**Report on Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination**

* **Preamble**

In recent years, Muslims have been subjected to a wide range of hate speech, racism and discrimination based on religion. Consequently, the terrorist operations against Muslims have remarkably and unprecedentedly surged in Europe. Perhaps the most prominent of these terrorist operations is the two consecutive mass shootings occurred at mosques in a terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, during Friday Prayer on 15 March 2019. Although the white supremacist who shot dead more than 51 people has been sentenced to life imprisonment, the hatred of, or prejudice against Muslims continues to exist[[1]](#footnote-1). The sharp rise in anti-Muslim attacks across various European countries is mainly due to the legitimized discrimination in European countries’ local laws, as well as the rise of far-right parties in Europe.

Therefore, civil society organizations need to exert more efforts to resist such bitter, deep-rooted hatred and combat intolerance based on religion. Before we delve into the driving factors that strengthens and perpetuates hatred against Muslims, we want to highlight some of the Islamophobia-related concepts and terms, as well as the historical and modern context of the emergence of this concept.

* **Islamophobia: Several Definitions**

Some literature traces the history and emergence of the term “Islamophobia”, dating it back to after the First World War. However, it was first emerged in its current form in 1997, when a British institution called the ‘Runnymede Trust’ used it to criminalize feelings of hatred, fear and prejudices against Muslims.[[2]](#footnote-2) In a report, prepared by a committee affiliated to the previously mentioned British institution, under the title "Islamophobia Challenges Us All", the first signs of coining a definition to this phenomenon appeared, as attention was drawn to the claims viewing Islam as a rigid, inflexible and immutable doctrine that promotes aggression and barbarism. Thus, Muslims are viewed by Europeans as backward, retarded peoples, and Islam is an ideal incubator for terrorism[[3]](#footnote-3).

According to the Center for American Progress, Islamophobia is defined as an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from America’s social, political, and civic life. Islamophobia is about a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilizing and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/ rights/ definition of a constructed ‘we’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Islamophobia is more than harsh talk; it is a systemic and institutional form of racism. It is the silencing of Muslim voices. It is selective condemnation. It is the constant not-so-random stops at airport checkpoints. It is the recently renewed travel ban, and considering every person who speaks Arabic as an extremist[[5]](#footnote-5).

These definitions converge and intertwine with other terms, such as the racial discrimination and xenophobia, and among the consequences of this expansion and spread of these concepts is the inclusion of discriminatory texts and provisions in national legislation and laws in the West in contradiction with the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of race or religion as stated in the definition of discrimination. Racism in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. At the same time, considering a particular belief or religion threatening the life of the West means an unjustified racist political stance. The phenomenon of Islamophobia has ancient roots dating back to after the First World War, but we can point out that the concept of Islamophobia was actually coined by the end of the seventies with the emergence of what is known as the Islamic awakening, and the political Islam currents declared in the Arab and Islamic world at the beginning of the eighties, especially after the Iranian revolution in 1979.[[6]](#footnote-6) The seeds of some of today’s major anti-Muslim organizations were planted in the years after the September 11 terrorist attacks. From that day on, Islam has been misunderstood and arbitrarily associated with violence and terrorism, and Muslims have been portrayed as barbaric, uncivilized people, which is biased, non-objective mechanism of conflict and exclusion that entails dealing with Muslims as undesirable persons in European societies.[[7]](#footnote-7)

* **Discrimination in law and practice**

Discrimination, in its essence, is a lack of equality, and causes harm to individuals based on their religion or beliefs. Moreover, it is a direct result of demonizing the other, who is different, whether in his belief, his religion, or his intellectual or ideological views. Although most Western countries prohibit discrimination in their national constitutions, it has been observed that some countries are trying to legitimize discrimination in their domestic laws, and in both cases Muslims suffer, especially refugees and immigrants, whose rates of discrimination, hatred and marginalization against them have increased according to the European Commission.[[8]](#footnote-8) At the level of practice, violations against Muslims have unprecedentedly surged in recent years. France, for example, has imposed various restrictions on Muslims’ public freedoms, and banned the wearing of hijab in both private and public sectors[[9]](#footnote-9). In August 2019, Netherlands finally passed the burqa and niqab ban law, which prohibits Muslim women from wearing any clothing that covers the face in schools, hospitals, and public transport and government buildings[[10]](#footnote-10). These laws are devoted to discrimination against Muslims on the basis of their belief and religion, and are inconsistent with the United Nations Global Compact in its Articles (1, 13, 55), which calls for respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people without discrimination based on sex, language or religion. .

