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Islam: A Declaration Of European Muslims



Bosnian Muslim leader Mustafa Cerić (file photo)
AFP

On February 24, Bosnia-Herzegovina Mustafa Cerić issued the following Declaration of European Muslims from the Zagreb mosque. In an interview with RFE/RL on March 14, Cerić described the declaration. "It is a personal -- it is probably too much to say "confession" -- but a personal appeal to the European audience not to make a mistake in generalizing all Muslims and not to spread Islamophobia, that was, I think, going on in Europe and in the West generally, especially after September 11 [2001]," Cerić said. "And the second message was to the Muslims who live in Europe to take seriously these three events that may have great consequences for their stay in Europe and their status in Europe. And the third message is to the Muslim world at large to ask them to help us in the West, and especially in Europe, to develop a kind of dialogue that is acceptable to us as Muslims, as well as to our European neighbors."

A DECLARATION OF EUROPEAN MUSLIMS:

Expressing the sense of the European Muslims regarding the attack in New York in September 2001, the massacre in Madrid in March 2004, and the bomb explosion in London in July 2005.

Whereas on September 11, 2001, thousands of men and women who worked at the World Trade Center in New York were killed by a terrorist attack, and on March 11, 2004, hundreds of people who had traveled by a train in Madrid were massacred, and on July 7, 2005, many innocent passengers were victims of bomb explosions in London, and whereas all these acts of violence against humanity have been attributed to "Islamic terrorism";

Whereas following the New York attack, the Madrid massacre, and the London bombing European Muslims live under the heavy pressure of a collective guilt for "Islamic terrorism," which is constantly being propagated by some politicians and media;

Whereas European Muslims believe there is no collective guilt, but an individual responsibility;

Whereas European Muslims suffer from Islamophobia due to irresponsible coverage of Muslim issues in Europe by some media;

Whereas European Muslims love freedom for others as they love it for themselves and appreciate citizenship and human rights in multicultural societies;

Whereas European Muslims would like to raise their children in peace and security with other religious communities in Europe on the basis of "the ethics of sharing";



Muslims praying in central London (AFP file photo)

Whereas Islam teaches Muslims that Jews and Christians are People of the Book and so all Jews, Christians, and Muslims should learn to share their common spiritual roots and their common future hopes without prejudice in order to avoid discrimination, low self-esteem, demoralization, religious and racial hatred, helplessness, lack of control, social avoidance, lack of opportunities, and political under-representation;

Whereas Europe is a shared continent of many faiths, nations, languages, cultures, and customs;

Whereas Europe is proud of its road from slavery to freedom, from mythology to science, from might to right and from the theory of state to the legitimacy of state, as well as Europe's commitment to the basic values of human rights and democracy;

Whereas European Muslims want to be part of a European life and prosperity as well as of the social, political, cultural and moral development of European societies:
Now therefore be it

Declared,

Part I

To the European Union, it is the sense of European Muslims that

(1) Europe is the House of Peace and Security based on the principle of the Social Contract.

(2) Europe is the House of the Social Contract because it is possible to live in accordance with one's faith in the context of "the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association." (John Rawls).

(3) A Contract is a person's dictate of reason, whereas a Covenant is person's will of the heart/faith. Hence, the Muslim is a person with an allegiance to God as an act of the will of the heart/faith; and the citizen is a person with a duty to the state as an act of the dictate of reason. By the Covenant man gives his heart to God and receives Inner Security; by the Contract he gives his reason to the state and receives security as an inhabitant of a city or town. A citizen is entitled to the rights and privileges of a free person, a member of a state, a native or naturalized person who owes loyalty to a government and is entitled to protection from it of life, religion, freedom, property and dignity.



Kazakh Muslims (RFE/RL file photo) **(4)**

European Muslims are fully and unequivocally committed to the following European common values: (a) the rule of law; (b) principles of tolerance; (c) values of democracy and human rights; (d) the belief that each and every human being has the right to five essential values: the value of life, the value of faith, the value of freedom, the value of property, and the value of dignity.

