



**1st OIC Observatory Report
on
Islamophobia –May 2007-March 2008**

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Executive Summary

One of the major issues facing present day international relations is the issue of Islamophobia. Islamophobia has existed since the time of inception of Islam. However in recent years, the phenomenon has assumed alarming proportion and has indeed become a major cause of concern for the Muslim world. Defamation of Islam and racial intolerance of Muslims in the western societies are on the rise. The proponents of Islamophobia, who for whatever reasons are either prejudiced or hold a negative view against Islam and Muslims, are active in defaming Islam. The Muslim world is particularly concerned because when the overwhelming majority of Muslims strictly adhere to the principles and teaching of peace and tolerance are against any form of terrorism or extremism in Islam, these vested groups of Islamaphobes are giving a negative portrayal that Islam and Muslims are supportive of terrorism and extremism. They also ignore the fact that many Muslim countries are themselves victims of terror and active partners of the international community in combating terror and extremism. As a result of the rising trend of Islamophobia, Muslims in different parts of the world, in the West in particular, are being stereotyped, profiled and subjected to different forms of discriminatory treatment. The most sacred symbols of Islam, in particular the sacred image of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is being defiled and denigrated in the most insulting, offensive and contemptuous manner to incite hatred and unrest in society. In the backdrop of this situation, the Heads of State and Government during the 3rd Extraordinary Summit held in Makkah in December 2005 adopted the OIC Ten Year Program of Action which inter-alia, approved the establishment of an Observatory at the OIC General Secretariat to counter Islamophobia by monitoring all forms of Islamophobia and to initiate a structured dialogue in order to project the true values of Islam. The leaders also tasked the Observatory to issue an annual report. The decision to submit the report was reiterated by the OIC Foreign Ministers at the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held in Islamabad in May 2007. Accordingly the first report of the Observatory was prepared covering the period between May–December 2007 and is submitted for consideration of the Eleventh Islamic Summit Conference held in Dakar, Senegal on March 13-14, 2008.

The Observatory Report 2007 is a collation of incidents and developments that vindicate the Ummah's concerns over the rising trend of Islamophobia. The Report also provides an account of the activities and efforts on the part of the OIC Observatory activities and the efforts made by the OIC Secretary General for the period covered, in countering Islamophobia and in bringing the issue to the forefront of the agenda of the international community, to create awareness of its dangerous implications on global peace and security and to stress on the urgent need to develop a collective political will to combat it. The present Report being the first one produced by the Observatory on Islamophobia has been developed from a historical perspective, elaborating on the definition and causes of this phenomenon and recording the developments during the period under review.

The Observatory Report is presented in four main sections: (i) the conceptual part where the term Islamophobia is discussed including its definition, historical background and its root causes, (ii) recent manifestations of Islamophobia including Islamophobic incidents and derogatory political statements from some Western politicians as well as some positive developments that have been observed (iii) the activities and efforts of the Observatory and the General Secretariat at regional and international levels to counter Islamophobia highlighting the OIC activities in this regard, and (iv) conclusions and recommendations. The methodology in compiling the report included collation of reports and studies by credible research organizations and think tanks, outcomes of international conferences, UN documents and resolutions and monitoring available reports of Islamophobic incidents. The report focused on OIC concerns over the harsh situation that Muslims are facing while

living in the western societies, as well as vilification of Islam in that part of the world. The Observatory had also based its conclusions on statements by Muslim and antiracist groups, materials published by international human rights organizations and monitoring bodies, research findings, media reports etc. The Report also highlights the legal aspects of Islamophobia by emphasizing that the phenomenon of Islamophobia is in contradiction with the requirements of the international instruments that ensure protection against defamation of religion and elimination of all aspects of discrimination and intolerance against Muslims. The report also provides strong arguments on the urgent need for the international community to come up with a binding legal instrument to fight the menace of Islamophobia. The Report has underscored that the right to freedom of expression should be carried out with responsibilities and cannot be a license to cause hurt, insults, provoke and incite hatred among religions by defaming, denigrating and insulting the sacred religious symbols of Islam and causing unrest and violence in societies.

In compiling its first report, the Observatory took into account the complexity of the issue of Islamophobia and the way it is perceived by its protagonists. In trying to come up with an acceptable definition of Islamophobia, the report took into consideration the definition provided by the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance, Mr. Doudou Diene who defined Islamophobia as “a baseless hostility and fear vis-à-vis Islam and as a result a fear of and aversion towards all Muslims or majority of them.” The UN Special Rapporteur in his report submitted to the 6th session of the UN Human Rights Council in 2007, mentioned that Islamophobia was a growing phenomenon and a matter of concern in the aftermath of the events of the 9/11. The Observatory Report has used the findings of polls, studies and reports of reputed international institutions to establish the recognition of rise in Islamophobia. In this respect, the reports and findings of the August 2006 *USA Today/Gallup* poll; the Washington based **Human Rights First**, 2007 Report on Islamophobia; **the Pew Research Center Report** of September 25, 2007 and the **The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)** have been incorporated. **The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)'s latest 2007 "Third Report on the Netherlands"** released on 12 February 2008 has also been referred to as it substantiates our concerns of Islamophobia. This report clearly mentions of the "dramatic" increase of Islamophobia in the Netherlands and that Muslims of the Netherlands have been the subject of stereotyping, stigmatizing and sometimes outright racist political discourse and of biased media portrayal have been disproportionately targeted by security and other policies.

The Observatory Report states that the phenomenon of Islamophobia will continue to be an issue of concern for the international community in the near future. However it believes that the outrage and outcry of the Muslim world against Islamophobic incidents, in particular the publishing of the defamatory cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the shocking and irresponsible remarks by Pope Benedict at a University in Germany succeeded in making an impact on the international community on the gravity of the issue. This was reflected in the trilateral joint statement by the OIC Secretary General, the UN Secretary-General and the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana in Jeddah 7 February 2006, and the joint statement on "rights to freedom of expression, peaceful protest" in Doha, Qatar, on 25 February, 2006 by the OIC Secretary-General, the UN Secretary General, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, the Foreign Minister of Spain and Foreign Minister of Turkey, the launching of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, the European Union and other Institutions initiatives to engage in a dialogue with the OIC, the US President's decision to appoint a Special Envoy to the OIC. The OIC Secretary General's participations in various international Conferences on inter-religious and inter-cultural tolerance together the Secretary General meetings with Heads of State and Government, Foreign Ministers and leading academics and NGO leaders of Western countries and Heads of International Organizations including the United Nations, the EU Presidency, OSCE, and Council of Europe, have contributed to sensitize the issue of Islamophobia. The announcement by the US Government to appoint a Special Envoy to the OIC and the Vatican's

decision to set up a department for dialogue with Muslims were considered to be among the positive developments. The initiatives undertaken by the OIC General Secretariat in combating Islamophobia have also been detailed in the report.

The Observatory Report took into account the important role of the Media in dealing with the issue of Islamophobia. The international conference organized jointly by the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the General Secretariat of the OIC under the title of “the Role of Media in the Development of Tolerance and Mutual Understanding” in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 26-27 April 2007 which was attended by political leaders and leading media personalities, and NGO members of both the Muslim world and the West was successful sensitizing the urgent and paramount need of objective reporting and responsible political discourse in fostering culture of tolerance and promoting mutual understanding and that freedom of expression should be linked with a sense of responsibility on the part of the party who is exercising the freedom.

The Report concludes that there is now a general awareness in the international community on Islamophobia and that western societies including Governments, NGOs and the civil society have started to take serious note of concerns of the Muslim Ummah of the dangers of defamation of Islam and their willingness to engage in dialogue. The Report also states that these developments still fall short of the actions and political will to address the issue in definitive terms. The Islamophobes remain free to carry on their assaults due to absence of necessary legal measures against the misuse or abuse of the right to freedom of expression. The Report felt that the OIC Member States may therefore continue to vigorously pursue their efforts to combat Islamophobia at the both multilateral and bilateral levels. A set of recommendations to strengthen the Observatory's efforts to combat Islamophobia have been provided for in the Report for consideration of the Summit.

1. Introduction

1.1. Historical Roots

Prejudice and intolerance vis-à-vis Islam is an old phobia, and has been a stubborn and distinctive trait of Western society and the European psyche since the seventh century.

Barely a few years after the advent of Islam, Christian Byzantine and Greek monks, and the Church establishment launched an intractable campaign of slanders and denigration against Islam, depicting it as a mere apostasy and a sort of barbaric paganism.

Although Islam had recognized Christianity as a revealed religion and venerated the message of Jesus Christ, considering it a part of the divine monotheistic faiths, the Church authorities insisted on adopting an open hostility to Islam.

Alarmed by the swift spread of Islam from Arabia into many regions in the Middle East and by the instant embrace of its teachings by the people of the region, the Church realized that it was facing a new, daunting challenge from a strong and determined rival. The relationship between the two has since been locked into an antagonism mode.

The modern time historian Groeber wrote in his book “The Nature of Culture”: Islam spread in the whole world in a very short period of time like sunshine spreads in moments. Islam did not obey the same standards and criteria as other spiritual and social phenomena. For it did not have a childhood and an adulthood; rather, it emerged all at once as a perfectly integrated phenomenon. The fact that it spread without a physical “table” was one of its miracles. In this way Islam acquired a universal identity since its inception, whereas Christianity did not have the same political impact until three hundred years after the death of Jesus Christ thanks to the conversion of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine.

The quick conquest of large areas in Asia, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula by Muslims in a short span of time during the Seventh and the beginning of the Eighth centuries sent strong shock waves of fear and awe across all Europe.

This fact accentuated the influence and authority of the Roman Church and the Byzantine Church, and increased their propensity to confront Islam. Empowered by this obsession, the Roman Church Pope Urban managed at the “Council of Clermont” in 1095 to mobilize Europe’s monarchs to launch a crusade against the “infidel Saracens” (Arabs and Muslims) in order to “liberate” the holy lands from their rule. The Crusaders war which lasted almost two centuries was instrumental in instilling in the collective memories of Westerners a lasting and a deep-seated sense of rancor, hate, and hostility towards Islam and Muslims, which is still lingering in the psyche of many Europeans.

A few centuries later, a new surge of symptoms of this phobia of Islam and Muslims emerged in Spain at the time of the “Inquisition Courts” in the closing stages of the fifteenth century. The Court, named after a former tribunal in the Roman Catholic Church and directed at suppressing “heresy”, became an infamous landmark of brutal persecution, intolerance, and xenophobic practices in the history of humanity.

According to its ruling all Muslims living in Spain, by their millions, were ordered to forcefully convert to Christianity or face killing or expulsion from Spain, a fact which resulted in untold suffering and tragedies that marked the history of medieval Spain.

It is to be recalled here that under Islamic rule, Spain was the most advanced, prosperous, and tolerant land in Europe, with a radiant civilization that enriched Europe in all fields of science, knowledge, and morality.

The fall of Constantinople into the hands of Ottoman Empire and the subsequent Muslim incursions into and conquest of large expanses of land in Eastern Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were other reasons to deepen hostility between the West and Islam. By the eighteenth century, the balance of power started to tilt sharply in favor of the West, as the decadence of Islamic power became irreversible. The same century witnessed the ascendance of the West as a result of its military might, advanced science and technology, as well as huge resources of wealth accumulated from the discoveries in America and Africa. Discoveries led to the era of colonialism and the total collapse of Muslim civilization. Muslim populations from the confines of Indonesia to the shores of the Eastern Atlantic were subjugated to the brutal rule of the “colonial masters”, who claimed that their aim was to “civilize” the conquered nations. Under such rule, Muslims suffered deprecation, foreign occupation, exploitation, and, subsequently, massacres and ethnic cleansing.

Throughout these periods, there were many shine epochs of fruitful contacts and interconnection that allowed for beneficial cooperation and a profitable commerce. Islam and Christendom were not merely competitors or rivals. They borrowed and learned from each other in all domains: scholarship, philosophy, medicine, architecture, technology, and most importantly in scientific enquiry etc. but it is an established fact that, in the Middle Ages, the civilizational traffic was mainly one way, from Muslims to Christians. The European historian Schaft says in a very interesting footnote: “The Arabians, we repeat, are to be regarded as the proper founders of the *physical science*, in the sense that we are accustomed to attach to this word.”

Therefore, the existence of fear and hate of the eternalized “Muslim enemy” still lurking under the surface of European normality has now come to the fore in a new modern form, and will, undoubtedly, remain as such in the foreseeable future.

By the middle of the last century, the religious factor in the hostile relationship between Islam and Christendom started to wane down to be replaced by another subtle phobia emanating from the physical presence of many Muslim immigrants in their midst, who were seen as an “enemy within”, and as a danger to the cultures and values of the West.

An increasing number of Western politicians and opinion leaders have started to base the thrust of their political activities on the premise of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant policies. They sense that this premise is gaining greater receptivity and may well continue to be tolerated and increasingly accepted across the spectrum of European societies.

Brought up on the teachings of the old enlightenment curriculum, namely the monoculture devoted to perpetrating the views of Western civilization as inherently superior to its rivals, many Europeans feel irritated from the mounting presence of foreigners of different cultures in their societies and unable to adjust to the cultural diversity that has become a fact of life in today’s global village.

At the present time the demographic landscape of Europe has seen many changes and alterations. East Europe is the host of predominant Muslim populated States as Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, and, to a certain extent, Macedonia. Almost 20 million Muslims are now living in many Western European States for the first time in history.

In this climate of unease, Islamophobia has started to take a different turn to the worst. Many observatories of human rights violations in Europe refer openly to the emergence of a new phenomenon of “racism” in Europe based on hate of people on account of their religion and ethnicity.

Despising Islam as a religion has become personified and directed against Muslims individually and collectively. The new Islamophobia, in a word, has emerged as a racist movement of intolerance and discrimination and should be dealt with as such.

1.2. Contemporary Period

The end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union towards the turn of the 20th century that brought about an end to ideological barriers and divisions had infused a sense of optimism in the international community for peace, stability and development. This optimism was however short lived when the world became witness to virulent acts of xenophobia and ethnicity. Mass killings and violent acts of human rights violations took place in Central Europe, precisely in the Balkans, in which the Muslims were among the worst victims. The Srebrenica Genocide is one of those unfortunate examples.

The situation took a turn for the worse in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US. Discrimination and intolerance against Muslims and defamation of Islam, particularly in Europe and North America reached alarming proportions. The distortion of Islam and attempts to defame it as a faith supportive of extremism has been on the rise and Muslims were treated with suspicion and in many cases profiled as potential terrorists. As a result, they became victims of various forms of discrimination and stereotyping and violation of their human rights. This intolerance of Muslims commonly came to be known as Islamophobia.

In modern times there are some western scholars such as Samuel Huntington, Daniel Pipes (Middle East Policy Advisor), Steve Emerson (Jihad in America), and Bernard Lewis who are proponents of Islamophobia and have accentuated the issue of this phenomena through their writings. For more than a decade they have denigrated and demonized Muslims as "the others," juxtaposing them with idealized images of "civilized" Americans. According to Huntington, who has done much to popularize this notion, "Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic societies." In fact, when in 1993, Samuel Huntington wrote "The Clash of Civilizations", he set an example of an Islamophobic mindset by articulating very clearly his anti-Islam position. He states in his book that "the underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism," "It is Islam, a different civilization whose people is convinced of the superiority of their culture and is obsessed with the inferiority of their power." For nearly a decade now the propaganda machine has been in full force to "solve the Islamic and Muslim problem." The agenda is to manipulate public opinion so utterly and thoroughly that Muslims would soon be universally viewed as no more than expendable animals and their faith of Islam as a violent, illegitimate religion."¹

The idea behind all this discriminatory exercise takes us to also believe by agreeing with Vincent Geisser, French sociologist politologue, and researcher at Institute of research and study of the Arab and Muslim world, based in Paris, that "Islamophobia is not a resurgence of the old issue of *Crusades vs Jihad* – though it retains occasional traces of theological argument – but a deeply modern form of anti-Muslim racism."²

¹ Quoted by Wahida Valiante, "The Echoes of the Past", in: <http://www.printhis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=The+Echoes+of+the+Past+%28by+Wahida+Valiante%29+-+Media+Monitors+Network&expire=&urlID=3739404&fb=Y&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mediamonitors.net%2Fwahidavaliante2.html&partnerID=31> retrieved on December 14, 2007.

² V. Geisser, *op. cit.*, p.39.

In his report on the Working Session II of the OSCE High-Level Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, Bucharest 7-8 June 2007 the Personal Representative of the Chairman in Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, Ambassador Omar Urhun stated inter-alia that numerous speakers at the session expressed their concern that extremist elements of the Muslim community had become synonymous with the Muslim community as a whole in the eyes of many in the West. So much so that many Muslims who believed in tolerance and peaceful coexistence were being subjected to discrimination and viewed with suspicion. Following atrocities such as 9/11, the London and Madrid bombings and the murder in the Netherlands of Theo van Gogh, monitors like the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) had noted a rise in Islamophobia. This even manifested itself in new systems of profiling adopted by law enforcement agencies. Some Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) participating States bemoaned the fact that such manifestation of Islamophobia seemed to be a recent phenomena, when Muslims had been living peacefully in and contributing to the welfare of their societies for centuries."

The distorted image of Islam and Muslims presented by Western media and in public discourse reflected a general lack of understanding of the Muslim faith, thus sowing the seeds of fear and hostility towards Islam in Western society. As a result, this new international environment gave rise to the critical need for a comprehensive assessment of the present scenario for forging about an understanding of the true nature of problems leading to the current Muslim image and their consequences.

1.3. The OIC Observatory on Islamophobia

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has been tasked by the Heads of State and Government during the 3rd Extraordinary Summit in Makkah to counter Islamophobia and to devote itself to address the issue by underscoring the dangerous implications of Islamophobia on global society in general and the Muslims in particular. Such task gained momentum when the OIC Foreign Ministers participating in the Ministerial Brainstorming/Thematic Session on Countering Discrimination and Intolerance against Muslims and Defamation of Islam on the sidelines of the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held in Islamabad in May 2007 decided that the Observatory should prepare an annual report on Islamophobia.

Accordingly, the present Annual Report was prepared, and it seeks to analyze the phenomenon in the context of the discrimination and denial of human rights suffered by Muslims on account of Islamophobia and to put forward a set of recommendations to effectively address the issue. The methodology followed was to collate reports and studies by credible research and think tanks, international conferences, UN documents and resolutions and monitoring available reports of Islamophobic incidents. The report focused on OIC concerns over the harsh situation that Muslims are facing while living in the West, meaning the US and Europe, as well as vilification of Islam in that part of the world. The Observatory had also relied to a large extent on statements by Muslim and antiracist groups, materials published by international human rights organizations and monitoring bodies, research findings, media reports and official documents that the Observatory has been compiling since the 34th ICFM.

