

Fatwa on the necessity of opposing Islamophobia

What is the opinion of the esteemed 'Ulamā' regarding Islamophobia, its definition and the duty upon Muslims to resist it?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى سَيِّدِ الْأَبْرَارِ، وَصَحَابَتِهِ الْأَخْيَارِ، وَأَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ الْأَطْهَارِ

قَالَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: ﴿فَسَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

وَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «مَنْ لَمْ يَهْتَمَّ بِأَمْرِ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَلَيْسَ مِنْهُمْ»

One of the greatest challenges facing the Muslim Ummah is Islamophobia. This is a global system of racism and discrimination which affects each and every Muslim, and does not discriminate on the grounds of age, gender or ethnicity. Islamophobia works in complex ways to exploit, control and dominate Muslims; worse still, it seeks to alter the form of Islam – *wa lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illa bi-Allah* – by forcing a transformation of Muslim belief, practice and life.

Under present conditions, among the duties of a Muslim of sound intellect, upon attaining the age of puberty or of legal maturity, is to aspire after a correct understanding of Islamophobia; an understanding that will both illuminate the complex nature of the system of Islamophobia and enable resistance to it. Muslims globally are affected by Islamophobia in ways that they know and understand and in ways that they don't so easily perceive or understand; what they know, however, is how they feel: hurt, anxiety, anger, pain, confusion, exclusion, stigmatisation, abuse, exploitation and erasure. Endangerment to Muslim existence underpins the legal judgment of obligation and duty established by this fatwa, which requires a Muslim to comprehend and then fight against Islamophobia. Allah the Exalted says,

‘And how could you refuse to fight in the cause of Allah and of the utterly helpless men and women and children who are crying, “O our Sustainer! Lead us forth [to freedom] out of this land whose people are oppressors, and raise for us, out of Thy grace, a protector, and raise for us, out of Thy grace, one who will bring us succour!’” (Q4:75). Thus Allah makes it a duty upon every Muslim to defend himself and herself and their community—particularly the weak and vulnerable. The horrific attack on the Muslim community of New Zealand, the result of Islamophobia, reminds us of the vulnerability of the Muslim Ummah, as it reminds us of its unpreparedness in the face of the threat, and its need for leadership that will rise to defend it.

It is upon the learned from among the Ummah to guide the Muslim through difficulty, to navigate paths through adversity. It is upon them to produce knowledge that enables an understanding of the world, and enable the negotiating of realities such that the Ummah remains both safe and secure, and in a position of ascendancy rather than domination. With respect to this, Allah says, “And let there grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state! (Q2:104); Allah also says, “With all this, it is not desirable that all of the believers take the field [in time of war]. From within every group in their midst, some shall refrain from going forth to war, and shall devote themselves [instead] to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith. And [thus be able to] teach their home-coming brethren, so that these [too] might guard themselves against evil” (Q9:122). And thus it is upon the learned of the Ummah, who understand social and political realities and their diagnoses, to respond to the challenge of Islamophobia; it is upon the rest of the Ummah to take from this guidance what will protect the Muslim in their time of need and endangerment.

Why do we need a definition of Islamophobia?

It is an obligation upon the learned of the Ummah to produce a definition of Islamophobia because, according to the ‘Ulamā’, every branch of knowledge (*‘ilm*) must be defined (*taḥdīd*) in terms of its scope (*mawḍū‘*), its source (*istimḍād*) and its benefit (*fā’idah*). Additionally, it has been claimed that “there is no such thing as Islamophobia” without an understanding of what that really means. Meanwhile, there has been a rise in violence, abuse and

discrimination against Muslims in the UK and globally. It is therefore important to identify what we are up against so that we can tackle the issue together.

What is the definition of Islamophobia?

