

DIALOGUE SERIES

Relations between the
MUSLIM WORLD
and the WEST

**Current State of Relations between
the Muslims and the West:
The Way Forward**

Discussion Paper



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State of Relations between the Muslim & the West:
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Current State and the Way Forward

FOREWORD

The Discussion Paper on *Current State of Relations between Muslims and the West: the Way Forward* has been prepared by PILDAT as a backgrounder for the interlocutors of the Dialogue Series on Relations between the Muslim World and the West. Foreign Legislators of Pakistani origin from a number of countries are scheduled to take part in the dialogues.

The paper highlights some of the major issues that define relations between Muslims and the West from the perspective of both sides. Towards the end, the paper outlines a set of key questions on the issue that are proposed to be taken up during the course of the dialogue.

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Islamabad
April 2008





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Introduction

Muslims-West relations stand at a crucial juncture today. As dust settles after the defining and consequential events of September 11 and the Iraq war, a significant section of the population both in the Muslim world and the West increasingly seeks alternate avenues to avoid a repetition of the violence and bloodshed witnessed in the recent years. Whereas, the state of relations between the Muslims across the world on the one hand and the Western countries on the other has changed drastically and arguably for the worse after these events, the world has also witnessed increased dialogue and integration efforts.

However, the picture remains far from satisfactory with the mutual unease existing between these entities on ideological aspirations gradually growing into a wider conflict, mainly exaggerated by the publication of materials deemed offensive by Muslims and deemed expression of free-thought by the West. Under these circumstances, fostering mutual respect and understanding between religious, cultural and social values of each group is vital for an effective dialogue between Muslims and the West.

In view of this on-going debate on the forecasted relations and evolution of existing differences between the Muslims and the West, in the immediate future and in the long run, this paper has been prepared to highlight the issues that shape this discourse. The paper attempts to outline some of the main areas of contention from the perspective of Western and Muslim audiences in separate sections.

Defining the Muslim-West Divisions

In this context, it must be pointed out that the division of Muslims and the West into two separate entities is not entirely real, particularly in the increasingly diverse world of today, as both entities are heterogeneous and often overlapping given the present cultural, religious and social diversity of the world, yet in a general sense the values and principles that define the two remain

distinct. The term West broadly refers to European countries and the European settlements around the world including the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Similarly, Muslim majority countries and Muslim communities in Non-Muslim majority areas comprise the Muslim entity in this discourse.

'Clash of Civilizations' a Myth or Reality?

The threat of an imminent wider conflict between Muslims and the West has increasingly become a focus of discussion in mainstream media and public discourse. The theory of a 'clash of civilizations' is being projected by some sections of the academia in both the Muslim and the Western countries to explain and predict the future dynamics of the presently volatile relationship between the Muslims and the West. The subscribers of this school of thought consider the widening conflict between Muslim and Western ideologies to be inevitable, owing to the fundamental differences in the principles that define the political and cultural norms in these societies.¹ A more recent stream of thought under this doctrine deviates from ascribing a lack of democratic values in Muslim countries as an important source of this conflict, and points out that the "true clash of civilizations" and the "new fault line for conflict"² between the Muslims and the West has foundations in the basic differences in attitudes towards gender equality and social liberalization. This assertion is summed up in the following lines: *"Although nearly the entire world pays lip service to democracy, there is still no global consensus on the self-expression values - such as social tolerance, gender equality, freedom of speech, and interpersonal trust- that are crucial to democracy. Today these divergent values constitute the real clash between Muslim societies and the West"*³.

