**ODVV’s input for the report of**

**the special rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief**

**for his report on Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination to the 46th session of the HRC [[1]](#footnote-1)**

1. **Conceptual framings and understandings of anti-Muslim hatred / Islamophobia**

Islamophobia is an exaggerated fear, hatred and hostility toward Islam and everything associated with it such as Muslims, Mosques, Islamic Centers, Holy Qur’an, Hijab, and the like. It rests in the mind and reflects in attitudes, and could be manifested through violent actions, like burning mosques, vandalizing properties, abusing women wearing scarf, or insulting Prophet or sacred symbols of Islam. [[2]](#footnote-2)

This negative feeling against Muslims and even those perceived to be Muslim constitutes bias, marginalization and discrimination in daily life, on Media, at workplace, in political and social sphere, in education and etc.

Although, it definitely is a form of discrimination, it is a different concept from racism since religion in itself is a whole different phenomena and Islam and Muslims are not limited to one specific race.

ODVV believes that the very existence of Islamophobia is something to be addressed and defined in international human rights instruments. Also, for further preventive efforts, different forms of the hatred should be deeply studied and documented.

1. **Media, hate speech and violence against Muslims**

The media plays a major role in promoting hatred against Muslims across the world. Studies have shown that over three-quarters of people in Western societies rely on the mass media, mainly television, as their primary source of information about Islam and Muslims.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Islam and Muslims are often portrayed as a threat to the security and values of the Western world. In addition, Islamic beliefs are illustrated as barbaric, irrational and sexist. There have been various instances in the media about how the Muslim community are often misrepresented to society, mostly in a way that is associated with terrorism or extremism.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In 2018 alone, France saw an increase of 52 percent of Islamophobic incidents; in Austria there was a rise of approximately 74 percent, with 540 cases. Forty-four percent of Germans, for example, see “a fundamental contradiction between Islam and German culture and values.” In Finland, the same figure is remarkable (62 percent) and in Italy, it’s 53 percent. To be a Muslim in Europe means to be mistrusted, singled out and vulnerable.[[5]](#footnote-5) Islamophobic street movements and political parties have become more popular.

In the UK, almost 50% of Conservative party members believe Islam is “a threat to the British way of life.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Even Muslim officials in Labour groups have been subject to stereotypes of “grooming gangs”, accused of plotting “planned takeovers”, called “terrorists” and “foreigners”, and are expected to condemn violence they had no part in committing.[[7]](#footnote-7) Furthermore, over half of Muslim Labour members do not trust te party to tackle Islamophobia.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Out of 6,822 religious hate crimes recorded by the UK police from 2019 to 2020, half were targeted towards Muslims. In 2018, Prime Minister Boris Johnson compared Muslim women wearing the hijab, to letterboxes and bank robbers, sparking a 375 percent increase in Islamophobic hate crimes.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Since 9/11, the Muslim-American community has helped security and law enforcement officials prevent nearly two of every five al Qaeda terrorist plots threatening the United States, however, the system of government prosecution and media coverage bring Muslim-American terrorism suspects to national attention, creating the impression that Muslim-American terrorism is more prevalent than it really is.[[10]](#footnote-10)

A British political journalist and broadcaster, Mehdi Hasan, criticized Western media for over-reporting a few Islamist terrorist incidents but under-reporting the much larger number of planned non-Islamist terrorist attacks carried out by "white folks". [[11]](#footnote-11)

While white supremacist violence is the biggest part of domestic terrorism in the United States[[12]](#footnote-12) and they were responsible for 67 percent of terrorist plots and attacks in 2020,[[13]](#footnote-13) reports and news are turning a blind eye on it. “For the last 20 years, we’ve often heard from federal law enforcement about their efforts undertaken to understand these [Islamist] groups, motivations, recruitment and methodology, We don’t hear that from federal law enforcement when it comes to these [white] groups.” said Farhana Khera, the executive director of the civil rights group Muslim Advocates.[[14]](#footnote-14) Right Wing extremism is also the fastest growing threat in the UK today.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Undoubtedly, any terrorist act must be condemned, all perpetrators must be held accountable, and efforts should be made to prevent them be they white, black, Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu etc. However, Media and politicians are more likely to spread the idea that maybe not all Muslims are terrorists, but nearly all terrorists are Muslims.

This is heartbreaking for Muslims around the world that when something terrible happens and the perpetrator is a Muslim, politicians and the media focus on his/her religion in news and statements while when something kind or useful happens by a Muslim, no one mentions his/her religion.

