)** Fourthly, the Muslim world’s leaderships and the OIC are required to bring the whole world on a single platform of common interest. Efforts are to be made to bring the world’s political and religious leaderships to agree to certain protocols and code of conduct on respect for all religions and religious personalities. A charter, not of peaceful coexistence alone but also of multilateral cooperation, needs to be worked out which may enjoy the status of a superior code of conduct, both legally and morally. A special UN General Assembly session can also be called for this purpose. Such an exercise needs to be carried out after necessary homework, for which it is imperative to hold seminars, symposia and necessary research work. A comprehensive dialogue is also required to be initiated to this end on global level. If the Muslim World succeeds to impress upon the world leaderships to agree to such a protocol, it would mean a greater good coming out of the evil now disturbing the civilized societies all over the world.

Conclusion

It may be pertinent to conclude the discussion with the quote from the article of Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, an intellectual and former Foreign Minister of Denmark (1982-1993), leader of the Danish Liberal Party (Venstre, 1984-98) and President of European Liberal Party (1995-2000):

63. Al-Quran, Al-Mā'idah, 32.

“Now that the conflict over the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad is dying down, or so I hope, it is clear that the only winners are the extremists in the Islamic World and in Europe.

“I regret the fact that the controversy started in my own country when a newspaper chose to publish the cartoons in a naïve effort to demonstrate freedom of expression. It happened last autumn, and at that time I argued publicly against what I regarded as an insensitive act, because it hurt other peoples’ religious feelings. It was also an unnecessary provocation, and constituted in itself a caricature of our cherished freedom of expression, that is guaranteed in our constitution...

“The lessons of this unfortunate incident seem to me to be clear: We should all acknowledge that in the modern world it is increasingly necessary for all sensible people to work for mutual respect, tolerance and better understanding. We must avoid situations where different values are confronted with each other in ways that trigger violence. Instead we must try to build bridges between religions, ethics and norms.

“Call it self-censorship if you wish. But self-censorship is practiced all the time by sensible people. If you wish to stay in the same room as other people you try not to offend them through unnecessary provocations. The room we are talking about is no longer the local pond but the global village. Co-existence is the key.”⁶⁴

64. Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, “Coexistence or No Existence,” Project Syndicate, February 16, 2006, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ellemann11/English> (accessed June 28, 2010).

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