However, in contrast, a wide array of intellectuals from both divides, point to the shared history of the human civilization on the whole and dismiss the inevitability of the clash of Western and Islamic civilizations as an oversimplification of much complicated socio-economic phenomena. In this context, Amartya Sen, a noted social scientist and a Nobel laureate points out

¹ Huntington, Samuel P., 2007. "The Clash of Civilizations Revisited", Islamica Magazine, USA

² Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris, 2003. "The True Clash of Civilizations", Foreign Policy, www.foreignpolicy.com

³ ibid

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that “the obsession with religious and so-called civilizations has been so strong in contemporary global politics that there is a tendency to forget how other lines of identity divisions have been exploited in the past”⁴, particularly with reference to the World Wars that resulted in violence and bloodshed at an unprecedented scale. The argument in favour of this school of thought also points out the cross-territorial, inter-religious and cultural exchanges of “ideas and influences” that have taken place throughout history and by virtue of which it is impossible to classify the world today in “disparate civilizations” (Sen, 2008). Whereas, it is acknowledged that the cultural norms and values, religious doctrines, and economic considerations do play an important role in defining international, inter-religious and cultural relations between Muslims and the West, yet a reconciliation of these multiple identities can lead to convergence of these allegedly 'warring' factions.

Identifying the Core Issues: Western Perspective

Given the diversity of the western world, in terms of ethnicities, cultures, religions and races, the views contained herein, are meant to give an overall picture, general attitudes and apprehensions of an average Western citizen towards the Muslim world and outline some of these common concerns in the following sections.

'Islamic' Militancy and Terrorism

The terrorist activities may not have a foundation in Islam but the fact that the terrorist acts carried out by Muslims have a distinctive Islamic ideology is one reason the word Islam and militancy appear to have become closely associated in the West (Table 1). As a large number of innocent Western civilians have fallen victim to the terrorist activities carried out, allegedly in some cases and proven in others, by Muslims in New York, Madrid, Bali and London and as the frequency of violent acts of aggression against Western targets across the world has increased, a general public perception in the West has formed linking Muslims to

contemporary extremist militant movements across the world.

From a Western standpoint, the list of charges against Muslims is long. To begin with, this attempt by a notable and increasing number of Muslims around the world to wage a holy war or jihad against the West has generally been seen as an attempt to subvert 'superior' Western values of democracy, freedom of speech and social liberalization⁵. In this context, many Muslim scholars with considerable following are seen as having a history of nurturing and supporting intolerant

**Table 1: Most Violent Religion
Views of Western Respondents**

| | |
|---|-------|
| Islam | 75 % |
| Christianity | 4.4 % |
| Judaism | 4.2 % |
| Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2007 Countries include: Unites States, Great Britain, Netherlands, France, Canada, Russia, Germany, Poland and Spain | |

views towards non-Muslims, often citing the Quran to support their assertions and frequent *fatwas* (edicts by the religious scholars), an example of which is the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran who pronounced the death sentence against Salman Rushdie following publication of his controversial book 'The Satanic Verses'. Recent *fatwas* include the one issued by the Al-Qaeda leadership, which justifies killing of innocent women and children as a means to get its message across⁶ (the fact that the Quran explicitly forbids targeting of women and children during war, is not widely known just as in many other instances, and therefore, prevalence of a negative image of Islamic values in the West is perhaps not surprising).

Similarly, it is also pointed out that, on the one hand Muslims speak out against the use of force against their brethren in many parts of the world by Western forces, yet on the other hand, Muslims fail to condemn (with the same amount of vigour) the images and videos of Westerners being beheaded and their bodies

⁴ Sen, Amartya, 2008. “Violence, Identity and Øverty”, Journal of Peace Research; 45:5

⁵ Maha Azzam, Dr, 2006. “Cartoons, Confrontation and a Cy for Respect”, The World Today; 62, 4; pp. 7

⁶ Huff, Toby E., 2007. Reformation in Islam? Society Abroad, 44:6269

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mutilated, all in the name of Islam.

Additionally, it is generally viewed that inculcation of intolerant attitudes and 'double standards' towards non-Muslims in Muslim countries starts with basic education for the young. It is widely held in the West, that religious educational institutions in Pakistan are breeding and recruiting grounds for extremists espousing a jihad against the West⁷. The argument is supported by the emergence of evidence linking the masterminds of the London bombings to these Madrassahs providing mentoring for jihad. Similarly, questions have been raised as to the nature of curricula being taught in mainstream schools of Pakistan that entice hatred and encourage violence towards non-Muslims⁸.