The report has been presented in four main sections: (i) the conceptual part where the term Islamophobia is discussed including historical background and its root causes, (ii) contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia, where special attention is given to derogatory political statements from Western politicians and some positive developments are given; (iii) the efforts done at international level to counter Islamophobia highlighting the OIC activities to counter it, and (iv) conclusions and recommendations.

The Heads of State and Government during the 3rd Extraordinary Summit of the OIC in Makkah, 2005 took into account the grave concerns of the Muslim world on the rising trend of Islamophobia, and mandated the OIC General Secretariat to establish an Observatory to monitor and counter Islamophobia and to take necessary countering measures and to initiate a structured dialogue in order to project the true values of Islam and empower Muslim countries to help in the war against extremism and terrorism.

The Observatory since its establishment has been active in implementing the decision of the 3rd Extraordinary Summit. A major development in this regard was the holding of a Brainstorming Session on Countering Discrimination and Intolerance against Muslims and Defamation of Islam during the 34th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) in Islamabad in May, 2007. At the Session, the OIC Foreign Ministers underscored that one of the main reasons for Islamophobic actions was ignorance and that enough was not being done to project Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance. The Session also concluded that it was wrong to draw a link between Islam and terrorism and urged the OIC Secretary General to foster close ties with United Nations and Western multilateral organizations, such as European Union (EU) and OSCE through both bilateral and multilateral actions and lobby. They recommended that along with countering Islamophobia, the OIC General Secretariat should also engage in a dialogue with the West, underscoring that the dialogue had to be a two-way perspective in order to create confidence among all faiths in respecting each other's diversity.

The OIC Foreign Ministers emphasized on the necessity of drawing a legal framework through which an international legislation combating defamation of Islam and discrimination of Muslims is set in order to provide a tool to address the issue properly. In this matter, they strongly urged the OIC Member States to act and work together in international *fora* lobbying for Muslim interests. It was proposed that the Human Rights Council (HRC) was one of the suitable institutions in which resolutions protecting Islam and Muslims should be submitted and adopted. The Foreign Ministers laid great importance on education, in particular for the younger generation in order to enlighten them with the positive and real image of Islam mainly in matters related to tolerance towards other faiths, the quality of being Muslim in terms of respecting other's privacy.

The Observatory Annual Report on Islamophobia – 2007, being the first of its kind produced by the OIC, apart from recording Islamophobic incidents, has also tried to analyze the phenomenon in the context of the discrimination and denial of human rights suffered by Muslims on account of Islamophobia and to put forward a set of recommendations to effectively address the issue.

1.4. Definition

The dictionary definition of the word "phobia" is "**a strong fear or dislike: an irrational or very powerful fear and dislike of something**". Simplistic as may be, Islamophobia by this very definition would mean an irrational or very powerful fear or dislike of Islam". Islamophobia however goes much beyond this and incorporates racial hatred, intolerance, prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping. The phenomenon of Islamophobia in its essence is a religion-based resentment. It has two distinct aspects: (1) from the viewpoint of the protagonists of Islamophobia and (2) from the victims' point of view.

The neologism Islamophobia was launched in 1996 by the "Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia". In the following year, the Commission released the Runnymede Trust Report "*Islamophobia: a challenge for all of us*"³ institutionalizing the word Islamophobia to mean

³ Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: A Challenge For All Of Us* 1997, in <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf> retrieved on November 24, 2007.

"prejudice against Muslims", though the word literally means "undue fear of Islam". The Runnymede Trust identified seven components that in their opinion define Islamophobia. These are:

- ☒ Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to change;
- ☒ Islam is seen as separate and "other". It does not have values in common with other cultures, is not affected by them and does not influence them;
- ☒ Islam is seen as inferior to the West. It is barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist;
- ☒ Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a clash of civilizations;
- ☒ Muslim Criticisms of the West are rejected out of hand;
- ☒ Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society
- ☒ Anti Muslim hostility is seen as neutral or normal.

Since the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, presided over a December 2004 conference titled "Confronting Islamophobia"⁴ and the Council of Europe has condemned "Islamophobia" in May 2005 in a Summit, the term Islamophobia has achieved a degree of linguistic and political acceptance.

The Muslim world considers misconception and incorrect interpretation of Islam and the values it stands for, as the cause of Islamophobia. The distorted and incorrect depiction of Islam has rendered Muslims to become the latest victims of racial discrimination and xenophobia. They are facing religious profiling and humiliation in the West and other non Muslim countries. Muslim citizens in different parts of the world including Europe and the USA are facing restrictions on travel. Muslim citizens and nationals of Europe experience discrimination in finding jobs, access to social security facilities, in performing their religious rites and upholding their cultural and religious identity.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance, Mr. Doudou Diène, in his report to the 6th Session of the UN Human Rights Council on the manifestations of defamation of religions and in particular on the serious implications of Islamophobia on the enjoyment of all rights has documented the dangers of the issue in clear terms. He defined Islamophobia "as a baseless hostility and fear vis-à-vis Islam, and as a result a fear of and aversion towards all Muslims or the majority of them. It also refers to the practical consequences of this hostility in terms of discrimination, prejudices and unequal treatment of which Muslims (individuals and communities) are victims and their exclusion from major political and social spheres. The term was invented in response to a new reality: the increasing discrimination against Muslims which has manifested itself in recent years."⁵ The Special Rapporteur in his report⁶ also mentioned that "Islamophobia is a growing phenomenon and a matter of concern in the aftermath of the events of 11 September, 2001."

⁴ He said at the occasion that "[a]n honest look at Islamophobia must also acknowledge the policy context. The historical experience of Muslims includes colonialism and domination by the West, either direct or indirect. Resentment is fed by the unresolved conflicts in the Middle East...[I]slamophobia is at once a deeply personal issue for Muslims, a matter of great importance to anyone concerned about upholding universal values, and a question with implications for international harmony and peace. We should not underestimate the resentment and sense of injustice felt by members of one of the world's great religions, cultures and civilizations." Quoted by M. Abu Sway, "Islamophobia: Meaning, Manifestations, Causes",

in: <http://www.passia.org/meetings/2006/Islamophobia.htm> retrieved on December 27, 2007.

⁵ Human Rights Council, document No. A/HRC/6/6, August 21, 2007, p.8 para.19

⁶ Cf. Human Rights Council, *op. cit.*, p.5, para.1

1.4.1. The Root Causes of Islamophobia

Based on the monitoring of Islamophobic incidents and the outcomes and statements at various meeting, conferences and workshops and credible reports on Islamophobia, the OIC Observatory identified the following as the root causes of Islamophobia:

- a) **Historical perspective.** Islam came under attack from Christianity and Judaism from its very inception. Islam as a modern faith with its liberal values in terms of upholding human rights, equality and human dignity, the rights of women had found greater acceptability to the people.
- b) **Ignorance or insufficient knowledge of Islam in non-Muslim societies.** The animosity between Islam and Christianity in the early stages of history have contributed in the development of a mind set among the common people of the West that Islam was a religion that lived by the sword and preached violence and hatred against non believers and that it stood to challenge the Western democratic life.
- c) **Insufficient dissemination of information about Muslim** countries being victims to terror attacks by extremists, the firm rejection of terror and extremism by the political leaders of the Muslim world, as well as **Misrepresentation** and incorrect interpretation of Islam at various levels has contributed significantly to the growth of Islamophobia.
- d) **Abuse or misuse of Freedom of Expression** by the media and vested interests. The sanctity of freedom of expression has been abused by individuals to cause hurt and insult to Muslims by provocative and defamatory remarks and publications against sacred symbols of Muslims and denigrating Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These incitements were the acts of individuals, groups and organizations with vested interests and the sole intention to incite violence and inter-religious intolerance.
- e) **Lack of legal mechanism** to prevent provocative literature and statements that incite religious and intercultural intolerance as well as the absence of a binding international instrument to contain defamation of religions.
- f) **The debate** on religious intolerance and discrimination against Muslims has mostly remained **confined to the educated elite** and failed to reach the grass roots.
- g) **Anti Muslim violence has been exacerbated after 9/11** by perpetuation of stereotypes and generalizations about Muslims and the idea of collective responsibility of all Muslims for acts of others sharing the same faith.
- h) Fear that jobs and **economic opportunities would come under threat** from growing migrant Muslim population in European countries.
- i) **Lack of committed political will** to enter into a serious dialogue that would produce necessary legal measures against those involved in willful provocation and incitement of inter religious and inter cultural intolerance.
- j) **The escalation of the Middle East crisis by the continued occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories** and the delay in giving the Palestinian people their inalienable right to their own homeland through establishment of the independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

1.5. Scope of Analysis: Muslims in the US and Europe

The Observatory felt that initially it would concentrate on Western world where Islamophobia was more pronounced and visible. This is because Muslims in the West have experienced long-standing discrimination.

Muslims in US have also been victims of Islamophobia. Several key polls indicated that the level of Islamophobia continues to be on the rise today in American society. An August 2006 *USA Today/Gallup* poll showed that 39 percent of Americans felt at least some prejudice against Muslims. The same poll indicated that Americans' personal discomfort with Muslims is reflected in survey questions dealing with their reaction to being near Muslims in different situations. Nearly one quarter of Americans, 22%, stated that they would not like to have a Muslim as a neighbor. Slightly fewer, 18%, stated they felt nervous if they noticed a Muslim woman flying on the same airplane as themselves, while significantly more – 31% – stated they would feel nervous if they noticed a Muslim man on their flight. The diagram on the findings of the poll is reproduced below:

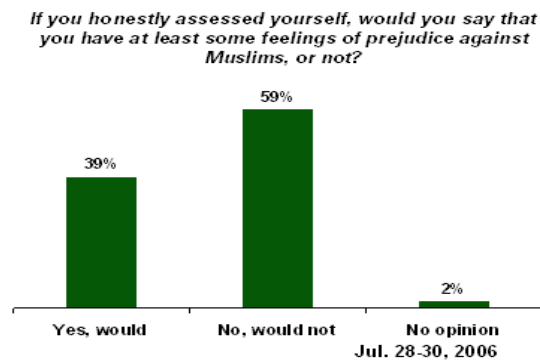


Fig.1. How Americans feel towards Muslims. (Source: *USA Today/Gallup* poll released in August 10, 2006)⁷

Muslims in Europe faced even greater discrimination than Muslim Americans in civic and political life. As European Muslims tended to be much less socio-economically integrated than Muslim Americans, their feelings of alienation have been correspondingly higher. This has caused many of the young European Muslims to be attracted by radicalism.

Muslims in Europe have encountered several barriers to integration. The ethnic and religious diversity that has long been a fact of American life is a relatively new phenomenon in most of the nations of Western Europe. Nationality in Europe has historically been defined ethnically since the Westphalia Treaty in 1648. Many European countries also tend to be socially and religiously more liberal than their Muslim communities. And as immigration was originally viewed as a temporary work arrangement, neither the immigrants nor their host countries have made concerted efforts toward integration.

Most Westerners who think Islamic identity is growing tend to consider it a bad thing. Among those in the French public who see Islamic identity on the rise, 87% call it a bad thing; in Germany, 83% say so; in Spain (82%). For those in the United States, Western Europe, and Russia who see growing Islamic identity as a bad thing, the primary concern cited is that it may lead to violence. However, many are also worried that it may keep Muslims from integrating into the larger society. For Muslims in Germany who see growing Islamic identity as worrisome, concern about retarding integration is

⁷ Cf: USA Today/Gallup "Anti-Muslim Sentiments Fairly Commonplace" in <http://www.gallup.com/poll/24073/AntiMuslim-Sentiments-Fairly-Commonplace.aspx> retrieved on December 15, 2007.

paramount for 58%, while fewer than one-in-five worry about violence. Among French Muslims, concerns are split between violence (40%) and integration (45%)⁸.

The figure presented below gives a clearer picture of how the Western views help in raising the sentiments of Islamophobia:

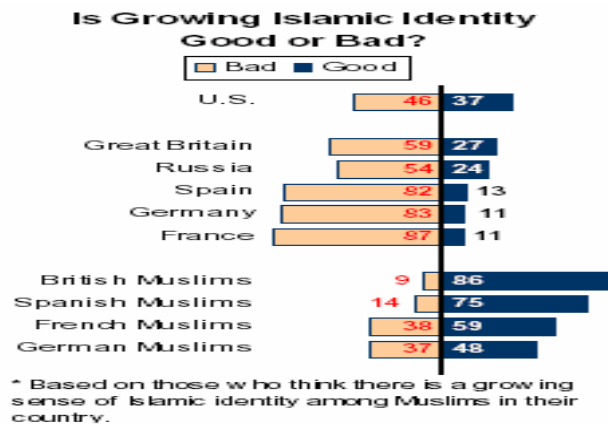


Fig.2 – How growing Islamic identity is perceived by Westerners. (Pew Global Attitude Project)⁹

These projections clearly support the belief that the phenomena of Islamophobia is on the rise. On the other hand, the aftermath of Islamophobic incidents in the West have served to fuel hostility and anti-Western feelings in the Muslim world, and the rhetoric used in the war against terrorists labeling them as Islamic fascists, Islamic extremist and any other Islamophobic terminology have created an unjust and wrong interpretation of the Islamic message in the Western and Non Muslim world.

In the West where Jews are defended through anti-Semitic laws, Muslims feel discriminated and ignored by not being protected by similar laws. Anti-Semitic remarks have always either widely been condemned or punished while no such safeguards are in place against acts of Islamophobia. In fact many Islamophobic incidents have been allowed unhindered under the pretext of freedom of expression.

To quote Amber Haque, "Muslim criticisms of the West are rejected out of hand. Hostility to or dislike of Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and anti-Muslim hostility is accepted as natural and normal."¹⁰ In sum, "Islamophobia creates polarization in the wider society and provokes discrimination and injustice towards Muslims in all walks of life. Women and children are specially exposed to hostile treatment, making them feel unsafe. Hostility does nothing to foster self-esteem. The young generation born and raised in the West may face an identity crisis and opt to bond more closely with their parents' backgrounds and distrust the West. Such distrust may lead some young Muslims to drop out of mainstream society and this fosters the conditions that make them readily influenced by extremist groups, which offers vulnerable youth a strong sense of identity and purpose. At the national level, such social disintegration can weaken the social fabric of a country when a party of its (educated) minority withdraws from society and fails to contribute effectively to the growth of society at large."¹¹

⁸Cf. Pew Global Attitude Project, "Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity", in <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=254> released on June 07, 2006, retrieved on December 05, 2007.

⁹ Cf. Pew Global Attitude Project, "Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns About Religious and Cultural Identity", in <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=254> released on June 07, 2006, retrieved on December 05, 2007.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Haque, *op. cit.*, p.3.

¹¹ Idem, p.10.

1.6. Islamophobia Awareness as an Issue in the West

An important point to note that the phenomenon of Islamophobia is not only a concern voiced by Muslims. Many western governments, including the EU and its institutions, and reputable western research institutions and organizations have begun to conform to the Muslim concerns about Islamophobia.

Some findings of selected western institutions recognizing the raise of Islamophobia are reproduced below:

- a) The Washington based **Human Rights First**¹², 2007 Report on Islamophobia documented authentic sources which substantiates that Islamophobia is on the rise in most of the Western societies. In its introduction, the report stated anti immigrant and anti Muslim rhetoric by extremist political figures in Europe has contributed to the rise in anti-Muslim discrimination and violence across Europe. Along with this, national security concerns and economic uncertainty has created a political climate in which the Muslims are the object of fear and exclusion.
- b) The **Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)**¹³'s Report on "The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States 2007: Presumption of Guilt" on 14 June, 2007 indicates a 25 percent increase in the total number of complaints of anti-Muslim bias from 2005 to 2006, with citizenship delays being the major issue. The CAIR's report is mentioned as being the only annual study of its kind, outlined 2,467 incidents and experiences of anti-Muslim violence, discrimination and harassment in 2006, the highest number of civil rights cases ever recorded in the Washington-based group's report. (Hundreds of anti-Muslim incidents reported immediately following the 9/11 attacks were detailed in a separate report.)
- c) **The Pew Research Center**¹⁴ Report of September 25, 2007 conducted a poll in the US which concluded that the findings indicated public attitudes about Muslims and Islam have grown more negative in the United States in recent years. For example, the belief that Islam encourages violence has increased among groups that express mostly negative views of Muslims, such as conservative Republicans and among college graduates. The proportion of college graduates saying Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence saw a significant increase from 28 percent in 2005 to 45 percent today. Furthermore, college graduates are now as likely as those with no college experience (44%) to express this point of view.
- d) **The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)** in a foreword of its document entitled, "Perceptions of Discrimination and Islamophobia: Voices from Members of the Muslims Communities, the European Union"¹⁵ of 2007, acknowledged that the evidence gathered by the EUMC over the last few years indicated that since September 11, European Muslims have been seriously affected by an "increasingly hostile social climate". The Director of the EUMC stated that it was important to recount the experiences of European Muslims in

¹² The Human Rights *First* is a non-profit, nonpartisan international human rights organization founded in 1978, based in New York and Washington D.C. without government funding in order maintain its independence. For more details about the organization and its activities, please see: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/>

¹³ The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is an advocacy group for Muslims in North America that was created in June of 1994; its professed goals are to "enhance understanding of Islam, promote justice and empower American Muslims." For more details about the council and its activities, please see: www.cair.com

¹⁴ It is a nonpartisan fact tank that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world through public opinion polling. For more details about the center and its activities, please see: www.pewresearch.org

¹⁵ Available at http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/muslim/Perceptions_EN.pdf retrieved on January 12, 2007.

regard to discrimination and Islamophobic incidents and discourse which has been increasingly found in the public and political domain and also to identify the social and political context which gives rise to this verbal and physical aggression.

The EUMC Report 2006 entitled "Muslims in the European Union - Discrimination and Islamophobia"¹⁶ made clear mention of the "disadvantaged position of Muslim minorities, evidence of a rise in Islamophobia" and that the "concern over processes of alienation and radicalisation have triggered an intense debate in the European Union regarding the need for re-examining community cohesion and integration policies." The report observed that European Muslims were a highly diverse mix of ethnicities, religious affiliation, philosophical beliefs, political persuasion, secular tendencies, languages and cultural traditions, constituting the second largest religious group of Europe's multi-faith society and those Muslim communities were no different from other communities in their complexity. It stated that discrimination against Muslims could be attributed to Islamophobic attitudes, as much as to racist and xenophobic resentments, as these elements are in many cases inextricably intertwined. The report raised the central questions of how to avoid stereotypical generalizations, how to reduce fear and how to strengthen cohesion in diverse European societies while countering marginalization and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or belief. The report took stock of existing government and civil society initiatives targeting Muslims and concludes with a number of opinions for policy action by EU Member State governments and the European institutions to combat Islamophobia and to foster integration and community cohesion.