Muslims are recently facing an angry backlash from the Indian government that has released the pent-up fury on them, through the amended Citizenship Act of 2019, which reduced the rights that should be granted to Muslims, unlike minorities from other religions. The amendment to the Indian Citizenship Law provides for **granting citizenship and the right of citizenship to illegal immigrants from three countries, namely Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, in case they are from six minorities defined by the law, namely, Hinduism, Sikhs, Buddhism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism, in addition to Christianity. The law thus ruled out granting the same benefits to Muslims in the three countries, despite the fact that Muslims make up 20% of the total population in India**.

 This law is no different from its predecessors in France and the Netherlands, as it includes discrimination and exclusion on a religious basis. **Doctrine cannot be a reason for obtaining the right to citizenship and it contradicts the right to equality guaranteed by international conventions** such as the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights and the Convention against Racial Discrimination, to which India is a party[[11]](#footnote-11). Therefore, the aforementioned laws set only examples that pave the way for making discrimination and exclusion against Muslims a permanent policy and make intolerance, hatred and attacks against them legitimate, which explains the high rate of aggression against Muslims in the past year.

Aggression against Muslims in Europe has unprecedentedly surged since 2019. In France, the rate of crimes against Muslims increased by 54% last year compared to 2018, as France recorded 145 attacks against Muslims in 2019, after it recorded only 100 attacks in 2018[[12]](#footnote-12). These attacks in France are due to many factors, the most important of which is the French government adoption of an anti-Muslim rhetoric and their non-discriminate attitude towards the moderate Muslim who is integrated into the French society and the terrorists who must be tracked down and condemned without attributing their acts to Islam. In Belgium, there were 278 cases of Islamophobia in 2018, including 54 physical attacks on individuals and Islamic places[[13]](#footnote-13). In the same year, 871 hate crimes against Muslims were reported in Germany. Fifty-eight of them were crimes against Muslim religious sites and in 46 crimes Muslims were physically injured by anti-Muslim racists.[[14]](#footnote-14)

* **The rise of the far-right**

The rise of the far-right in recent decades has remarkably contributed to the growth of hatred against Muslims and immigrants, and increased Islamophobia in Europe. Far-right groups and parties have exploited this phenomenon to establish its hostile discourse against everything related to Islam and Muslims, whether by explicitly expressing hostility to Muslim immigrants, rejecting minorities or multiculturalism, defending an ethno-national identity and calling for the curbing of immigration, which constitutes a basis for any electoral program for these far-right groups and parties[[15]](#footnote-15). Accordingly, these parties began to nourish their political and media discourse with hate speech, intolerance and racism against Muslims, believing in the superiority of the white race, and referring the cause of Europe's problems such as the economic and security obstacles to the presence of Muslim refugees and immigrants.

* **Civil society organizations’ good practices**

The exasperating tension and hate speech in recent times, especially against Muslims in Europe, has necessitated the decisive intervention by civil society organizations and international institutions to reduce hatred, intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. Last year, the United Nations launched its strategy to combat hate speech, and made it clear that the phenomenon represented an attack on tolerance and human rights.[[16]](#footnote-16)

On June 12, the European Network Against Racism, along with 150 other civil society organizations, sent an open letter to the President of the European Commission regarding the violence practiced by the police in the countries of the European Union against persons of color and Arabs and against institutional racism in the European Union. The speech indicates that the death rate of blacks and minorities in Britain’s places of detention is attributed to the police use of excessive force, and the number multiplies when it comes to minorities. Civil society organizations interested in combating hate speech are playing a vital role in following up the arrest of people from ethnic minorities, and the abuse and discrimination against them. However, this phenomenon has not ended due to the failure of some European Union countries to recognize the existence of discriminatory practices by the police towards minorities in general and Arabs in particular. This requires increasing the efforts of civil society organizations to curb this phenomenon, and urge the European Union countries to confront any institutional errors that incite abuse of minorities or followers of a certain belief.[[17]](#footnote-17)