Lack of Democracy in the Muslim World

Recent surveys on the issue of democratic development trends in Muslim countries have consistently indicated a widespread desire of Muslims for democracy. Over the 1995-2001 period, 87% Muslims favoured democracy as a better form of government than present alternatives as well as favoured establishment of a democratic political system in their respective countries as opposed to 86% approval of the same by respondents in Western societies⁹. However, despite massive public support for democratic systems of governance, of the 47 Muslim-majority countries in the world, only a handful have functional democracies in place.

From the Western perspective, democratic sustainability is impossible without embedding the values of tolerance, personal freedoms including that of expression, provision of human rights as well as social liberalization at the very core of the society. In this regard, Muslim societies are perceived to have low levels of tolerance for individuals and groups deviating from 'accepted' cultural and religious norms. This is thought to hold particularly true for the rights of the disadvantaged, including women and minorities in addition to other unaccepted groups¹⁰.

Under these circumstances, when electoral democracies can alter the social set up of a country by providing the right of expression to each citizen, they, therefore pose as a threat to the authoritarian regimes in most Muslim countries existing, in some cases, with the support of influential religious blocs. In this context, Western academics and journalists often cite Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a prime example of the apparent incompatibility between democracy and Muslim societies. The royal dynasty of the Kingdom, the head of which is referred as the 'Custodian of the two holy mosques', has sustained its grip on power through the support of a strict religious body. Despite attempts by women to obtain the right to vote in the recently introduced local body elections, to participate in mainstream political discourse and even to drive cars, the same have been dealt with a firm hand by the dominant religious forces acting in the name of Islam¹¹.

Given such examples of authoritarian regimes, legitimised by the Muslim clergy, it perhaps comes as no surprise when Western audiences view a lack of democracy in Muslim countries as strongly linked to an Islamic ideology and to low levels of social tolerance.

Gender Equality and Human Rights

Islamic societies are generally viewed in the West as patriarchal with a superior status granted to men. To Western societies, the concept of polygamy, which is allowed for men, the higher inheritance shares for sons than daughters as specified in the Quran, and perhaps most importantly, the idea of veiling women are indicators of the unequal status granted to women in Islam. To quote Hilsdon and Rozario, two Western academics, "*there is a widely-held belief in the West that all Muslim women are oppressed because of their religion. No distinction is made in terms of country, region, class or communities, not to mention from family to family*"¹².

Similarly, with regards to issues of social liberalization and human rights in a broader context, Muslim

⁷ Stern, Jessica, 2000. "Pakistan's Jihad Culture", *Foreign Affairs*, 79:6

⁸ Hoodhboy, Pervez, 2005. "The United States and Islam: toward Perpetual War?", *Social Research*, 72: 4, pp-873-902

⁹ 2002. World Values Survey (WVS), www.wvs.org

¹⁰ Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris, 2003. "The True Clash of Civilizations", *Foreign Policy*, www.foreignpolicy.com

¹¹ "Saudi women challenge driving ban", BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7000499.stm

¹² Hilsdon, Anne-Marie and Santi Rozario, 2006 "Special Issue on Islam, gender and human rights" *Women's Studies International Forum* 29, 331338

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societies are viewed as still living under 'draconian laws', the Shariah in this regard is much feared. Often-cited examples include the strict punishments for the crimes of adultery and theft etc., which consist of stoning and cutting off of the hand of the convicted persons¹³. In addition, as pointed out by two noted US academicians, the Western view holds that the "Muslim societies are also distinctively less permissive towards homosexuality, abortion and divorce... these issues are part of a broader syndrome

| Approve of: | | % population |
|-----------------|---------|--------------|
| Gender Equality | West | 82 |
| | Muslims | 55 |
| Divorce | West | 60 |
| | Muslims | 35 |

World Values Survey, 2003

of tolerance, trust, political activism and emphasis on individual autonomy..."¹⁴ This statement is apparently confirmed when viewed in light of the findings of the World Values Survey, 2003 indicating low levels of approval of gender equality and the right to divorce in Muslim countries, as defined by the West.