- e) **The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)** latest 2007 "Third Report on the Netherlands"¹⁷ released on 12 February 2008 revealed that there was a "dramatic" increase of Islamophobia in the Netherlands. The report found that Muslims of the Netherlands have been subject of stereotyping, stigmatizing and sometimes outright racist political discourse and of biased media portrayal have been disproportionately targeted by security and other policies. The report made specific mention that in recent years Dutch politicians had resorted to "stereotyping, stigmatizing and sometimes outright racist remarks concerning Muslims and to derogatory remarks about Islam, in both cultural and religious terms." The report stated that Islam in the Netherlands has been portrayed as a violent religion with Muslims being a major threat to the country. The Dutch society, as per the findings of the ECRI report has repeatedly qualified Islam as a subculture and that Muslims were the carriers of backward values, generally incompatible with democracy.

2. Contemporary Manifestations of Islamophobia

Islamophobia is one of the major priorities of the OIC. The Observatory has tried to keep a track of major incidents in 2007 which is attached as Annex "A"¹⁸.

The recent past has witnessed numerous incidents of aggression on Muslims and vilification of Islam, the most outrageous being the Danish caricatures, Pope Benedict XVI remarks, and derogatory political statements against Islam from some Western politicians.

¹⁶ For more details, please see: EUMC, "Muslims in the European Union - Discrimination and Islamophobia", available at http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/muslim/Manifestations_EN.pdf retrieved on December 14, 2007.

¹⁷ For more details, please see: ECRI, "Third Report on Netherlands" available at http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ecri/2-country-by-country_approach/netherlands/Netherlands%20third%20report%20-%20cri08-3.pdf retrieved on February 12, 2008.

¹⁸ Please see p.28.

2.1. Some Derogatory Western Political Statements

The outrage of the Muslim world against the Danish caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) triggered the debate on Islamophobia as a global issue and raised the question whether the right to freedom of expression could justify remarks and publications that are provocative and insulting and create unrest and violence in societies. Although there were expressions of regret from Western governments on the incident, there were no concrete steps on the part of the Western governments to prevent such acts even though the safeguards are provided in international instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As a result the provocations and incitements continued impeding the healing process among the diverse communities in the European society. In fact, the right to freedom of expression has been used to legitimize vilification of Islam and discrimination of Muslims.

The most glaring instance supporting this is Dutch MP Geert Wilders, the leader of the far right Freedom Party, calling for a ban of the Noble Qur'an in the Netherlands. In his words, he stated that "ban this wretched book like *"Mein Kampf"* is banned." Wilders, whose party holds nine seats in the 150-member parliament, wrote in a letter published in the local *De Volkskrant* newspaper and cited by *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*: "I am fed up with Islam in the Netherlands: no more Muslim immigrants allowed. "I am fed up with the worship of Allah and Muhammad in the Netherlands: no more mosques," wrote the far-right lawmaker.¹⁹ Danish debate on freedom of expression continued in 2007 when the Danish People's Party has used a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as an election campaign under the slogan "Freedom of speech is Danish, censorship is not", followed by the words "We defend Danish values". The material was used during the campaign for November's general election²⁰.

Many European politicians have inflammatory statements against Islam and Muslim. For example, "among the Nordic states, Denmark is the country where Islamophobia has gained the strongest roots. The Danish People's Party have, with the demagogue Pia Kjaersgaard in a leading role, [verbally] harassed Muslims for years. Just like in Sweden, a number of extreme Rightist and openly Nazi groups spreading Islamophobic propaganda exists." In Sweden, "it's the equivalent of the Danish People's Party, the Sweden Democrats, who have made Islamophobia into politics."²¹

In the Netherlands, there is the case of the same Dutch MP Geert Wilders wanting to release a film vilifying the holy Qur'an. This case is similar to incident happened in 2003, when a relatively unknown Dutch politician, Pim Fortuyn became famous because of his remarks against Muslims. Pim stated that Muslims were '*achterlijk*', a word that fits somewhere between 'retarded' or 'backward' in English. He also stated that the Dutch should only accept non-Islamic immigrants, and turn away Islamic immigrants at the border. For this controversy, he was expelled from the political party he led (*Leefbaar Nederland – Livable Holland*), but he created his own party (*List Pim Fortuyn*) that has gained huge popularity since most of the members of the *Leefbaar Nederland* shifted to his new party, and after his assassination, it became the second largest in the Netherlands²². There is also Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali refugee who renounced Islam, became a Dutch MP and spoke out against the religion, only to relocate in the US after a row about her asylum application. She has provoked the ire of Muslims due to her anti-Islam position and by denigrating Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s family as she considered him a pedophile and said Islam is inferior to Western culture. She assumed that under Dutch law, Mohammad's marriage to six-year-old A'ishah (whose

¹⁹ See: <http://www.islamonline.com/news/newsfull.php?newid=25635> retrieved on August 15, 2007.

²⁰ Cf. The Guardian, "Danish election ad reignites Muhammad cartoon controversy", in: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/cartoonprotests/story/0,,2199006,00.html> retrieved on October 27, 2007.

²¹ Cf. Global Politician, *op. cit.*

²² For more details, please see: B. van Dried (ed) *Confronting Islamophobia in Educational Practice*, Trethem Books, Amsterdam, 2004, p. vii-viii.

age is disputed by Muslim scholars) and his consequent consummation of the marriage when she was nine would make him a pedophile.

In Austria, Susanne Winter, a candidate for the Freedom Party who lost local elections in Graz in southeastern Austria, made derogatory remarks against Islam and also attacked Prophet's family during her campaign by stating that Prophet's marriage to a 6-year-old girl would make the prophet a "pedophile in today's system." Speaking at a rally, Winter demanded that Islam should be "thrown back where it came from, beyond the Mediterranean Sea."²³ In this country, Austrian right-wing firebrand Joerg Haider stated he planned to change building laws to prevent mosques and minarets being erected in his home province of Carinthia. Haider, Carinthia's governor, said he would ask its parliament to amend the building code to require towns and villages to consider "religious and cultural tradition" when dealing with construction requests. "We don't want a clash of cultures and we don't want institutions which are alien to our culture being erected in Western Europe," Haider said in a statement²⁴.

In Italy, the Northern League coordinator, Roberto Calderoli, organized the '**Pig Day**' against new **mosques** to have a competition to select the most beautiful pig to be placed in the places where somebody thinks of building a mosque, which according to him is not a centre for religious activities but the potential centre of recruitment of a terror cell. Calderoli announced protests against the building of a new mosque in Bologna. "The Bologna city council has given the go-ahead to the building of a new big mosque, I put myself and my pig at disposal of the committee against the mosque for a walk on the ground where Muslims want to build their mosque" he said today. Calderoli claims the success of a similar initiative in Lodi where the mosque was not built after the ground was declared infected after the walk made by the pig.²⁵

In Switzerland, members of the right-wing Swiss People's Party, currently the largest party in the Swiss parliament, have launched a campaign to have the building of minarets banned. For them, the minarets are not necessary for worship, but rather a symbol of Islamic law, and as such incompatible with Switzerland's legal system. Therefore, the Swiss People's Party suggested that Muslims are tolerated in Switzerland as long as they remain invisible to the public²⁶.

Actually, the question of minarets has sparked a debate all over the world, Europe in particular, and the symbol shown below became the banner of this all debate:



Recently, Liz Fekete, the deputy director of the International Race Relations (IRR) and editor of the *European Race Bulletin*, published a paper in the IRR website titled "Cultural cleansing?" in which she argues that "politicians and Christian leaders are supporting public campaigns and petitions

²³ Cf. Dier Spiegel, "Austrian Politician Calls Prophet Muhammad a 'Child Molester'" in <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,528549,00.html> retrieved on January 16, 2008.

²⁴ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL2739608920070827> retrieved on September 01, 2007.

²⁵ See: <http://www.agi.it/italy/news200709131553-pol-ren0060-art.html?op=makePrintable> retrieved on September 15, 2007.

²⁶ For more details, please see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6676271.stm> or <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/25/AR2007052500560> retrieved on June 06, 2007.

against the construction of mosques which are being denounced for destroying Europe's Judaeo-Christian heritage."²⁷ It is important to quote excerpts from her arguments:

Central to the current public discussion of Islam is a kind of conjuring trick. By removing Muslims from the social reality they face here in Europe and linking them to the homogenous and repressive force that is said to be global Islam, the discourse vests them with an illusion of unity and power so subversive as to constitute the 'enemy within'. In reality, though, Europe's Muslim communities are so diverse - Turks, Kurds, Moroccans, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Somalis, Afghanis, Iraqis, Iranians, etc. - and so fragmented in ethnic, national, linguistic and sect terms and so economically marginalised - as to defy any attempt at unity, let alone power.

Muslims, as a faith group, are minorities in democratic secular states, with protected rights, including the right to practise their religion. The anti-mosque campaigners get round this inconvenient fact through a second conjuring trick: denying that Islam is a religion and categorising it instead as a political and criminal ideology that, in the name of security, must be cordoned off from the body politic. Hence, the proposal by Dutch MP, Geert Wilders, to ban the Koran which he argues is similar to *Mein Kampf* in its legitimisation of violence. In the same vein, the Frankfurt campaigners complained in a letter to the local newspaper that 'all Muslims' are 'incompatible with our legal order'; an Italian Forza Italia MP warned that 'Our land is contaminated with thousands of these dangerous [elements], spreading cancers which are centres for recruiting fanatics to be martyred in the holy war which Islam is waging against the West'; and Swiss SVP MP Oskar Freysinger sees in the minaret a 'symbol of political and aggressive Islam...a symbol of Islamic law. The minute you have minarets in Europe it means Islam will have taken over'.

The Observatory believes that the minaret issue has nothing to do with secularism, rather with discrimination against Muslims and being intolerant to Islam. On the other hand, it means that the Western grassroots have found legitimacy on the public discourse by their politicians in order to spark discrimination against Muslims. For example, in Europe, a group of citizens have created the Stop Islamisation Of Europe (SIOE) alliance, congregating people across Europe with the single aim of preventing Islam becoming a dominant political force in the old continent. It originated with the joining of *Stop Islamificering Af Danmark* (SIAD), a political party dedicated to stopping the Islamisation in Denmark, with a loose association of people in England, whose rallying cry is "No Sharia Here", who want to maintain English law and want to stop the creeping growth of *sharia* law in England. SIOE is growing in Europe with the amalgamation of similarly minded groups²⁸.

2.2. Some Positive Developments

Following the Danish Caricatures crisis, in a trilateral statement, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana, and the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu expressed similar concern about the recent escalation of violence. "We fully uphold the right of free speech," the statement said. "But we understand the deep hurt and widespread indignation felt in the Muslim World." We believe freedom of the press entails responsibility and discretion, and should respect the beliefs and tenets of all religions." They also called for renewed dialogue, among and between communities of different faiths and authorities of different countries. "We call on them to appeal for restraint and calm, in the spirit of friendship and mutual respect."²⁹

Another development following the Danish Cartoon crises was a joint statement on "rights to freedom of expression, peaceful protest" in Doha, Qatar, on 25 February, 2006³⁰ by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference,

²⁷ L. Fakete, "Cultural cleansing?" in: <http://www.irr.org.uk/2008/january/ha000009.html> retrieved on January 19, 2008.

²⁸ For more details, please see: <http://sioe.wordpress.com/about/>

²⁹ http://europa.eu/newsletter/archives2006/issue74/print_index_en.htm retrieved on December 24, 2007. Please refer to Annex C on page 56 for the full text.

³⁰ Please refer to Annex D on page 57 for the full text.

the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister of Qatar, the Foreign Minister of Spain and Foreign Minister of Turkey.

On February 13, 2006, Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP, met Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, OIC Secretary-General in Jeddah. Following their discussions held a week before and their joint statement with the United Nations Secretary-General issued on February 7, 2006, they discussed the way forward to renewing the dialogue between Europeans and the Muslim World. On its February 14, 2006's edition, the *Arab News* stated it "...can only be described as the first confidence-building measure between Europe and the Muslim world..."³¹ Top on the agenda of the meeting between the two dignitaries was a discussion on the ways and means of turning the tide of the raging furor over the blasphemous cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that were first published in a leading Danish newspaper in September, 2005. Solana agreed with Ihsanoglu's suggestion that the EU and the OIC should jointly make efforts to adopt a UN resolution on the lines of the existing Resolution No. 60/150, which calls for combating defamation of religions.

There is also sizeable opinion in the West that shares the concerns of the Muslim world. Islamophobic incidents mostly occur or motivated outside the official sphere of the Western states and governments. To illustrate, the 'Stop the Islamization of Europe' rally (SIOE) that was proposed to take place on September 11, 2007 in Brussels was banned by the city Mayor Freddy Thielemans. Also the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Terry Davis, made a statement condemning the initiative. In the Netherlands, the official position of the government is to counter Islamophobic actions from the opposition extreme right party Vlaams Belang, as it was in the case of pressures to ban the holy Qur'an from the society. The Italian Minister of Interior, Giuliano Amato, rejected calls for banning the Muslim veil in public places stating that the ban could invoke the important question: "why a nun should be allowed to wear her habit and not a female Muslim", adding that the Italian constitution guarantees freedom of religion.

The Observatory is encouraged to note that there are efforts to counter Islamophobia by the West because in the official level the incitement against Muslims is refrained and positive steps are taken to better integrate Muslims in Western societies. To this end, the position of the Vatican helps us to better accommodate our perspective since it urged Muslims to reject violence, work with Christians for peace and to love and respect all people and not become "cultural or religious blocs opposed to one another."

The decision of US President George Bush to appoint a Special Envoy to the OIC is one of the positive developments. While making the announcement the US President said, "Our special envoy will **listen to and learn from** representatives from Muslim states and will share with them America's views and values. This is an opportunity for Americans to demonstrate to Muslim communities our interest in respectful dialogue and continued friendship".

Many European countries are given positive signs in the fight against Islamophobia. The Council of Europe, having 44 Member Countries, is active in facing the malaises of Islamophobia in a proactive manner. The Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has published two relevant General Policy Recommendations: General Policy Recommendation No. 5 on combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims (CRI (2000) 21) and General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination (CRI (2003) 8). In addition, ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 8 on combating racism while fighting terrorism (CRI (2004) 26) notes that "*As a result of the fight against terrorism engaged since the events of 11 September 2001, certain groups of persons, notably Arabs, Jews, Muslims, certain*

³¹ Cf. "Solana Seeks to Quell Carton Rage" in *Arab News*, February 14, 2006 available at <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1§ion=0&article=77773&d=14&m=2&y=2006> retrieved on November 24, 2007.

*asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants, certain visible minorities and persons perceived as belonging to such groups, have become particularly vulnerable to racism and/or to racial discrimination across many fields of public life including education, employment, housing, access to goods and services, access to public places and freedom of movement"*¹³⁹. ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 5 recognizes that Muslim communities are subject to prejudice, which "*may manifest itself in different guises, in particular through negative general attitudes but also to varying degrees, through discriminatory acts and through violence and harassment*".³²

The need for engagement at the level of religious institutions between the Muslim and the Western world probably became pronounced after Pope Benedict XVI's unfortunate speech on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at University of Regensburg on September 20, 2006. In the wake of protests from the Muslim world and the OIC, the Vatican has taken a conciliatory approach to engage more closely with the Muslims. Pope Benedict XVI has reversed a controversial decision he took a year before to downgrade the Vatican department which deals with the Islamic world. The Council for Interreligious Dialogue was restored to its former position as a department in its own right.-It could also be a starting point for the "historical reconciliation" between Islam and the Vatican, proposed by the OIC Secretary General, Prof. Ekemeleddin Ihsanoglu. As a result of this new approach of the Vatican, a number of 138 Muslim leaders and scholars sent a letter to their Christian counterparts, including the Pope in October 2007 titled "A Common Word between Us and You" suggesting ways and means to initiate a productive dialogue between the two religions.

3. General Secretariat's Countering Actions

The OIC General Secretariat's strategy to address Islamophobia is to react and respond in an appropriate manner to all activities and incidents that cause insult, discrimination and violation of human rights of Muslims on account of their faith and to reach a common ground with other civilizations to address the issue in an effective manner.

The OIC had responded strongly to the publication of derogatory cartoons of Prophet Muhammad by a Danish newspaper which served to sensitize the Issue of Islamophobia globally. The incident caused hurt and insult to all Muslims and were convinced that it was a willful provocation to incite violent reactions in order to establish that Muslims were intolerant of any criticism. The fact that it was deliberate act of violation of all accepted norms of respecting diversity of religious and cultural values was regrettably downplayed by the many in the West on the pretext of freedom of expression.

More recently, the Observatory has issued a strong condemnation against the most recent publication of a blasphemous caricature of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) by Swedish newspaper *Nerikes Allehanda*. The Secretary General reiterated the condemnation of the OIC over the publishing of insulting caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by Swedish artist Lars Vilks in the *Nerikes Allehanda* newspaper and conveyed his concerns that this kind of irresponsible and provocative incitements in the name of defending freedom of expression, by intentionally offending the sentiments of Muslims were leading the international community towards more confrontation and division and somehow providing extremist and deviant ideologies with valuable ammunition. The Observatory expressed its concern over the move by David Horowitz of the US based Freedom Center to organize a "Islamofacism Week" in two hundred university and college campuses throughout the United States of America on October 22-26, 2007. The concern of the OIC and the member states over this move was strongly voiced during the 62nd UNGA and various think tanks and academic institutions in the USA. The initiative of Mr. Harrowitz did not receive the expected response as the majority of the universities did not provide him the expected forum.

³² Cf. EUMC, *op. cit.*, p.62-63. Emphasis in the original.

a) On the Dutch Documentary Film

The highly provocative documentary film that was produced by the controversial Dutch parliamentarian Mr. Geert Wilders defiling the Holy Quran and that the documentary would be broadcasted in March, 2008 in the Netherlands caused enormous concerns to the OIC. Immediately after being informed of this alarming development, the OIC General Secretariat addressed a strong note of concern to the Embassy of the Netherlands in Riyadh drawing its attention to the concerns of the Muslim World. The General Secretariat requested the Dutch Government's intervention in taking immediate steps and measures to stop the broadcasting of the documentary. The Dutch Embassy in Riyadh in response, stated in its note of 19 January 2008 that "the Dutch Government had openly expressed its concern about Mr. Wilders' plans and the possible offensive nature of such a film for Islam and its believers". The Dutch Embassy in its Note referred to the public statement of the Prime Minister Mr. Balkenende of 18 January 2008 in which the Prime Minister reiterated the position of the Dutch Government. The Dutch Embassy also forwarded excerpts of these remarks of concern made by the Dutch Prime Minister.

