

**2nd Annual International Islamic Leadership Peace and
Justice Conference**

September 28-30, 2010,

Dublin, Republic of Ireland

Official Islamophobia

Farid Younos, Ph.D.

Department of Sociology and Human Development Studies

California State University, East Bay

Abstract

The world of Islam is facing numerous challenges in the 21st century. With the astonishing and fast growing pace of information in the media, Islamic awareness, not only among Muslims, but also among non-Muslims has multiplied several folds. Muslims are learning more and more about their faith - politically, socially, economically, educationally and scientifically. Non-Muslims are keen to know about Islam because Islam is in the center stage of world politics, shaping the worlds' thinking and direction. At the same time, while people are learning, exploring, and investigating, Muslims and non-Muslims consciously and unconsciously develop an Islamophobic attitude. Among this phobia is Official Islamophobia that Muslim governments such as the one in Afghanistan are afraid to implement as a true Islamic agenda, and by the same token, foreign governments are afraid of the emergence of Islamic political system and they try to block such movements. Algeria is a case in point. In this presentation, the causes and reasons of official Islamophobia, and the failure of Ulema (men/women of knowledge) that consequently led to the failure of Muslim societies are discussed. In conclusion, this talk addresses what needs to be done to save Muslim societies and gain the trust of non-Muslim governments, which will eventually lead to peace and justice for world communities.

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Introduction

Dear distinguished scholars, men of knowledge, and sister and brothers;
Assalamu Alaikum (peace be upon you),

It is my honor and privilege to be in this distinguished gathering. I am very much humbled when I received the invitation from brother Professor Sheikh Satardien, and I thank him for his kind invitation. I would like to thank brother Nasruddin Saljouki who made the coming to Ireland possible, and Brother Rateb Sidiq and sister Nazifa Rahimi Sidiq from Bolani: East&West Gourmet Afghan Food, in California who graciously sponsored my trip to Europe.

Before I say a few words, I have to admit that I am not an Alim like most of you but rather a researcher of Islamic studies for the last 30 years and Alhamdulillah a Muslim who committed his life for the sake of Islam.

During long centuries, the Islamic system was a role model for humanity. Muslims were pioneers of justice, social organization, judicial system, tolerance, and cooperation among non-Muslim groups and sciences. Islamic Spain was a best example of that, where equality, business, and the economy flourished. After the colonial powers took over the Middle East, especially upon the invasion of the French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, Muslim glory nose dived and consequently we could not revive our status as a world civilization.

Muslim societies lack justice, sanitation, and are engulfed with illiteracy and ignorance. Muslim countries, unfortunately, are at war with each other and they are not one single Ummah anymore-what the Qur'an expected from the Muslims to be. After more than 300 years of domination, colonialism, and now neocolonialism, Muslim societies and people are off track, lost and confused as to what direction they should take. Copying and imitating others did not solve our problems. Muslim governments were and are afraid of properly implementing Islamic principles to solve their socioeconomic problems. And that is what official Islamophobia is all about. As we all know, there are different kinds of Islamophobia. This presentation covers official Islamophobia in which Muslim government failed to use Islamic principles and guide their people to prosperity.

Roots of the Problem

The Islamic civilization is founded upon the three words starting with the Arabic alphabet A'in. The first A'in stands for *ilm* (knowledge). The second A'in stand for *ibada* (worship). And the third A'in stands for *Ad'l* (justice). The root of the problem is that we are not using knowledge as the foundation of our work. We misunderstood *ibada* and its application in our socioeconomic and political life and consequently we cannot attain justice because justice comes only through pure knowledge and worshiping Allah(swt). Knowledge for Muslims comes from the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet

