

Tolerance International-UK is proud to announce its
National Tolerance Campaign in Central Hall Westminster
July 7th 2007:

*Silent Voices of Islam:
A Message of Peace and Tolerance*

Edited by Maryam Al-Alami



The mission of Tolerance:

The mission of Tolerance International - UK is to promote tolerance and moderation between people, society and nature for the equal benefit of all and for future generations.

Promoting peace, coexistence & equality in religion
Engaging with & alerting those vulnerable to extremism
Affecting policy through research & public participation
Calling for the participation & empowerment of women
Eliminating discrimination, promoting tolerance

PREFACE

On 7th July 2005 a series of bomb blasts rocked London and killed 52 commuters and injured 700 people. In order to heal the open wounds of the attacks, we propose that 7th July be established as **National Day of Tolerance** - a day of reflection on the dangers of extremism and to promote tolerance towards the diversity of cultures and faiths that make up modern Britain.

Tolerance International-UK needs to collect **2 million signatures** to make this day a reality. The petition is available at www.toleranceinternational.org.uk/petition.

If you would like to link to this petition from MySpace, Facebook, or your website, that is also possible.

This preface can be brief, because the evidence of our eminent speakers' words are in the extracts that follow, namely a certain mutual understanding that extremism can only be addressed by Muslims themselves using their strong faith.

The first step is for Muslims to acknowledge that there is a problem within their community, to engage with those vulnerable, and to encourage the voices of people in that community; particularly the voices of the young people, and the voices of women.

Tolerance International-UK hopes that it can work hard hand in hand with communities to address the very worrying situation- the spread of extremism. But allow us to quote Ayatollah Gangeii (page 45): The good news is that these countries that have gone through this cycle of extremism have also found its solution.

The solution is: The Glory of Islam.

It is Islam and Muslims themselves.

If anybody wants to help, all they need to do is to empower the genuine voices of Islam to do what they need to do:

- on a national level,
- and on an international level.

In whichever country in which you find extremism in the world, try and find the opposite voice and empower it.

That is the solution.

Because nobody, nobody can take away the recruits of the fundamentalist terrorists other than Muslims. It is too strong a faith for others to try and stop it. It needs to be Muslims themselves.

Now that's why Tolerance International UK has given priority in its Tolerance programmes to empowering the Muslim community; to helping; to assisting; to researching; to understanding.

We wish you well.

Maryam Al-Alami (Editor; Director of Research, Tolerance International-UK)
Hamid Bayazi (CEO, Tolerance International UK)
London

SPEAKERS AT THE CONFERENCE THE 7TH JULY 2007

Chair: Stephen Lloyd

Senior Partner BWB, Chairman Charity Law Association (2006)

Session One:

Lord Taverne

Dick Taverne studied philosophy and ancient history at Baliol College, Oxford. He became a lawyer (Queen's Counsel), a Member of Parliament and served as a Minister from 1966. In 1996, he was appointed to the House of Lords. He is author of the *March of Unreason: Science, Democracy and the New Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005)
On Tolerance and Fundamentalism

Lord Khan

Lord Shaukat Khan was Sheriff of Nottingham. He has been involved in community work for many years both professionally and in a voluntary capacity. He was a Nottingham City Councillor, was Chair of the Housing Finance Committee and represented the Council on various Housing Associations. He is currently Director of the Asia Link Network and involved in a number of regeneration initiatives in East London where he lives.
Britain post-7/7 and communities

Richard Rampton

Leading libel lawyer, Awarded Chambers and Partners "Defamation Silk of the Year"; has received the title of "king of the Libel Bar."
Tolerance of Difference: Freedom of Thought and Expression

Rafiqq Abdulla, MBE

Lawyer, interpreter of Rumi and Attar, broadcaster and writer; a member of the Sharia Finance Advisory Council
On Islamic Jurisprudence and reading faith

Dr. Maryam Al-Alami

Director of the Tolerance Institute, Tolerance International-UK
She is co-author of the report *Engendered Penalties: Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination* (2007). She has taught Law and carried out research on Public Participation and Environmental Justice; The Precautionary Principle and Public participation. Maryam currently heads the research initiative into community polarisations in TI-UK
On the participation and empowerment of women

Session Two

Dr. Richard Stone

Chair of the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia; Founder President Alif Aleph UK (which promotes contact between members of Jewish and Muslim communities); panel member of the Stephen Lawrence and David Bennett Inquiries
On multiculturalism and interculturalism

Dr. Mohammed Essam El-Din Fahim, Ph.D.

Head Imam & Chairman, South Woodford Muslim Community Centre; Former Chair of Redbridge Care Homes. Dr. Fahim is an inspirational advocate for Islam. Passionately teaching the modern teachings of Islam to all communities. He has been an active advocate for human, women and children rights and is frequently consulted by the authorities and the media on Islamic, interfaith and wider communities issues.
On prayer and traditions of tolerance in Islam

The Reverend Father Robert Hampson

Robert Hampson is the Chair of the East London Three Faiths Forum.

Born in 1958 in Upminster, Essex; he graduated from the London School of Economics. He trained to be a priest in Cambridge and was ordained in 1997; studied Biblical studies and Philosophy of Religion at Heythrop College, London. He has taught Philosophy at the Thurrock Adult Education Centre, and was visiting tutor at Heythrop College.

On Fundamentals of Faith

Ayatolla Jallal Ganjei

One of the most respected and learned scholars active within the Shia tradition of Islam. He has written on matters of Shiite teaching, as well as on general Islamic subjects, but most importantly he is known for his passionate stance in contesting the false interpretations of Islam by "Terrorist Fundamentalism". He is Chair of the Committee for Religious Minorities of the NCRI.

On fundamentalism and on the tolerance aspects of Islam

Hamid Bayazi

Has 25 years experience in the on profit sector as an inspirational advocate of charitable activity. Hamid Bayazi is Chief Executive of Tolerance International. He was Vice President of the Middle East Fund from 1999-2005 and Vice Chairman of Iran Aid. He has written a number of papers on Islamic fundamentalism, two of which have been made into educational documentaries.

On Polarisation: Reasons and Consequences

SPECIAL THANKS...

The event organisers would like to thank Leon Menzies Racionzer, Dr. Martin Corner, Raficq Abdulla MBE, Lord Shaukat Khan, Dr. Richard Stone, Rev. Robert Hampson and Gautam Barua for their generous assistance, support and hard work in helping to prepare the event programme. Special thanks are due to the event administrators who have done a sterling and skilful job in ensuring that this event is a success; to Dr. Mohammed Essam El-Din Fahim, Ph.D, Mr. Leon Menzies Racionzer and Dr. Martin Corner.

ps. Please remember to sign the petition to the Prime Minister to make 7th July an annual National Tolerance Day. This is a way of placing tolerance high on the list of national priorities. Nothing could be more important at the present time.

We live in dangerous times. Often it seems as though we are surrounded by anger and suspicion, by people who refuse to accept others as they are. All this is reflected in cultural discrimination, in racial violence, and in the violence of religious extremism. What can we do about this? We can do what most people do already. We can live in peace with our neighbours as we are taught to do by our faith/belief. We can refuse to give way to anger and suspicion. We can show by our behaviour, that trust is stronger than fear. But we can also act to show that we do not accept the politics of intolerance. Tolerance International-UK is supported by Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jedi Knights and people of faith or none. We are working to affirm tolerance as the first principle of British society. By tolerance, we mean not just putting up with others. We mean recognising the dignity of difference.

Please support this petition.

You can do so online by going to toleranceinternational.org.uk and clicking on petition.

Thank you.

PROGRAMME

14.15 Chair, Stephen Lloyd

14.20 Remembering 7/7
1 minute silence

14.22

Pianissimo; Adolpho

Adolpho Barabino is an internationally well recognised concert pianist. He has had great success in Germany, where he gives recitals, and in England where, after having performed at the London Wigmore Hall he has been invited to play with the English Chamber Orchestra as well as with members of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and to record the complete Chopin works

Session One

14.35 Lord Taverne
Tolerance and Fundamentalism
Lord Khan
Britain's communities post 7/7
Richard Rampton
Law, liberty and consequences
Rafiq Abdulla, MBE
On reading faith: How do we read religion?
Dr. Maryam Al-Alami
On the participation and empowerment of women

15.25 Introduction to Tolerance International-UK- video

15.40 The release of 52 white balloons in remembrance of the 7th of July victims

Session Two

16.10

Messages of support:

Esther Hyman, sister of Miriam Hyman (victim 7/7/2005). Cardinal Archbishop Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster. The Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities. Rabbi Dr. Tony Bayfield, Head of the Movement for Reform Judaism, Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani. A number of Mayors from various London Boroughs

16.20 Dr. Richard Stone
New diverse cultures of the UK
Dr. Mohammed Essam El-Din Fahim, Ph.D.
Traditions of Tolerance In Islam
The Reverend Father Robert Hampson
Fundamentals of Faith
Ayatolla Jallal Ganjei
Terrorist Fundamentalists' Characteristics; The Solutions
Hamid Bayazi
On Polarisation: Reasons and consequences
Terror, Islam and Martyrdom: Fundamentalists' strategies for destabilising Western societies and how Western governments should mitigate fundamentalism: The UK context

17.15 Short break

17.20 Questions to the panel

17.50 End

Speech by Stephen Lloyd

Chairman's Introduction



We're here to mark the launch of Tolerance International-UK and in particular its Tolerance Day campaign, and the first part of that is this conference "The Silent Voices of Islam".

I'd like first of all to give you a few brief words about Tolerance International- UK. This is a new charity, the driving force behind of which has been Hamid Bayazi, set up to provide support to victims of intolerance and extremism.

Tolerance seeks to contest extreme behaviour prompted by distorted religious teachings, cultural divisions and political ideologies; recognising at all times that extremism is an attitude which can affect all religions, all cultures and the political life of all societies.

Tolerance International aims to support communities which are vulnerable to such pressures both at home and abroad.

In order to address this broad vision, Tolerance has adopted two particular activities. The first is this conference today which aims to provide a platform for a message about genuine and tolerance in Islam and in other religions.

Secondly, you'll find in your pack details of an online petition. Please go to it, because this petition calls upon the government to recognise the 7th of July as the National day of Tolerance, so that on this day every year, Britons of all religions, creeds and cultures may celebrate their common values and bonds and so prevent small minorities who seek to divide us from taking ownership of this day and other days to promote hate and extremism.

In a broader context, Tolerance is undertaking at the moment, four key activities.

First of all, an educational project, successfully piloted at the Bishop Challenor School in Tower Hamlets which has been recommended by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to other schools in the borough. This aims to encourage young people about issues to do with intolerance in a variety of forms - cultural, religious and racial and to provide them with real life examples where they need to address that situation and work with it.

Secondly a programme designed to enable islamic communities to engage with young muslims in Morocco and empower them to contest and disassociate themselves from extremist religious teachings.

