

The IHRC wishes to highlight continuing discrimination against minorities in Canada, France, UK, USA and Netherlands.

25 November 2014

Statement to the UN Forum on Minority Issues

#### Individual Statement- Islamic Human Rights Commission

IHRC urges the UN HRC to ensure that minority protection concerns extend to minorities in all countries and not just non-Western jurisdictions. Otherisation of out-groups in these settings is not just a domestic issue, resulting in hate crimes and other acts of hatred. Recent years have provided ample evidence that demonisation and exclusion by western governments also helps them to legitimise external illegal interventions including war, war crimes and other atrocity crimes.

#### CANADA

, Canada's Muslims suffer doubly from racial and religious discrimination with the latter increasingly overtaking the former. Nearly two-thirds of Muslim respondents to our recently published 2014 hate crime survey had seen policies or practices at work, school or business that excluded or negatively affected Muslim people. Over a third had experienced job discrimination based on religion while 67% said they believed that Canadian politicians condoned discriminatory acts against Muslims. One of the most disturbing consequences of Islamophobic social attitudes and practices is that they contribute to silencing, marginalising or excluding Muslims if they are seen as not quite belonging or if they always have to justify and explain themselves in ways which other Canadians are not expected to do. Such experiences can only take place in an environment that not only tolerates hate crime but creates and reinforces it. Some 9 out of 10 Canadian Muslims in our survey had seen some form of negative or insulting stereotypes of Muslims in the media and nearly three-quarters had seen policies that negatively impact their community.

#### USA

Large numbers of Muslims remain subject to hate-motivated social and political attitudes created by the media and politicians which impact adversely on their everyday lives. Following the attacks of 9/11 Muslim profiling has become legitimised through legislation such as the Patriot Act and NDAA making suspicion the main prism through which Muslims are perceived. The normalisation of discrimination is also worrying as it has helped make more and more Americans comfortable with profiling. An IHRC survey in California (2012), often touted as the most liberal and progressive state in the US, showed a staggering 88% of Muslim respondents reporting negative experiences in everyday life, media, political discourse and policy. A staggering 29% of respondents stated they had experience violence as a result of being (or being perceived to be) Muslim.

## FRANCE

In a widening of the scope of its hijab ban in state schools and public service posts France also banned the public wearing of the face veil. The dress laws in particular have had drastic consequences for Muslim women effectively excluding a large proportion of them from state employment. The bigotry aroused by the subject of Islamic dress has incited attacks on Muslim women wearing the headscarf. Muslims and their places of worship continue to be attacked at an alarming rate. In July, France also became the first country in the world to ban pro-Palestinian protests.

IHRC's survey work in 200 – 2010 showed 11% of respondents reported violent attacks and some three quarters felt that political discourse was to blame for the discrimination and hatred they faced.

## UK

Muslims are highly critical of the media believing that it portrays the community in a negative light and together with disparaging comments made by politicians creates a social climate in which acts of hate are encouraged. Physical attacks against Islamic places of worship and members of the Muslim community, some of them fatal, have continued to occur. The British government continues to treat the Muslim community as a security problem continuing to apply anti-terrorism measures disproportionately against Muslims, and proposing to enact still more. The past year has also witnessed an aggressive government witchhunt targeting the right of Muslims in Birmingham to govern Muslim-majority schools, instigated by a right-wing minister using the Islamophobic tropes of misogyny and extremism as a pretext to remove Muslim school governors from their posts.

## NETHERLANDS

In 2014 the annual Sinterklaas Festival became a testing ground for the status of ethnic minorities and their attempts to influence what it means to be Dutch. The issue revolves around the helper(s) of St. Nicholas in the festival known as "Black Petes", who are clownish and acrobatic figures dressed in Moorish page suits and blacked up faces. While the legend of Sinterklaas is rooted in Middle Age European history the character of Black Pete is a colonial construct dating from the 19th century at the height of the Dutch Empire, when the Netherlands was involved in slavery and slave trade for more than 200 years

In July, following a case brought by equality activists, the mayor of Amsterdam was ordered by a judge to reconsider the annual Sinterklaas parade through the city on the grounds that it was based on racial stereotypes. IHRC welcomed the ruling but was dismayed to see it overturned several months later by *the* Council of State, the country's highest appellate court. The racist aspects of the commemoration of Sinterklaas are offensive and an affront to the memory of those who suffered from European colonialism.

IHRC urges the UN HRC to press for proper minority protection and inclusion in the countries stated

Thank you