Muhammad(pbuh). That is why the Qur'an says, "Oh my lord! Advance me in knowledge" (Qur'an 20:114). And the Prophet(pbuh) says that, "learning is mandatory for all men and women". In another Hadith, the Prophet(pbuh) said, "Seek knowledge from cradle to grave". In a third hadith relating to our topic the Prophet(pbuh) said, "Seek knowledge even in china". In these sayings of the Prophet above, there are no gender preferences, but rather an equal consideration for both genders in learning and in education. Several points can be drawn from the above quotations. The phrase, "even in China" alludes even to the idea that learning and education does not recognize borders. Knowledge is universal . The phrase, " from cradle to grave" implies learning is a continuous and never ending process. Unfortunately, Muslim societies are suffering from illiteracy and ignorance of their own text, the Qur'an and their faith. Statistics shows that more than 62% of women in Muslim societies are illiterate. Illiteracy and misunderstanding of the civilized faith made Muslims fanatics, ethnocentric and egocentric.

Muslims today completely misunderstood the meaning and implication of worship. To many Muslims, worship means five times prayers. They forget that *ibada* comes from *abd* and that is the total obedience of Allah (swt) and in all aspects of life. So when someone educates himself/herself he is in the stage of worship. When someone keeps himself/herself clean, since we have learned from the Prophet (pbuh) "that cleanliness is half of faith", then he or she is in a stage of worship. When people greet each other, this is a stage of worship. By this, we mean that anything that Allah(swt) and His noble Prophet(pbuh) recommend, and Muslims perform, they are in stage of worship. Unfortunately, the root of the problem is that Muslim governments failed to educate their people to conduct a civic life style based upon the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet(pbuh). Lack of sanitation, illiteracy, wrongful disputes, not accepting others idea, ethnocentrism and egocentrism are all part of Muslim living because of the misunderstanding of the word worship. And Allah (swt) will never shower His mercy if people are not obeying his laws. As the Qur'an says, " And obey Allah and the Messenger that you may obtain mercy" (Qur'an 3:132). Lack of these two principles implementation of knowledge and application of worship properly caused injustices within our Muslim societies and the governments are responsible for it. Because people from dawn of history look for justice and leadership, and Muslim governments failed to provide a just leadership. This lack of justice made people *mazloom* (Oppressed) and the governments are those who are in the seat of power, are oppressors(*zalim*). Muslim people always are afraid of their own government because these governments are not a representative of the people. They cannot talk against their government, and if they do they are in trouble. So freedom of expression that the Qur'an brought to humanity 1400 years ago does not exist. The freedom of pen as the Qur'an says " He who taught (the use of) the pen"(Qur'an 96:4), has been taken away from Muslims and consequently Muslims resort to western democratic ideals thinking that western democracy is better than Islamic democracy. When freedom of the pen and expression is taken away from the people that means that their intelligence or *aq'l* is taken

away from them. The highest stage of Islamophobia by Muslim governments is that Muslim governments and establishments are afraid from their own people. The gathering of Saqifa in the history of Islam not only established a political system by the people, but also an Islamic democracy emerged. Unfortunately, Muslim political parties are banned from political participation, which does not exist in some Muslim countries. Islam was the first political system that fought poverty by establishing the institution of Zakah. And as a matter of fact, Zakah (obligatory charity) became one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslim governments instead of using their resources, exploring the economic principles of Islam and promoting venture capital without interest, are borrowing from the World Bank or International Monetary Fund with interest. The result of this borrowing and lack of Islamic economics is that our societies are suffering from poverty, famine, and a decent standard of living.