Thirdly, research - a research project is being run by Tolerance with the aim of identifying and quantifying levels of polarisation in Islamic communities in Britain and providing recommendations to address that.

And finally, working with a major American charity, the IPC - the Iran Policy Committee, which is itself a charity under American law- working in Iraq to search out solutions to deal with the devastating effects of polarisation within muslim communities in Iraq and you can all, I am sure, recognise what valuable potential work that is...

I thought I would quote you a few lines from a poem by William Butler Yeats which he wrote just at the end of the First World War, which has I think, particular relevance to what we are discussing today

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer
Things fall apart
The centre cannot hold
Mere anarchy is loosed out on to the world.
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed
And everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned
The best of us lack all conviction,
while the worst are full of passionate intensity”.

And actually I'd like to suggest that much of the theme today is actually give the best a confidence in tolerance to give the best a passionate intensity. And on that note, I'd like to introduce Lord Dick Taverne, QC so he can talk about Tolerance and Fundamentalism.

© Stephen Lloyd, London, 7 July 2007

Message of support from Rabbi Dr Tony Bayfield

Head of the Movement for Reform Judaism



"What you are doing today puts many to shame.

Since the 1960s the world has been disfigured by a phenomenon which is often called 'the rise of fundamentalism'. Whether the term is a satisfactory one or not, the phenomenon represents a global disaster, afflicting particularly those three closely related faiths Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Fundamentalism has five key characteristics. It begins as a fearful rejection of modernity which has challenged old ways of understanding the world and shaken old truths. It responds by reasserting those truths in an uncritical and simplistic way. It advocates a retreat into a past, simpler, purer way of life which never actually existed. And it sets out to seize political power. So that it can impose the truths and the way of life on all without consent and with resort to violence if necessary.

Fundamentalism afflicts Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike and, by and large, mainstream faith leaders have done all too little to resist. Some have been seduced into thinking that it is really this 'old-time religion' that is authentic. Some have placed organisational unity and stability above resistance. Some have felt justifiably threatened. Some have excused fundamentalist leaders by confusing the conditions under which the poor and oppressed who are duped and exploited with the cynical exploiters themselves.

As a result, fanaticism and terror, violence and intolerance flourish whilst mainstream religious leaders wring their hands.

Religions have a great deal to answer for. But we should never lose sight of the fact that there are fundamentalists amongst the secular as well, extremists who betray the same intolerance, dogmatism and willingness to use and justify violence.

The only salvation is for the silent majority, both religious and secular, to cease to be silent and for the moderates to demonstrate that moderation is not the same as acquiescence.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam, at their best, all advocate peace and tolerance as supreme values. As do moderate humanists and secularists. We have however to grasp the truth that we see on our television screens daily - namely that peace and tolerance are not universal values. They have to be asserted, worked for and even fought for. Our television screens tell us that both the good name of religion and the very future of societies all round the globe are at stake.

Thank you for ceasing to be silent and for showing intolerance of intolerance. Thank you for advocating the best of our shared values. Those Jews, Christians, Muslims and moderate secularists who are not standing shoulder to shoulder with you today have a great deal to thank you for. But this is only a beginning and we must lose no opportunity for joining the cause".

Message of support from Esther Hyman

Sister of the late Miriam Hyman, victim of the London Bombings 2005



Miriam Hyman

"First I send my apologies for not being able to join you today. After gathering for my sister, Miriam Hyman, two years in a row at a park in London where we played as children; family and friends decided to make this an annual tradition. I am spending the day with Miriam's loved-ones, and my experience so far tells me that this is the best way to provide and receive support at this difficult time.

I was touched by Tolerance International's invitation to join you at this commemorative event, and I do regret not being able to attend. Please accept this message of support instead, and know that I will be thinking of you, releasing fifty-two white balloons, one for each victim of the London bombings.

I would like to add my voice to those who call for mutual tolerance, on a personal and a global scale. No matter what our religion or creed, the sanctity of life seems undeniable, and it follows that our neighbour's child is as precious as our own.

I feel lucky to live in a diversely multicultural society. The rich tapestry that is our heritage is endlessly interesting and absorbing. We must learn to focus on what connects us, and to appreciate our differences as a source of edification and delight. Miriam and I ourselves are a mix of English and Indian blood, of the East and the West, and I have always seen this as an advantage!

One day in August 2005, a recently built mosque in my area of East Oxford opened its doors to the public. After much deliberation, I went to their open day and introduced myself and explained my circumstances. I told them that I was there to extend a hand of friendship, and to make sure that they knew that I did not blame the Muslim community for the actions of the radicalised few. This turned out to be a cathartic experience for me, and I have maintained contact with the young men and women who formed the Oxford Islam and Muslim Awareness Project. I hope to be able to promote good relations between the Muslim population and the wider community.

I feel as if I am preaching to the converted. I know that those gathered at this commemoration will be like-minded people, with the interests of all of the community at heart. I wish you well for your mission to promote tolerance between all peoples".

Message of support from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor

Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster



"I am sorry that I cannot be present at the conference at Central Hall, Westminster today. I wish every success to any campaign that seeks to build tolerance and understanding between peoples of different race, colour and creed. We must work to enhance the dignity of every person and to respect diversity in matters of faith and tradition. These are essential foundation stones for building peace in our world. May each of us be an instrument of peace and may your conference promote a "civilization of love" spoken of by Pope John Paul II".

Message ends..... Every good wish for tomorrow

Rt Rev John Arnold

Auxiliary Bishop in Westminster

Moderator of the Curia and Chancellor

Archbishop's House, Ambrosden Avenue

London SW1P 1QJ, U.K.

Tel: 020 7931 6062

Fax: 020 7931 6058"

Message of support from Hazel Blears, MP

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Race, Faith and Cohesion Directorate
Communities and Local Government



"Thank you very much for your invitation to Hazel Blears MP to speak at your conference. I am sorry that we are not able to send anyone to the event tomorrow, which looks like it will be a useful and productive session, at an important time.

As I said on the phone, we have been greatly heartened by the response across communities in the last week or so, and would like offer our strong support (if only in this case over email!) to those working with local communities to build resilience against violent extremism. Your voices speak louder than ours.

You may be interested to know that in a press statement today, our Secretary of State said:-

"Once again the true strength and character of our society has been shown - with a calm response reflecting the breadth and courage of our communities in the face of the recent attempted bombings.

"I have been pleased to see the strength of responses condemning the actions of terrorists and encouraging communities to work together with the police. This builds on the strong consensus we have seen following 7/7 and since, with individuals and groups uniting to stand up to those who seek to undermine our society.

"With the threat of terror we face the way forward lies in celebrating the values we all share. We must therefore work together and make the most of the wide range of strengths throughout our communities."

I hope you agree that this shows our strong support for your work, and I'd add our best wishes for your conference tomorrow. I'd be interested to hear of any follow up that ensues from the event.

Best regards,

Ed

Race, Faith and Cohesion Directorate
Communities and Local Government
020 7944 0520"

Message of support from The Worshipful

The Mayor of Waltham Forest

"I was very pleased to receive the invitation to your event on 7 July. It is with great regret that neither I nor the Deputy Mayor are able to attend.

We applaud your efforts to encourage tolerance and to support vulnerable and alienated young people in danger of falling under the influence of extremist elements. Recent events have shown us only too well how important integration, respect and mutual understanding are. In Waltham Forest, one of London's most diverse boroughs, we are working hard to promote messages of tolerance under the banner 'One Community'.

We wish you every success for your day of remembrance on 7 July and with your other projects to promote tolerance in the UK.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Liaquat Ali JP
The Worshipful
The Mayor of Waltham Forest"

Message of support from Councillor Faizullah Khan

The Worshipful The Mayor of Hackney

Also on behalf of:

Madam Mayor Cllr Ann Jackson, The Worshipful The Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Councillor Nurul Islam, The Deputy Mayor of Camden,

Councillor Angela Meader, Deputy Mayor of Lambeth



"Thank you very much,
Assalamu aleikum,
Peace be with you all.
I will not change the gear unless you ask me (joke).

I was not expected to address you but it is my great honour
and pleasure.

I was able to make it to this hall with all the hardships which are around. My car is parked just outside Westminster Abbey and I had to walk all the way up to Buckingham Palace and to take this route from here; because peace is very dear to me..... But I think that I am taking the liberty. After reading my message, I would like to add on something.

The Lord Almighty Allah, the God in which I believe has one name, which is "Haleem". The meaning of "Haleem" is 'Tolerant'. He is all-tolerant. The very existence of this universe and this world in our lives is due to his tolerance.

My Lord is most Tolerant.

Elsewhere in the Qura'n he has said, and I believe he is all-powerful to do all the things which he wants to do at any time. If he would have desired and wished he would have made all people in the same religion, so there is a purpose of creating us in different religions. But with tolerance and tempered with his mercy which is all-bounding, he says elsewhere that his mercy has wrapped everything, so whatever we are, wicked, evil; his tolerance is prevailing for us to continue our lives and this is in my religion. I am taught that Allah (God) loves each and every creation; every human being; more than his or her mother will love, and it is 90 times.

So I believe in God who has created you who is your creator too and I believe that he is merciful. And I believe that he is all-powerful in the scheme of things as earlier spoke. We have a very vague jigsaw of things in front of us. We cannot see what is the desire, what is the meaning of it; but we are supposed to accept and to carry on and to spread the message of peace and harmony. This is my message to you. That peace and harmony are the fruits of understanding and tolerance and we should promote them all the time.

Thank you".

Speech by Lord Taverne, QC

Tolerance and Fundamentalism



Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe that the idea of transforming today's date into a day to celebrate tolerance is a wonderful idea- it seeks to transform regret for the past into hope for the future; to turn tragedy into a positive response to a past marked by danger- the best qualities in our society.

I want to examine the nature of the threat from fundamentalism. What is fundamentalism? By definition it is the strict adherence to a belief that some sacred texts are the literal expression of the word of God. In practice, it is the belief that the words of the bible or the torah or the qura'n record truths which cannot be questioned and which endure irrespective of any evidence that contradicts them or any change of circumstances that make them out of date.

Let me start with the total opposite- the polar opposite of fundamentalism, as set out by the 17th Century philosopher, who could justly be called the father of liberal democracy, John Locke. No one in my view has more eloquently stated the case for tolerance and the avoidance of dogmatism. Now he wrote, and this is a memorable quote in my view,

"Since it is unavoidable to the greater part of men, if not all, to have several opinions without certain and indubitable proofs of their truth, it would methinks become all men to maintain peace and the common offices of humanity and friendship in the diversity of opinions, since we cannot reasonably expect that anyone should readily and obsequiously quit his own opinion and embrace ours. For where is that man that has incontestable evidence of all that he holds or the falsehood of all he condemns".

