



## **Defaming Islam: Malaysia Lectures America About Freedom**

A study in hypocrisy.

By Doug Bandow on 10.18.12

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The United Nations again lived down to its reputation. The recent ministerial meeting in the General Assembly provided a moment of unintended hilarity. Commenting on the controversy surrounding the recent film critical of the Prophet Mohammed, Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman asked, "Why is it when Muslims are stigmatized and defamed, it is defended as freedom of expression?"

He apparently imagines a world in which Muslims demonstrate striking forbearance in the face of shocking intolerance. He imagines a world in which Muslim states do not routinely persecute Christians, Jews, Baha'is, and other religious minorities. He imagines a world in which non-Muslims do not face arrest, prison, and death for "blasphemy" toward Islam and Muslims do not face arrest, prison, and death for converting away from Islam.

Minister Aman imagines a world in which Christian girls are not kidnapped and forced into marriage in Muslim nations. He imagines a world in which Muslim mobs do not murder Christians, destroy churches, wreck Bible schools, and wipe out entire Christian villages. He imagines a world in which Muslims treat religious minorities as they demand to be treated in societies in which they are a minority.

It is a wonderful world. But it is not the world in which we live today. To the contrary, most majority Muslim states discriminate and many persecute non-Muslims as well as minority Muslims. There's no need for individuals to defame Christians, Jews, and others when the state imprisons and kills them.

Minister Aman's wonderful vision does not even describe his own country of Malaysia. There are worse countries, to be sure. But Malaysia now is lecturing the rest of the world about religious defamation and freedom of expression.

How does Minister Aman's government treat Christians and others who believe differently than the majority? Consider what the most recent State Department

[report](#) on religious liberty said of Malaysia: "... the constitution as well as other laws and policies placed some restrictions on religious freedom." Muslims are barred from converting to other faiths, "although members of other religions may convert to Islam."

Religious minorities "have expressed concern that the secular civil and criminal court system has gradually ceded jurisdictional control to Sharia courts, particularly in areas of family law involving disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims." Moreover, "religious minorities continued to face limitations on religious expression, including restrictions on the purchase and use of real property." Further, there have been "reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice."

Yes, the Malaysian government certainly has moral standing to lecture Americans and others about the terribly unfair treatment accorded Islam in the West.

Malaysia is no better on freedom of expression. Freedom House [gives](#) Malaysia a 4.0 freedom rating, in the middle of its one to seven system. That leaves Malaysia only "partly free." Noting promises of political reform in 2011, the organization reported that "hopes for reform were undercut by crackdowns on academic freedom, violations of religious rights, and the passage of harsh new legislation on assembly late in the year."

The State Department [published](#) a detailed 57-page report on the state of human rights in Malaysia. It makes for depressing reading. Concluded State: "The most significant human rights problems were restrictions on the rights of migrants, including migrant workers and refugees; and the persistence of laws that allow detention without trial."

But that's not all. Other issues "included some deaths during police apprehensions and while in police custody; caning as a form of punishment imposed by criminal and Sharia courts; restrictions on freedom of press and religion; obstacles preventing opposition parties from competing on equal terms with the ruling coalition; and violence and discrimination against women." Ethnic Malays receive official preferences and "there were restrictions on union and collective-bargaining activity." The government continued to prosecute the opposition leader on sodomy charges that many believed to be trumped up.

Other than that, everything is wonderful in Malaysia. No wonder Minister Aman felt entitled to lecture the West about freedom of religion and expression.

What is striking about the West is the fact that nominally Christian governments allow and sometimes even finance the defamation of *Christianity*. Think of a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine, elegantly titled "Piss Christ" and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Think of the movie *The Last Temptation of*

*Christ*, defended as artistic expression despite the outrage felt by many Catholics. Think of Larry Flynt's parody of the late Rev. Jerry Falwell, which the U.S. Supreme Court declared to be protected by the First Amendment. Think of the routine criticism of religious beliefs and figures in America today.

Yet Minister Aman is horrified because someone had the temerity to -- shock! shock! -- criticize Islam.

That the functionary of a government which unashamedly restricts both freedom of religion and expression would lecture the rest of the world about both issues comes as no surprise. That the rest of the world seems reluctant to equally unashamedly defend these liberties is disheartening.

Western governments should explain that they are not responsible for what their peoples say or do. But it is not the duty of Western governments to go on to denounce videos, movies, cartoons, articles, or any other form of criticism of Islam. After all, there is more than a little to criticize, and there are plenty of people, including in the West, prepared to rush to Islam's defense.

However, Western officials should indicate they will not take seriously criticism from governments which discriminate and persecute against religious minorities in their own societies. Even more emphatically, Western officials should explain that they will not engage those who murder innocents and destroy everything from indigenous churches to foreign embassies because someone somewhere in the Western world criticized Mohammed.

Finally, Western officials should indicate that the existence of such governments and peoples creates a prima facie case for ending any financial aid and military support. Those who want to commit and mayhem should at least do so on their own dime and time.

Particular contempt should be shown those who, like Minister Aman, sanctimoniously lecture the West even as their own governments violate basic human rights. Hypocrisy is nothing new in diplomacy and U.S. officials are not exempt from the disease. The one thing that the latter should get right, however, is defending individual liberty. They should politely explain to Minister Aman and others like him: if you don't protect religious and political liberty at home, spare us pious lectures about the travails of Islam abroad.

There is a serious international problem of religious intolerance, but today it is characteristic of Islam, not Christianity. The governments that complain loudest about insults to Islam are most likely to oppress non-Muslims. The next time murderous Islamic mobs make their violent appearance overseas, Washington should defend liberty, not express sensitivity.