Our ‘Ulamā’, after prolonged inquiry and investigation, have arrived at the following definition of Islamophobia:

Islamophobia is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

According to the scholars of logic (*ahl al-mantiq*), a definition is required to be both inclusive (*shāmil*) and exclusive (*māniʿ*). It should additionally serve a purpose (*ghāyah*). The definition above meets these requirements. The following breakdown of terms will clarify this:

A type of racism: Scientifically no population is a race. Races are not natural but come about by bundling together features such as appearances, attitudes, and behaviour and mapping them on to a population. Despite Muslims being from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they are often racialised and discriminated against based on their name, their perceived cultural identity or beliefs. According to the principles of the higher objectives of the Sharia, “the crux of the matter is the signified, not the signifier” (*al-‘ibrat bi-l-musammayāt lā bi-l-asmāʿ*); in other words, we should not be arguing over technical details relating to the definition but rather concern ourselves with the essence, i.e. what service the definition might do for the Ummah. This is a people’s definition, its purpose is to help people of goodwill understand the phenomena of Islamophobia, so that they can denounce it when it appears, and demand its end.

To sign up to something that is beneficial for the Ummah is from the Sunnah, as the Prophet said regarding the *Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl*: “Certainly, I had witnessed a pact of justice in the house of ‘Abdullah ibn Jud‘ān that was more beloved to me than a herd of red camels. If I were called to it now in the time of Islam, I would respond”. By this Sunnah, it is incumbent upon the Muslims to work pragmatically within existing structures that safeguard communities against oppression.

That targets expressions of Muslimness: “Muslimness” is similar to commonly found expressions in the English language such as Jewishness or Englishness. In other Islamicate languages it is the cognate of *Musalmāniyat* and of the Arabic concept of *Shi‘ār al-Muslimīn*. It is a duty upon the Muslims to uphold and defend the symbols of Islam, as Allah says, “And anyone who honours the symbols set up by Allah [shall know that] verily, these [symbols derive their value] from the Allah-consciousness in the [believers] hearts” (Q22:32). The symbols set up by Allah include his Messenger, Muslim identity, Muslim habitats and Muslim habits. “Muslimness” describes not so much any person or actual group than a family of overlapping and flexible features by which in a given situation something is seen as having the quality of being Muslim or one’s Muslim identity. Such features can range from the names people use to the clothes they wear, from the languages they speak to the foods they eat – or don’t eat. They include associations based on habitats (“Bradford”) or habits (not socialising at the pub). These features are not fixed but rather historical and contextual.

Perceived Muslimness: this part of the definition accounts for the fact that a number of non-Muslims mistaken for Muslims have been affected by Islamophobia. The Sikhs are one such example: after September 9-11 the first casualty of the Islamophobic backlash was a Sikh man named Balbir Singh Sodhi (1949 – September 15 2001). He was mistaken for a Muslim because of his turban and beard, both symbols of Muslimness. The second major example that supports the inclusion of this expression in the definition is that of Jean Charles da Silva e de Menezes (7 January 1978 – 22 July 2005) who was a Brazilian man killed by police officers at Stockwell station on the London Underground after he was wrongly deemed to be one of the fugitives because of his perceived Muslimness, in this case his racialisation as an ‘Arab’. This event took place two weeks after the 7/7 bombings.

How will the definition of Islamophobia serve the Ummah?

Unless we challenge Islamophobia we condemn ourselves and future generations to injustice and oppression. Allah says: “And how could you refuse to fight in the cause of Allah and of the utterly helpless men and women and children who are crying, "O our Sustainer! Lead us forth [to freedom] out of this land whose people are oppressors, and raise for us, out of Your grace, a protector, and raise for us, out of Your grace, one who will

bring us succour!” (Q4:75). The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him said, “The best form of resistance is to speak truth to unjust rule (*sultān jā’ir*)”. The act of resisting Islamophobia by learning about it, defining it, identifying it and countering it, are all part of the broader obligation upon Muslims to enjoin the good and forbid the evil (*amr bi al-ma’rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*), as demanded by the verse, “and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong” (Q31:17). Those who would deny the obligation of resisting Islamophobia should fear falling under the remit of the saying of the Messenger of Allah, may peace and blessings be upon him: “There are two qualities, of which nothing is more virtuous: belief in Allah and benefitting the believers; and there are two qualities, of which nothing is more odious: associating partners with Allah and harming the believers”. Islamophobia is the biggest source of harm for the believers in the world today. To refuse to confront it, is a dereliction of one’s duty as a human and a Muslim.

And Allah knows best.

الشيخ تاج الإسلام السلهتي البنغالي

الشيخ مصطفى شيخ السندي

في بردفورد ٨ من شهر رجب سنة ١٤٤٠ هـ