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Islamic State Group Wants Quran Burning to End

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The Islamic world is outraged over Western religious insensitivity, highlighted by the burning of the Quran in Sweden and Denmark. The Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), chaired by Saudi Arabia, recently convened in “a virtual extraordinary session” to “take appropriate actions to prevent attacks and insults[] against the sanctities and beliefs of others and to stop the repetition of such acts of aggression that spread hatred and contempt for religions and threaten the global peace, security and harmony.”

The OIC insisted that the time for rhetoric was past. Instead, it lauded “the continued engagement of the Secretary-General with the governments of Sweden and Denmark for dialogue and understanding on the importance of taking the necessary and concrete measures to prevent the recurrence of such acts under the pretext of freedom of expression, and criminalize these hateful acts.” The group explained that freedom of expression — which virtually no OIC member respects — “entails special duties and responsibilities.” This means such freedom shouldn’t exist when it comes to criticizing Islam.

No doubt, burning the Quran is disrespectful, but Western societies long ago dropped special protections for any religious belief. Free speech sometimes, indeed, at its best often, offends, but lack of free speech undermines all free institutions, which is evident in OIC members.

OIC Members Among the Most Brutal Tyrannies In the World

Freedom House rates nations on a scale of political and civil freedoms from 0 to 100. Where do OIC members fall? They are a cavalcade of brutal tyrannies. Consider Saudi Arabia (8), Somalia (8), Afghanistan (8), Libya (10), Sudan (10), Bahrain (12), Iran (12), Cameroon (15), Chad (15), Egypt (18), United Arab Emirates (18), Gabon (20), Djibouti (24), Oman (24), Qatar (25), Brunei (28), Iraq (29), Mali (29), Guinea (30), Algeria (32), Turkey (32), Jordan (33), and Uganda (35). All of these are “not free.” (For comparison, China is 9 and Russia is 16.) A few, including Kuwait (37), Pakistan (37), Malaysia (53), Indonesia (58), and Senegal (68), are judged to be “partly free.” *None* are rated “free.”

Many of these countries are no better when it comes to religious liberty. Even some of the marginally freer countries persecute ruthlessly, such as Pakistan, with its pervasive misuse of

blasphemy laws. Indeed, the best predictor of religious persecution is an authoritarian Islamic state, which unfortunately characterizes most OIC members.

Consider the 17 “Countries of Particular Concern” designated by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Eight have Islamic majorities. Of the 11 placed on the next tier, the Special Watch List, nine are largely Islamic nations. Of the 11 worst states listed by Open Doors International on its annual World Watch list, eight are mostly Muslim by population. Of the next 44, 28 have a Muslim majority. A few of these countries, principally the “stans” in Central Asia, are tyrannies against all faiths, including Muslims. Most, however, persecute non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims *for religious reasons*.

Striking is the dearth of similarly oriented Christian persecution. Russia may be the most obvious, favoring the Russian Orthodox Church and penalizing Muslims, as well as small, powerless minorities, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Communal violence in the Central African Republic includes attacks on Muslims by the majority Christian population. But authoritarianism motivates government hostility against the Catholic church in Nicaragua. Similarly, in Cuba, communism, not Christianity, fuels ongoing persecution. In most Western nations, history and heritage barely sustain traditional Christian faiths, let alone generate persecution of other religions.

OIC Needs To Remove the Plank From Its Eye

Before demanding that Western nations abandon their freedom policies, the OIC should challenge its own members to stop punishing minority faiths — Christians, Jews, Baha’is, Yazidis, Hindus, Muslims (Shia, Sunni, Sufi), and others. The organization is made up of governments that almost universally discriminate and persecute, imprison and even execute vulnerable religious minorities, and stand by as mobs displace, rape, beat, and murder their differently believing neighbors. Thus, the OIC has no credibility when they complain about the treatment of the Quran in Christian lands. Indeed, Jesus spoke of such a situation when he instructed his hearers to “first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:5)

The persecution plank is large. For instance, USCIRF reported on Afghanistan, where the Taliban is firmly in control: “In contrast to its pledges for change and inclusivity upon its seizure of power, the Taliban has since ruled Afghanistan in a deeply repressive and intolerant manner—essentially unchanged from its previous era in power from 1996 to 2001.”

Then there is Iran. According to the USCIRF:

Religious freedom conditions in Iran sharply deteriorated. Following the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini after her arrest and torture by police for wearing an “improper hijab,” Iran repressed nationwide protests with lethal force, detained and killed children, sexually assaulted and raped detained protesters, and engaged in other gross violations of human rights, including executions of protesters without due process.

What of Pakistan? Detailed USCIRF:

In 2022, Pakistan's religious freedom conditions continued to deteriorate. Religious minorities were subject to frequent attacks and threats, including accusations of blasphemy, targeted killings, lynchings, mob violence, forced conversions, sexual violence against women and girls, and desecration of houses of worship and cemeteries. Members of the Shi'a Muslim, Ahmadiyya Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Sikh communities faced the continued threat of persecution via harsh and discriminatory legislation.

The Commission shows Saudi Arabia to be a religious bottom feeder: "The Saudi government continued to systematically deny non-Muslims the ability to build houses of worship or worship in public," and it bases the judicial system on Shari'a. Moreover, "apostasy (including conversion away from Islam) and blasphemy are both crimes carrying the potential for a death sentence, though blasphemy is more often punished through prison sentences, fines, and lashings." **(RELATED: Time to Treat Saudi Arabia as the Anti-Christian Dictatorship It Is)**

These governments presume to lecture the West on its speck of religious sensitivity. Seriously? Misbehavior by Muslim-majority states obviously should not insulate Western governments from criticism. Much of the Western world is supplanting guarantees of religious liberty and freedom of expression with wokish enforcement codes. Moreover, 9/11 unleashed nationalist excesses directed at Muslims. Still, even at its worst, the U.S. was more protective of religious minorities than the best of the Islamic majority nations today.

While the U.S. and other Western nations should be held accountable for violations of religious liberty, OIC members have no standing to complain about Quran burnings. They should end murderous persecution against all religious minorities. Then they could credibly engage their counterparts in culturally Christian lands over behavior Muslims consider offensive.

OIC governments know the rhetoric. While complaining of Islamophobia, Ali Bardakcioglu, head of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs, stated that: "We Muslims condemn all types of violence and terror, regardless of whoever commits it against whosoever." Now these states should turn such words into action.

Quran burning is offensive to Muslims. Far worse, however, is the pernicious discrimination and even violent persecution widespread in so many Islamic-majority nations, including members of the OIC. Before taking the insensitivity speck out of the West's eyes, these governments should remove the persecution plank from their own eyes

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