

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

When French President Macron said that Islam is in crisis, he perhaps meant to refer to Islamist extremism which is indeed a challenge that we Muslims are facing.

In the fight against Islamist extremism, Muslims are not opponents but partners. Therefore, the French government's statement should have been clarified and issued in collaboration with the Muslim leadership of France who have been proud residents and citizens of France and who have faced the menace of Islamist extremism themselves.

The lack of clarification as well as the absence of important involvement of Muslim leadership by the government of France when making the statement led to an angry reaction from the Muslim World and interpreted as a direct attack on 6 million French Muslims.

What followed in the next few weeks only escalated and created a widening chasm between France and the Muslim World. On 16<sup>th</sup> October, a French teacher, Samuel Paty, was killed for showing demeaning depictions of Prophet Muhammad in the classroom while discussing freedom of expression.

The attack was perpetrated by 18-year-old Abdoullakh Anzorev. He was not a student of the school where Samuel Paty taught. He lived 100 kilometres away from the school and was known to be in contact with Syria-based Islamist militants. The perpetrator not only murdered the teacher. He monstrously beheaded him and arrogantly posted a picture on his Twitter account of Mr. Paty's severed head.

In the aftermath, the French President Emmanuel Macron visited the school where Paty had worked and rightly said, "This was a typical Islamist terrorist attack."

As a Muslim scholar, I completely agree that this was a typical and abominable Islamist terrorist attack. I strongly condemn the attack on Samuel Paty. My religion –Islam– does not teach nor condone such barbaric and heinous crimes as a response to demeaning depictions of Prophet Muhammad or to any criticism of Islam.

There is absolutely no defence and justification in Islam for such deplorable, extrajudicial violence and murder committed by homicidal maniacs who pervert Islam. Islam does not teach its followers to respond in repulsive, sinful ways to mockery. The manner this crime was perpetrated was exactly the modus operandi of Islamist militants.

Islamist extremism is an evil that afflicts the Muslim world far more than the tragedies that have overwhelmed France. Millions of Muslims have been victim and lost lives to Islamist extremists. The behaviour of Islamist extremists contradicts the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

Prophet Muhammad is known by Muslims as the “Mercy to all Worlds”. There are many recorded incidents in the life of Prophet Muhammad in which He was mocked, defamed, abused, and even physically attacked.

I know that these depictions do not represent the true image and personality of Prophet Muhammad. But I simply do not understand why insulting depictions of Prophet Muhammad are considered an example of freedom of speech in France and some other countries.

I support freedom of speech but with responsibility. We support freedom of speech that is constructive and serves a useful role to unite communities instead of divide.

France has legislation that prohibits destroying, damaging, or using its national flag in degrading manners. Disrespecting the national symbol of the nation can lead to a fine of €1,500 euros. Freedom of speech should follow the same standards, whether it is disrespecting the national symbol of its nation or disrespecting religious symbols of its 6 million French Muslim citizens and other faith communities.

It is time to understand that continuous demeaning and disrespecting of symbols of a particular community will upset and anger the community. Such mockery and insult will only continue to create division, lead to the banning of French products, and jeopardize diplomatic relations with the Muslim World. Such incidents will also be exploited by those pursuing nefarious political agendas.

I appeal to the French Government to please stop the publishing of any demeaning depictions of Prophet Muhammad that are an insult and mockery of the whole religious community. Instead, the community – artists, politicians, and Muslims – should advance open debate, mutual understanding, and unite on a common, noble cause against the evil of Islamist extremism that targets all innocents.

I appeal to all Muslims to please exercise self-restraint in accordance with the merciful teachings of Prophet Muhammad, and reject acts that violate Islam, including breaking treaties and promoting vigilantism.

I also urge my fellow Muslims to increase efforts to teach others about the true personality of Prophet Muhammad by disseminating and making known His noble characteristics, qualities, and high moral standards, most importantly through good character and conduct with fellow citizens.

May God unite us –Muslim and non-Muslim– on shared interests that keep our countries and its diverse communities strong in promoting love and just as strong in combating hate in all of its ugly forms.



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28 October, 2020