Now it is worth remembering that quote especially if we consider the great variety of religions in the world. There was an Anglican priest, David Barrat who spent forty years counting and cataloguing the different religions in the world.... And he established that there were over 10,000 distinct religions. And that listed Christianity as just one, when in fact Christianity alone has some 33,380 different denominations. Now it is a sobering thought that many followers of these religions believe that their religion or their denomination represents the true view of God and indeed some regard the beliefs of other religions as the work of satan.

But let me turn to the dangers of fundamentalism and the harm fundamentalists have done and still do. Now ofcourse all recent attention has focused on Islamic fundamentalism. But I think that it is worth bearing in mind the harm caused by others.

First, Jewish fundamentalists. They allow no rational doubts to question the absolute truth and divine authorships of the torah. Well a few years ago, the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote a book in which he said:

"In the course of history, God has spoken to mankind in many languages; hrough Judaism to Jews; Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims. Truth on earth is not nor can it aspire to be the whole truth. No one creed has a monopoly on spiritual truth".

Now these are admirable sentiments which ofcourse closely echo those of John Locke. But they were promptly condemned by a group of Orthodox jews as heresay for daring to suggest that different religions had something to learn from each other. One rabbi cited a verse from 'Proverbs': "The name of the wicked will rot".

Now the influence of Jewish fundamentalists may seem limited, yet it might be argued that they cannot be compared with Islamic ones. Yet few can deny that the root cause of conflict in the Middle East is the jewish settlements on Palestinian land, especially those in the West Bank. And how are these justified? By reference to the book of deuteronomy, I quote:

"For ye shall pass over the Jordan to go over the land that God giveth you and you shall possess it and dwell therein"

What was written in the Old Testament thousands of years ago is invoked to justify seizing land on which Palestinians have lived for centuries. These fundamentalists have done enormous harm to the cause of peace and tolerance.

Next an example of the harm done by Christian fundamentalists. American Evangelics, unfortunately supported by the Catholic church have succeeded in enforcing on UN agencies their view that contraception is a sin. As a result, family planning has virtually disappeared from the agenda of aid agencies in Africa. In Uganda, for instance, which is making very good progress in the fight against AIDS through the distribution of condoms, and where the birthrate had dropped to about three per woman, the birth rate is now over seven. The incidence of AIDS is again increasing. And despite the increasing incidence of AIDS, Uganda's population is likely to increase from 25 million to some 120 million by the middle of this century.

And a similar story is unfolding in Niger and Chad and a number of the poorest African Countries. Now this picture makes achievement of the millenium goals absolutely impossible. Women's education will suffer, in fact it will regress. All hope of making poverty history will be gone. Poverty, hunger and disease will increase. I regard this particular manifestation of Christian fundamentalism as a crime against humanity which arguably will do more harm than Al-Qaeda can ever hope to achieve.

Ofcourse the example of fundamentalism uppermost in people's minds is that of Islamic fundamentalism., for which you will hear more later. The harm it does is well-known. But I believe that it is important not to confuse the issue of fundamentalism with others. It has been wrongly identified with the so-called "war on terror". It has been entangled with the Iraq war and the so-called war in Palestine. But if peace were to come to Palestine or to Iraq it would not stop Al-Qaeda or the Taliban or the fanatical theocrats who run Iran. They were there long before the Iraq war and were little concerned at first with the affairs of Palestine. The struggle against Islamic fundamentalism (I think this is an extremely important point) is not one of a military war but one of ideas. The Islamic fundamentalists want to convert the world into a kind of medieval, totalitarian intolerant vision of society based on their own narrow fundamentalist interpretation of the Qura'n. And this enemy can only be defeated by the opposite vision of a democratic, tolerant, secular (by which I mean) non-theocratic vision of Islam. And that vision is not one that Christians, Jews, Muslims or even humanists alone can promote. We must leave that to our Muslim colleagues who have been the driving force behind this initiative today, although we must do anything we can to support them.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I must end by citing the example of one of the people that I admire most. I am a humanist. He is a priest. He is Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I twice had dinner with him in South Africa in the dark days of apartheid. He is the most charming of men. One story he told was of how he liked coming to London and would always ask a policeman the way to Trafalgar Square when he was within sight of it. And the reply always came: "Over there Sir". But as a black South African, he explained, it was just so wonderful to hear a policeman call him Sir.

Now I hope that we haven't forgotten the struggle against apartheid. It was also a struggle against violence and intolerance. Some of the opponents of apartheid were as violent and inhuman as its defenders. They came to liberate South Africa with their necklaces; a horrendous practice of forcing tyres around those they suspected of collaboration, filling them with petrol and then setting them alight. Now Tutu at great personal risk to himself led the fight against this practice and intervened time after time to save people (often his own opponents) from the gangs and their necklaces. It was because people like Tutu and Mandela fought intolerance and autocracy with a message of democracy and tolerance that they won people's hearts and minds that apartheid was finally defeated. One day, I trust a democratic and tolerant Islam will similarly prevail.

© Dick Taverne, London, 7 July 2007

Speech by Lord Shaukat Khan

Britain's communities post 7/7



Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, may I first of all offer my apologies for coming late. As you know, the events outside [Tour de France] are such that it made us tour around the city more than we wished for but I hope that I am not inconveniencing you too much.

Today and every day since the 7/7 we remember those who lost their lives, and also those who suffered tremendously after that fatal incident where 52 people lost their lives. And as we remember those, we also remember those who on that day worked tirelessly to help and deal with such an enormous tragedy from public services to many other individuals and people in order to support those people suffering.

That day, and those that followed demonstrated the strength and resolve of the communities that make this city and this country a model of tolerance for all to see. Over the past two years, people of all faiths, languages, colours, different backgrounds and ages have come together not only to show their abhorrence to extremism of any kind but also to work together in building bridges between communities, creating better understandings; isolating those that are trying to create divisions and fears; and of course there are many who have tried to allow the Muslim community in every event that has happened in the city or anywhere else in the world; and the good thing has been that people have stood fast; and have not let those people get away with it.

Muslims like others have also been affected, both emotionally and socially. Attempts have been continuously made to malign them, as I've said in any negative event that occurs or happens. But it is a credit to the community leaders, the community members for staying calm and working with authorities, neighbours, friends and organisations to distant themselves from criminal elements of our communities and societies. And as Lord Taverne reminded us that these exist in all communities whether they be Muslim, Christians, Jewish or others.

The communities have become more aware of the environment that they are living in and the need to take their roles and responsibilities seriously and proactively. And this has a positive effect on our communities. The increase in joint activities between all faiths, and this has been quite evident from the inter-faith dialogues that are going on, and other activities, both the Churches and the Jewish communities and Muslim communities are undertaking. Secondly it is also the inclusion of Tolerance and understanding of others at all levels, both in educational institutions as well as in community organisations.

There is a promotion of activities; both cultural activities that are also involving all communities and are also a positive sign of such tolerance; as well as debates and discussions about the issues and problems that are taking place amongst the communities.

All of these signs are of a positive development for the Tolerance programme and issues; hence the need to build upon such progress and positive desires is essential. But at the same time, we must also look at some of the issues that affect those people and certainly are of concern, both internally and externally.

We still have alienation of young people amongst our communities. We still have social isolation of groups, particularly the Muslims. We still have social deprivation amongst the communities, both in the inner cities as well as in the outer cities. We still have a problem

of external issues as like the previous speaker said; Lord Taverne, that we have issues like Kashmir. We have issues like Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan to name but a few. These are also of concern. We cannot isolate those or assume that they have nothing to do with what people feel and think and which affects them. Britain is a multi-cultural and tolerant country. We are proud of it. We need to ensure that that tolerance and understanding is built upon, both at a political level, a social level, economic level and at community level.

We can be negative and keep thinking about the past and be stuck in the blame culture. We must not let ourselves be held back by such views and by those people. We need to be positive. We need to look ahead. We need to be creative and positive in our approach and in our thinking, and that also means that we need to make decisions which are hard but important. That we look at Islam, not for what few people present but in a wider context. As the previous speaker said, as is well-known, Islam is a good religion that talks about tolerance, and talks about love and talks about understanding. And why do we pick up only the negative things or only a small minority and highlight those things. It is up to us. It is up to all of us who believe in tolerance, who believe in a fairer and good society to promote those people, those projects that seek tolerance.

We have a common interest, Muslims as well as others. We are part of this society. We will be affected as much as anybody else. So we have a vested interest in having a tolerant and a caring society. And we must not allow those people who are always looking at creating division and thus creating an intolerant society. I believe that we have the resolve. I believe that we have the means and we have the resources to do far more positive work and far more creative thinking in creating a tolerant society; and that will be happening at all levels. We need to be helping our young people to understand what tolerance is. We need to be helping those communities who are living, not only in the inner cities of London but also in the rural communities. They are as important as we are here. Their understanding of a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious society is as important as it is in the centre of London. We have all got to work together and make sure that we never allow extremes of any religion to dictate to what we need to be a tolerant society.

Thank you very much.

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Speech by Richard Rampton QC

Law, liberty and consequences

Tolerance of difference: freedom of thought and expression



Voltaire is supposed to have said - though he probably didn't -
"I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

I don't know how many of us would go quite that far - perhaps, in truth, quite a number of us, - but there can't be much doubt that it expresses one of the basic principles of western democratic civilisation. It may be thought to exemplify a model of society which is inherently antithetic to tyranny, one which in principle rejects, except where absolutely necessary for the maintenance of its citizens' safety and well-being, the ideology of compulsion in favour of debate and persuasion. In essence, its philosophical foundation is, perhaps, the perception that all citizens are of equal value, with equal rights to say and do whatever they wish, so long as they do not cause serious harm to others.

The proscription of *acts*, which are perceived to be harmful to others, is relatively uncontroversial. On the whole, it is not difficult to achieve consensus at any given time in history about what kinds of behaviour need to be declared unlawful and what do not - though there will always be debate and disagreement about particular issues (for example, at the present time, 'substance abuse').

It is with *ideas*, and the words used to express them, that the real difficulty arises. When, if ever, does one citizen, or one group of citizens, however powerful or vociferous, has the right to suppress or censor the ideas of others and the means by which those ideas are expressed? The answer, in an ideal world, ought to be, never.

The reality is somewhat different. All western democracies - even, despite its First Amendment, the USA - have laws, which impinge on freedom of thought and expression. But those are mostly civil laws, which leave citizens free to choose whether to use them, and, if they do go to law, to settle their disputes voluntarily. *Compulsion* in this area, whether it derives from the State through the apparatus of the criminal law, or is exerted by extra-judicial means, such as threats of victimisation or violence, is another matter entirely. And it is here that we have, I think, now reached a point that requires us to reflect most earnestly upon how to proceed for the future.

Perhaps no one will dispute that a person who incites others to murder those who have expressed ideas or opinions, which he or she disagrees with or finds offensive, ought to be constrained by criminal process. But that's an easy one: murder is itself a crime, so inciting it should be, too.