Anti-Semitic and Anti-West Public Outlook

The strong stance taken by most Muslim nations on the Israel-Palestine conflict is seen by the West as strongly biased against the Israelis. The refusal of many Muslim countries to recognize Israel as a sovereign and independent state is considered a fitting example of the prejudice against the existence of Israel bordering on anti-Semitic sentiments.

In this context, when surveys indicate that nearly 40%¹⁵ of Pakistani population, one of the most populous Muslim countries and a nuclear state, consider Israelis as masterminds of the September 11 attacks, when

even Pakistani academics are forced to admit that "animosities lead to blind spots, and delusions among the public have become more dangerous and fantastic..."¹⁶ and when such public perceptions are complemented by statements given by a Muslim head of state, the Iranian President, denying the holocaust and simultaneously calling for "wiping out Israel" from the world map¹⁷, the conclusions, therefore, drawn by average Western citizens relate Muslims in general to anti-Semitism, which remains a highly explosive issue in the West even today.

Intolerance and Lack of Freedom of Speech

Following the public outcry, on numerous occasions, against critics of Islam in Muslim countries which often turns violent and results in indiscriminate bloodshed, Muslim countries are identified as one of the least free societies in terms of freedom of speech and expression. The fatwas issued by the religious leaders, against the critics often contains a message of violence, such as the one issued by Ayatollah Khomeini ordering the killing of Salman Rushdie as a punishment for satirising Islam and the Holy Prophet. Such fatwas are often re-read by Muslims in event of similar criticisms, an example of which is the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gough in 2004¹⁸.

Similarly, the widespread protests, violence and boycott of Western products after the publication of cartoon satirising the Holy Prophet of Islam in numerous Western newspapers by Muslims across the world was seen as manifestation of the ingrained intolerance of the Muslim societies. On the other hand "the defence of the cartoons is seen by many in Europe as a defence of the superior core values of Western democracy..."¹⁹ which include civil liberties such as absolute freedom of speech as well as personal freedoms.

Over centuries, the Western tradition of secularism has led to a minimal role of religion in determining public affairs, separating religion from state. On the other

¹³ "Sharia law", The Guardian, UK, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/aug/20/qanda.islam>

¹⁴ Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris, 2003. "The True Clash of Civilizations", Foreign Policy, www.foreignpolicy.com

¹⁵ Hoodhboy, Pervez, 2005. "The United States and Islam: toward Perpetual War?", Social Research, 72: 4, pp-873-902

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ "Iran leader defends Israel remark", BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/middle_east/4384264.stm

¹⁸ "Gunman kills Dutch film director", BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3974179.stm>

¹⁹ Maha Azzam, Dr, 2006. "Cartoons, Confrontation and a Cry for Respect", The World Today; 62, 4; pp. 7



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hand, a recent study by US academicians on contemporary Muslims states that *“of countries with substantial or predominantly Muslim populations, majorities in many countries (several in the 90% range) say that religion is an important part of their daily lives”*²⁰. Islam has remains ingrained in every aspect of the Muslim societies, forming public policy guidelines in many countries. In addition, the Muslims not only revere Jewish and Christian Prophets but their Faith is not considered complete without it. Ridiculing or satirising these and other Prophets remains out of question for all Muslims.

The sacred role of religion in the lives of Muslims is in contrast to the role of Christianity in the West in general. As argued by a British Muslim academician, the cartoon controversy *“has not been depicted as one between Christianity and Islam but between the West and Islam. Religion has not been ridiculed in the Islamic world as it has been in the West, and Muslims don't want it to go that way”*²¹. The differences in these Western and Muslim approaches towards religion are arguably an important reason in escalating the 'cartoon controversy' and the conflict on freedom of speech.