(5) As they try to live a decent life in Europe, European Muslims have the following expectations: (a) an institutional [presence] of Islam in Europe; (b) the economic development of the Muslim community so that it may have a full spiritual and cultural freedom and independence; (c) the development of the Islamic schools capable of educating European-born Muslims for the new challenges in multicultural societies; (d) political freedom that will enable European Muslims to have legitimate representatives in the European state parliaments; (e) a reform of European immigration policy, which has tended to be very restrictive toward Muslims recently; (f) opening the way for Muslim law to be recognized in matters of personal status such as the Family Law; (g) the protection of European Muslims from Islamophobia, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and similar atrocities.

(6) European Muslims are committed to a comprehensive joint program for religious dialogue that will: (a) build awareness of the complexities of the secular context in which religions exist today; (b) promote understanding, respect differences, and explore common ground; (c) affirm religious identities as important instruments to deal with insecurity and conflict, and to learn to respect and live with diversity in situations of conflict; (d) contribute to ongoing discourse on human rights; (e) create an understanding of the 'otherness' of the 'other' person; (f) show the complex relationship between religion, culture, politics, and economics, and highlight factors leading toward positive contributions by religions to common efforts for truth, justice and peace; (g) identify religious principles, moral and ethical values, and norms that are common and that can be affirmed for the sake of a life together; and those that are distinct to each faith; and to recognize possible differences, tensions and misunderstandings between particular moral and ethical values in different religions; (h) highlight the positive historical experiences and recall memories of good-neighborly relations and living together that are also part of Europe's history; (i) establish a common platform for religious coexistence in the spirit of a good will that can be found in both the Books of God and the hope for our common future.

Part II

To Muslims who live in Europe, it is the sense of the European Muslims that:

(1) Muslims who live in Europe should realize that freedom is not a gift given by anyone. Muslim freedom in Europe must be earned. And the Muslim presence must be recognized in spite of a xenophobic opposition.

(2) Muslims who live in Europe should be more concerned now about their responsibilities than about their freedoms because by assuming their responsibility in European economic, political, and cultural life, Muslims who live in Europe will earn their right to freedom. Hence, the freedom of European Muslims will not be at

somebody's mercy, but a possessed value that can neither be denied nor taken away.



A mosque in Baku (AFP file photo) **(3)** Muslims who live in Europe should present Islam to the Western audience as a universal Weltanschauung, and not as a tribal, ethnic, or national culture. Muslims cannot expect other Europeans to appreciate the universal message of Islam if they are constantly faced with an ethnic or national expression of Islam. It is not only that European Muslims can impress the wider European public with the universalism of Islam, but Europe is also a good place for the Muslims themselves to discover the power and beauty of the universality of Islam.

(4) It is in the West that many Muslims discover Islam in a totally different way from how it exists in their homeland, because here they meet their fellow Muslims from other parts of the Muslim world and thus begin to appreciate the diversity of Islamic experience and culture. Muslims who live in Europe have the right -- no, the duty -- to develop their own European culture of Islam as a proof of the third interaction between the East and the West and as a need for a new renaissance that will lead the humanity to a better and safer world.

(5) The young generation of Muslims who live in Europe should be spiritually strong and intellectually bold enough to break the Muslims' own stereotypes about Islam before asking others to change their stereotypes. Muslim youth must take the lead in shaping their future, not waiting for the elders to do the job. Muslim youth should not be shy in taking the lead into a better future for Muslims who live in Europe.

(6) Muslims who live in Europe should commit themselves to the following imperatives of their faith:

- Read and Learn! The revelation of the Koran did not begin with the imperative of faith, but with the imperative of knowledge. God Almighty did not ask Muhammad to believe, but He has asked him to read and learn what and how to believe. This is so because humanity is born with faith. There is no need, therefore, to ask humanity to believe if that is already in the soul. But there is a need to remind humanity to read and learn what is in the soul. Humanity needs knowledge with faith, as well as faith with knowledge.
- Believe and work hard! Humanity lives neither in a pure spiritual world without matter, nor in a pure material world without spirit. The secret of success is that the person unites in the self these two values: spirit and body. In other words, the purpose of one's life is in the activity of spirit, and that is faith, and in the activity of his body, and that is hard work. There cannot be Muslim dignity unless the great gap between the faith of heart and the power of mind is closed.
- Be pious and respect your parents! The Koran's emphasis on the link between the worship of God and the respect for parents has a strong message for both East and West. The message to the East is not to concede to the pressure to give up on family values; and the message to the West is to stop the game of chance with the future of humanity. The institution of family tradition has no alternative. The issue of family values is not only a moral demand of human society, but also an existential condition of humanity. The

attempt to break the common laws of family life is equal to an attempt to break the common law of the nature of the Sun in rising from the East. No one has been able to change the nature of the Sunrise; no one will be able to break the law of the family life as long as the Sun rises by the will of God Almighty.