But what of the person who first expressed the offensive or insulting idea that provoked the threat of murder or violence? Is he also to be prosecuted? Is he to be intimidated into silence by the threat of prosecution and punishment?

Let me take an example. Several countries in Europe have made Holocaust denial a crime - Germany and Austria, unsurprisingly, perhaps; but also France, Belgium, Spain, Poland and a number of the other of the old Communist bloc countries. But we have not; nor has the USA. And, at least for the present, rightly or not, in my view. For though Holocaust denial is often, both in its intention and its effect, a vehicle of dynamic anti-Semitism, the traditions of free discussion and debate that we have for so long nurtured in this country

are still the best way of dealing with such disreputable phenomena. Holocaust denial is both morally offensive and historically absurd. But, even when it cannot be ignored, it can be met and mastered by argument, both moral and historical.

Why, then, do some sections of society, both here and elsewhere in the western democratic world, reject such an approach to the rebuttal or demolition of ideas or opinions that they find repugnant? Why do pro-life campaigners in the USA murder doctors who carry out abortions? Why do animal rights extremists attack the persons and the property of those who use animals for research for the benefit of their fellow human beings? Why should the presence of a fake severed head of the Prophet (amongst others) in a production of *Idomeneo* in Berlin cause the cancellation of the opera for fear of violent reprisals from so-called Islamic extremists? Why should two senior BBC executives who were thought to be responsible for the broadcast of *Jerry Springer - The Opera* need security guards to protect them from violence threatened by supposedly devout Christians? And what is it that provokes someone who disapproves of the notorious Danish newspaper cartoon to call for the execution of those responsible for its creation and publication?

These are but a few examples of the intolerance of ideas and opinions that presently seems to flourish in our western democracies. There is obviously no single answer to the question of what its causes might be. These will vary from case to case, and I do not think it sensible or satisfactory to try and explain them in terms of simple religious bigotry. For though the supposed tenets (often misrepresented) of a religion are commonly the banner under which intolerance goes to war, I think it obvious that the true causes are often more complex and varied than that.

But that we have to recognise the resurgent phenomenon of intolerance and try to deal with it there can be no doubt. If we do not, then it will gather force and begin to infect the whole way in which we have, until now, felt able to deal with it. Indeed, there may come a point when the reaction to it will become as repellent as the phenomenon itself, and when the apparatus of the State moves beyond the criminalisation of overt incitement to violence and racial hatred and into the criminalisation of thoughts and words which the government and its supporters 'disapprove' of or find uncomfortable. I fear, indeed, that we may already have started to move in that direction: how else can one explain how it is that a young woman who stood by the Cenotaph in Whitehall reading out the names of the Iraq War dead in protest at what she believed to be an illegal and immoral invasion found herself prosecuted and convicted of a criminal offence? That way, I venture to suggest, lies perdition, where the spectres of the Third Reich and Soviet Russia, and countless other tyrannies before and since, will stalk our streets, listening in to our conversations, controlling the information we receive from the media and punishing those who espouse or express ideas that the authorities perceive to be 'incorrect'.

Better by far, I would suggest, to try and pre-empt such a ghastly scenario by means of *education*. We have in this country the history, the tradition and the resources to enable us to teach our children about the true meaning of tolerance. No matter from what religious, ethnic, cultural or economic sector of our diverse society the young people come, we have the wherewithal to inform them of what Voltaire said and to explain to them why it is that he was right - even if he didn't say it.

But saying isn't doing - fine words never buttered any parsnips - so let's get on and do it. It can be done, though it will undoubtedly take time; and it is precisely what this charity has set itself to start doing.

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Speech by Rafiq Abdulla, MBE

On reading faith: How do we read religion?

“When all else fails, you can always tell the truth” Professor Abduls Salam Nobel Laureate.



All religions are blessed and cursed by their particular revelations and holy texts. These texts, which the faithful read or listen to, expound, reflect - set in the stone of sacred conceptualisation insights, intuitions and the consequent ethical projects and obligatory conduct derived from readings of faith. They do not, nor can they, express the silent midnight fears and doubts, the sudden joys and fluid epiphanies that visit us with grace and grant us a level of serenity beyond words. Music can suggest this deep realisation or ecstasy of the spirit, art may touch on it, poetry too, but our holy texts are fashioned, some might even say, hardened by a thousand interpretations, which are necessary but not sufficient. Thus reading our faith or religion through the texts given us - through the Bible, the Qur'an, the Torah, the Bhagavad Geeta, through the traditions, the sutras, the myths of origins and endings which continue to have power over the faithful - is a delicate task calling for intelligence, subtlety yes, but also simplicity and humility. The great Christian mystic, Thomas a Kempis wrote in his marvellous book, *The Imitation of Christ*, several centuries ago:

“Indeed it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God. I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. For what would it profit us to know the whole Bible by heart and the principles of all the philosophers if we live without grace and the love of God? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone.”

All of us, people of faith and no faith, could do worse than ponder on this wise advice. Thomas a Kempis tells us not to affect wisdom but face up to our abiding ignorance. We can *know* too much and never know well enough.

We all bring our own enigmatic histories, our own psychological ticks and tricks to our readings; we are supported and undermined by our communal understandings of our holy texts. We all bring to our readings a partiality we can never escape entirely. But I do believe we can choose to read ironically, to be aware that we are limited creatures, with limited understanding, that we will inevitably get things wrong, that no matter how luminous and divinely-inspired, how radioactive a holy text may be, it comes to life when we engage with it with the intelligence of the heart. All this, I believe, should make us think again when we read our religions, and think again....always. We should handle all certainties with immense care, truth is not easily conceived and absolute truth is inconceivable to finite beings such as ourselves.

Thus we are bound to read our faiths with consideration and intelligence - of course we approach them from a particular perspective, as I have said we carry with us baggage that makes us both impassioned, alive, and blind. We are all tempted to fence in the vast ranging spaces of faith and the sky of spirituality with partial readings; we set up divisions so that we may stamp ourselves with identities of purity and shame, with exclusive superiorities that claim special knowledge so that we may justify our beliefs and actions no matter how oppressive, cruel or destructive. God knows his own and we - the faithful - are inevitably His own, to hell with the rest. This dangerous divisive thinking is justified by crude readings of our religions and I think we can all agree that this practice is a major

source of anguish and danger in our interdependent and rapidly globalising world. We need to think again, we need to read again, to remember who we are when we are alone in the dark of the midnight hour, when we are set adrift in the domain of shifting and changing dreams as we enter sleep.

A guest at a wedding I recently attended, a charming Dutch ex-banker who was sitting next to me at the wedding feast, asked me why it is that Muslims are not standing up and saying "NO not in our name" to the extremists or radicals who carry out appalling atrocities in Europe in the name of Islam. I found it difficult to give him a glib answer. Of course Muslims protest against acts carried out in the name of Islam by terrorists mired in potential and actual catastrophes they do not understand entirely, but these protests don't capture the by-lines of publicity; the sensation-hungry media is keener on screening the flag-burning rants of rampaging crowds shouting hate-filled slogans - and if they are Muslims all the better. As the American novelist Don DeLillo points out, we are all fascinated and intrigued by catastrophes or by the construction of catastrophes-about-to-happen when we see it on TV, and so we read our nightmares through the spectacles performed by others.

I can say with confidence that Muslims in general are as appalled as non-Muslims at the potentially terrible during the first weekend of July 2007 but their concerns were given a ten-second viewing on BBC 24 News on the following Sunday night. Muslims in the UK are caught between the rock of their real and perceived grievances and the hard place of public distrust and obloquy. How does one rise above the group paranoia and delusions which stir, which churn up different communities who feel aggrieved and enraged? How can one mediate so-called strong religion with some more reasonable reading of faith? There is such a degree of prejudice against Islam and Muslims and vice versa, there is such a degree of bad faith between Muslims and non-Muslims, such lack of trust, such a degree of denial by Muslims who are not prepared to examine their faith critically, their cultural and political attitudes, but non-Muslims also are blinded by their own prejudices against Muslims whom they regard, certainly covertly - never mind the soft rhetoric of integration - as the ultimate "Other"; Muslims are regarded as the ultimate barbarians not only at the gates but within the body politic. Prejudice is an invisible but effective shield against self-examination that would enable people to acknowledge the extent to which bad faith plays a role in Western incursions in and invasions of Islamic lands especially the Middle East, ostensibly for their own good. There are many instances of this terrible collusion in the disasters that we witness all over the Middle East. Let me give one example by quoting the former UN Middle East Envoy, Alvaro de Soto who said in a confidential report that the halting of direct funding to the Palestinian government and the freezing by Israel of the monthly tax revenues due to that government has - and I quote him - "...effectively transformed the Quartet (that is the USA, the UN, the EU and Russia) from a negotiation-promoting foursome guided by a common document - that is the road map for peace - into a body that was all but imposing sanctions on a freely-elected government of a people under occupation as well as setting unattainable pre-conditions for dialogue." This observation was made by a UN official and not by some Islamist ideologue.

As Islamists avoid looking into the failings of their own values and governance within Muslim societies, so we in the West are not prepared to face up to our own collusion with the forces of repression and terror in the Middle East. All parties are motivated by bad faith, by poor excuses and by poor readings not only of the demands of their own faith, but also by faulty readings of the faith and motives of the so-called "Other". We like thinking well of ourselves and badly of anyone who does not resemble us - thus there are Muslims - as there are Christians - who believe that only good Muslims, or indeed, good Christians will be saved on Judgement Day, therefore it is the duty of Muslims...or Christians to convert the

heathen. This attitude - I am tempted to say "symptom" - leads to absolutist thinking not capable of change; faith and the world are read by such people with monochrome certainty. So how are we to overcome this impasse? How are we to learn to read our faiths and each other more intelligently and more ironically?