Identifying the Core Issues: Muslim Perspective

It must also be pointed out that significant differences exist within Muslim communities on the issues discussed here, as in the case of Western societies. The Muslim communities can be loosely divided into traditionalists, secular modernists, progressive ijthahadis (favouring independent reasoning) and militant extremists. However, the positions mentioned here correspond to the general perception of the Muslim public in general without ascribing views to any particular school of thought.

Muslims: Victims of Western Aggression

A majority of Muslims perceive Muslims around the world to be under the attack of Western aggression²², be it Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Palestine, Kashmir, India, Bosnia, Kosovo or targeted racial profiling of Muslim residents in the Western countries. In this sense, even if an average Muslim does not approve of violence by fellow Muslims driven to desperation, they hold the Westerners partially responsible for instigating the present conflict.

In addition to the military subjugation of Muslim countries by West in the name of opening them up to the noble values of freedom, democracy and civil liberties, the Muslims feel the sting of perceived Western hypocrisy when the European Union fails to admit Turkey, a democratic, modern and secular Muslim-majority country in its sphere.

Double standards with respect to Democracy and Human Rights

Given the history of Western countries and their continued relationship with authoritarian regimes throughout the world, and the parallel Western mantra of supporting democracy and civil liberties in Muslim countries is seen as a classic case of double standards on part of the US and its Western allies. A fitting example in this context remains that of Pakistan. In a January 2008 survey of the International Republican Institute, 89% of Pakistanis disapproved of President Musharraf and his policies²³, the same opinion was driven home on a larger scale by Pakistanis in the General Elections a month later. However, despite the clear verdict, the US and Western allies sent in assurances for continuation of the support to the dictatorship in the country²⁴.

The introduction of strict security laws, such as the US Patriot Act of 2001, curtailing basic civil liberties as a tool for employing heightened security measures against terror suspects and acceptance of the same by

²⁰ Esposito, John L. and Dalia Mogahed, 2008. “Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think”, Gallup Press, New York

²¹ “Cartoon rows illustrate hard road to cultural understanding”, http://www.methodist.org.nz/index.cfm/touchstone/march_2006/cartoons_controversyhtml

²² Esposito, John L. and Dalia Mogahed, 2008. “Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think”, Gallup Press, New York

²³ Pakistan Public Opinion Survey”, International Republican Institute, USA 2008, <http://www.iri.org>

²⁴ “U.S. Embrace of Musharraf Irks Pakistanis”, New York Times, February 29, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/29/world/asia/29pstan.html?ref=todayspaper>

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Western societies without much opposition is a source of concern for many. On the issue of a proposed second Patriot Act in 2003, a renowned philosopher and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Noam Chomsky argues that *"the current justice department has claimed the right to arrest people, including American citizens, put them in confinement indefinitely, without charge, without access to lawyers and families, until the president declares that the war on terror is over. They have even gone beyond that. The new plans include plans to actually take away citizenship if the attorney general decides to do so. This has been very harshly condemned by civil rights lawyers, law professors, others, but very little of it leaks into the media. It's not really well-known..."*²⁵ In this context, the issues of human rights abuses, raised contentiously by Western governments and civil society representatives, are regarded as a one-way policy in general Muslim public opinion. The arrest and unbounded custody of terror suspects (incidentally, mostly Muslims) in Western jails without being held on trial is seen as a gross breach of the same human rights advocated by the West. The question of the treatment of these prisoners at notorious prisons including Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghuraib (Iraq) continue to cast shadow on the human rights causes of the West²⁶. Similarly, in Muslim opinion, the recent revelation of torture techniques used by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States on the terror suspects including waterboarding²⁷ have further eroded the 'higher standing' of the West in ensuring basic human rights.

