



## **Report on Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination January 11, 2021**

### **RE: DISCRIMINATION AND THREATS ON PROGRESSIVE AND FEMINIST MUSLIMS**

Contributors:

Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV),

Alliance des Imams du Corridor Nord pour le Développement Humainitaire (AICNDH, Burundi)

(as members of umbrella organization Alliance of Inclusive Muslims)

### **Violent reprisals against human rights-affirming Muslim-minority faith leaders in Burundi**

#### **Background:**

The capacity of Muslims across the world—in both Muslim-majority and minority societies and communities—to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of thought, conscience and religion, particularly as these rights pertain to the ability to engage critical analysis of Islamic scripture and promote human rights-affirming narratives of Islam publically and privately, is diminished and in some cases violently repressed. Impediments to the enjoyment of these rights within Muslim societies and communities are exacerbated by the homogenization and dissemination of hegemonic, “mainstream” narratives of Islam that threaten diversity of thought, give credence to fundamentalist and rights-diminishing narratives, and perpetuate stereotypes against Muslims that fuel anti-Muslim/Islamophobic sentiment globally.

Such narratives comprise the discursive elements of a continuum of violence that ultimately results in reprisals against Muslims who express different world views, including those engaged in promoting and affirming universal human rights norms from within Islam. Oftentimes, victims of these types of reprisals are Muslim advocates, activists, and faith leaders who promote rights-affirming narratives of Islam that are perceived to be dissenting, inauthentic, and potentially blasphemous as per majority and prevailing Islamic narratives across Muslim societies and communities. Furthermore, victims of such reprisals often receive no redress by the state and are repeatedly targeted by religious extremists for their advocacy.

#### **Imam Khalfan and The Alliance of Imams for the Development of Humanity (AICNDH):**

Imam Khalfan is the Mufti of Bujumbura and the Executive Director of AICNDH, a network of Burundian Imams committed to promoting human rights norms and sustainable development principles within Muslim communities in Burundi. AICNDH



has been the main implementing partner of MPV's #ImamsForShe program, which supports and builds the capacity of Imams to advocate for gender equity and the empowerment of women in their communities. Under Imam Khalfan's stewardship, the network has grown from 28 to over 200 women's rights-affirming religious leaders across Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda. Additionally, Imam Khalfan's work with AICNDH was integral for the implementation of the #ClubsForShe initiative, which brought together adolescent and young Muslim women in Burundi to participate in an overnight camp with the aim to equip them with knowledge and resources regarding their right to education and employment, economic independence and to self-determination, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

On December 26, 2020, Imam Khalfan was poisoned with arsenic while he was imprisoned for two days in a police cell in Bujumbura. He was subsequently released and sent to the hospital in critical condition. He is 36 years old and is married with two young sons. It is believed that two other individuals jailed at the time were also poisoned, as it was reported they both unfortunately passed away.

There have been multiple attempts on Imam Khalfan's life, so much so that the previous Chief Mufti of Burundi, Abdallah Sheikh Sadiki Kajandi, assigned him one full-time military escort. It is believed that Imam Khalfan was targeted because he was appointed Chair of the Election Committee for the election that would determine the next Chief Mufti of Burundi to be held on January 10, 2021. In this capacity, Imam Khalfan has been able to control and challenge attempts at bribery and fraud from a contingent of radical Salafi Imams. Furthermore, the government of Burundi, which had retained a neutral stance on the election and candidates, ultimately decided to endorse Imam Khalfan's candidate citing security reasons. It is clear that Imam Khalfan's advocacy and engagement with the election and Burundian government has made him the target of powerful, well-funded, extremist Imams who labeled him a dissenter and threat to the influence they were trying to wield.

### **Recommendations:**

The recommendations below are specific to respect for, protection, and fulfillment of the rights of Muslims and Muslim faith leaders who, for their work and advocacy promoting universal human rights norms and challenging fundamentalisms and extremisms in their societies and communities, are deemed dissenters and targeted by extremists intra-communally. To this end, MPV recommends that governments:

1. Exercise due diligence in investigating reprisals against Muslim human rights advocates and activists and in trying perpetrators of intra-communal Muslim



- violence, and offer redress and protection to victims of such violence and reprisals;
2. Hold accountable religious actors and institutions that incite violence against Muslim human rights activists and advocates;
  3. Create and facilitate knowledge sharing platforms between relevant government agencies and institutions and vetted, human rights-affirming Muslim faith-based organizations with the aim to build the capacity of state actors to assess the internal struggles between the radical and progressive elements of their Muslim communities;
  4. Ensure the inclusion of progressive Muslim perspectives in relevant policy spaces at local and national levels, and create and facilitate Interfaith Advisory Councils that are inclusive of progressive Muslim voices;
  5. Sponsor and endorse progressive Muslim civil society advocacy campaigns that challenge and undermine extremist ideologies in local communities and create an enabling environment in which Muslim human rights advocates and activists enjoy the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of thought and conscience without fear of persecution or discrimination.

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