It has been seen from the excerpts that the Dutch Prime Minister at a press conference in the Hague on 18 January 2008 expressed his concern and stated that "broadcast of the film would invite heated reactions that could affect public order, public safety and security and the economy" and also that the Dutch Government was preparing itself for domestic and international repercussions of the film. He emphasized that maliciously offending a population group or those who profess a certain belief have no part in the Dutch tradition.

The OIC Secretary General met the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Maxime Verhagen, upon the latter's request, during the Alliance of Civilizations Annual Forum in Madrid on January 15, 2008. The Dutch Minister informed the Secretary General that his Government acknowledged the concern of the OIC with seriousness and that the Government does not associate with and condemns such activities in the strongest possible terms. He also informed the Secretary General that he met the parliamentarian in question personally to ask him to refrain from such a derogatory act. He also explained that if the announced documentary is broadcasted and the content violates the Dutch laws, then, the parliamentarian would be prosecuted. The Dutch Foreign Minister appealed to the OIC Secretary General for his help and cooperation so that the film does not hurt the Dutch interests in the Muslim world.

The OIC Secretary General reiterated the OIC's strong concern at Mr. Wilders' action and cautioned the Dutch Foreign Minister that the broadcast and distribution of the documentary could spark off strong repercussions that might go out of hand and become difficult to contain. He told the Dutch Foreign Minister that the best option available to avoid a bad situation would be to do the needful in stopping Mr. Wilders from exhibiting the film and that the Dutch Government should impose all necessary measures in this regard. The Dutch Foreign Minister acknowledged the possible dangerous consequences of the broadcast of the documentary film and told the OIC Secretary General that freedom of expression did not give unconditional right to insult. Later in his speech at the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the AOC in Madrid, the Dutch Foreign Minister declared inter alia, that "The Dutch Government condemns very strongly the call for the ban on the Quran. Freedom of Expression is not the same to insult others. It carries responsibilities".

The OIC Secretary General addressed letters to the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, Foreign Minister of Slovenia, as the EU term President, Secretary General of Council of Europe, the UN High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations, and the Foreign Minister of Finland in his capacity as the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, conveying the concerns of the Muslim world and calling for their intervention in addressing the issue with urgency. He drew their attention to the Article 20 Para 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states "any advocacy of national,

racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law”.

b) The Initiative to Ban Minarets in Switzerland

The General Secretariat noted with concern the initiative taken by a Swiss Parliamentarian to draft a law banning minarets in Switzerland by collecting signatures from the Swiss people to back the initiative.

The General Secretariat has initiated a demarche to the Swiss Embassy in Riyadh requesting an explanation. In response, the Swiss Ambassador in Riyadh visited the General Secretariat on 5 January 2008 to explain the Swiss Government's position. The Swiss Ambassador stated that four out of the seven members of the Federal Government, as well as a significant number of parties, associations and groups have criticized the initiative. He informed that some legal experts consider the initiative to be unconstitutional and contrary to international law, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights which supersedes the Swiss Constitution. According to these experts, if the initiative became law, it could not be implemented. He added that the matter would take some years to take any real shape. He also added that the Swiss Government was against such motives and wished that it would not have popular support. He said that the Swiss Government would remain seized with the issue and would keep the OIC informed accordingly.

The Secretary General met the Swiss Foreign Minister Mrs. Micheline Calmy-Rey, upon her request, on 15th January 2008 in Madrid on the sidelines of the Alliance of Civilizations Annual Forum. The Secretary General conveyed the OIC's concerns with regard to the initiative to ban minarets. The Swiss Minister confirmed that the Swiss Federal Government was not supporting the initiative. She explained that according to the unique system of the country, the issue would have to go to the public debate and be dealt with openly in the society. However, she raised doubts whether until November 2008, the proponents of the initiative could collect required 100.000 signatures. She said if they could, then it would be seen whether the initiative could be declared unconstitutional and that there were different opinions among the legal experts on that issue. She conveyed the desire of the Swiss Government to maintain contacts with the OIC.

c) The New Caricature Crisis Involving Denmark

The General Secretariat has followed with close attention and concern the developments in the aftermath of the recent reprinting of one of the most provocative of the insulting caricatures of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) by at least 17 Danish newspapers, as a reaction to the alleged plot to assassinate the Danish artist who drew the mentioned caricature. The Danish newspapers announced that their aim was to show solidarity in the defense of the freedom of speech. As a reaction, the OIC Secretary General initially made a statement on 15 February to the international news agencies and denounced the reprinting of the caricatures. The OIC General Secretariat issued a press release on the issue on 16 February 2008, (available on the OIC website) calling on the Danish Government to assume moral responsibility.

3.1. Media and Islamophobia

The Observatory took into account the all important role of the Media in dealing with the issue of Islamophobia. It is a fact that the Western media both print and electronic, the internet websites and blogs and even movies have to a large extent, contributed to the growth of intolerance and prejudice against Muslims and Islam in Western societies. With this understanding, an international conference was organized jointly by the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the General Secretariat of

the OIC under the title of "the Role of Media in the Development of Tolerance and Mutual Understanding" in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 26-27 April 2007.

The objective of the Conference was to sensitize the media on the dangers of religious intolerance and the urgent and paramount need of responsible media reporting to address the issue. The Conference was participated by political leaders, academics, media personalities, international organizations and representatives of leading NGOs and the civil society. The positive outcome of the conference was that the participants were unanimous in underscoring the point that the media could and should play a constructive role in fostering tolerance and understanding among the representatives of different cultures and civilizations, as well as in combating prejudices and bridging the gap rather than widening differences. The participants emphasized the importance of unbiased teaching of history, objective reporting and responsible political discourse in fostering culture of tolerance and promoting mutual understanding. They concluded that freedom of speech is one of the fundamental freedoms. However, it should be linked with a sense of responsibility on the part of the party who is exercising this freedom.

3.2. Initiatives for Engaging in Meaningful Dialogue to Promote Tolerance

The OIC Secretary General's initiatives in meeting Heads of Government and the political leadership the Western World including his meetings with Heads of State/Government, Foreign Ministers and the political leadership of many European countries and Heads of International Organizations such as UN, OSCE, EU Presidency and Council of Europe, have contributed to sensitize the issue of Islamophobia. The announcement by the US Government to appoint a Special Envoy to the OIC and the Vatican's decision to set up a department for dialogue with Muslims were considered to be among the positive outcomes of the General Secretariat's activities.

A number of initiatives were undertaken by OIC Secretary General to contribute to promote sensitize the issue of discrimination and intolerance of Islam and Muslims otherwise known as Islamophobia and to underscore the need for dialogue and understanding among the Muslim World and the West. Notable among these were³³

- a) Wilton Park Conference on Stereotype and Islamophobia in London in May 2006,
- b) Istanbul Workshop on Islamophobia in February, 2007;
- c) Participation in an Workshop of Islam-West Relations held in Paris at the invitation of the President of France;
- d) Participation in OSCE meetings on Islamophobia: in Bucharest (June, 2007) and Cordoba (October 2007);
- e) Successful holding of the OIC-Georgetown University Symposium on Pluralism and Islam in Washington DC in September 2007, an occasion for interacting with prominent Think Tanks and academic Institutions in Washington and New York and one to one meetings with Heads of delegation of European and Muslim countries.

The point that was underscored in all these interactions was that Islamophobia was gradually gaining into the mind set of the common people in Western societies that was producing a negative and distorted perception of Islam. It was emphasized that Muslims and Western societies would have to address the issue with a sense of commitment to end Islamophobia. A step in this regard is to have a dialogue within societies to remove misgivings and prejudices. This dialogue to be result oriented would need support and commitment at the political level on both sides to arrive at a consensus that Islamophobia poses threat not only to Muslims but non Muslims as well. Given this political will, the

³³ More details on the initiatives are available at Annex B on page 43.

stakeholders of the West and Muslim world would initiate a process that would be less on rhetoric and more on a plan of action to address the root causes of Islamophobia.

3.2.1. Cooperation with the United Nations

The Ministerial meeting at the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly (GA) on October 4-5, 2007 in New York titled *The High Level Dialogue on Inter-religious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace* also highlighted the dangers of Islamophobia. The Secretary General of the OIC in his statement at the Meeting stated inter-alia, that the concept of Dialogue among Civilizations was initiated by the OIC as early as 1998. He argued that the Dialogue was still entrapped in the phase of a debate and that practical and concrete actions were needed to bring out the concept from being an empty slogan. The OIC Secretary General reiterated the need for reaching an historical reconciliation between Islam and Christianity, which would be a positive development in inter-religious amity.

3.2.2. Alliance of Civilizations

The Turkish and Spanish joint initiative for an Alliance of Civilizations in 2005 has gained prominence in the international *fora* after it came under the UN auspices. The establishment of a permanent Secretariat of Alliance of Civilizations at the UN Headquarters in New York, release of the Report of the High Panel and appointment of former Portuguese President Mr. Jorge Sampaio as the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations has brought about new dimensions to the project. The OIC has been involved with the Alliance of Civilizations project from its conceptual stage. The AoC had a jumpstart with a Ministerial Meeting on the Group of Friends (GoF) held on the sidelines of the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on September 26, 2007 and gained further relevance by holding its First Annual Forum in Madrid in January 2008.

The OIC Secretary General proposed during the GoF meeting that the success of AoC depended on four elements: (1) to address the problem at the grass roots level rather than confining it to the elite group, (2) to end stereotyping of Muslims by the media (3) to have political engagement at the highest levels and (4) to attain historical reconciliation between Islam and Christianity in Europe".

3.2.3. Cooperation with the OSCE

The OSCE General Secretariat based in Vienna and OSCE's democratization and human rights center, ODIHR, based in Warsaw are prominent among the Western intergovernmental institutions with which the OIC General Secretariat established a high level of cooperation on the subject matter in the last two years. The exchange of visits between the Secretaries General of the OIC and the OSCE, as well as participation from the two organizations at various meetings and workshops related to combat discrimination and intolerance against Muslims have contributed to the creation of a very positive ground for the further development of ties of cooperation between the OIC and OSCE.

3.3. Legal Dimension on Combating Islamophobia

3.3.1. Elimination of Discrimination and Protection against Intolerance and Racially/Religiously Motivated Violence

The OIC General Secretariat has been working closely with the Permanent Missions of the OIC Member States in Geneva for adoption of a resolution in the HRC on combating defamation of religions and against attempts to identify Islam with terrorism, violence and human rights violations and to address concerns of the international community over the intensification of the campaign of defamation of religions, and the ethnic and religious profiling of Muslim minorities. The resolution

however failed to obtain a consensus with the European and Western members of the HRC either voting against or abstaining.

The elimination of discrimination and the protection against Intolerance is in part a matter of legal protection. The right to be free from discrimination based on religion is enshrined in international law particularly the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other instruments. Such standards have been incorporated into the laws of many countries. United Nations Special Rapporteurs continue to monitor the exercise and infringements of this right, and to recommend ways to combat Islamophobia and other forms of racism and intolerance. Indeed, Islamophobia became a topical issue for the international community particularly, with devastating effects not only on the lives of the Muslim communities, but also on the societies where they live. Islamophobia, whether in the shape of intolerance and discrimination, or whether in the form of violence, is a violation of human rights and is a threat to social and political cohesion. It is obvious that Islamophobia is seen in countries where Islam is not observed by the majority of the population.³⁴

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDR) states that: ‘Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.’ Also, Article 1 of the UDHR states that ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’. Articles 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights oblige States to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of human rights. Importantly, Article 26 of ICCPR creates a right to equality, guaranteeing all persons equality before the law and equal protection of the law.

Specifically with regards to discrimination based on religion, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief³⁵ calls on ‘all States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.’³⁶ It also adds that they ‘shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.’³⁷

Crucially, according to Article 20, paragraph.2 of the ICCPR, ‘any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law’. This provision represents a clear limitation to the right to free speech which, according to Article 19 of the ICCPR, ‘carries with it special duties and responsibilities’. The Committee on Civil and Political Rights in its General Comment 11 provided that ‘these required prohibitions are fully compatible with the right of freedom of expression as contained in Article 19, the exercise of which carries with it special duties and responsibilities.’³⁸ This is clear indication that human rights instruments recognize provisions against incitement to religious hatred as being a completely legitimate safeguard against the abuse of the right to free speech.

Further, in 2001, the UN Conference against racism held in Durban came to the conclusion that ‘at the outset of the third millennium, a global fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and

³⁴ Ambassador Ömür Orhun, ‘Countering Islamophobia and Discrimination against Muslims’, Equal Voices, Issue 17, at http://fra.europa.eu/eumc/index.php?fuseaction=content.dsp_cat_content&catid=43a17e680d287&contentid=43a27e1065bbf

³⁵ Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 36/55 of 25 November 1981

³⁶ Article 4, Paragraph 1

³⁷ Article 4, Paragraph.2

³⁸ General Comment 11, paragraph.2

related intolerance and all their abhorrent and evolving forms and manifestations is a matter of priority for the international community”.³⁹ Moreover, it was recalled that ‘the dissemination of all ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred shall be declared an offence punishable by law’.⁴⁰ With regard to the Internet, deep concern was expressed about the use of new information technologies ‘for purposes contrary to respect for human values, equality, non-discrimination, respect for others and tolerance, including to propagate racism, racial hatred, xenophobia, racial discrimination and related intolerance’.⁴¹ In this regard, the Durban Declaration made reference to article 4(b) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which it states “places an obligation upon States to be vigilant and to proceed against organizations that disseminate ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, acts of violence or incitement to such acts”⁴² and also defined “the stigmatization of people of different origins” by, inter alia, the media, political parties, and national or local organizations as “an act of racial discrimination.”⁴³

The Durban Plan of Action urged States to take necessary legislative, judicial, regulatory, administrative and other measures to prevent and protect against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It specifically urged States to take all necessary constitutional, legislative and administrative measures to foster equality among individuals and groups of individuals who are victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and to review existing measures with a view to amending or repealing national legislation and administrative provisions that may give rise to such forms of discrimination;⁴⁴ and also urged them, including their law enforcement agencies, to design and fully implement effective policies and programmes to prevent, detect and ensure accountability for misconduct by police officers and other law enforcement personnel which is motivated by racism, racial discrimination.⁴⁵

International human rights law raises awareness about religious rights and provides tools for decision-makers in governments, parliaments, and civil society. It calls on all States to commit themselves to human rights principles including those related to combating intolerance and discrimination against religious groups. Therefore, there is a need for a binding legal instrument to fight the menace of Islamophobia in the context of freedom of religion and elimination of religious intolerance.

3.3.2. Combating Defamation of Religions

The 60th Session of the UN General Assembly adopted a Resolution 60/150 on Combating defamation of religions, which called for the urgent need to respect beliefs and disallow their defamation. This resolution reflects the international community’s views and willingness to eliminate any discrimination against Muslims or defamation of Islam.

Most importantly, because of the tight link between defamation of religions and its prejudice to individual Muslims and communities, it was necessary to deal with this particular issue as a rising human rights issue. The non-existence of an international instrument on respect towards religions and religious beliefs led the OIC to table a resolution before the Human Rights Council (HRC) in its 4th Session. On 30 March 2007, in a resolution (A/HRC/4/L.12) on Combating defamation of religions, adopted by a vote of 24 in favour, 14 against, and nine abstentions, as orally amended, the Council expressed deep concern at attempts to identify Islam with terrorism, violence and human rights

³⁹ The Declaration of the World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (UN, Durban, August 31 - September 8 (DOC)), paragraph 3

⁴⁰ Ibid, paragraph 86

⁴¹ Ibid, paragraph 92

⁴² Durban Declaration, , P 87

⁴³ Durban Declaration, , P 94

⁴⁴ Durban Plan of Action, P.70

⁴⁵ Durban Plan of Action, P.71

violations and noted with deep concern the intensification of the campaign of defamation of religions, and the ethnic and religious profiling of Muslim minorities, in the aftermath of the tragic events of 11 September 2001. The Council urged States to take resolute action to prohibit the dissemination including through political institutions and organizations of racist and xenophobic ideas and material aimed at any religion or its followers that constitute incitement to racial and religious hatred, hostility or violence and also urged States to provide adequate protection against acts of hatred, discrimination, intimidation and coercion resulting from defamation of religions, to take all possible measures to promote tolerance and respect for all religions and their value systems and to complement legal systems with intellectual and moral strategies to combat religious hatred and intolerance; further urges all States to ensure that all public officials, including members of law enforcement bodies, the military, civil servants and educators, in the course of their official duties, respect different religions and beliefs and do not discriminate against persons on the grounds of their religion or belief, and that any necessary and appropriate education or training is provided; invites the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to regularly report on all manifestations of defamation of religions and in particular on the serious implications of Islamophobia on the enjoyment of all rights; and requests the High Commissioner for Human Rights to report to the Human Rights Council on the implementation of this resolution at its sixth session.

The 6th session of the HRC in Geneva in September 2007 was marked by Mr. Doudou Diène's report (A/HRC/6/6), which stated that "the increasing trend in defamation of religions cannot be dissociated from...the ominous trends of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance which in turn fuel and promote racial and religious hatred." He mentioned that "in the current context, Islamophobia constitutes the most serious form of religious defamation and that Muslim minorities in the West have been in the eye of storm since the 9/11 attacks. He further stated that "Political parties with open anti-Islamic platforms have joined governmental coalitions in several countries and started to put in place their political agendas," and "In sum, Islamophobia is in the process of permeating all facets of social life." He referred to the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as evidence on the rising Islamophobia in the West and as evidence that "the basic principle of coexistence of different cultures and different religions, which is the lasting basis for peace, is threatened now. His report stated: "Freedom of expression cannot be used as a pretext or excuse for incitement to racial or religious hatred".

To substantiate his conclusions, Mr. Doudou Diène cited the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC)'s campaign to ban the construction of minarets in the country; a similar move that was also underway in the German city of Cologne; the demonstration outside the European Union Parliament in Brussels on 11 September 2007 against the "Islamization of Europe" that took place despite the mayor's refusal to provide an authorization; the "intellectual and ideological theorization of Islamophobia by Norman Podhoretz (editor-in-chief of the influential review "Commentary" and advisor to a U.S. presidential candidate) in his latest book: World War IV.

Indeed, the Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance provided that the concept of the clash of civilizations and religions is 'becoming increasingly widespread in the thinking and rhetoric of the political, intellectual and media elite, and which is manifested in the refusal of diversity, a dogmatic rejection of multiculturalism and a defense of identity based on intangible "values". At the legal level, these two ominous trends are reflected in a hierarchical interpretation of fundamental freedoms that ignores the balance and complementarity of such freedoms and the restrictions and limits so carefully established by the relevant international instruments, particularly by giving preference to freedom of expression over all other freedoms, such as freedom of religion.' In addition, the EUMC Report 2006 entitled, mentioned elsewhere in the present document, noted that efforts to protect human rights values such as freedom of expression 'may at times clash with the perceptions of religious duties of certain individuals or faith groups. However, this perspective is of fundamental importance and Member

States have a positive duty under international human rights law to protect and promote these values, while ensuring that a potential critical stance towards certain attitudes of other groups in society respects the principle of equal treatment.’