This is a difficult call. How do people change attitudes, how do we replace prejudice with engagement? At one level - we can make a choice - we can choose to think and act differently in the context of our global responsibilities, we can choose to set aside our sense of superiority and difference and try to understand what motivates other people, to understand the back story of their actions and ours, and the unforeseen consequences that follow - we can choose to read history with intelligence and proper irony. We can, as the late Richard Rorty put it, we can embark on the project of living together by an act of imagination. We learn about others, according to Rorty - and I quote, by "the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers This process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of re-description of what we ourselves are like." Some may regard this as a sort of hopeless idealism in which academics and philosophers are prone to indulge in. Private Equity pirates, Hedge Fund hunters of profit, vociferous Commodity Traders in the City dealing in billions, risking and raking in the dollars, will no doubt smile at this hapless naiveté; they know that success in this world, the amassing of fortune and power is not done through communal piety but by acts of greed. Greed makes the risky world go round. Politicians and public servants too, who are practised in the nonchalant art of rhetoric, who rejoice in the humdrum machinations of power, are likely to slip behind the habit of benign - often false - public utterance for the public good and shake their heads warily as they plot a smile or two at this simple-minded plea for common understanding. I don't have to cite the extremists who are hell-bent on achieving their aims by mainly foul means. The realist description of people, they would all argue, is that we are unredeemable and self-seeking as groups and as individuals. I believe it is an over-narrow view of humanity which rationality to a mechanistic process governed by genetic drives computed into self-interested survival susceptible to mathematically-inspired prediction, a sort of democratic but generally fatalistic disavowal of moral responsibility. This is another, less congenial, reading of the new religion of the secular age where the human is reduced to an individual modelled on a machine whose behaviour can be predicted by computational logic. Symptoms replace causes, and human experiences of sorrow, depression, bereavement, loss and solitude are explained under a medical model whereby these existential moments in our lives may be medicated back to 'normality'. Efficiency replaces humanity; performance targets become the shibboleths of measuring success - even of birdsong! Reason is reduced to rationality, which can be regarded as the technology of reason. This new religion of the free market creates a powerful system of social control in which society is becoming more rigid and stratified, and politics has given way to financial markets and our freedoms are jeopardised not only by the so-called 'war on terror' but also by free-wheeling international financial markets - this, in turn, has led to corruption on an immense scale as we have seen in the dramatic bankruptcies of super corporations such as Enron and the recent failure of the sub-prime lending market in the USA recently.

I do not buy into this mechanistic vision of humanity, I am still persuaded by the economist-philosopher, Adam Smith, who wrote about the importance of "moral sentiments" as the glue of societies. Eamonn Butler, the Director of the Adam Smith Institute, described moral sentiments in this way, I quote: "Smith [held] that people are born with a moral sense, just as they have inborn ideas of beauty or harmony. Our conscience tells us what is right and wrong: and that is something innate, not something given us by lawmakers or by rational analysis. And to bolster it we also have a natural fellow-feeling, which Smith calls

"sympathy". Between them, these natural senses of conscience and sympathy ensure that human beings can and do live together in orderly and beneficial social organizations."

We live in communities, this implies that we have obligations towards each other and the greater society - by that I mean not only the political states we live in, but also within the global society, which is developing with great rapidity; we are answerable to each other. The nay-sayers may remark that just because I quote the father of capitalist economics does not mean I am right. Adam Smith was a product of his time when morality still had a romantic ethical and philosophical basis rather than the so-called scientific one to which we subscribe today. But I shall persist and rely on Smith's reading of our nature.

All our readings - of our faiths, of others, of politics, of what makes life worth living - must, I believe, at least be imbued by Adam Smith's "moral sentiments", of conscience and community, which are not particularly Western but are the nearest values we have to the universal - I repeat if we are to live intelligently on this hard-worked planet of ours, we must remember that all of us are interdependent and accountable for our actions and our thoughts.

I feel this is the least we can do in tribute to the victims of that terrible day on the 7th July 2005.

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Speech by Dr. Maryam Al-Alami (pre-ex)

Director of Research, Tolerance Research Institute at Tolerance International-UK

On the participation and empowerment of women



Ladies and Gentlemen, I am here because I completely believe in what we are doing at Tolerance International-UK.

Our collective experience at planning today's event has been a team effort and I hope that I do my colleagues proud today.

So I thank you for taking the time to be here today and for allowing me the privilege to listen to me speak, especially to those of you who have travelled from very far because you believe in our work.

Isn't it the faith that we have in human nature that allows us to see the good in one another?

Aren't we here today because we collectively reject the horrors of 7/7?

We are here today because we care about our communities.

We also share one thing by being here today.

We are here in remembrance.

We are here for tolerance.

Empowering women is central to the whole question of extremism and intolerance.

The distortion of the perception of women in contemporary Islam comes out of its problematic relationship with the West, and that is what I address today. I address this by looking at the issue of real women, as Islam understands it.

Our 'Mission of Tolerance' at Tolerance International UK's (TI-UK) aims to moderate extremes by providing a common ground for people of all faiths to interact positively in order to re-assert the needs of our societies. At Tolerance International we like to believe that this moral grounding is based on people's experiences and their beliefs in the common good. This generally depends on the peaceful edicts of one's creed.

The common factor in societies and cultural groups is people. People tend to be complex beings with differing cultures, creeds and belief systems. One common ground they all have is tolerance as the moral grounding for actions.

Only in providing a common ground for all faiths to interact positively can people in society take ownership of the 7th of July. The 7th of July was a day on which Islamic Fundamentalism 'won' by creating chaos and disorder. The most dangerous religious consequence of the fundamentalism of that day was the way in which a distorted image of Islam was reflected to the world.

In Islamic fundamentalism religious values were no longer what they seemed, they were turned upside down and the religious principles could no longer be defined independently of the government and political leaders who implemented them. According to Gangeii, on

that day Islamic fundamentalism relied on two things:

Firstly 1- Total belief and adherence to Sharia Law and what is called the "religious principles" of Jihad.

Secondly 2- An execution that put those principles into practice, (where the necessity of establishing an Islamic state was even more important than the actual practice of Islam itself) (Gangeii, 2007)

In his 1999 paper on "Muslims and Democracy" Professor Filali-Ansary observed that "the past is often held to weigh especially heavily on Muslim countries, particularly as regards their present-day receptivity to democracy". He did not dispute that history had an "overwhelming and decisive" influence in shaping the contemporary features and attitudes of Muslim societies, but he saw the overwhelming influence being the nineteenth century encounter of Muslims with the modernising West.

The diverse conflicts that local Muslim populations had waged in defence of their independence and identity against colonial powers in the nineteenth century meant that their independence, identity and religion became as Filali-Ansary describes "intimately fused". The differences between Muslims and Europeans were conflated. Thereby, the polarisation of Muslims from Europeans came to dominate all the approaches that were taken to questions that related to what he termed "religion, politics and the social order".

On the level of principles, Islam should favour "individual freedoms" and the "capacity for religious choice" writes Mohamed Charfi in 1998. But the evolution of historical developments has caused Muslim societies to evolve in the opposite direction towards the loss of individual autonomy and submission to the community and the State. This evolution gave rise to such dichotomies as "Islam and the West".

In fact, according to Altawajri, Muslims, particularly those living in Western countries have a "thirst for knowledge and equality in order to achieve liberation of their emotional and intellectual life" (Altawajri, 2007).

TI-UK's Mission of Tolerance views this liberation of emotional and intellectual life as the act of remembering the 53 *[note: one went under a train on the circle line due to the shock of the blasts but has never been mentioned by the press (see wiki below)]* who died on this day. It is in memory of human suffering; that we need to feel a sense of peace and forgiveness inside. Forgiveness for the consequences of these fanatical acts; and the phobia of Muslims that ensued.

The 7th of July is a day in which vengeance should be forgotten; and hatred be put aside. Where the ultimate aim: is to enable people of faith/ no faith to use their commonalities in order to reflect on issues of intolerance, discrimination and extremism in a healthy positive way. In order to engage young vulnerable people in a healthy dialogue, whereby the reflexes that may take them towards such discrimination and intolerance may be engaged by embracing the essence of their root belief: as a common voice for peace and democracy.

The mission of Tolerance is five-fold that spells out the word 'PEACE':
We Promote peace, coexistence & equality in religion
We aim to Engage with & alert those vulnerable to extremism
We aim to Affect policy through research & public participation
in order to Call for the participation & empowerment of women

thereby Eliminating discrimination, and promoting tolerance

We believe that the “C” part of this ‘PEACE’ mission – that is Calling for the participation and empowerment of women; is the key to combating extremism. We choose to focus on women, because the mother is the base of the home. And we choose to address extremism in the name of Islam because at present Islam is facing a crisis of identity with Islamophobia at one end of the spectrum and so-called religious- based extremism at the other. We work to moderate extremes by addressing this ideological crisis. Islam’s war is not territorial, it is ideological. It is quite distinct from other conflicts like Ireland and Israel.

I return to the question of women, Islamic communities have developed with time to promote gender-based distinctions, discrimination and inequality, not only in the home but also in social and political arenas. For some reason, most people within these communities refuse to address these cultural norms. Some people within Muslim societies (as lead by clerics like Morteza Motahhari) believe that a “woman’s self esteem derives from the man, and so she does anything to gain his esteem. Her soul and flesh, feelings, even her basic identity, belong to and are identified with him. Man replaces God for a woman”, a view plainly contradictory to monotheism, which Islam represents.

According to Islam and Islamic precepts, a woman owns her body and all her property. Under the pretext of the sanctity of the family, however, the reactionaries, or extremists, consider the husband as the owner of his wife’s body and life, thus making her his slave.

Khomeini’s theory of velayat-e-faqih begins with gender discrimination and ultimately tramples upon the most rudimentary human rights of women. For the fundamentalist mullah’s perspective, gender distinction is the key to controlling people. People are controlled in worship, in trade and in signing contracts. On the marriage of virgin girls, Qomi has said: “In Islam, the marriage of a virgin girl is not allowed without the permission of the father and the consent of the girl. Both must agree, but at the same time the rule of the divine leadership superseded that of the father and the girl on the issue of marriage and vali-e faqih (that is the supreme leader) can enforce his view contrary to the opinion of the father and the girl.” That means that a cleric could sanction the forced marriage of the girl over her own objection and that of her father.

According to Rajavi, from the fundamentalists’ perspective, “sexual vice and virtue are the principal criteria for evaluation”. The most unforgivable of all sins is sexual wrong doing, so piety, chastity and decency are basically measured by sex-related yardsticks. They seldom apply to the political and social realms. Fundamentalists perceive women to be sinister and satanic.

“She is the embodiment of sin and seduction. She must not step beyond her house, lest her presence in society breed sin”. (in Rajavi, 2003)

The fundamentalists look at the world and the hereafter through distorted sex-tinted glasses. Throughout history they have fabricated their own fantasies as moral lessons and attributed them even to the Prophet Mohammed’s ascension to Heaven. (Rajavi, 2003)

Such fantasies are nowhere to be found in the Quran. The Quran consists of more than 6200 verses, the great majority of which deal with the question of existence, history and human being, and emphasize the responsibilities of the human race. “The total number of verses focusing on religious precepts does not exceed 500, of which only a handful deal with sexual vice and virtue” (Rajavi, 2003).

According to the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet), the Prophet enumerated seven mortal sins, namely loss of faith in God's mercy, homicide, robbing orphans of their belongings, sorcery and demagoguery, usury, and slandering virtuous women.

A common theme runs through these seven sins, however diverse they may be: rather than being introspective, they all relate in one way or another to social relations and man's relations with others in society.

Looking at the list of the seven mortal sins, the question comes to mind that while one of the mortal sins is slandering women, why do fundamentalists exaggerate gender distinctions? "Is it not a dogma persisting from ancient times? That may be so, but the fundamentalists may see this as the only way to maintain a monopoly on Islam." (Rajavi, 2003)

At Tolerance International we call for the participation and empowerment of women in all aspects of political, cultural, social, educational and working life. Women's input and involvement is fundamental for a democratic process. Religious dogma, in particular a false interpretation of Islam, undermines the position of women. We seek to empower women, as we believe that women's participation in social and political leadership is a cornerstone of the solution to contesting religious extremism.