Gender Equality and Human Rights

An overwhelming majority of public opinion in Muslim countries does not agree with the Western ideals of gender equality and women rights²⁸. The ideals of women rights in this context are not based on gender equality but are *"underpinned by ideas of male and female complementarity"*²⁹. Numerous reservations

were recorded by representatives of Muslim countries at the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) particularly with regards to marriage and family laws³⁰ which were perceived to be based on Western ideals of gender equality and not in line with the Islamic traditions.

Similarly, while a general agreement exists on most basic human rights including equality of human beings, security of life and property, personal freedoms, equality before law just as those held ideal by the Western standards, there remains a fundamental difference in that, the former are guided by Islamic law. Additionally, on many other issues of human rights which are regarded as directly in conflict with the moral and familial code of Islamic laws, differences between Western and Muslim countries arise. Therefore, when Muslim countries are rapped over their human rights records on the basis of Western standards, a general sense of injustice arises leading to a resistance to imposition of foreign values and cultures³¹.

Within Western countries, vastly different approaches are adopted towards gender equality and human rights issues with respect to Islamic customs. A classic example is that of the female veil. Whereas, British courts have on numerous occasions affirmed the right of Muslim girls to wear a headscarf in schools³², the neighbouring French have disagreed. In 2004, the French banned wearing of headscarves by Muslim schoolgirls in order to promote equality of all religions and defend the ideals of secularism³³.

In this context, it is argued that such difference in approaches of closely related Western countries indicate the levels of tolerance and acceptance of Muslims in each society. The question raised is, if the customs and traditions followed by Muslims by their own choice and free will, and if the same customs do

²⁵ Chomsky, Noam, 2003. "Interview: Does the US Intend to Dominate the Whole World by Force?", Amsterdam Forum , Radio Netherlands

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ "US interrogation memo made public", BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7327020.stm>

²⁸ Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris, 2003. "The True Clash of Civilizations", Foreign Policy, www.foreignpolicy.com

²⁹ Hilsdon, Anne-Marie and Santi Rozario, 2006 "Special Issue on Islam, gender and human rights" Women's Studies International Forum 29, 331338

³⁰ ibid

³¹ Vroom, Hendrik M., 2007. "Islam's adaptation to the West", Scottish Journal of Theology, 60(2): 226241

³² "British criticism of headscarf ban" http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/3477109.stm

³³ "French scarf ban comes into force" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3619988.stm>



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not in anyway affect the lives of others (such as the veil), then is not their forbiddance a breach of fundamental human rights?

'Freedom of Speech' not 'Freedom to Affront'

The recent controversy surrounding the publication of cartoons satirising Islam and the Holy Prophet, has highlighted the fundamental differences in the approach of each towards freedom of speech. Whereas the West preaches the ideals of unconstrained and absolute freedom of expression, Muslims and other critics maintain that even the West has been practicing self-censorship over the years, particularly when Holocaust denial remains a crime punishable by strict sentences in many European countries³⁴. In this sense, it is argued that the Western commitment to freedom of speech is not as sincere as they project it to be. The 2006 conviction of David Irving, a British historian, who questioned the scale of Holocaust by an Austrian court on charges of Holocaust-denial³⁵, is a classic example put forward by critics of the West's approach towards the cartoon controversy.

Muslims maintain that making light of any religion is off-limits, particularly when it wounds the sentiments of others. The argument is that freedom to affront cannot be granted to anyone under the guise of freedom of speech. Particularly, with regards to the recent satirical cartoons, it is generally agreed by Muslims that *"an assault on the Prophet cuts across all political issues among Muslims, and the context was clearly viewed as inciting racial hatred towards an already besieged community"*³⁶. Similarly, some argue that had similar satirical cartoons been made hurting Jewish sentiments, they would have insistently been labelled as anti-Semitic³⁷.