In sum, the right to freedom of expression should be exercised with the responsibilities and limitations as prescribed by law. The international community should initiate a global dialogue to promote a culture of tolerance and peace based on respect for human rights and religious diversity and urges states, NGOs, religious bodies and media to support and promote such a dialogue. Developing the human rights language to address emerging issues such as defamation of religions was an important step forward that is of interest not only to Muslims but to all the international community.

3.4. Role of NGOs and the Civil Society

NGOs play an important role in present day international relations and issues of global concern. Their role in stemming discrimination of Muslims in non-Muslim societies and addressing the issue of Islamophobia is also crucial. The UN General Assembly "High-level Dialogue on Inter-religious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace" held two plenary sessions on the role of NGOs and the civil society. It was encouraging to note that religious leaders, journalists, academics and diplomats taking part in the session touched on a range of topics, such as the manipulation of faith and religious doctrine by extremist groups to justify violence, and the need to combat that trend. The importance of balancing respect and preservation of local cultures and beliefs with strategies towards modernization and development and advocacy efforts to promote cultures of peace and tolerance over war and hatred was also highlighted. Among the many suggestions for moving the dialogue forward, participants stressed the need to establish an "inter-religious advisory council" to mediate religiously motivated conflicts worldwide and to teach children to respect people of different faiths. They also deliberated at length on best practices and strategies for antireligious and intercultural cooperation. The OIC concern over the rising trend of Islamophobia was articulated at this session and the role of the civil society for greater involvement in addressing the issue was underscored.

3.5. Assessment

That Islamophobia will continue to be one of the major concerns for the international community in the foreseeable future notwithstanding, the OIC General Secretariat's strategy and efforts in raising concerns over the growing trend of Islamophobia and the need for a meaningful dialogue, though it has made positive impact on the international community. Awareness has been created among governments and other stakeholders that Islamophobia is a serious threat to global peace and stability and the political will to address the issue seems to be emerging. The initiative taken by His Holiness the Pope to initiate a dialogue between Islam and Christianity will contribute to a historical reconciliation between Islam and Christianity that has been advanced by the OIC Secretary General. The step taken by more than 300 Christian scholars and clergymen from across the globe of apologizing to Muslims for the Crusades and the repercussions of America's so-called war on terror⁴⁶ is also a positive development in fostering tolerance among religions and cultural beliefs and countering hatred such as Islamophobia.

The Observatory also believes that the above developments are conducive in creating a better atmosphere between Muslims and Westerners. For instance, the majority of people in most Western and Muslim countries believe in the importance of better interaction between both sides, despite skepticism of the other side's keenness on building bridges of confidence, a new Gallup poll has shown that:

⁴⁶ For more details, please see:

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1195032694156&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout retrieved on November 29, 2007

"The overwhelming majority of Americans (70%) and Canadians (72%) believe that greater interaction is a benefit," concludes the Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index conducted for the first annual report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Islam-West dialogue. In other Western countries, including Denmark, Belgium, Italy and Spain, the majority of respondents believe their personal level of concern about better relation with the Muslim world is higher than that of their governments. In the Middle East, 70 percent of Iranians believe in the importance of interaction between the West and the Muslim, followed by Turks at 64 percent. Similarly, residents of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the occupied Palestinian territories and Malaysia feel that greater interaction with the West is a benefit rather than a threat.⁴⁷

Therefore, those signs coming from the grassroots need a clear political engagement asserted by robust and committed agenda between the West and the Muslim world so that harmony could be a reality again. Such agenda should have the statutory mission to safeguard and realize the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of the West and the Muslim world because it is believed that present day misperceptions are not based on differences of religions, but traditional Muslim values are seen as anti-thesis to secular Western values of absolute individual freedom.

⁴⁷ Cf. "Westerners, Muslims want better ties" in <http://www.islamonline.com/news/newsfull.php?newid=81669> retrieved on January 24, 2008.

Conclusion

It is being felt that the global awareness that is being raised by the OIC and the member states against discrimination and human rights violations against Muslims, defamation of Islam, and Islamophobia appears to be making an impact. Western societies including Governments, NGOs and the civil society have started to take serious note of our concerns over the dangers of defamation of Islam and willingness to engage in dialogue. However, their positive response still falls short of the actions and political will to address the issue in definitive terms. The Islamophobes remain free to carry on their assaults due to absence of legal measures necessary for misusing or abusing the right to freedom of expression. The OIC Member States must therefore step up the counter measures by keeping the pressure on the international community at the multilateral forums and bilateral agendas. One positive step would be strengthening the Observatory with logistical support and intellectual expertise.

The common misconception in the Western countries that Muslim countries have not spoken out against terrorism needs to be correct without any delay. The OIC and its Member States have minced no words in condemning terrorism. The Western society has to be convinced of the OIC position that terrorism is a multifaceted and multidimensional menace which does not follow any religion and that it is contrary to the spirit of Islam. Furthermore, the Western civil society must be made to realize that Islam has been the prime target of both terrorism and those associating it with terrorism and that the war against terror cannot be successful without the support of the Muslim countries.

Recommendations

For our common goal to be achieved, the Observatory divides recommendations in two parts, i.e., short term (for immediate action) and long term (for subsequent/simultaneous action), and they address specific areas of intervention, as follows:

I. On the part of the OIC and the Muslim World

I.I. Short Term Preventive and Preemptive Measures:

- a) The primary objective of the Observatory in accordance with the Ten Year Program of Action (TYPOA) should be correct projection of Islam as a religion of moderation, peace and tolerance. In this matter, the programs of different OIC Member States, such as, Pakistani President Musharaf's vision of enlightened moderation can be a part of the strategy.
- b) The Observatory should continue to monitor closely all Islamophobic incidents and take necessary measures through issuance of statements and diplomatic initiatives.
- c) The Observatory should continue to monitor all lectures and workshops taking place in different parts of the world and submitting a summary report to the Secretary General every month.
- d) The Observatory should regularly sensitize the OIC Member States on any prejudice and anti-Muslim campaign and urge them to raise their concern during their bilateral meetings with Western leaders.
- e) To update the already existing shortlist of reputed Muslim think tanks or NGOs in the US, the UK and some leading cities of Europe to monitor and counter anti Islam campaign.

- f) To coordinate activities of the concerned OIC bodies with the Observatory in organizing meetings, workshops and conferences on interfaith dialogue with the objective to remove misgivings and prejudices against Islam.
- g) To invite leading scholars on theology who can effectively defuse allegations and give correct interpretations of Islam to participate in the OIC conferences related to Islamophobia.

I.I.I. Long Term Preventive and Preemptive Measures:

- a) To strengthen the coordination between OIC Member States and the Observatory in monitoring and countering Islamophobia.
- b) The OIC Member States may continue their joint efforts towards adoption of an international Convention for promotion, understanding, tolerance and respect between different cultures and religions.
- c) The Member States may develop clear plans and strategies to face up the challenges of Islamophobia on bilateral as well as multilateral levels.
- d) Positive public debate about Islam and Muslims may be encouraged and supported financially by the OIC Member States, Muslim civil society organizations, communities and the media.
- e) The engagement of Muslim scholars, think tanks, research institutes, and universities on issues and activities related to Islam and Muslim societies needs also to be supported.
- f) The OIC Member States may extend their support to the Observatory to enable it to discharge its activities in countering Islamophobia.

I.II. Action at the Legal Level

- a) There is a need for a legal instrument on the "Elimination of Religious Discrimination and Intolerance" with a Committee to implement it and monitor it. This should take into consideration the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 36/55 of 25 November 1981 and UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions on defamation of religions.
- b) Victims of Islamophobia must be encouraged and given necessary help to file complaints under the 1503 Human Rights Council Complaint Procedure.

I.III. Actions at the Level of the Civil Society

The need to build an effective network of relevant actors that could exert efforts in countering Islamophobia is a pressing one. To create a database through networking of government as well as non-government institutions, the following **actions** may be taken:

- a) Member States are urged to motivate national NGOs and other civil society institutions to furnish reports to the Observatory on actions taken on countering defamation of Islam, protecting the interests of Muslims and promoting interfaith dialogue;
- b) The OIC General Secretariat should closely work with the Union of NGOs of the Islamic World (UNIW) in order to organize events with the purpose of sensitizing the grassroots of appalling

effects of Islamophobia as well as in creating bridges for intercultural dialogue with the Western counterparts;

- c) The Western Muslim NGOs already coordinating with the OIC may expand the network through contacts with other NGOs of the West, including the Non-Muslim ones which are sympathetic to our cause and provide required information for the database;
- d) Take necessary steps to bring reputed Muslim NGOs into the focus of the international forum by bringing them into contact with their Western counterparts.

I. IV. Actions on Inter-Cultural Dialogue

- a) To encourage and urge Muslim think tanks and NGOs in the Western countries to develop closer contacts with their Non-Muslim counterparts and remain engaged in a regular contact and dialogue. The Observatory should take necessary actions in this regard.
- b) To encourage youth forums and Educational Institutions to organize seminars on Alliance of Civilization so that the concept is better understood and developed within the younger generation and to prevent them from being motivated by the extremists and propagators of intolerance. The relevant concerned OIC institutions will coordinate with the Observatory in this regard.
- c) The dialogue for Alliance of Civilizations must begin with the quest for a better and comprehensive understanding of Islam in the Western World.
- d) The Secretary General to continue maintaining his high level contacts with leaders of the Western countries. Keynote addresses by the Secretary General at reputed Think Tanks in the USA, UK, Europe and Australia will go a long way in countering misgivings and misinterpretation of Islam.

I.V. Actions on Media

- a) The Islamic Media should be encouraged to react against selective reporting against Islam and Muslims.
- b) The OIC should arrange/co-sponsor and support conferences like the Baku Media Conference involving media people to sensitize them about the true values of Islam and to facilitate the West-Islamic World dialogue.
- c) To devise a system of monitoring all actions in the print and electronic media related to Islam and take appropriate actions in issuing appropriate rejoinders wherever applicable.
- d) To take initiative in disseminating well written researched articles and papers on Islam and arrange to have these published in reputed newspapers of the West.
- e) To publish supplements in leading newspapers and magazines and holding of multi-lingual debates in reputed electronic media as well as renting air-time on Western TV and radio channels to broadcast educational programs on the teachings of Islam involving the leading scholars to discuss and debate on cotemporary issues.
- f) The international media should be sensitized and properly cultivated to motivate them to be more responsible in carrying out their responsibilities. If and when necessary, the Observatory

must be ready to place paid advertisements in leading newspapers and TV documentaries highlighting the message of peace and tolerance that Islam stands for.

- g) To prepare documentaries or make movies on the glorious past of Islam and Muslims as well as the present day advancements.
- h) To Project in the electronic and print Media the OIC activities in all fields of combating Islamophobia including the high level contacts of the Secretary General to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue.
- i) To call upon the OIC Member States to enact or reinforce appropriate legislations on internet service providers preventing the dissemination of Islamophobic materials.
- j) Unbiased and responsible reporting and coverage of Muslims should also be promoted to challenge the misgivings and wrong perceptions about Islam.
- k) To work on a strategy to establish a network of Islamic media for rapid reaction to Islamophobic incidents.

II. On the Part of the Western World⁴⁸:

II.I. Short Term Actions Preventive and Preemptive Measures:

The Western world may be urged to:

- a) To avoid provocative and inflammatory statements, expressions, and publications that are against the sacred symbols of Islam.
- b) Muslims are geographically, demographically, intellectually, and culturally an integral part of Europe. Their interests, right to freely practice their religion, their cultural values and rituals must be ensured.
- c) To take effective measures to protect Muslims as a vulnerable minority group from religiously or racially motivated discrimination, hostility and violence and ensure that such abuses are effectively investigated, prosecuted and punished. They should consider strengthening legislation that prohibits discrimination and hate crime motivated by religious or racial bias.
- d) To enhance efforts to prosecute and take legal action against discriminatory and violent acts, encouraging Muslims to report such crimes to police, preventing discrimination against Muslim women on the grounds of dress.
- e) To promote systematic efforts to monitor discrimination against Muslims in employment, housing, access to service and other areas of society in order to increase knowledge of such trends and to facilitate the development of effective strategies to prevent and combat discrimination based on religious beliefs.
- f) They should encourage debate within the media about their responsibility to avoid perpetuating prejudice against Islam and Muslim communities, develop campaigns to foster respect for

⁴⁸ Based on reports released by different Western institutions dealing with the issue while doing the research for the present annual report.

cultural and religious pluralism, and raise awareness of positive contributions of Muslims, in order to promote tolerance and understanding.

- g) To ensure that any measures adopted to regulate immigration comply with international human rights standards. In particular, it should be ensured that any such measures fully respect the principle of equality before the law and do not amount to discrimination on grounds such as religion, nationality or ethnicity.
- h) The education curricula must ensure true message and teaching of Islam, its principles and values as well as advocating diversity.
- i) To actively engage in dialogue with Muslim communities for the purpose of developing strategies to promote the integration of Muslims in different fields of society and to address problems related to the practice of Islam.

II.I.II. Long Term Actions Preventive and Preemptive Measures:

- a) To undo the myth that Islam approves terror and violence against those who do not believe in it and therefore have to be persecuted or exterminated.
- b) To avoid using Islamophobic rhetoric used in the war against terror labeling them as Islamic fascists, Islamic extremist, etc, which has taken the western audience into getting a wrong impression on the message of Islam.
- c) To ensure that double standards are not a part of the Western mindset that generally believes that attacking different races is unacceptable but attacking religions is a fair game. Religious identity must enjoy the same recognition and dignity.

II.II. Actions on Legal Aspects

- a) To strengthen law enforcement against violent hate crimes and provide adequate resources to law enforcement bodies. In this regard, to uphold and to enforce the implementation of provisions contained in the ICCPR's Article 20 para.2 is a must.
- b) To ensure that provisions covered by international legal instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, are applied equally to all.
- c) To legally protect all different religious believers equally because in the West where Jews are defended through anti-Semitic laws, Muslims feel being discriminated and ignored and must be protected by similar laws. Anti-Semitic remarks have always either widely been condemned or punished unlike acts of Islamophobia that need to enjoy the same.

II.III. Actions at the Level of the Civil Society

- a) To give voice to Muslim think tanks and NGOs in the Western countries to develop a strategy for better understanding of Islam by the Western society.
- b) To encourage the civil society and NGOs to organize conferences and get involved in bilateral interactions for recognition of Islamophobia as an issue that is dangerous to global peace and security, and to motivate the general public, including those at the grass roots against Islamophobia.

II. IV. Actions on Inter-Cultural Dialogue

- a) To continue strengthening the ongoing trend of holding inter-civilizational and inter-religious events which have already started to create awareness of Islamophobia of being an issue of global concern.
- b) To encourage youth forums and Educational Institutions to organize seminars on dialogue among civilizations so that the concept is better understood and developed within the younger generation.
- c) To promote research, educational programs, youth and cultural exchanges for greater knowledge and understanding of Islam.

II.V. Actions on Media:

- a) The concerned authorities should take necessary measures against publications of inflammatory, insulting and provocative materials in the media or postings of such in websites.
- b) The Media should be encouraged in avoiding selective reporting against Islam and Muslims.
- c) To project the accurate image of Islam, tackling misrepresentation of, and hatred towards Muslims in the media including the internet. In doing so, encourage the media to promote further dialogue between the Islamic World and the West, and to highlight best practices in promoting tolerance and dialogue among civilizations.
- d) To adequately highlight the positive contributions of Muslims to the society.*
- e) To encourage media and internet service providers to develop clear codes of conduct and training programs for journalists and other media professionals to promote diversity and combat Islamophobia.

ANNEXES

A. Islamophobic Incidents after the 34th ICFM

Throughout 2007, Islamophobic incidents have taken place on a regular basis in different parts of the world, the west in particular. The spate of insulting cartoons, caricatures, writings and mockery of Islam has been a regular feature in innumerable internet websites and blogs. In compiling the 2007, Observatory recorded a selection of the major incidents monitored by it after the holding of the 34th ICFM in Islamabad in May 2007. It may be recalled here that the General Secretariat had taken a strong position over the publication of the blasphemous cartoons of the Holy Prophet by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Postens* and the derogatory remarks made by Pope Benedict about the Prophet Muhammad in a conference in Germany, in 2005. These two incidents preceded the Observatory Annual Report.

1. The US based Human Rights First 2007 Hate Crime Survey – Companion Survey on Islamophobia stated that in 2006, discrimination and violence against Muslims persisted throughout much of Europe. The report stated that although the number of registered incidents decreased from a peak level in 2005, after the subway bombings in London, the number of violent incidents remains high. In Belgium, in May, an anti-immigrant fanatic murdered a pregnant Malian au pair, and the two-year-old Belgian infant in her charge. Shortly before, he had shot and seriously wounded a woman of Turkish origin wearing a Muslim headscarf, as she sat on a bench reading. In Poland, in July, at least four men attacked a Moroccan actor at an antiracism festival in the northern city of Olsztyn, hitting him over the head with a bottle and stabbing him repeatedly, leaving him in critical condition. Both cases illustrate the double discrimination of racism and religious intolerance so frequently evident in attacks against Muslims. Other recent incidents have included bombings and arson attacks on mosques and Muslim institutions in many countries, including Austria, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Russia, and the United Kingdom, with attacks on Muslim cemeteries also widely reported. Assaults on individuals ranged from spitting, shoving, or the snatching of women's headscarves, to punches and kicks and lethal bludgeoning, stabbings, and shootings. Personal assaults were often accompanied by shouted insults alluding to religion and ethnic or national origin - sometimes expressing both racism and religious hatred. Muslims were often singled out for attack because of their apparel, their association with Muslim institutions, or even the color of their skin, while members of minorities that are often mistaken for Muslims were also attacked. The perpetrators included members of organized extremist movements, racist youth cultures, and ordinary people acting in a climate of xenophobia and nationalist chauvinism. In western Europe, anti-Muslim violence was driven by fears of Islamist terrorism and newly mainstream trends to present immigration and Muslim minorities as a threat to national identity. In parts of eastern Europe and in particular in the Russian Federation, proliferating nationalist movements have propagated ideologies of ethnic and religious supremacy and fueled growing violence toward national minorities, in particular the largely Muslim minorities of Russia's southern territories. A majority of governments in Europe still do not track and record anti-Muslim incidents through official state mechanisms. In nations where the recording of data does take place, many governments still under-report such incidents and significantly under-record official complaints. In addition to continuing fears of suicide bombings and other violent attacks, two series of events dominated international discussions of the status of Muslims in Europe. First, there was nationwide rioting in France in late 2005 that brought national and international attention to previously unheard grievances of the largely Muslim minority population on the outskirts of major cities. The second set of events followed the publication of cartoons ridiculing Islam by a leading Danish daily newspaper in September 2005, at a time of heightened xenophobia and anti-immigrant discourse in Denmark and in much of Europe. After protests by Muslims and others that the cartoons were denigrating and offensive, they were republished in early 2006 by mainstream media across Europe. Non-violent protests in Europe were followed by demonstrations across much of the Muslim world, many of which became violent, further contributing to and exacerbating European xenophobia and anti-Muslim bias.