Because we believe in hope, we believe that these people who are sympathetic to the ideas of people in extremist groups are the people we can have a dialogue with.

Our approach opens the way to dialogue, which in itself is the most important obstacle to overcome.

Connecting with those who are at risk of being affected by distorted religious teachings, using core religious values such as mercy and coexistence helps open the way to dialogue, this is the most important obstacle to overcome. Empowering those vulnerable to re-examine their understanding of the core values of their faith ultimately helps them to disassociate themselves from damaging distortions. This requires public involvement to generate a comprehensive approach and a change in policy. We will conduct research into the roots of unrest and the sources of extremist interpretations of religious texts, which are leading to acts of violence and polarisation within our communities. We aim to offer independent unbiased information to bring clarity to a confused and worrying situation, thereby hoping to improve on the public's perception and to gain active participation for our campaign in promotion of tolerance.

Empowering women to choose a life different to their own and to work towards an active coexistence that breaks down the barriers of inequality and discrimination that they face in everyday life is the key. Only by shaping the contemporary features and attitudes of women in British societies and in Muslim societies can we alleviate the nineteenth century encounter of Muslims with the modernising West and thereby go some way in tackling extremism.

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"One initial report, in the minutes after the explosions, involved a person under a train, while another concerned a derailment (both of which did actually occur, but only as a result of the explosions)."

Speech by Dr. Richard Stone

New diverse cultures in the United Kingdom;
On Racism, Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism



Friends we started off this afternoon with Dick Taverne, Richard Taverne, then we had Richard Rampton and now you have Richard Stone so that makes me Richard the third, which is perhaps a little unfortunate if you follow Shakespeare but perhaps if you follow some other people, it is not such a bad place to be in. I just did want to correct Richard 'the first' on one small point. Not correct, but add. When you were talking Dick about the Torah and what it says about the settlers, and the land "the land is for you" as Jews. I as a Jew just want to add that I am aware that the Torah says "You shall have the land of milk and honey, for you are a just people". In other words, it is conditional. You don't have it unless you are just. So that is something that we Jews have to take very close to our hearts these days.

But what I want to talk about is racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (in that order). In talking about racism I am going to use the word black in its political sense which means people that are likely to have suffered discrimination because of the colour of their skin. Although some white people say that black people have some racism against white people, but the real racism in this country, certainly in Europe is anti-black racism. And this is built on the history of slavery and of colonialism and the main racism in this country is anti-black racism.

Now the main thing that I want to get across, that is the theme is that racism is not in the head of black people, it is in the head of white people. And that black people can do very little to reduce racism. Black people try to reduce racism as Jews try to reduce anti-Semitism and Muslims Islam phobia. You get ticked off for trying to push your case too hard. You can't take a joke when there is a racist joke or an anti-Semitic or an Islam phobic joke. You can't take a joke. It is very difficult to plead your own cause.

The change actually when it comes to racism has to come from people outside Black and Asian communities which are the communities we are particularly talking about. And the change has to come really in the minds and actions of those people who have power in the white communities, mainly white middle class middle aged men like me. So we have a heavy responsibility for making these changes. The business about discrimination is to do with an abuse of power. It is the power of the people who have more power in exercising the abuse of that power against people with less power.

The same applies when it comes to anti-Semitism and in particular the new sharp end of racism, which I have discovered in the last ten years on the Islam phobia Commission and in other interaction with Muslims; which is Islam phobia. It's the new sharp end of racism in my opinion. And bearing in mind what Mary am was saying earlier on, the Director of Tolerance International; also in discrimination of women as well, of course as white middle class men. We have a very big responsibility my friends.

I just wanted to read you, as an example of what goes on in the country today, and how this shows itself, is the leader in the Daily Telegraph this morning, and this says:

"We must make Muslims loyal subjects once more".

"We must make Muslims loyal subjects once more".

That's the strapline at the top. Actually the article is not as nasty as that seems. I just want to take apart the idea that:

"We must not make Muslims loyal subjects once more".

Firstly I wanted to say that the internal workings of a minority community are not for those outside to deal with. Though what we can provide outside that community sometimes is support; especially in providing a neutral space, a sensitive neutral space for people within that community, which is what actually what we've been doing in the Runnymede Islamophobia Commission on and off for the last ten years.

So in a way I think that it is better for non- Muslims to make every effort to engage with Muslims and don't go round making Muslims more loyal subjects once more.

We should be offering that support and if we can also the neutral spaces if we can for non-Muslims to come and get across internal divisions. We should be supporting voices, which are usually excluded such as women and younger people, as Maryam was saying earlier on. I incidentally thought of volunteering for a sex-change operation so that we would at least have two women speakers here today. But I have to tell you that my wife wouldn't allow me to have that.

I think it is actually wrong to demand that "you must change" which is in effect what Muslims are saying. It reminds me of a lot of the programmes that the government has been having in the last five to ten years, certainly after the twin towers, on integration. Which is that:

'You must integrate more with us'.

A lot of it has been that way round.

My experience of having been introduced to Muslim communities by a number of people that are here today (over the last ten years) is that Muslim people in this country contribute enormously. Their efforts of integration are huge. The massive contribution of Muslims is not recognised.

In fact I think contribution is a much better word than integration. Let's talk about contribution rather than integration. I think it is almost offensive to talk about integration to people who try to integrate but the problem is when you ask people, the first respectful question is:

"Tell me about how you and your family contribute to this society. What have you and your community actually done for Britain?"

And the answers are phenomenal.

Who actually knows how many counsellors there are in this Community that are of Muslim background?

We know that there are a very small number of MPs.

How many doctors are Muslim in this country?

How many consultants are Muslims? How many Barristers?

How many lawyers?

How many young people in the City that contribute to the City Circle that many of you may know about?

-contributing hugely to this country. And yet the government effectively have been saying, like the Daily Telegraph:

"We must make, this is 'we' white people must make Muslims loyal subjects once more".

All the Muslims that I have ever met, all of them that is, except one or two people are very loyal subjects to this country and contribute enormously to the country.

So the first question is: "Tell me about your contribution?"

The next question, if you're going to respect a minority is to say:

"Do you find blocks to your attempts to contribute to this society?"

And when I ask this question in many parts of this country;

The answers are: "Yes we do face blocks.

Then when you've heard about these blocks you say, "Then, tell me about them."

When you've heard about them, then I think you are entitled to say:

"Are some of these blocks put in your way because of your colour or because of your religion? Tell me about them."

And you will start hearing stories, which are quite disgraceful. In the first phase of the Islamophobia Commission from 1996 to 1997, the thing that struck me most as a non-Muslim in the Commission introduced by non-Muslims to our Muslim communities around was what you may describe as low-level Islamophobia. People being spat on, on their way to and from the mosque. Name-calling. Children, girls in school being told that they can only do gymnastics in knickers and vests, wherein the dress code for observant Muslims is of course to cover up. Now I have had to tell some Local Education Authorities and their head teachers in schools:

"Olympic athletes train in track suits. Why can't you have your girls training in track suits?"

So I think that there is an awful lot of that low-level racism against Muslims, which you might describe as Islamophobia.

And I then ask people,

"Well look, all this is going on: Why don't you report it to the authorities?"

And do you know what people said to me again and again in different parts of the country?

"Ah but that's how British people are".

I was devastated by that. Really to think that two million Muslim people in this country are willing to think that, that's how British people are; are basically institutionally Islamophobic. The fact that people really are not even aware of how horrible they are acting to people.

Finally when you have gained the confidence of these people and you have listened and listened and listened, and you want to make change and you actually want to work alongside people. You want to try and make change and to try and support people who are suffering these types of discriminations. Finally you might actually ask about the dreadfully difficult problem of a handful of young educated men who successfully hide their evil intent, which is so contrary to the peaceful inner jihad of Islam. If you get round to that maybe on the third visit, when it is the time to ask that question; not to come in like the media and other surveys do, starting with the handful of people:

"What are you doing to prevent extremism in your community?"

I think that should be the last question not the first.

Then we must also remember that those families of the young men who had blown themselves up or were threatening to do so. Almost all of them would have said that they didn't know what was happening with their young brothers or sons as the case may be.

You must remember how these people have been suicide bombers. That these families have lost one of their beloved sons just as much as the families who had those killed in the same blast. So I commend Tolerance International today on convening today's event. I have to say I hope that Tolerance International will take the lead from its Director Maryam Al-Alami to increase the voice of women to modify the tendency of many men to dominate the discourse in religious committees and in religious communities.

Thank you very much.

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Speech by Dr. Mohammed Essam El-Din Fahim, Ph.D. Traditions of Tolerance in Islam



My dear brothers and sisters, Assalamu Aleikum wa rahmatu allah wa barakatuh, may his peace blessings and mercy be upon all of you; and thanks for waiting patiently to listen to me.

Today we call to mind the atrocities which engulfed us all in London in 2005 when many innocent lives were lost and many more were injured. Our hearts go out to all the victims and their families. We pray to God to give them patience and shower his mercy on all of them.

No one who terrorises people has any right to claim that he is a religious person, whether he is a Muslim or a Christian or a Jew. The prophet Mohammed peace be upon him (pbuh) said: "Anyone who terrorises people is not amongst my followers" [reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

He also said that: "No Muslim should be given...refuge by any Muslim". In Islam it is a crime to glorify or condone terrorist murder. Or even to suggest that suicide bombers are anything but martyrs. They are but killers waging war against God and his messengers. The true martyrs are the innocent people they killed.

Islam defines terrorism as an act of war waged against God and his messengers by openly committing disorders on the earth. Any act of terrorism is severely punishable in Islam as stated in verses 33 and 34 in chapter five.

Listen very carefully please to the punishment. And I wish if the British Government would apply this punishment regarding those who have been captured.

The punishment of those who wage war against God and his messenger and strive with might and maim with mischief through the land is execution or crucifixion or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides or being exiled from the land. That is their disgrace in the world and the heavy punishment is theirs in the hereafter, except for those who repent before they fall into your power.

In that case, know that God is oft-forgiving, most merciful.

For the double crime of treason against the State, combined with treason against God, as shown by overt crimes, four alternative crimes are mentioned, any one of which is mentioned to be applied according to the crime committed.

Of course, no one can wage war against God, as he is exalted in mind, the irresistible. But this emphasises that terrorism is a crime not just against humanity, but also against God himself, and the teachings of all his messengers. That is why Islam regards the killing of one innocent soul as equivalent to the killing of all mankind, and the saving of one life as the equivalent to the saving of the whole of humanity. Verse 32, chapter 5 illustrates this.

If anyone slew a person, unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land, it would be as if he slew the whole people. And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.