Islam declared men and women equal, in creation, in the family as well as in the society. Women in the time of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) were part of civic participation and engagement. They were sitting in the Mosque and arguing for their rights against Caliph Omar (may Allah be pleased with him). The first pulpit of the Mosque was made by the suggestion of a woman. The story tells how the three step pulpit came to existence. In the beginning, Mosques did not have a pulpit. One day, when the Prophet, was standing and delivering his sermon a woman, who had a slave who was a carpenter, asked the Prophet if she could make him something upon which to sit. The Prophet answered, that if she pleased she could do that. We learn from this story that women sat in the Mosque with their fellow brothers. Everyone had an opportunity to discuss the issues of the new Islamic society or system to contribute, and be part of it. Men and women openly discussed their concerns with the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh). These stories illustrate how an Islamic society should be; it should not have biases or seclusion against women. Unfortunately, in Muslim society of today women remain a kind of second class citizens. They have no rights, no place for civic participation, no place in the mosque, and they have become a puppet of men instead of being a sister or a partner with equal standing. The Qur'an says, "The believers are but the single brotherhood; so make peace in reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and fear Allah, that you may receive Mercy." (Qur'an 49:10). Two very important ideas in the above verse need to be under consideration. One is the concept of *Ukhuwa* (brotherhood) in Islam. In the Arabic language *ukhuwa* can be applied to women as well as men; thus, this verse alludes to the total sisterhood and brotherhood within the Muslim community. Also, the above verse sees equal justice between men and women.

Solutions

Muslim societies and government should get out of this cultural gap and go back to the roots of Islamic law, principles and values that were established in the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Right now it looks like Muslim

societies, sociologically speaking are deculturized. The only thing left for us, are the five pillars of Islam, not as a foundation for nation building or personality shape up but as rituals. Declaration of faith, the Shahada which is the foundation of Muslim commitment to Islamic laws and values does not have any application in our daily lives. Many do not know why they are praying, and that is why there is no motivation for progress. Zakah, which supposed to be a sustainable project economically for Muslim society, lost its economic and sociological meaning. Fasting, which is supposed to rejuvenate us for the next 11 month, has become an annual ritual with no impact in the life for the rest of the year, and Hajj, where many do not know the sociopolitical and universal aspects of it, has become another expensive ritual annually. Muslims are living with a sugar coating of tribalism and tribal mentality. Islam taught us that there is no distinction between an Arab and ajam but unfortunately, Muslims in Arab states or any other Muslim state who are working as laborers are considered to be second class citizens. The Qur'an says, "Allah will not change the fate of the people until they change what is in themselves"(Qur'an 13:11). Some of our countries are under occupation, our people are suffering and most of our governments have either become a puppet of the west or are dumped with western weapons that can be used against other Muslims not against the enemy of Islam. The time has come that we as one single brotherhood make a change, educate our people, get rid of illiteracy within 10 years from now, establish civic participation of men and women and overall build an Islamic democracy and grant people a freedom choice, expression and restore their dignity and integrity. Backwardness, tribalism and ignorance caused us to be inferior. Some of us resorted to western democracy and left Islam behind, thinking that Islam does not grant us freedom, and some of us resort to Islamic radicalism and terrorism, while our religion dictates peace, harmony and cooperation. The 21st century must be a century of change for the right direction and position ourselves as Muslims with our own values and principles.

The failure of the ulema to make a constructive change for the sake of Muslims not only caused Muslims to become more secular, but also paved the road of western type of "democratization" rather than Islamization.

Failure of educated Muslims in general to create an agenda of change not only kept Muslims status quo, but it caused radicalism. Many educated Muslims see politics and Islam as two separate entities, imitating the West.

To revive Muslim ummah, the following is being proposed:

1. A congress of Ulema should declare the civic rights of men and women equal.
2. Freedom of expression and the pen should be the law of the land in all Muslim countries based upon Islamic morals and ethics.
3. literacy programs must be established with a goal of eradicating illiteracy within 10 years in all Muslim countries.
4. All economic investments and venture capital should be for the sake of Muslims not corporations alone. And natural resources should belong to Muslims.

5. All Muslim governments including the monarchies should bring parliamentary election, civic participation and establish Islamic democracy.