Media Portrayal: Reinforcement of Stereotypes / Islamophobia

The media portrayal of issues involving Muslims is generally viewed by the same as biased and skewed which tends to endorse the existing negative stereotypes with regards to Islam. It is argued that media sensationalises the news by focusing on headline news, similarly, the terminology used to refer to Islam is often in terms of militant-, fundamentalist- or moderate-Islam, implying different forms of the religion with some associated with violence and militancy. Such coverage in the media has been partially responsible for creating an environment of "Islamophobia" whereby, in view of Western audiences the identity of Islam has become closely associated with violent acts of aggression. The following excerpt from the 'Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue'³⁸ points out the alleged media bias in the Western media against the Muslims:

"Whereas journalists most commonly portrayed Christian, Jewish and other religious actors engaged in religious activities (in 75% of statements, on average), Muslim protagonists were only associated with religious activities in 13% of statements... More often, actors identified with Islam were engaged in militant or political activities (in 68% of statements). Muslims were also associated with fundamentalist and extremist activities more than six times as often as other religious protagonists were."

A 2005 study by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) found that in the United Kingdom, the media portrayed the Muslim terror suspects with bias. Even when suspects were released by the law enforcement agencies without any charge, the media implied convictions³⁹. The findings raise the question as to what extent does the media give priority to sensationalist coverage over accurate information? Similarly, not only is there a complaint of misrepresentation and distortion of facts but it is

³⁴ "Push for EU Holocaust denial ban", BBC NEWS, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6263103.stm>

³⁵ "Holocaust denier verdict upheld" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5313504.stm>

³⁶ Maha Azzam, Dr., 2006. "Cartoons, Confrontation and a Cry for Respect", The World Today; 62, 4; pp. 7

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ World Economic Forum, 2008. "Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue", WEF, Geneva

³⁹ "Anti-Muslim bias 'spreads' in EU", BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4325225.stm>



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alleged that often cultural practices in Muslim countries are indirectly related by the media to religious beliefs such as the cultural practices of honour killings, female circumcision and forced marriages etc.



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Key Questions for the Dialogue

As the mutual unease existing between the Muslim and the Western world is explored further, it becomes apparent that, while there is an element of truth in each of the factors discussed in previous sections, many perceptions are based on one-sided pieces of information.

If the Muslim and the Western worlds are serious in resolving the present cultural, political and economic conflicts, it is incumbent upon them to understand and promote greater understanding of each other's views. In order to achieve this, some of the questions that need to be probed in detail from the perspective of Muslims as well as Western audiences are listed here;

1. Have the relations between the Muslim and the Western world improved or worsened during the last few (say, five) years?
2. Is the theory of an inevitable "Clash of Civilizations" between Muslims and the West a plausible explanation for the future dynamics in this volatile relationship?
3. What are the prime reasons responsible for the negative stereotyping of Muslims in the West and vice versa?
4. Is the West partially responsible for a lack of a modernized political and democratic culture in the Muslim world?
5. Can the continued Western policy of appeasing authoritarian Muslim regimes in the Muslim world be successful in stabilizing the relationship, given the democratic aspirations of a majority of Muslim people?
6. Are the Muslims justified in portraying themselves as victims of Western aggression?
7. Can the perceived animosity of Muslims towards Non-Muslims be attributed to the close interplay of religion with the affairs of the state in most of the Muslim states? Is separation of religion from state a viable option for progress?
8. If not, are the Muslims capable of bringing an indigenous reform in the existing Islamic law given the widespread sectarian differences?
9. Are the ideals of gender equality and human rights in the Muslim world and in the West compatible with each other?
10. Does freedom of speech allow freedom to affront? Is the cartoon controversy a sign of much bigger differences and of incompatibility between the Muslim and Western societies?
11. Has the media in Muslim and Western countries played its role with responsibility and accuracy?
12. How can the perceived media bias towards Muslims in the West and vice versa be addressed?
13. Can this mutual unease and apparent conflict between the Muslim and Western worlds be resolved at all?

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