- Be honest and fight for your rights! Success here and salvation in the hereafter do not come by themselves. One should seek his/her success. One should fight for his/her rights here and now. Also one should work for salvation in the hereafter; one should deserve God's mercy. The difference between the East and the West is in that that the East believes more in God's mercy than in hard work, whereas the West relies more on hard work than on the mercy of God.
- Be aware of tomorrow! There is clear proof in the Holy Koran that we have the right -- no, the duty -- to plan our future and to believe that our future may be better than our past. It is extremely strange that some have adopted the idea that the Muslim future is hopeless, and so the only hope is in the Muslim past as a way of life and a goal of history. This idea has no foundation in Islam. It is not only that God Almighty teaches us that our future might be better than our past, but also common reason tells us that we cannot change our past, but we can, with God's help, shape our future. So, we are not responsible for the past Muslim history, but we are responsible for the future Muslim history. Muslims should not be afraid to think about their future in the same way as they should not be possessed by their past. Muslims have a future because they have faith in God. And they have faith in God because they believe that the truth and justice will prevail.

Part III

To the Muslim World, it is the sense of the European Muslims that:

(1) The Muslim World is a Universal Community of Muslims who are brothers by their common faith in One God and in the prophethood of Muhammad, peace be upon him.

(2) The idea of global awareness should not be a strange thing to Muslims. In its essence, Islam is a universal faith and a global phenomenon. It would have been fully appropriate if the Muslims had come forward with an agenda for globalization in terms of a global freedom and security, because Muslims are scattered almost everywhere on the globe and so their freedom and security are of a global importance.



Women in the Iranian military (AFP file photo) **(3)**

Not only have Muslims failed to come with a genuine idea of globalization, but they are, generally speaking, failing now to live in a global world. Muslims have no global strategy; they have no global mind and head; they have no global calendar to save them from the embarrassment of the confusion about the date of Eid.

Unfortunately, they have the image of threatening the freedom and security of the world; they have a stigma of global terrorism.

(4) It is because of the stigma of Islamic terrorism from which Muslims are unjustly suffering today that a Declaration of the European Muslims to the Muslim World should be worked out in order to emphasize the importance of a change from a bad global image to a good global image of Muslims, especially in matters of their faith.

(5) The center of Islam should take the lead in providing global guidance in practical matters of our universal faith, in global issues of our time, and in global dialogue with our neighbors.

(6) Muslims, wherever they may be, should prove to the whole world that Islam is both a sincere faith and a righteous religion; that it is both attractive in its culture and peaceful in its politics; that it comprises both good people and rich lands; and that Islam includes both the wise man of the East and the rational man of the West.

(7) It is wrong to blame Islam for the lack of democracy in the Muslim world. It is sin to violate human rights in the name of Islam; it is crime against Islam to tolerate a high rate of illiteracy in the Muslim world and to witness a huge gap between enormously rich and extremely poor people in the Muslim world.

(8) European Muslims have the right and the duty to raise these and other issues that have an impact on the future of their children as they are trying to figure out who they are and what they are supposed to do as Muslims in a European environment.

(9) European Muslims call for a global Muslim Community to take the lead in promoting peace and security in the world.

(10) The Muslim World is a legitimate Ummah that should be capable of carrying out the duty of a morally good, rationally balanced, economically just and globally effective Community which is worthy of trust, partnership and friendship everywhere.

We all take different paths in life, but no matter where we go, we take a little of each other everywhere!

Friends are God's way of caring for us!

(English translation provided by the **Center for Islamic Pluralism**)

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