Official Islamophobia by Non-Muslim governments

Living in the west for most of my life, almost four years in Denmark as a student and 31 years in the United States made me learn one important lesson; that non-Muslim governments neither care about Muslims nor respect their values but play with them games of bigotry and double standards. Their relationship with Muslims is for economic gain, strategic interests and control of Muslims resources, but not for cooperation. Non-Muslim governments are afraid of Islamic political systems because of the emergence of Islamic political system will cut off their economic interests. Missionaries will not have a chance to convert people. Our resources belong to ourselves, our labor and workforce that are now exploited and subjugated under the name of western type freedom and democracy will gain their dignity and integrity. Non-Muslim governments are afraid of Muslims that with the emergence of a true political system by Muslims will guarantee the return of Palestine to its rightful people. They are afraid of Muslim government because Muslims would not allow their corporations to plunder their resources such as diamond of Africa or oil in the Middle East. They are afraid of genuine Muslim government because the true Muslim governments will put a halt to neocolonialism. And that is why they are against the emergence of a new Islamic political system. I have to declare in this gathering that we Muslims are not the enemy of the West or their way of life, we are the enemy of subjugation, exploitation and deculturization. We are the enemy of injustice, insult, bigotry, double standard, racism, and fascism. We want to have self determination for the sake of Muslims not the sake of a few corporations who have exploited masses for the sake of their own interests. We want to revive Madina again as it existed in the time of the Messenger of God(pbuh).

Conclusion

It is important to realize that official Islamophobia by Muslim governments, failure of the Ulema to implement a moderate Islamic political system in which all civic participation based on Islam applied, and the abandon of Islamic political system by non-Muslim governments caused worldwide resistance and Islamic radicalism. If Muslim governments do not change for the sake of Muslims, an Islamic revolution is very much predictable almost in all Muslim countries. These revolutions would be staged not only against Western domination such as what we find in Iran but against despotic monarchies and other regimes of those who ignored the rights of the Muslims and Muslim needs and political agenda. On the other hand, democratization is on the march. Western democratization in Muslim countries means deculturalization of Muslims by Christian missionaries, subjugation and exploitations of Muslims

promoted by the action of western corporations and slavery of Muslims by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as they did in Latin America, and finally dumping of Islamic norms, values, and principles into the trash bin of history.

Wassalaum Alaikum,
Thank you very much.

Dr Younos short biography

The most outspoken and independent thinker in the Afghan-American community, Dr. Farid Younos received his Doctorate degree in International and Multicultural Education from the University of San Francisco and , in addition to becoming a television personality and celebrity who, with his controversial and novel ideas attracted millions of viewers in the Afghan community worldwide, as an advocate of women's rights. After the September 11th, Dr. Younos has responded by educating others about Islam and politics of Afghanistan.

He has been interviewed by major newspapers including New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Associated Press and radios such as, voice of America, Freedom Radio (Prague), CNN, NPR/KQED with Michael Kraznie and many other local and national media concerning Afghanistan.

The University of San Francisco magazine calls him, "A prominent voice in the Bay Area of northern California." Dr Younos co-authored "Asia in the San Francisco Bay Area," an Asia Society publication and wrote "Gender Equality in Islam" published by 1st Books Library, 2002, and, Democratic Imperialism: Democratization vs. Islamization, 2008. His new book, Islamic Sociology is due early December.

Dr Younos is the founder of Afghan Domestic Violence Prevention, associated with Afghan Coalition. He is awarded "Peace at Home" Award, California Senate 2002 and the Rollie Mullen Award from Stand! Against Domestic Violence, 2003.

Dr Younos has been invited and sponsored numerous times by Afghans and Americans in Europe, Canada as well as in the US to speak about Islam and Afghanistan. It was June of this year, 2010, that he submitted his peace plan for Afghanistan to the US Congress, and he was called by the US House of Representatives for a Congressional briefing where he proposed and promoted for the first time in that institution an Islamic democracy.

This past academic year he was honored to have his students nominate him for the university's "Outstanding Professor" award, at the California State University East Bay where he teaches at the sociology and department of human development studies.