

# PLURALISM & CIVIL SOCIETY

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## Reflections on Muslims in the West

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A contemporary Islamic thinking has to be represented in public life in the Western world (US and Western Europe). Muslims have a great opportunity to develop a new-trend in the Islamic thinking through words and actions, which would pioneer a contemporary Islamic trend in the entire Muslim world. American and European Muslims should not hesitate in fulfilling such a responsibility for observing certain relations with Muslim peoples in the world.

A courageous and pioneering effort is needed for the benefit of the Muslim generations in the US, Europe and in the whole world. An excuse of a gradual approach may miss the opportunity and make many practical activities in these countries meet unreceptive audience among Muslims or others. Thinking should be allowed always to come out immediately at a suitable platform. The Muslim human mind cannot be required to provide another "Quran" suitable for every time and place, but it has to provide a human relative thinking in the given circumstances.

Accordingly, a think-tank is required, whether affiliated to a particular Muslim organization or independent (I personally prefer the latter), with the necessary human and material resources, to provide a badly needed intellectual observatory and direction pilot.

Human rights represent the universal characteristic in our contemporary thinking and actions, for individuals, societies and states. God's messages are meant -in my view- to convince people to worship the One Lord in order to protect them against worshipping one another! It is a deep invitation for human freedom and equality from within the person. We should stress this fact in our words and actions. We should defend human rights wherever they are violated, and consistently, and avoid any apologetic or double-standardized stands!

Accordingly, we should support and work with any group struggling for human rights, whether permanently or in a certain occasion. Justice in all its dimensions: social, economic, political, national or international, has to lead our policies, and to be made clear in all what we say and do. I know that "politics is the doing of what is possible", but what is ideal ought to be stressed in any way.

Having several affiliated bodies, or an umbrella platform and various media of expression may help in this respect. Any discrimination or bias against any group of people on the grounds of ethnicity gender or faith has to be condemned and struggled against by Muslims, not only when Muslims are targeted.

Muslims specialists should have their contribution in the diagnosis and remedy of the various problems of education, health care, drugs, violence, rape... etc, dealing with the social realities, and planning for the short, middle and long term, not only feeling content by repeating that religion can easily solve the problem, or by thinking that Muslims are immune from these social ills.

Muslims have begun to suffer as all what Americans and Europeans suffer from these ills. Solidarity and cooperation with all human beings everywhere who may face natural disasters, epidemics and mass

suffering.

Supporting democracy, as practiced in the USA and Europe, does not mean that we turn blind eye and deaf ears to its shortcomings. Many critics of the status quo are not against democracy in principle. Citizens who do not vote may not be in many cases against democracy, but they may feel that their votes cannot bring whom they may trust in public offices. Definitely such a passive attitude can be explained but not justified. However, some serious thinking is needed to deal with the negatives of campaigning, corruption, moral promiscuity...etc.

It should not be taken for granted that our stand is known from being committed to religion; the Catholic church and other religious bodies persistently make their views known about such negatives. Democracy is meaningless without socio-economic justice, and this Islamic stand has to be always emphasized. The natural environment and resources have increasingly been the concern of the contemporary world. Development in any time or place should not undermine the permanent natural environment and resources in such a place or in the whole world.

Developed countries have to keep in mind that the population of developing countries are equal human beings who have equal rights in development and in ecological security as well. Islam is in its essence a religion of cleanliness and observance of the environment and against any destruction or abuse of the natural resources. Muslims have to defend the human rights of comprehensive development in all its dimensions: material and moral, short and long term. Human being is entrusted by God with being a vice-regent on earth, in order to maintain justice in people's relations and in dealing with nature. We have to always observe the equation of short-term development in all its dimensions for all the human beings through the entire world. Muslims respect life whatever it may be. They can never allow themselves to act against any life.

Participating in public life is a right to Muslims living in the West. Muslims ought not shy away from utilising their adopted (Western) national symbols (the Flag, matter such as: "One nation under God", extracts from the constitution of the country concerned) in addition to selected Quranic verses.