2. **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**, the Somali refugee in Holland who renounced Islam and later became a Dutch MP, made derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and characterized Islam as inferior to Western culture. Her anti Islam posture was with malifide intention to acquire citizenship in the USA. The former Dutch MP violated the provisions of the Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. The woman continues to write against Islam in several western newspapers including the NY Times irrespective of the fact that her writings are insulting to the sentiments of Muslims
In: <http://theaustralian.news.com.au/printpage/0,5942,21811256,00.html>

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, is presently a columnist in *Washington Post* column of *On Faith*. In an article in *august 2007*, entitled "**My View of Islam On holy war, apostasy and the rights of women in Islam**", Ali stated that that women in Islam did not have rights, that the Qur'an is outdated, that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as immoral. She concludes the article by saying that "the western world would be wise to recognize the realities of Islam, a religion laid down in writing over a millennium ago with violence and oppression at its heart."
In: http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2007/08/my_view_of_islam.html
retrieved on 04.08.07

3. **The Right Wing Swiss people's Party** has taken up an initiative to move for a legislation **for banning minarets in Switzerland** since members of the right-wing Swiss People's Party, currently the largest party in the Swiss parliament, have launched a campaign to have the building of minarets banned since, for them, they are not necessary for worship, but rather are a symbol of Islamic law, and as such incompatible with Switzerland's legal system. In fact, Muslims pray in bad conditions as they are confined to disused warehouses and factories. The Party is trying to obtain 100.000 signatures after which it will be tabled in the parliament. The issue will be examined by the concerned authorities whether such a move is in accordance with the Swiss constitution after which it will be put up for vote. If passed, it will become a law. The OIC has issued a diplomatic demarche to the Swiss authorities and Swiss Ambassador to the KSA visited the General secretariat to explain the move did not have the support of the present Swiss Government and that it did not enjoy general support. The OIC Secretary General also took up the matter with the Swiss Foreign Minister personally. Although no definitive decision can be expected before 2011, the adoption of such legislation cannot be entirely ruled out. The OIC and the member states will have to keep up the pressure on the Swiss authorities against the legislation.
More details available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6676271.stm> retrieved on 06.06.07.

4. **A report of the Financial Times June 9, 2007**, quoted Human Rights Watch (HRW) that France's policy of deporting radical Muslim clerics could risk further alienation among the country's Muslim community. The Human Rights Watch was quoted saying that the forced removal of long-term residents and Muslim religious leaders suspected of extremism could prove to be counterproductive and could alienate communities whose co-operation was vital to the fight against terrorism. Since 2001, France has expelled 71 individuals, 15 of whom were imams, according to figures from HRW.
In: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/c44c57aa-13c9-11dc-9866-000b5df10621_i_rssPage=7c485a38-2f7a-11da-8b51-00000e2511c8.html retrieved on 09.06.07.

5. **US based Freedom Center activist David Horowitz** took an initiative to observe an Islamo-Fascist Week in 200 US Universities in October 2007 with the objective to corrupt the minds of young Americans against Islam. The OIC Secretary General expressed the outrage of the OIC and of the member states on the event at the United Nations and reputed think tanks and Universities in the USA on this Islamophobic initiative underscoring that Fascism was a Western concept that was practiced by some European governments in the early twenties and had no connection whatsoever

with Islam. Mr. Harrowitz who is well known for his anti Islam stance failed to get the expected response from the Universities.

6. British columnist Adrian Morgan wrote a defamatory article entitled "Islamist and Our Dangerous Silence". He was very critical about some British people avoiding offensive acts, words or attitudes towards Muslims in order to coexist with these people. His piece was full of Islamophobic mindset by taking derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Islam. . Taking recourse to freedom of expression and freedom of speech, he wrote "Appeasement to an uncompromising 7th century ideology (Islam), especially when such appeasement is motivated more by fear than by genuine respect, is the fast route to totalitarianism or subjugation. America is not nearly as far down the road to perdition as Europe and Britain. Unless people are allowed to speak freely, critically and openly about any dead religious figure, even if that speech causes offense to some, the very mainstays of our Western values will disappear. I would rather live free and forthright, even with death threats from barbarians, than be cowed into silence under PC servitude. Remember what your Constitution was built upon, and stand up for what it contains. I fear that Britain is already dying. Please do not allow this to happen to your great nation."

In: <http://globalpolitician.com/articles.asp?ID=2971&print=true> retrieved on 17.06.07.

7. There was widespread outrage in France (21.06.07) after the discovery in the north of the country that about **50 graves of Muslim soldiers who had died for France over 90 years ago had been desecrated**, mainly with Nazi slogans. French officials showed their displeasure over the incident. The incident took place in April 2007 but it came to the knowledge of the Observatory in June 2007. In: <http://www.arabia.pl/english/content/view/374/16> retrieved on 24.06.07.

8. The construction of one of the Europe's biggest mosques near to a globally famous Christian landmark has sparked a furious row in Germany. Immigration and integration are hugely sensitive questions in Germany, which is home to a Turkish community of several million. But almost within the shadow of Cologne Cathedral, political correctness has now been replaced by bitter confrontation as the city's Muslims begin to build a 2,000-capacity mosque with twin minarets that will reach 170ft.

In: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/core/Content/displayPrintable.jhtml;jsessionid=AW1KVEH1EA2KPOFIQMG SFFOAVCBQWIV0?xml=/news/2007/06/25/wger125.xml&site=5&page=0> retrieved on 26.06.07.

9. The construction of Great Mosque of Montreuil (Paris, France) was halted when a local far-right politician won a court ruling last month outlawing a lease negotiated with the city for a plot of land to build the mosque. Despite a major fund-raising campaign, only 200,000 euros of the total 1.5 million euros needed to build the mosque have been raised from the local community made up mostly of Malians, North Africans, Senegalese and Muslims from the Comoros.

In: http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C07%5C11%5Cstory_11-7-2007_pg7_12 retrieved on 15.07.2007

10. Australia enacted new laws that require Arabs seeking visa entry into Australia to provide the names of their parents and grandfather. According to a leading Islamic group, this legislation hint at racial and religious profiling.

In: <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22092556-662,00.html> retrieved on 18.07.07

11. Spanish police have put mosques under surveillance and have boosted their Arabic translators tenfold since attack on Madrid three years in 2004.

In: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKL237464620070723> retrieved on 25.07.07

12. The Peter Boyles Show, guest host Lou Pate made insulting remarks Muslims were "a sick race" and a violent community," adding, "They have honor killings ... that they condone. They will

kill...their own wives; they will kill their own daughters"; and claimed that "genital mutilation [is] quite common there."

In: <http://colorado.mediamatters.org/items/200708080003> retrieved on 15.08.07

13. Dutch MP Geert Wilders, the leader of the far right Freedom Party, pressed Wednesday, August 8, for banning the Noble Qur'an in the Netherlands, drawing immediate rebuke from the government. "Ban this wretched book like "Mein Kampf" is banned," Wilders, whose party holds nine seats in the 150-member parliament, wrote in a letter published in the local *De Volkskrant* newspaper and cited by *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*. "I am fed up with Islam in the Netherlands: no more Muslim immigrants allowed." "I am fed up with the worship of Allah and Muhammad in the Netherlands: no more mosques," wrote the far-right lawmaker. Earlier this year, Wilders pressed for a no-confidence vote against Muslim ministers Ahmed Aboutaleb and Nebahat Albayrak, questioning their loyalty to the Netherlands. He has also campaigned to ban the building of new mosques and halt all Muslim immigration. The Dutch government swiftly condemned the remarks as damaging for community relations and said the proposal was unworthy of consideration

In: <http://www.islamonline.com/news/newsfull.php?newid=25635> retrieved on 15.08.07

- ☒ **The same Dutch far right MP plans anti-Islam film against the Holy Quran.** Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen met with the head of the far right Freedom Party to highlight the risks of such a film. The Observatory has made a diplomatic demarche on the matter to the Dutch Government and is following the developments closely.

14. The Case of Swedish Caricature of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

A Swedish artist called Lars Vilks has produced a blasphemous caricature of Prophet Muhammad, and *Nerikes Allehanda*, a Swedish provincial newspaper published the cartoon alongside an editorial on freedom of expression. PeO Warring, deputy chairman of the Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association (TU), said that regardless of what people thought of the cartoons it was important that they could be published and debated. "The strength of freedom of expression lies in the fact that it tolerates - and protects - not only comfortable, harmless and uncontroversial opinions, but also those that are tasteless, controversial, upsetting and offensive," he said in a statement.

In: <http://www.thelocal.se/8318/20070828> retrieved on 30.08.07

The OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu strongly condemned the newspaper for publishing the blasphemous caricature and said that this was an irresponsible and despicable act with mala fide and provocative intentions in the name of freedom of expression. The Swedish Ambassador and a senior official of the Swedish Parliament called on the secretary General to explain their Government's position on the incident. The OIC Secretary General conveyed the concerns and strong resentment of the OIC and the member states over the provocative act of the cartoonist and stated that such action could not be condoned even in the name of freedom of expression when the exercise of such freedom causes hurt and insult to the sacred religious sentiments of others and can cause violence and unrest in society.

15. A New South Wales Senate candidate for the Christian Democratic Party (CDP) has compared controlling Muslim immigration in Australia to stopping the spread of bird flu. The Christian Democrats are pushing for a halt to Muslim immigration because there has been no serious study of the effects of Muslims on Australia. They say the 10-year measure would give some breathing space to assess the situation.

In: <http://abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/08/23/2013166.htm?section=justin> retrieved on 26.08.07

16. Seven-year-old Pakistani Javid Iqbal on a holiday to Florida was stopped repeatedly at airports on suspicion of being a terrorist. The security alerts were triggered because Javid shares

his name with a Pakistani man deported from the US, prompting staff at three airports to question his family about his identity. Javaid's passport now contains a sticker saying he has undergone high-level security checks.

In:

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=476369&in_page_id=1770 retrieved on 26.08.07

17. Austrian right-wing firebrand Joerg Haider said on Monday he plans to change building laws to prevent mosques and minarets being erected in his home province of Carinthia. Haider, Carinthia's governor, said he would ask its parliament to amend the building code to would require towns and villages to consider "religious and cultural tradition" when dealing with construction requests. "We don't want a clash of cultures and we don't want institutions which are alien to our culture being erected in Western Europe," Haider said in a statement.

In: <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL2739608920070827> retrieved on 01.09.07

18. Two Dutch women who recently married young Muslims from Tunisia have lost their jobs at the NATO base at Gellenkirchen in Germany, close to the Dutch border.

In: <http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/news/news.php?article=13212> retrieved on 01.09.07

19. Alex Epstein in his article "'Muslim Opinion' Be Damned: Hatred of America is Irrational and Undeserved" posted on *American Chronicle* assumes that six years after 9/11, is the fact that many Muslims are mad at Americans. He assumes that the so-called Muslim opinion is not the unanimous and just consensus that its seekers pretend. It is the irrational and unjust opinion of the world's worst Muslims: Islamists and their legions of "moderate" supporters and sympathizers.. He accused President Bush, has taken the opposite approach to "Muslim opinion": appeasement. Instead of identifying anti-American Muslims as ideological enemies to be discredited, he has appealed to their sensibilities and met their demands--e.g., sacrificing American soldiers to save Iraqi civilians and mosques. Instead of seeking to crush the Islamists by defeating the causes they fight for--such as Islamic world domination and the destruction of Israel--he has appeased those causes, declaring Islam a "great religion" and rewarding the Palestinian terrorist Jihad with a promised Palestinian state. Instead of destroying terrorist regimes that wage war against the West--including, most notably, Iran--he has sought their "cooperation" and even cast some as coalition partners.

In: <http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/viewArticle.asp?articleID=36664> retrieved on 04.09.07

20. Driver attempts to run woman over: A man's attempt to run a 30-year-old woman over with his car while she waited for a bus in Southampton was racially motivated, police have said. The woman, wearing traditional Islamic dress and a head covering, was targeted at Lordshill Centre on 23 August. The man drove up next to her in a red car and verbally abused her, before trying to mount the kerb in his car. He then he drove off towards a nearby roundabout, before driving back towards the woman, who ran off, police said.

In:

http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/hampshire/6972201.stm retrieved on 05.09.07

21. Mosque targeted in urine attack: Reports of shoes, clothes and a carpet in a mosque in Bath (UK) were urinated on during prayers. Avon and Somerset Police treated the incident at the mosque on Pierrepont Street as a hate crime. Police have released CCTV images of two men suspected of being connected with the incident. Bath Liberal Democrat MP Don Foster said he had written to the mosque's leader, Imam Rashad Amazi, expressing his concern.

In:

<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/somerset/6976289.stm> retrieved on 05.09.07

22. **The religious liberty arm of the World Evangelical Alliance** strongly rebuffed Doudou Diène's report that has claimed that the source of Muslim extremism is the "defamation" of Islam. Elizabeth Kendal, who serves as the principal researcher for the WEA's Religious Liberty Commission, reacting to report to the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) written by U.N. Special Rapporteur Doudou Diene, who recommended that the international human rights covenants be "reinterpreted and amended" to deal with Islamophobia, stated that "the very heart of the issue was not 'defamation' of Islam or 'baseless' Islamophobia but the fact that the dictators of Islam were consumed and driven by 'apostaphobia!'"

In: <http://www.christianpost.com/pages/print.htm?aid=29348> retrieved on 19.09.07

23. **Italian authorities put off plans to build a mosque in the northern city of Bologna.** Bologna's Mayor Sergio Cofferati that the the construction of the mosque in the San Donato neighborhood would be decided after taking into account the feelings of the neighborhood, The far-right Northern League party, which has campaigned against the mosque construction, rejoiced the halt. Northern League parliamentarian Roberto Marini called the halt to the Bologna mosque a "victory".

In:

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1189959293818&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout retrieved on 25.09.07

24. **Belgian extreme right wing Vlaams Belang** took up plans to launch a campaign to "stop Islamisation," first in Antwerp and later in other cities. The party called for a stop to the registration of newcomers in the city, a restriction on the number of mosques, and the expulsion of radical imams. http://www.expatica.com/actual/article.asp?subchannel_id=24&story_id=44124 retrieved on 25.09.07

25. **Pastor opposing airport's sinks for Muslims:** A Baptist pastor who lost a son in Iraq objects to the placement of special sinks that would aid Muslims at the Indianapolis airport in preparing for prayer because he opposes "the fraternization with our open enemies during a time of war," according to a statement from his church. The Rev. Jerry Hillenburg, pastor at Hope Baptist Church on the city's Far Westside, is calling on Mayor Bart Peterson to halt the installation of the floor-level sinks at the Indianapolis International Airport.

In:

<http://www.indystar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070921/LOCAL/709200579/1196/LOCAL11> retrieved on 22.09.07

26. **Britain's first Muslim minister, Shahid Malik, e was detained by airport security officials in America.** He was stopped and searched at Washington DC's Dulles airport after a series of meetings on tackling terrorism.

In: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/west_yorkshire/7066944.stm retrieved on 31.10.07

27. **Panel: 'Islamophobia' charges are hijacking human rights** – The religious freedom experts expressed concern that United Nations' Second World Conference on Racism focused on "Islamophobia to be held in 2009 was simply an effort to sidetrack interest in the lack of tolerance and freedom inside Islamic and Arab countries.

In: <http://www.scbaptistpress.org/printerfriendly.asp?ID=26729> retrieved on 03.11.07

28. **The autobiography of outspoken Progress Party politician Carl I. Hagen "Ærlig talt" - Speaking Honestly - has offended Norwegian Muslims.** Hagen denigrated Prophet Mohammed

(PBUH) as a warlord, man of violence and abuser of women has, unsurprisingly, caused offense." Hagen's remarks come in connection with the massive trouble linked to the publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammed.

In: <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article2093629.ece?service=print> retrieved on 11.11.07

29. Islamophobia in Danish Electioneering – The far-right Danish People's Party (DPP) has stepped up its anti-immigrants campaign ahead legislative elections in November 2007 with more electioneering posters antagonizing Muslims, who make up the largest immigrant minority in Denmark. The DPP election posters signified the party's xenophobic agenda with one poster showing a group of hijab-clad women under the headline: "Follow the Country's Traditions and Customs or Leave." Another one shows a hijab-wearing woman withdrawing money from a cash dispenser machine carrying the logo of the Welfare Benefits Office, with a caption reading: "Make Demands on the Foreigners. Now They Must Contribute!" A third poster went far, featuring a hand drawing portrayal of a man the party called Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) and captioned: "Freedom of Expression is Danish. Censorship is Not. Defend Danish Values."

In: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/printer-friendly/printerfriendly.php?type=news&id=50166> retrieved on 13.11.07

30. A gunman used a military assault rifle to fire on a dozen worshipers at an Islamic centre at the Swiss city of Lausanne late on Monday, injuring one seriously, police said on Tuesday, November 13. "He injured one person seriously before worshipers immobilized him on the ground," according to a police statement cited by Reuters.

In: <http://www.islamonline.com/news/newsfull.php?newid=56927> retrieved on 14.11.2007

31. Police in Los Angeles, USA abandoned a controversial anti-terrorism plan that would have created a computer database of the city's Muslim population, (15.11.07). The Los Angeles police department said they had planned to launch the mapping effort to better understand the Muslim community, rather than as a form of profiling or targeting those who practice Islam. But after the program met widespread opposition, including from Muslim interest groups, the American Civil Liberties Union and other rights organizations, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced Wednesday that the plan had been scrapped.

In: <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5iH2VYWu40m4yJxHYVgESSFZBgLtw> retrieved on 17.11.07

32. Media report reveals 'torrent' of negative Muslim stories – A "torrent" of negative stories has been revealed by a study of the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the British media, according to a report on 13.11.07. Research into one week's news coverage showed that 91% of articles in national newspapers about Muslims were negative.

London mayor Ken Livingstone, who commissioned the study, said the findings were a "damning indictment" on the media and he urged editors and programme makers to review the way they portray Muslims, adding that "the overall picture presented by the media is that Islam is profoundly different from and a threat to the West," and "there is a scale of imbalance which no fair-minded person would think is right." Only 4% of the 352 articles studied last year were positive, he said.