Emmanuel Macron set France and Europe on a new collision course with the Islamic world last month all in the name of freedom. Muslims were enraged by Macron’s description of Islam as a faith “in crisis all over the world” that had, in effect, been hijacked by extremists. His defense of the notorious, recently republished Charlie Hebdo caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, and a national crackdown on mosques, Imams and Islamic groups added fuel to the fire. The projection of the Prophet Muhammad caricatures on to the walls of several French cities after the teacher’s death was intolerable for many Muslims.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Upholding secular values at all costs is a form of fundamentalism that confronts religious fundamentalism. On both sides, lack of respect is a big part of the problem. In western societies like France secularism was supposed to guarantee an equal democratic society but it seems that the radical form of defending secular values is now threatening the principals of democracy, equality and good governance by spreading hate and rage against Muslims and marginalizing them. This can lead to a powerful Islamophobic, anti-Muslim backlash that could spawn yet more bloodshed. The reality is that Muslims around the world are increasingly victims of discrimination and hate crimes.

ODVV believes that freedom of expression should not lead to prompting hatred against specific groups or be respected at all costs. There must be some standards to determine the language politicians and officials use to express their ideas publicly.

We request the special rapporteur to draw a line between freedom of expression and blasphemy. Provoking anger and hatred of millions of people should not be justified in the name of freedom of expressions.

ODVV is concerned about the very social and political structure that promote hatred against Muslims and lead to violence against them.

1. **Discrimination in law and practice**

New counterterrorism policies overwhelmingly target Muslims. The so-called war on terror, which singled out Muslims and Islam as a civilizational threat to “the West”, created the conditions for widespread Islamophobia.

In Britain, for example, you are 150 times more likely to be stopped and searched under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act if you are of Pakistani heritage than if you are white.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Donald Trump’s Muslim ban policy is a prime expression of the association of Muslims with terrorist threat.

Women with Hijab are perceived as “the other” especially in Europe. The headscarf is either seen as a symbol of subjugation and, therefore, Muslim women must be “saved” but when they take clear responsibility for wearing it, they are seen as rebels who need to be controlled because they might have a hidden political agenda or even might be instrumentalized by “their men” or the organization to which they may belong.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Since 2004, France has banned religious symbols, including many religious head coverings, in public schools and government buildings. In the name of secularism, the government is actually choosing a specific life style over others. Also, in some swimming pools and beaches burkinis (a mix of the words "burka" and "bikini") are banned and women have to pay fines if they don’t obey the rule.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In Denmark, judges cannot wear headscarves and similar religious symbols and anti-Islamic political parties are trying to ban hijab for school teachers and medical personnel, too.[[20]](#footnote-20) Also, in Austria’s parliament approved a law banning headscarves in public primary schools.[[21]](#footnote-21)

How can a law claim to protect freedom of expression and not allow people to wear their own choice at the same time? Moreover, according to studies[[22]](#footnote-22) these laws actually hinder the economic and social integration of Muslim women.

ODVV requests the special rapporteur to carefully pursue counter terrorism acts and measures in countries to tackle Islamophobia and possibility of prosecution and investigation of Muslims and other minorities.

ODVV is concerned about specific laws in some European countries especially in France that ban Muslim women to wear Hijab in public educational institutions. We believe it is in breach of articles 18, 26 and 27 of the ICCPR.

ODVV in deeply concerned about violence and discrimination against Muslim minorities around the world. The international community should make efforts to condemn these acts and ensure no one is being prosecuted because of his/her religion.

1. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/HatredAndDiscrimination.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=182&p_ref=61&lan=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9781137334831_3> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21565503.2018.1531770> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/opinion/europe-islamophobia-attacks.html> and also <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/16/a-summary-of-attacks-on-muslims-in-western-countries/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/sep/30/half-of-conservative-party-members-believe-islam-is-threat-poll-finds> and also <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/5/uks-conservative-party-suspends-14-for-islamophobic-comments> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/14/hold-one-in-four-muslims-experience-islamophobia-in-labour-party> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/14/over-half-muslim-labour-members-do-not-trust-party-to-tackle-islamophobia> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/14/hold-one-in-four-muslims-experience-islamophobia-in-labour-party> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.newstatesman.com/2009/07/mehdi-hasan-muslim-terrorism-white-british> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/fbi-sits-on-report-detailing-white-supremacist-terror-threat> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/201021_Jones_War_Comes_Home_v2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/fbi-sits-on-report-detailing-white-supremacist-terror-threat> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://news.sky.com/story/right-wing-extremism-fastest-growing-threat-says-uks-top-cop-in-counter-terrorism-12135071> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/01/macron-europe-new-clash-islamic-world> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/opinion/europe-islamophobia-attacks.html> see also <https://academic.oup.com/bjc/article/58/6/1281/4999978> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.brusselstimes.com/opinion/119513/beyond-the/> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48744153> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/06/03/how-will-austrias-new-headscarf-ban-affect-muslims/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <https://vfouka.people.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj4871/f/abdelgadirfoukajan2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)