We are gathered here today to celebrate Tolerance International. According to the Oxford Dictionary, there are two meanings for the word 'tolerance'. The first meaning is, the ability, willingness or capacity to tolerate something. And the second meaning is, an allowable amount of variation of specified quantity, especially in the dimensions of the machine or part. This is known as 'engineering tolerance'.

When I used to design aeroplanes forty years ago, the tolerance was so small (plus or minus 0.1mm). Later in life, when I started to design columns and beams, the tolerance increased. "God's creation is perfect, because he is perfect, therefore his word does not permit any engineering deviation", as stated in verses 3 and 4, chapter 67.

But because man is not perfect, God demands from us to practice religious tolerance. So let me give you a few examples from the Qura'n regarding religious tolerance. The first verse which comes to my mind is verse 256, chapter 2:

"La Ikraha fe Din, Qad tabayana al-rushdu min al-ghayb".

No compulsion in religion, what is right is clear from what is wrong. Compulsion is incompatible with religion, because:

Number one: religion depends upon faith and will and these would be meaningless if induced by force.

Secondly, truth and error have been so clearly shown up by the mercy of God that there should be no doubt in the minds of any persons of good will as to the fundamentals of faith.

Thirdly, God's protection is continuous, and his plan is always to lead us from the depths of darkness into the clearest light.

In chapter 10, verse 99, God is saying to prophet Mohammed:

"If it had been your Lord's will they would all have believed; all who are on earth. Will you then Mohammed compel mankind against their will to believe?"

If it had been God's plan or will not to grant the limited free will that he has granted to man, his power would have made all mankind alike. All would then have had faith. But that faith would have reflected no merit on them. In the actual world as it is, man has been endowed with various faculties and capacities so that he should strive and explore, and bring himself into harmony with Allah's will. Hence, faith becomes a moral achievement, and to resist faith becomes a sin".

As a complimentary proposition, men of faith must not be impatient or angry if they have to contend against unfaith; and most important of all, they must guard against the temptation of forcing faith, because imposing it on others by physical compulsion or any other forms of compulsion such as social pressure or inducements held out by wealth or position will not make it a true faith. Forced faith is no faith. They should strike spiritually and let God's plan work.

In chapter 109, God clearly states: "You have your religion, I have my religion: Lakum dinukum, wa liya Din".

I cannot force my faith on any of you and you cannot force your faith on me.

However, we continue to live together as brothers and sisters in humanity because God says:

“Oh mankind I have created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into Nations and tried you get to know each other; to care for each other, to love each other, not to despise each other. Surely the most honoured among you in the sight God is the righteous. Not the white, not the black, not the yellow, not the red; the one who really fears God”.

Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and the beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious, for your Lord knows best who have strayed from his path, and who received guidance. In this wonderful passage are laid down principles of religious teaching which are good for all time. But where are the teachers with such qualifications; that's what we suffer from today. We have no Imams or teachers who can teach the new generation, the children. We must invite all to the way of God, and expound his universal will. We must do it with wisdom and discretion. Meeting people on their own ground and convincing them with illustrations from their own knowledge and experience which may be very narrow or very wide. Our preaching must be not dogmatic, self-regarding, not offensive but gentle, considerate and such as would attract their attention. Our manner and our arguments should not be acrimonious but modelled on the most courteous and the most gracious example.

Let me finish by saying, Islam is a religion of peace, justice, mercy and tolerance. It is a divine way that controls all aspects of life including rules governing war and peace. Islam teaches the best values and most morals. The fault lies with man, not with his religion.

Thank you for listening.

© Mohammed Essam El-Din Fahim, London, 7 July 2007

Speech by The Reverend Father Robert Hampson

Fundamentals of Faith



Good afternoon everybody and thank you for the invitation to speak today. I have chosen this title, perhaps provocatively because I believe that the words we use very often become so well worn that they often cease to have any value. And a word like fundamental or fundamentalist may become so clichéd that they cease to have value. But there are other words as well, words like liberal, words like abuse, words like tolerance. What do we really mean by them? Now I come from quite a different stance from some of the speakers. One of the speakers introduced themselves as a humanist. I am a practicing and believing Christian. And in many respects that may put me on the conservative side. And so it is important for me to, as well as you, to underline what it is that are the fundamentals of faith. And I have got three.

Values I believe is the first one. They are things which we search for. And we don't discover them quickly. We have to search diligently to find them. And our faith and traditions assist us with that. They give us signposts of where to look. And if we are hardworking in that over time, over years, sometimes over decades, we come to things that are truly valuable. And if you read the scriptures of all our three traditions, I believe you find in there deep values about what is important in human life; about respect, about honesty, about integrity. Many other things too.

These values then enable us to face the world in a different way. They enable us to direct what we do to the world outside. That is number one. And I want to say this because I was recently in the land of Palestine, on the West Bank of Palestine, not in Israel, during the time when the cartoons of the prophet Mohammed came out, and it is easy for us in the Western perspective to say "Why can't people be tolerant?" But I can say to you, it wasn't only the Muslim community that were highly offended it was also the Christian community. I was there amidst a largely Christian village, and I can say without any doubt that the Christian people of that village were as horrified as the Muslim people and deeply offended. Something had been taken away from what was important to the Community of faith. Something had been under-valued. And where values exist, which are found after a long search the need to be upheld. And if we dismiss that for trite tolerance, we are in danger of taking away something very important for all of our humanity.

The second point; the second fundamental of faith I believe is the belief in God. And I want to come back to this in a minute because I think that it is absolutely central. But belief in God is essentially belief that our life is directed, and the scriptures, whichever one of the traditions we're in, but the scriptures show us the way of how God has directed the life of human beings. He comes in to their lives unexpectedly, and sometimes we don't even notice it for one hundred or two hundred or three hundred years. But we look back and we see the footprints. And we say yes, God was there, maybe in our own lives too. And at the time we think that it was a bad thing. And then, twenty years later, we realise that perhaps it was the greatest blessing of our time. And so we know, as believing people that God is present when we look back, we see the scriptures, we see the signs that is there. The time span of God is strangely not ours. He appears in a great way I reckon about every five hundred years. And when we want him to appear on our time span, we sometimes come to the conclusion that he is not present. That is number two.

Number three is transformation. That is a fundamental of faith. Transformation, that we change not only ourselves but the world around us. If we're imbued with a vision which the

values give us which the signposts of our faith and traditions direct us to, then we ought to with that power, with those visions that the values give us, go out into society and make society a different place. Because if it doesn't happen that way, then what is faith for? Faith is to give us values. It's to show us where the footprints of God are. And it is to lead us to transform the society in which we live. They are the fundamentals of faith.

However, we live in a society which has largely progressed from faith. It has progressed from faith with the liberal values that have largely come out of the enlightenment. These are good values; the values which we have heard illicit, of Voltaire and John Locke, amongst many others. And you know that these values have opened up many vistas of humanity which were not present before they were hammered out in the last two or three hundred years.

Liberal society has benefits, but it also has choices. It offers us choices. A plethora, a forest of choices and it tells people that these choices are of equal value. But the religious person cannot accept that. Because when he has buried himself in the tradition for so long and searched for those values which have required years to find and to hone for the values useful to him in his life. He can't accept that any choice is valuable and all societies are equal. Liberal society also doesn't tell you what choices are best. You need something else for that. You need to find your values. Society's values perhaps, but ultimately God's values. We believe as Christians and Jews, I am sure that it is the same for Muslims that we are made in the image of God. And that image is what guides us in our respect for the human subject. And we have to move forward in our search for what these important choices are.

And I want to move forward, because I want to look in a way at which these values, these beliefs in God, and the transformation can be turned around in a negative way. For a start, the person who doesn't search diligently; who doesn't stay within his or her tradition and look for those values and doesn't discover them and make them part of their life can often substitute instead a belief structure which is very rigid and very dogmatic and so instead of values, we have doctrines. And so that is wrong not because it is a value but because it's in a book in a particular place. So, that is one way in which we can go wrong.

On the second level, on the belief in God, and this is where perhaps our Brethren who perhaps want to force the hand of God are in danger of making a great mistake. That is when we don't really believe that God has got everything in his hands. We don't realise that God is working on a time span that is far greater than ours, and we try to jog things along a bit. These bombs and many other things really manifest a disbelief in God, an unfaith in God because they don't realise that God is there to use human beings for his purposes, not to have people in his name do things for him. It is dangerous to assume that we can take on the role of God. Vengeance is mine says the scripture.

And thirdly, instead of transformation religion can become insular. I don't know whether it is religion or anything. And one of the problems of liberal society is that we have become insular. We don't look out to see how we can transform society. The big models of transformation seem to have died in the West and 1989 and the coming down of Communism. Rather we keep looking inside and say:

"You do your thing, and I do my thing".

They are wrong as far as the fundamentals of faith are concerned. They don't work. They don't do anything. You need your values and you need your understanding of God and you need to look out to transform the world around you.

People, I believe who are being lost in a negative form of fundamentalism, and I will also add to that; a negative form of liberalism, have provided us with a great vacuum. I have many friends who will come under the category of fundamentalist. And I honour the fact that they have found values that are important. I honour the fact that they believe in God, and I honour the fact that they look for transformation. But I also look at liberal society and I say to myself: What is the future for us when we have no signposts like we used to have? When we don't create that deep search for truth and for values that the religious traditions provide?"

There is a vacuum. And I want to suggest that fundamentalism is filling that vacuum. It's coming in because there is nothing there.

Society needs I believe to re-find its religious values and to re-find its religious traditions and to revalue those and to find in them what is good and wholesome. It's not going to happen when we merely talk about tolerance in a way which is dismissive of those values and how precious they are.

Going back to my time in Palestine, and the way in which the insult to the prophet Mohammed and Muslim people was felt not only by the Muslim community but also by the Christian community and I am sure by other communities as well.

There are some things that have to be put on a different scale. It is not just allowing everyone to believe about everything that they want. It's for a common search. That's what is important, a search that allows us to go in a direction together and find that God is working in our traditions.

Belief in God means that essentially at some stage in life God's going to sort out the mess. We are not going to achieve that. We allow God to work. We have faith in him. And we don't go around blowing ourselves up. But what we do need, I believe, we do need to listen to their concerns and to the traditions and the values that these communities have. Take those values away and I don't think we have anything left in our modern society.

Thank you.

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Speech by Ayatolla Jallal Ganjei

On Terrorist Fundamentalists' Characteristics: The Solutions



In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Ladies and Gentlemen, Brothers and Sisters in faith. Allow me to start by expressing my apologies for not being able to be with you in person. We are gathered here today on the second anniversary of the London bombings, at a time that Britain is witnessing again acts of terrorism perpetuated in the name of Islam.

Let me start this address by emphasising that such acts and attitudes have nothing to do with Islam. Islam has absolutely no common grounds with such false interpretations. The reason is quite obvious. Islam is a monotheistic religion. It believes in one God ; a God who obviously is the Creator of all, and one who loves and cares for all of mankind.