In: <http://www.24dash.com/printNews/7/29255.htm> retrieved on 14.11.2007

33. Cartoon upsets Muslims - Cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro — better known as Zapiro — has riled Muslims with a cartoon that portrays Allah, but he is unrepentant. "I do these things because I believe in freedom of expression," Shapiro said, acknowledging that his cartoon in the Cape Times yesterday had landed him in hot water. He said he understood the cartoon had provoked a flood of angry SMS messages from the Muslim community. It was drawn in support of columnist Deon

Maas, who was fired by Rapport newspaper last week after he argued that people should be allowed to believe in Satan if they wanted to.

In: <http://www.thetimes.co.za/PrintArticle.aspx?ID=626956> retrieved on 24.11.07

34. **Belgian City Bans Hijab** – Ghent City, Belgium's third largest, has decided to prohibit civil servants who were with the public from donning hijab. "It is really not clear who counts as an employee in contact with the public, but we will have to carry it out," a city spokesman told Reuters on Wednesday, November 28. The city council voted the ban with 26 in favor and 23 other against. The spokesman said hijab-clad employees might be offered work elsewhere. Teachers and police officers will be exempted from the hijab ban. Belgium's second city Antwerp banned the Muslim headscarf earlier this year.

In:

http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1195032713329&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout retrieved on 29.11.07

B. OIC Activities in Countering Islamophobia

The OIC Observatory on Islamophobia, creation of which was unanimously approved by the Foreign Ministers of the OIC Member States during the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) held in Islamabad in May 2007, started its functions at the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah after this event. Nevertheless, before the Observatory came into existence, the OIC General Secretariat has exerted sincere and strong efforts to address the issue. Some of the noteworthy initiatives undertaken are detailed below:

1. Wilton Park Conference

The General Secretariat took an important initiative and organized a conference focusing on Islamophobia in UK in cooperation with the prestigious Wilton Park institution on 2-3 May 2006. This constituted one of the most significant events initiated and organized by the OIC General Secretariat in the West on Islamophobia. Representatives of some of the OIC and European governments, and of international organizations such as the UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, European Union, academicians, media representatives, as well as Muslim organizations and NGOs based in Europe were among the participants. The Conference witnessed the opening Statement of the OIC Secretary General as well as the address by the British Minister of State, Kim Howells and the High Commissioner of Malaysia in London on behalf of the OIC Summit Chairmanship.

The participants acknowledged that stereotyping has been on the rise and has led to incitement of hatred, discrimination and intolerance targeting dignity of human beings as individuals and as followers of faiths and value systems. They emphasized that urgent steps need to be taken to address the negative consequences of stereotyping and urged the governments and all actors of civil society - intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, as well as communities – to take responsibility for coordinated action. In this regard, an institutionalized and loosely structured response is likely to produce measurable results. After an interactive global dialogue it would be advisable to devise a road map for multilayered joint action. These efforts would supplement the efforts made through bilateral contacts and the actions being taken in the United Nations.

The participants agreed that in Europe there is a need to enhance efforts to promote greater understanding and awareness about religion. In the Muslim world, endeavours have to be made to dispel misperceptions about the West and to promote democracy, human rights and good governance. In this regard, Conference participants encouraged the OIC to implement its Ten Year Program of Action (POA) to promote human rights, social justice and good governance within the OIC countries.

It was also discussed that policies of multiculturalism and integration pursued by Europe should be made more resilient and sustainable, while respecting separate identities of other faiths and diversity of their adherents. Immigrants and multiculturalism should be regarded as an asset. In this regard, the developing role of Muslim civil society institutions, working in tandem with wider NGO community, is crucial. Muslim organizations in Europe should be supported and strengthened to become legitimate voices of Muslim communities.

2. Developments Regard Relations with the European Union

The OIC was also active in developing cooperation with the European Union (EU) to address the issue of Islamophobia. In September 2006, an OIC-EU Ministerial Troikas Meeting was held in New York, upon the initiative of Finland as the EU term President, during the UN General Assembly after a pause of several years.

On the sidelines of the 62nd UN General Assembly, September 2007, the OIC-EU Troikas Meeting took place, and among several issues, the question of Alliance of Civilizations was on the agenda and it was concluded recognizing the need to focus on Youth, Media and Muslim migration to Europe. It was agreed that tendency to divide and negative campaign against religious values and sentiments should be avoided. Also was agreed that to build bridges, to initiate joint activities of concerned parties and to bring harmony would have to be among the objectives of Alliance of Civilizations' activities.

In the Conclusions of the EU Ministerial Council of 28 February 2006, the OIC was cited among the organizations that the EU should cooperate to foster an atmosphere of dialogue and tolerance. To this effect, the OIC Secretary General has had fruitful meetings with Mr. Javier Solana, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy in New York in September 2006 and 2007. Both the parties agreed to have an exchange of representatives and to have meetings in Jeddah as well as in Brussels. The OIC General Secretariat has also officially approached the President of the EU Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium in January 2007 to open an office in Brussels to develop ties of cooperation with the EU, which is already approved by the concerned authorities, and the process of finalizing it is underway.

The Secretary General had a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Slovenia Mr. Dimitrij Rupel, the future presidency of the European Union during his visit to Geneva in March 2007 and both the leaders emphasized on the importance to stem the rising trend of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and OIC's willingness to cooperate with the European countries bilaterally as well as within the framework of the EU, Council of Europe and OSCE institutions in order to combat stereotypes and misunderstandings and foster tolerance.

It may be mentioned here that the European Commission put out a proposal declaring 2008 as the European year of International Cultural Dialogue and that is the year when Slovenia will preside over the European Union. Slovenian Foreign Minister informed the Secretary General that one of their topmost priorities would be dialogue among civilizations and in this regard OIC would be their focal point in the Muslim World.

3. Istanbul Islamophobia Workshop

In preparation to the thematic session at the 34th ICFM, already referred to, the OIC Secretary General called for an informal-consultative meeting of some leading experts from the Member States, international organizations and Muslim institutions based in the West to engage in a brainstorming session to explore the options to formulate a strategy to move forward on this issue. The Consultative meeting took place at the Islamic Research and Cultural Centre (IRCICA) in Istanbul on February 2nd, 2007.

The participants emphasized the importance of a proactive role of the OIC General Secretariat as, in the light of increasing negative trends in certain Western countries, Islamophobia as well as relations between the Islamic World and the West had gained crucial importance. They supported the efforts of the Secretary General aiming at furthering political engagement, supporting dialogue among the representatives of cultures, civilizations and religions, and at inviting media involvement in these activities. They also supported the call of the Secretary General for international cooperation and particularly cooperation with the Western countries hosting Muslim communities as well as with the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU. The importance of being able to create the necessary groundwork for jointly organizing a conference with the OSCE, as was being suggested by the General Secretariat, was particularly emphasized by the participants.

The participants emphasized the importance of educational and youth projects and in this regard of the need for increased coordination and cooperation between the General Secretariat and ISESCO under the leading role of the General Secretariat. They also pointed out that Alliance of Civilizations project provided ample opportunities and an overall umbrella for international cooperation in the fields of dialogue as well as education and youth areas.

It was discussed that although there were certain views against the suitability of the use of the word of "Islamophobia", the term had actually entered some English dictionaries and had been and was still being extensively used by Muslims and non-Muslims, government departments, politicians, NGOs, in reports, pronouncements and speeches and that many organizations like the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia had used the term extensively in their reports. There were suggestions that although the term was gaining popularity, according to the context and the location, and as much as possible, a more legalistic term such as "discrimination and intolerance against Muslims" could be used. It was also proposed that the terms of "anti-Muslim", "anti-Islam", "intolerance against Muslim" or "intolerance against Islam" or any other appropriate words/terms which may more or less give the same meaning could also be considered. However, the participants admitted that it would be difficult to reach a consensus on the matter.

4. Media Aspect/Baku Media Conference

The role of the Media is one of the most important factors in combating discrimination and intolerance to Muslims and Islam. Either it is a print media or an electronic one, or computer games or movie films; it has the potential of creating huge impact on human psyche both positive and negative while disseminating information on discrimination and intolerance in any form. Empirical evidences are visible everywhere starting from the after effect of 9/11 to caricature crisis or Pope's comments. Media and equally, political discourse are the only possible tools to counter the negative propaganda against Islam and Muslims propagated by the Media and the politicians themselves.

With this understanding, an International Conference organized jointly by the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference under the title of "the Role of Media in the development of tolerance and mutual understanding" was held in the capital city of Azerbaijan, Baku on 26-27 April 2007.

The Government of Azerbaijan hosted the Conference towards implementation of the Baku Declaration adopted by the 33rd Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) which called for the organization of an OIC conference during the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan of the 33rd ICFM Session in 2007 in order to discuss the role of media in developing tolerance and mutual understanding.

The Conference was jointly inaugurated by the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Dr. Elmar Mammadyarov. The former President of Romania, Dr. Ion Iliescu and the Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altuwajri, Director General of ISESCO, OIC's specialized Organization for education, science and culture, jointly moderated the Conference.

In addition to the high level personalities and officials from various parts of the world, representatives of the UN, OSCE, UNESCO, ISESCO, Council of Europe and the EU, academicians, media experts and journalists discussed the challenges of promoting dialogue through mass media, ways to effect and expand mutual understanding, education and universal values as essential tools for spreading tolerance and mutual understanding, the relationship between a nation state and its civil society, and lastly the agenda of pursuing dialogue worldwide.

During the deliberations of the Conference, the participants concurred that Media could and should play a constructive role in fostering tolerance and understanding among the representatives of different cultures and civilizations, as well as in combating prejudices and bridging the gap rather than widening differences. The participants emphasized the importance of unbiased teaching of history, objective reporting and responsible political discourse in fostering culture of tolerance and promoting mutual understanding. They concluded that freedom of speech is one of the fundamental freedoms; however it should be linked with a sense of responsibility on the part of the party who is exercising this freedom. While the role of education in fostering understanding and in creating awareness and sensitivity about cultures and civilizations was particularly highlighted, linking any particular religion, in particular, as is the case recently, Islam to terrorism by Media was rejected and an appeal was made to the Media institutions to refrain from utilizing phrases linking Islam and Muslims with terrorism, as terrorism does not have any religion.

5. Brainstorming Session during the 34th ICFM in Islamabad

The Ministerial Brainstorming/Thematic Session on Countering Discrimination and Intolerance against Muslims and Defamation of Islam⁴⁹ held on the sidelines of the 34th ICFM discussed in detail the ways to address the looming challenge of Islamophobia and anti Muslim sentiments.

The Foreign Ministers have, in that session, endorsed the recommendations of the General Secretariat has in advance presented in a working paper prepared on the subject. Calling on the Member States for their strong support to the Secretary General in strengthening the Observatory of the General Secretariat, the participants urged the observatory to establish a workable and proactive strategy and a feasible Road Map in which all Member States would participate and assume their responsibilities. It was also underlined that the success of this Observatory would depend upon the resources provided for the accomplishment of the tasks stated on the working paper.

The meeting decided the following:

(i) That it was wrong to draw a link between Islam and terrorism. The Foreign Ministers said that this would have to be addressed properly and collectively so that the reality of Islam negating violence comes to everyone's knowledge. (ii) A proposal was made to set up a separate Department for countering Islamophobia. (iii) The OIC should seek close ties with United Nations and some relevant multilateral Western organizations, such as European Union (EU), through both bilateral and multilateral actions and lobby. The Foreign Ministers endorsed the Secretary General's view that a sincere dialogue with the West was needed and that it had to be in two-way perspective in order to create confidence among all faiths in respecting each other's diversity, and the presence of OIC at the Alliance of Civilizations is a strong approach to achieve this goal. (iv) The Foreign Ministers emphasized the necessity of drawing a legal framework through which an international legislation combating defamation of and discrimination against Muslims and Islam is set in order to provide a tool to address the issue properly. (v) It was proposed that the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNCHR) was one of the suitable institutions in which resolution protecting Islam and Muslims should be submitted and adopted. (vi) The Foreign Ministers laid great importance on education, in particular for the younger generation in order to enlighten them with the positive and real image of Islam mainly in matters related to tolerance towards other faiths, the quality of being Muslim in terms of respecting other's privacy, (vii) the Ministers stressed on addressing the media's role in increasing hate, prejudice, stereotypes, and bias against Islam and Muslims. Indeed, a code of conduct must be searched so that freedom of expression would not become the argument to foster media views depicting Islam and Muslims.

⁴⁹ It was titled as such because debates were underway about which concept to be used.

Since the 34th ICFM, the Observatory has been in contact with Member States soliciting feed backs on the developments in their countries on countering Islamophobia. In this regard, a note verbale was sent to the OIC Member States providing them with the recommendations that were endorsed by the Foreign Ministers in the thematic session on Islamophobia. It also requested the Member States to act on the following:

- a) To nominate a focal point in each of the Government of the Member States with whom the Observatory will communicate.
- b) To provide a list of eminent Islamic scholars and NGOs to the Observatory for building up its data base and network.
- c) In order to make the Observatory effective and functioning, the General Secretariat would welcome regular updates of the actions taken by the Member States in regards to countering Islamophobia including statements and holding of inter-faith dialogues so that the same is recorded in the data base and reflected suitably in the website.
- d) The Secretary General has decided on the production of a quality documentary film based on the research of renowned Islamic scholars projecting the glory and true image of Islam and to arrange its worldwide distribution in English, French, and Arabic languages.
- e) The General Secretariat is considering the construction of a separate web site for the Observatory which will not only highlight actions against anti-Islamic propaganda but also carry articles and write-ups on Islam to sensitize the West for their better understanding of the true teachings of our great religion.
- f) It is hoped that Member States will contribute generously in financial terms so that the OIC Observatory can put its plans into action within the soonest possible time.

The Observatory has been producing a monthly report on monitoring Islamophobic articles or statements available in the Western most relevant media.

6. Cooperation with the OSCE

The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) General Secretariat based in Vienna and OSCE's democratization and human rights center, ODIHR, based in Warsaw are prominent among the western intergovernmental institutions with which the OIC General Secretariat established a high level of cooperation on the issue of Islamophobia during the last two years. The exchange of visits between the Secretaries General of the OIC and the OSCE, as well as mutual invitations to Ministerial and other Conferences and particularly, exemplary level of cooperation of Ambassador Omur Orhun, Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims with the OIC General Secretariat have contributed to the creation of a very positive ground for the further development of ties of cooperation between the OIC and OSCE. However until today the OSCE Ministerial Council did not take any specific decision for joint programs or events to be realized with the cooperation of the OIC. In fact, the OIC has continuously maintained a regular liaison with the OSCE on issues of common interest, particularly on the question of combating extremism, Islamophobia and intolerance.

The OIC Secretary General held a meeting with Mr. Marc Perrin de Brinchambaut, the OSCE Secretary General, in New York in September 2006. Upon the initiative of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, an OIC representative participated in a Special Workshop on Islamophobia in

Istanbul in September 2006. Likewise, another OIC representative attended the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw in October 2006. The Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims participated in an OIC Workshop on Islamophobia in Istanbul in February 2007.

The Director General for Cultural and Social Affairs represented the OIC Secretary General at the OSCE High-Level Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, Bucharest 7-8 June 2007.

The Working Session II that has discussed "Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims" was moderated by Ambassador Ömür Orhun, Personal Representative of the Chairman in Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims. The salient features of his report are as follows:

Working Session II focused on discrimination against Muslims. Keynote speaker Hassan Nafa'a of the Arab Thought Forum emphasised the lesson history taught us: that no one culture or religion could be characterised as extremist, but that in each, extremism could materialise. It was necessary to treat all forms of intolerance on an equal basis in order to successfully combat each. Picking this up, the second introducer, Tufyal Choudhury of Durham University underscored that equality was the thread running through international human rights treaties and the objective in addressing intolerance. He advocated a number of policy approaches including paying greater attention to enabling institutional bodies to proactively address discrimination rather than relying overly on prosecuting individual cases. These introductory themes recurred in a number of the interventions from the floor.

Numerous speakers expressed their concern that extremist elements of the Muslim community had become synonymous with the Muslim community as a whole in the eyes of many in the West. So much so that many Muslims who believed in tolerance and peaceful coexistence were being subjected to discrimination and viewed with suspicion. Following atrocities such as 9/11, the London and Madrid bombings and the murder in the Netherlands of Theo van Gogh, monitors like the EUMC had noted a rise in Islamophobia. This even manifested itself in new systems of profiling adopted by law enforcement agencies. Some OSCE participating States bemoaned the fact that such Islamophobia seemed to be a recent phenomena, when Muslims had been living peacefully in and contributing to the welfare of their societies for centuries.

Furthermore, the OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims held in Cordoba, Spain, 9-10 October 2007 was the first one tackling officially the question of Islamophobia in the West.

Approximately 300 participants, including experts on Muslims and tolerance issues, gathered in the Spanish city of Cordoba from 9-10 October 2007 for the OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims. Once there, they considered the 13th OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Ministerial Council's decision that: "The OSCE should continue to raise awareness and develop measures to counter prejudice, intolerance and discrimination, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction to race, colour, sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

Miguel Ángel Moratinos (OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation of Spain), Manuel Chaves (president, Junta de Andalucía), Rosa Aguilar (mayoress of Cordoba), M. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut (secretary general, OSCE), Amr Moussa (secretary

general, the Arab League), and President Jorge Sampaio (high representative, Alliance of Civilizations) spoke at the opening ceremony.

The conference consisted of four plenary sessions: "Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Old Prejudices and New Targets," "Consequences of Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims," "Media and Public Discourse as Instruments to Counter Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims," and "Educating to Overcome Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims."

The focus of this conference has to be understood in the larger context of the OSCE's efforts to promote mutual respect and understanding and to fight intolerance and discrimination. However, any hope of improvement remains elusive, despite the good intentions presented at the conference. For example, Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs does not favor the Muslims' use of Cordoba Mosque for prayers, although Christian services are allowed therein. Furthermore, this event was held during Ramadan, which meant that Muslim participants had to give priority to it over their fasting.

The OIC Statement at the fifth session stressed the OIC General Secretariat's readiness in continuing its cooperation with OSCE General Secretariat and ODIHR under the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations, which could also be used by all members of the International Community, international institutions and civil society to translate their will into action. It was also emphasized that in the wider picture, we do not see that the challenge that we face today can be properly addressed, if the official authorities and politicians do not assume ethically and morally righteous and responsible attitude in front of the masses, when discrimination and intolerance against Muslims, and defamation of Islam as a religion and denigration of its most revered symbols are condoned under the exercise of freedom of expression and press, in a way to surmount time to time to explicit and calculated incitement or hatred.

In fact, this was the first time that western officials have met officially to discuss problems linked to Muslims. In fact, at other conferences organized by the OSCE or other western institutions, the question of Islamophobia was raised along with other forms of religious discrimination: anti-Semitism or Christianophobia. In other words, this is a time for an alliance, dialogue, and reconciliation (as opposed to a clash) of civilizations. Westerners should bear in mind Amr Moussa's words at the inaugural session: "Islam is different from communism because it is not easy to beat, although it is easy to live with and easy to dialogue with. However, if one targets it, the whole world will be in extreme danger."