On December 23, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights launched the Peace Makers Forum, between 21 and 25 December 2019, an initiative that includes a number of organizations and young people of various nationalities to combat hate speech and extremism, in addition to the project "Strengthening the role of youth in peace and security in the southern Mediterranean", which was implemented by Maat with the support of the Council of Europe, and one of the most important axes of the project is to **promote cultural dialogue, peaceful coexistence and combat hate speech**. Maat also organized a cultural event in November 2020, entitled African Cities Day, in which about 30 young people, from nine African countries, participated to encourage convergence and dialogue between cultures. Through such forums and stands calling for combating hate speech and promoting intercultural dialogue, Maat tries to build a participatory regional approach with other organizations to counter hate discourse, which reduction contributes to strengthening peace and security in the world and defusing intolerance and discrimination based on religion. In a similar vein, and in the context of combating the spread of hate speech in and outside the Internet, the Council of Europe launched in 2013 the “No hate speech” project. This project, through campaigns and national movements in 45 countries, seeks to mobilize young people to combat hate speech and promote human rights via the Internet. National campaigns have a noticeable effect on combating hate speech, especially online, and the work of these national campaigns and movements continues even after the project ends through partnerships and joint projects. In October 2019, a "No Hate Speech Network" was formed by a group of activists, individuals and organizations who participated in the activities of the No Hate Speech movement over the past seven years.

Moreover, in cooperation with European countries and civil society organizations, the state-led initiative to prevent mass atrocity crimes, (GAAMAC), organized a webinar entitled “Addressing hate speech in Europe” within the framework of Geneva Peace Week 2020. The symposium concluded that the stereotypes perpetuating and reinforcing hate speech, which are attributed to lack of knowledge of everything that is not European, can be overcome through dialogue, and education, in addition to the voluntary commitment of states to spread awareness of discrimination against marginalized groups in their institutional structures, enact laws and prevent structural discrimination, which requires in the first place the desire of European Governments to address discrimination and its structural causes. [[18]](#footnote-18)

* **Recommendations**
* Reducing hate speech requires the Special Rapporteur to indicate in his report the criminalization of offending any Abrahamic religion, just as anti-Semitism was criminalized earlier, by enacting the necessary laws in this context.
* For countering hate speech, it is necessary to expand areas of cooperation between different European countries and between civil society organizations; in order to enhance the comprehensive spaces for exchange and dialogue as a basic tributary in combating hate crimes and speeches.
* Amending laws or legislations that discriminate against minorities, especially Muslims in Europe, consolidating the principles of peace and interfaith dialogue in educational curricula, changing the stereotypes about Muslims, not selecting a specific belief and stigmatizing it with terrorism and violence.
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3. الإسلاموفوبيا، مقاربة جيوسياسية، مؤمنون بلا حدود، 6 فبراير 2017، للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://mominoun.com/pdf1/2017-01/islamofoubia.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. European Islamophobia Report 2019, Seta, P.8, Available at the following link: <https://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EIR_2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. مكافحة صناعة رهاب الإسلام نحو إستراتيجية أكثر فعالية، مركز كارتر، مايو 2018، ص 5، للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/symposium-report_final_arabic.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/36CvZ1K> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. مصدر سبق ذكره، ص 8، على الرابط التالي: <https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/symposium-report_final_arabic.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/2HbHkgw> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. فرنسا: ماكرون يعلن توسيع حظر الحجاب ليشمل موظفي القطاع الخاص الذين يقدمون خدمات عامة، يورو تايمز، 2 أكتوبر 2020، للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <http://euro-times.com/index.php?aa=news&id22=39882> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. قانون حظر النقاب في هولندا: لم يتم تسجيل غرامة واحدة خلال عام، بريطانيا بالعربي، 21 أكتوبر 2020، للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3f3C9vu> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. مشروع قانون في الهند يسمح بتجنيس أقليات غير مسلمة، بي بي سي عربي، 9 ديسمبر 2019، للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/world-50716676> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
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15. اللمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/2IJtoen> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. الأمين العام يطلق استراتيجية الأمم المتحدة لمكافحة خطاب الكراهية، أخبار الأمم المتحدة، 18 يونية 2019، للمزيد على الرابط التالي: <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2019/06/1035301> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
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18. Available at the following link: <https://bit.ly/36U3LzI> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)