Therefore Islam which is founded on this cornerstone, on the one hand seeks to devise the parameters for human relations and coexistence and so therefore encourages acts of love, charity and kindness to all its followers. Because in Islam all people of all faiths are equal in the eyes of God, we are all equal and in essence Brothers and Sisters. Therefore respect, friendship, kindness and generosity are the virtues that matter, and that is why in Islam, Muslims are asked to be active and pioneers in creating better relationships, better living conditions, and to be strong advocates for peace and co-existence. However, contrary to Islam, exists the evil and wicked extremist interpretation, which I will refer to here as 'terrorist fundamentalism'. This is a twisted political movement whose only objective is to take power and to impose its self-made regulations upon others. They will use any means whatsoever to reach this objective even if it means murder. So the characteristics of these fundamentalists are :

1. To gain political power in the name of religion, they will go to any lengths
2. They falsely try to impose dogmatic backward regulations which they name laws of 'Sharia'. Laws that will govern all aspects of people's private and social lives. These regulations have absolutely nothing to do with Islam. They are essentially dogmatic traditions which were devised in the middle ages.

In observing the various terrorist-fundamentalist currents we come to realise that all these groups have these two characteristics in common. In other words, whether the Shia Mullahs of Iran and their proxy-organisations or the Sunni Taliban of Afghanistan, and other Sunni organisations, they share these fundamental characteristics.

Let us look at an example which is still in existence. I come from Iran which as you all know went through a revolution which we all supported in the hope of achieving freedom and prosperity. This regime, as you know, is the only remaining model which has institutionalised this un-Islamic behaviour in the name of Islam. In this example we can well see that ever since they took power they have given material, inspirational and other forms of support; recruiting other Muslims to this mindset ; to the extent of creating a whole corps within the Revolutionary Army to coordinate these affairs. It acts in support of all such organisations all over the world ; Sunni and Shiite alike allocating Billions to finance and inspire them.

Therefore as Muslims we need to understand that this is not just a threat to the West ; it is an active threat to world peace, and it is the biggest plague to hit all Muslims and their communities. One only comparable to the time of the 'Inquisition' in Christianity.

From my personal experience, the sectarian violence in Iraq under Iranian influence; the polarisation of the Muslim communities in Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, and the West and Britain are all results of the spreading of this mindset.

We have all seen Muslims killing Muslims ; people of all walks of life being murdered; devastation and destruction. This is the true face of 'terrorist fundamentalism'. Here I would like to point to two important facts.

Firstly, regulations being imposed on these nations and communities as the laws of Sharia do not come from the Qura'n ; were not endorsed by the prophet or even his disciples. When we study these laws we realised that they have essentially been added to Islamic laws through despotic Islamic monarchs in and around the 3rd century after Islam ; and have been pushed into Islamic literature by bought-over Muftis and Mullahs of the day. Research and historical documents that we have can vividly prove that what is preached as Sharia by such people has no backbone and history in Islam whatsoever.

The second and the most important point is: what brings hope to this entire situation. This is the emergence of a democratic, tolerant and genuine Islam which has been stopping the movement of the fundamentalists. This has become more organised and forms the solution to this problem. Nothing other than genuine Islam and Muslims has the power to overcome this extremism.

So my brothers and sisters, there is good news. The glory and the power of Islam through its rightful bearers is the solution to the problem. As I looked at the Iranian example earlier, allow me to also expand on the fact that the harshest brutalities of the Iranian mullahs have been towards moderate and genuine Muslims, in particular the People's Mujahidin of Iran. Now we in the West have heard the negative connotations which follow words like Jihad and Mujahid. But is this not ironic that the only triumphant model of fundamentalism in today's Islamic world ; the inspirer of many extremist groups and movements ; the inspirer of evil groups and movements, the godfather of this evil trend is most scared by the Mujahidin. If the governments of the West seek to stop this evil trend, they must both at an International and National level, especially in relation to countries like Iran. Instead of spending millions on arms and perhaps another war, to invest in supporting and empowering those Muslims whose creed and past allows them to contest these false interpretations.

This is the experience that people like me who have experienced fundamentalist rule first-hand, can pass on to people like you whose communities are going through it now. In one word, we need to impress on the government the need to invest more in Islam and true Muslims to be able to address extremism in the name of Islam.

Allow me to end my talk here in prayers for peace and prosperity in the world, but also with spreading this good news that the antidote to this extremism does exist. It is peace-loving progressive muslims that need to be given the opportunity and the support. I pray for the success of your gathering and apologise again for not being able to be there with you in person.

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Speech by Hamid Bayazi

On Polarization: Reasons and consequences



Ladies and Gentlemen, I think I'll follow Dr. Fahim. Thank you very much for waiting to listen to me. Let me just start, having heard the message of the Ayatolla, that there is a solution. Now the country is going through a crisis. The West is generally speaking is going through a crisis. And by and large, people feel that there isn't a solution. There is confusion amongst the public. There is strong confusion amongst policymakers but today we have heard from a very learned and perhaps the strongest voice of Shia Islam today. Now I say this because Gangeii was the best pupil of Khomeini, whom as you know was the grand Imam of Shi'ism. And once Khomeini wrote his doctrine of Velayat-e-faqih, the Shia version of the jurisprudence leadership or ownership of the social life of people, Gangeii parted from him.

We heard from him today and he said "There is a solution" and the solution today to this problem which today releases itself in the form of "Islamic" extremism is available, and that is the empowerment of genuine advocates of Islam. This is the purpose of this conference: to give a voice to those Muslims whose creed and whose speech contests that of extremism: The real and the genuine message of Islam.

Now my learned colleague here, Dr. Fahim started and spoke about this very important Islamic phrase- "La Ikraha fe Din". Putting it into the social context, of the time at which this verse was said, that is 1400 years ago in Saudi Arabia, Din doesn't really translate into religion. Din translates into a way of life. Islam emphasises not only for you not to impose your faith upon others. Do not interfere with the way that they live. Live and let live. That is the true message of Islam and that is the glory of Islam and that is why I am proud to be Muslim.

I am supposed to talk about polarisation in the community: reasons and consequences. I will start with the reasons. These are: there is a great international socio-political vacuum after the downfall of Russia. Some of us are old enough to remember - those of you who are here to remember that in 60's early 70s. Most revolutions or uprisings for change, in all countries, including Muslim countries; including Palestine; Iran - They all assumed a Marxist character.

People were seeking justice and getting sick of the dictators who ruled them. Usually an ideology takes the forefront and then people follow it. Now, in the vacuum of one ideology, as if you like, the strength of Islamic righteousness was taking ground, which I think symbolised itself in the very beginnings in the Iranian revolution, which was the first of his kind. It opened a new way where people who were oppressed felt that they could seek justice by Islam. But what has happened, since is the most important point.

The twisted political ideology that these extremists have imposed upon these movements for justice which has disfigured them; and now for us the Muslims of the world, whether in the West or in the East, the most impressing threat is this, what I refer to 'disease'. Now why do I give it the name 'disease'? Because it's got a pattern, and certain communities; in this particular case, Islamic communities are by and large not immune to it. As a young man myself going through the Iranian revolution coming from a background of relative wealth and comfort and not liking the Shah so much, I became a strong-minded Muslim; I became a supporter of Khomeini. I didn't understand what this guy was all about, but I

supported him whole-heartedly, madly. I understand what the youth of our communities go through. They don't mean harm when they start. But what takes over is a 'disease'. And it characterises as a 'disease'. And unless we recognise that we cannot use the antidote to diffuse this 'disease'. Now this is what this conference is about.

Tolerance International-UK is not a religious organisation. We have a humanist chairman whom you've heard. We don't profess to be religious, but we do profess that by correct analysis and research we can recommend changes in policies and changes to people of religious leadership to be able to contest this.

To begin with our Tolerance Day Campaign seeks to empower and support the Muslim community which is the community unfortunately at this moment in time which is more vulnerable to this extremism. So what will the consequences be if this goes on? A disease has a pattern. Does anybody here know how you catch a cold? Go in a bus, somebody sneezes, you catch a cold. I'll tell you how a young Muslim catches the disease of extremism. It's as easy as that because I caught it.

Why does it turn into violence? Despair? Because they don't have a voice? Because nobody really represents them? Now these are the reasons. The consequences It's a pattern; a pattern that unless you realise will take over. I have absolutely no doubt. It will take over in Britain as it has taken over in Palestine, as it has taken over in Iraq. It is an antagonistic polarisation within the community of Muslims and it is dangerous. And that is why I want to thank you because I know many of you represent organisations and many of you have come a long way and I know many of your organisations seek to engage in community activity, or activities for the Muslim community or other inter-religious communities, inter-faith communities. You have a responsibility. We have a responsibility. We cannot sit aside and allow this to happen. Extremism in Islam, in the name of Islam will create extremism in the name of other religions. It's a pattern.

Allow me to take you through an example of a pattern to which I am very familiar and that is in my country, Iran. We started loving Khomeini. 99.5 percent of us- completely united. Within 6 months, as soon as the voice of the moderate Muslims started coming out, the community was polarised to an extent that father was executing son; son was killing father. Look at Iraq today. Do you really think- ask any Muslim and they will laugh. Do you really think that Shias and Sunnis have so serious a problem that they would blow each other up. No, no, no. This is polarisation. This is the consequence. This is the pattern of the disease. So we have a responsibility because the same pattern has entered communities of Muslims in the West as well and it is no good denying it. There are those who have gone to the extreme. There are those like my colleagues here who are preaching the opposite. There are those in the middle, by and large 80-90 percent who are completely confused and a good half of them lending the other way.

Now I am a Muslim.

I love Islam.

I love Muslim communities and I would like to help them.

And this is what Tolerance International is about. We think that unless we address this question in this country and in other countries this will blow up out of proportion.

Uncontrollable.

The consequence is serious.

So therefore our responsibility is as people of faith; representatives of organisations; members of the media; leaders of communities and religions.

It is serious.

Thank you very much for attending. And, I hope you take these messages and I hope that our organisations and our communities can work hand in hand to address this very, very worrying situation. But allow me to end like the Ayatollah did.

That the good news is that these countries that have gone through this have also found its solution.

The solution is: The Glory of Islam.

It is Islam and Muslims themselves.

If anybody wants to help, all they need to do is to empower the genuine voices of Islam to do what they need to do:

- on a national level,
- on an international level,
- exactly the same.

In whichever country in which you find extremism in the world, try and find the opposite voice and empower it.

That is the solution.

Because nobody, nobody can take away the recruits of the fundamentalist terrorists other than Muslims. It is too strong a faith for others to try and stop it. It needs to be Muslims themselves.

Now that's why we have given priority in our Tolerance programme empowering the Muslim community; to helping; to assisting; to researching; to understanding.

I wish you well.

Thank you

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