7. Alliance of Civilizations

The Turkish and Spanish joint initiative for an Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) in 2005 has gained prominence in the international fora after it came under the UN auspices. The new UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki Moon like his predecessor Mr. Kofi Annan has attached considerable importance to the project. The establishment of a permanent Secretariat of Alliance of Civilizations at the UN Headquarters in New York, release of the Report of the High Panel and appointment by the UN Secretary General of former Portuguese President Mr. Jorge Sampaio as the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations has brought about new dimensions to the project. The OIC has been involved with the Alliance of Civilizations project from its conceptual stage and is ready to cooperate with the High Representative Sampaio as well as the AoC Secretariat in developing a bilateral work program.

7.1. Ministerial Meeting on the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations

The AoC had a jumpstart with a Ministerial Meeting on the Group of Friends (GoF) of the held on the sidelines of the UN 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on

September 26, 2007. A large number of Ministers of the UN Member States made statements extending their support to the Alliance. Apart from the Ministers, the Secretary General of the United Nations, The Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), The High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations and the Foreign Ministers of Spain and Turkey were among the prominent speakers.

The meeting was opened by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon who welcomed the group and expressed his appreciation for the commitment shown by the GoF and for the rise in numbers of participants. Statements were also made by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, the Secretary General of the OIC, Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsaoglu and the Foreign Ministers of Spain and Turkey as co-sponsors. Others who spoke included the Ministers of Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, El Salvador, France, Iran, Italy, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, Pakistan, Portugal, Qatar, Russia, Slovenia, Switzerland and United Kingdom. The European Commission (EC), Council of Europe (CoE), Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), UNESCO and ISESCO also spoke at the meeting.

The participants made for taking the work of the Alliance forward in accordance with the HLG report and the four action areas – media, youth, education and migration.

The High Representative underscored that for the Alliance to gain political momentum there was a need to scale up efforts and strengthen ties and commitment to the Alliance. *He emphasized that one functional priority would be the setting up of the Trust Fund to support the Alliance's activities and announced that the stakeholders would be receiving a letter calling for contributions.*

He said that the top priority of the AoC would be to work in closer collaboration with all partners, both within and outside the UN system. He said that regional organizations would play an important role in bridging divides – namely the so called "West-Islam divide" – by promoting cross-cultural dialogue among partners and within member countries. Asian, Pacific, African, European and Latin America regional bodies need to be mobilized to make the AoC a success.

He mentioned three critical suggestions of critical importance which included (a) the development by international organizations and bodies of Charters for partnering with the Alliance; (b) the development by countries of their own "National Strategy for cross-cultural dialogue"; and (c) the appointment by countries and international organizations and bodies, of a "Coordinator", responsible for the implementation of the Charter, ensuring internal coordination, as well as to serve as a focal point in the relations with the Alliance's Secretariat and other partners.

The Secretary General of the OIC, Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, in his statement, congratulated the high Representative and the co sponsors for their contributions in helping the AoC to gain in momentum. The OIC Secretary General reiterated his support to the AoC stating that OIC had initiated the concept of dialogue among civilizations as early as 1998. He however mentioned that so far the dialogue had remained within the confines of the academic platform and that the time was now ripe for practical steps. He mentioned that Islam continued to be under attack in the west and mentioned the action plan of a certain group in the US to stage demonstration in 200 US universities on "Islamofascism" was an instance of intolerance against Islam and the Muslims. The OIC Secretary General proposed that the success of AoC depended on four elements: (1) to address the problem at the grass roots level rather than confining it to the elite group, (2) to end stereotyping of Muslims by the media (3) political engagement at the highest levels and (4) a historical Reconciliation between Islam and the West".

The AoC also featured as a major item in the agenda of the OIC-EU Troika meeting. The OIC Troika was represented by Mr. Riaz Mohammad Khan, Foreign Secretary of Pakistan & OIC Chair,

H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu Secretary General of the OIC, H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan and H.E. Mr. Henry Okello Oryem State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uganda. The EU side comprised Mr. João Gomes Cravinho, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Portugal, (EU Chair) and other officials of the European Union and the Foreign Ministry of Slovenia. During the meeting, both sides expressed their strong support for the Alliance and their willingness to cooperate in giving it material support. The EU and the OIC Troika reached a consensus that Clash of civilizations was not inevitable and that engaging in a dialogue was the best way to diffuse the tensions among different cultures emanating from misunderstandings and misgivings. The two sides also agreed that the AoC should become the organizational framework for the dialogue among civilizations. They agreed that the focus of the activities of the AOC should be on Education, Immigration, Youth and the Media and to work towards building bridges among different cultures.

In a separate bilateral meeting between the Secretary General of the OIC and the High Representative of the AoC, Professor Ihsanoglu once again reiterated his support to the AoC stating that the OIC with 57 Member States and 5 Observers can be a major player in implementing the plan of action envisioned by the High Representative. The High Representative stated that he was scheduled to visit the Gulf region including Saudi Arabia and that he would be happy to call on the Secretary General at the OIC Headquarters for further discussions.

The AoC also featured in the bilateral meetings between the OIC Secretary General and the EU Presidency, the Director General of European Council of Europe and the Foreign Minister of Slovenia (EU Char designate for 2008). In all these meetings, the crucial role of the OIC in making the AoC successful was recognized and underscored. It may be mentioned here that the AoC received overwhelming support in the General assembly Session on Inter religious and Inter cultural understanding.

The OIC Secretary General has participated in the First Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations held in Madrid on January, 2008.

8. Observatory Visit by Mr. Greg Rickman, US Special Envoy to Monitor & Combat Anti-Semitism

A delegation of the US State Department led by Mr. Greg Rickman, US Special Envoy to Monitor & Combat Anti-Semitism had a meeting with the Observatory at the General Secretariat in Jeddah on July 23, 2007. The discussions focused on exchange of views on cooperation for further strengthening efforts to address the issue of discrimination and intolerance of religious faiths and for dialogue for reaching a historical reconciliation towards the Alliance of Civilizations. The Observatory's concerns over Islamophobia in the US were conveyed to the US Special Envoy.

9. Symposiums in the United States

The realization for engaging with the Muslims is also taking root in the United States. The prestigious US think tank Brookings Institution located in Washington DC very recently held a workshop entitled "US-Muslim Relations: Engaging the Muslim World". The workshop was held in the backdrop that US standing in the Muslim world had "sustained deep and rapid deterioration in recent years" and "that the deepening divide between the US and the Muslim Countries and communities was a huge barrier to US interests." The workshop recommended that the next US President elected in 2008 should develop a strategy that will effectively engage the US with the Muslim world.

In September and October, 2007, The OIC Secretary General was very effective in articulating his ideas and thoughts to the US Government, eminent scholars, religious and civil society leaders, NGOs, media professional and the youths.

9.1. The Georgetown Symposium

The OIC General Secretariat in cooperation with the Prince Al Waleed bin Talal Center for Christian Muslim Understanding at the Georgetown University in Washington DC organized two symposiums on 20 and 21 September, 2007. The Secretary General addressed two interactive round tables sessions at the prestigious Georgetown University in Washington DC, one on "Islamophobia and the Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century" and the other on "Role of the Media in West-Islam Relations". The first Session of the Islamophobia was devoted to proposing road map for addressing the issue itself. Several recommendations were made by the participants that are reflected in the sections for recommendations of the present report.

The **Second roundtable** was on the "Role of the Media in West-Islam Relations" held at the Mortara Center Conference Room of Georgetown University in Washington DC on September 21, 2007.

The workshop began with Professor John Esposito introducing the Secretary General to the participants. While doing so, Professor Esposito paid rich tributes to the Secretary General for his leadership towards "reinvigorating" the OIC and for his visionary efforts towards improving the relationship between the Muslim countries and the Western World through removing misgivings and prejudice of Islam in the West and vice versa.

The Secretary General's Statement was followed by an interactive session during which questions were asked and recommendations were proposed on the media's role towards improving Islam - West relations. The following came out from the interactive session:

The impact and importance of visual and Media projection of Islam was underscored. One participant stated that in the past Hollywood feature film such as "The Messenger" has helped in projecting Islam as a religion of peace and proposed that production of similar feature films and their global screening would be conducive to removing misgivings about Islam.

The Secretary General in his response stated that the proposal was a good one. He however pointed out that the Western media was inclined towards negative portrayal of Islam such as the activities of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. He said that positive developments such as the announcement by President Bush to appoint a Special Envoy to the OIC and his speech at the Islamic Center as well the statement made by Under Secretary Karen Hughes at the Foreign Press Center immediately after the President Bush's program at the Islamic Center was almost completely ignored by the US media. The Secretary General stated that this tendency of the US media had to be reversed for the sake of improving US relations with the Muslim world.

In reference to the Secretary General's proposal for a historical reconciliation between Islam and Christianity similar to the reconciliation reached between Christian and Judaism, one participant stated that the latter was possible because the Jewish Americans readily adapted and integrated with Western values and norms. He felt that this may not be possible in the case of Muslims.

The Secretary General in his response said that one would have to consider that there was only one Jewish State as against 57 Muslim countries. Furthermore the Christians were overtaken by feelings of guilt for the persecution of Jewish people in Nazi Germany. He said the pessimism in the question notwithstanding; the objective of a historical reconciliation between Islam and Christianity was realistic through a dialogue undertaken in a spirit of mutual understanding.

Another participant proposed that the language of friendship has been narrowed down and so called freedom of expression have been overtaken by influence of intelligence agencies over media and education.

The Secretary General said that the possibility of involvement of intelligence agencies in influencing the media could be there. He underscored that there was no fixed agenda about on how to go about with things but all governments needed a political will to reach a consensus to set legal limits on freedom of expression.

In response to a question of strengthening and modernizing the information dissemination system of the OIC, the Secretary General said that he had already taken on hand a project to restructure and revitalize the Islamic International News Agency and that it would be tasked to project Islam globally with the possibility of having its own cable TV Channel.

The Secretary General also responded positively to the proposal of arranging workshops and round table conferences among media personalities and professionals of western and Muslim countries.

There was another observation made by a participant in which it was suggested that the OIC should take the lead in improving US-Islam relations and to engage the media of the Muslim and Arab countries in public diplomacy. It was stated that the NGOs and civil societies in the US would play a very constructive role in this matter.

The OIC Secretary General in his concluding remarks stated that the workshop was very important in bringing out the various aspects of the issue of Islamophobia. He highlighted that the issue was at the top of his agenda with a view of removing misgivings and misconceptions between Islam and the West. He added that the OIC has already taken some steps in this regard namely the establishment of the Observatory. He agreed with the opinion that the report has to take into account legal and human rights aspects of the issue. He stated that the OIC needed the cooperation and help of all the participants because the report has to be done in a cooperative and collective effort. He added that he took note of all the comments and recommendations made by the participants and that the workshop was a beginning of regular contact between the OIC and other stakeholders.

9.2. Roundtable at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

The meeting was chaired by Chairman and CEO of the Center Dr. John J. Hamre. The Archbishop of Washington D.C. was a special invitee, and was participated by leaders of different religious faiths including Muslims, Christians and Jews and members of the US Congress.

The President of the Center in his very brief introductory remarks highlighted the credentials of the Secretary General as an eminent scholar and diplomat. He underscored that religions would play a role in bringing about a difference in America and this could be achieved by long term dialogue between Islam, Christians and other faiths. He then invited the Secretary General to make his presentation.

The OIC Secretary General in his speech gave a brief introduction of the OIC and its activities to the participants who comprised a group of scholars and media representatives. In doing so, the Secretary General highlighted the point that the OIC is the biggest International Organization after the UN with 57 Member States and 5 Observers.

The Secretary General also highlighted the point that the OIC was undergoing a major reform and was being restructured to meet the development needs and concerns of the member countries.

He articulated the vision and goals envisioned in the OIC Ten Year Program of Action, (POA) and that the POA was an outcome of the inputs and contribution of more than 100 scholars drawn from all parts of the Muslim world and finally adopted by the leaders of the Member States at the 3rd Extraordinary Summit of the OIC held in Makkah in December 2005.

The Secretary General then reflected on the topic of the Discussion, ie, "Islam-West Relations". He said that the principle impediment in the way of improving relations between Islam and the West was the phenomenon of Islamophobia. He called on the CSIS to take a proactive role in cooperating with the OIC in addressing this issue as it was assuming dangerous proportions and posing a threat to global peace and security.

The Secretary General said in the present days, Muslims have become victims of stereotyping and profiling that has given rise to Islamophobia. He underscored that US-Islamic relations have historically been cordial and friendly. However its image has been tarnished as a result of the crisis in the Middle East.

The Secretary General emphasized that the US should take a more generous and positive policy for helping many of the developing Muslim countries to address socio economic issues, in particular poverty and illiteracy. He said that these conditions provided the proponents of terror a platform to use religion to attract the youths and illiterates to their side. He said that as strategic partners, the Muslim World and the US can defeat the terrorists. He said that this would not only restore confidence among the Muslims about the US but also help in developing understanding and tolerance between Islam and other faiths and cultures.

10. Actions taken at the 62nd UNGA

In pursuant of its resolution 61/221/06, a high-level dialogue on inter-religious and intercultural cooperation for the promotion of tolerance, understanding and universal respect on matters of freedom of religion or belief and cultural diversity, was held at the Ministerial level in the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly (GA) on 4th and 5th October 2007 in New York. *The High Level Dialogue on Inter-religious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace* was convened following up the UN GA's adoption in 2006 of a resolution that encouraged Member States, the UN system and civil society to carry out a range of initiatives in an effort to promote tolerance and respect for diversity of religion, culture and language. Government ministers and senior diplomats from over 70 countries addressed the meeting. The session also featured two informal panel discussions with leading academics and religious leaders.

11. Various Contacts of the OIC Secretary General

The Secretary General's initiative in meeting Heads of Government and the political leadership in the Western World including his meetings with Heads of State/Government, Foreign Ministers and the political leadership of many European countries such as UK, France, Austria, Netherlands, Spain, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Heads of International Organizations such as UN, OSCE, EU and Council of Europe, participation by the General Secretariat in conferences and workshops on interfaith dialogue and tolerance issues to highlight and promote the true message of Islam and generate a constructive dialogue, have contributed to the overall efforts to promote understanding of Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance.

The OIC Secretary General has also remained focused on projecting Islam in the United Nations. The most recent events in this initiatives were his participation in the High level Segment of UN Human Rights Council Meeting in Geneva in February this year and his meeting with the Secretary

General of the United Nations Mr. Ban Ki Moon on the sidelines of Arab League Summit held in Riyadh at the end of March 2007. During the meeting the two Secretaries Generals held intensive discussions on the dangerous implication of the issue of defamation of Islam on global peace and security. They agreed that all possible actions must be taken to raise global awareness on the need for understanding and tolerance among faiths and there must be accepted mechanism and joint action programs adopted by the international community to address avoidable provocations and incitement and end discrimination and vilification of Islam and cooperate towards effective and meaningful dialogue among civilizations.

C. Joint Statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union

Signed in February 7, 2008, following is the text:

We are deeply alarmed at the repercussions of the publication in Denmark several months ago of insulting caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed and their subsequent republication by some other European newspapers, and at the violent acts that have occurred in reaction to them.

The anguish in the Muslim World at the publication of these offensive caricatures is shared by all individuals and communities who recognize the sensitivity of deeply held religious belief. In all societies there is a need to show sensitivity and responsibility in treating issues of special significance for the adherents of any particular faith, even by those who do not share the belief in question.

We fully uphold the right of free speech. But we understand the deep hurt and widespread indignation felt in the Muslim World. We believe freedom of the press entails responsibility and discretion, and should respect the beliefs and tenets of all religions.

But we also believe the recent violent acts surpass the limits of peaceful protest. In particular, we strongly condemn the deplorable attacks on diplomatic missions that have occurred in Damascus, Beirut and elsewhere. Aggression against life and property can only damage the image of a peaceful Islam. We call on the authorities of all countries to protect all diplomatic premises and foreign citizens against unlawful attack.

These events make the need for renewed dialogue, among and between communities of different faiths and authorities of different countries, all the more urgent. We call on them to appeal for restraint and calm, in the spirit of friendship and mutual respect.

Kofi A. Annan
Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu
Javier Solana

D. Doha Statement

It was signed by Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister of Qatar, the Foreign Minister of Spain and Foreign Minister of Turkey.

Following is the text:

Earlier this month the United Nations, the European Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference took the unprecedented step of issuing a joint statement appealing for restraint and calm after the publication of insulting caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed, considered blasphemous by Muslims and deeply offensive by many others, as well as the reactions thereto.

All of us now join to renew our call for restraint, and for an immediate end to the present atmosphere, which threatens to sow deep discord between communities, societies and countries. We deeply regret the offence given by the caricatures, as well as the loss of life and damage to property in several countries.

We reaffirm the universal right to freedom of expression. We appeal to everyone to exercise that right responsibly, and not to use it as a pretext for incitement to hatred, or insult to the deeply held belief of any community.

We also reaffirm the right to peaceful protest, especially where deep hurt has been caused, and we acknowledge that Muslims do indeed feel deep hurt over the caricatures. We applaud that vast majority of the protesters and demonstrators throughout the world, who chose to express their indignation in an orderly and peaceful manner.

We urge everyone to resist provocation, overreaction and violence, and turn to dialogue. Without dialogue, we cannot hope to appeal to reason, to heal resentment or overcome mistrust.

As we meet today in Qatar, we appeal earnestly to all leaders, religious and secular, to use their influence to promote the universal values and beliefs that we all share. As individuals, and as representatives of our respective organizations and countries, we fully support universal human rights, and the strict application of relevant laws. We believe all rights should be exercised responsibly. Neither media publications, nor places of worship, should be used for incitement, or to spread hatred.

The international society we all want to live in is a tolerant one, which recognises both rights and responsibilities. The hallmark of every tolerant society -- and indeed of every tolerant person -- is respect for the right of all people to freedom of worship and of opinion and expression, and appreciation of diversity as an asset, not a threat.

We look to the high-level group of the Alliance of Civilizations, which meets here in Qatar tomorrow, to suggest ways of encouraging broader and deeper mutual respect and understanding between people of different belief, culture or tradition.

We intend, as a group, to follow up this joint statement, and commit ourselves to formulate a joint strategy and agreed measures that will contribute to overcome the current crisis, to prevent its recurrence, and to promote tolerance and mutual respect between all religions and communities, in Europe and elsewhere.

The group has requested the United Nations Secretary General to bring this document to the attention of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, and the European Union.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Cf. <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2006/sg2106.html?email=yes> retrieved on December 25, 2007.