

belgium: Deadly terrorist incident in Liège raises the issue of 'conversion' and 'radicalisation' in prison

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (08.06.2018) – On 29 May, a gunman killed two female police officers and a student in Liège before he was shot dead by police. Prosecutors are investigating the shooting as a terrorist incident.

The shooting occurred around 10:30am local time near a high school on a major road in the city, which lies some 90 kilometres east of Brussels.

The local public prosecutor said the man armed with a knife repeatedly stabbed the two policewomen, then used their firearms to shoot them dead, and shouted 'al-Akhbar'. One of the deceased officers had already lost her husband and leaves behind two 13-year old twin daughters.

After the killings, the man continued on foot, opening fire on a parked vehicle where a 22-year old student sat in the passenger seat. The young man, who had recently finished his exams and was to become a teacher, died. The killer then continued and entered the Leonie de Waha school where he held a cleaning lady hostage. When he realised that she was Muslim, he asked her if she was observing Ramadan. When the woman replied yes, he answered that he would not kill her. The woman pleaded with him and tried to convince him that it is bad for a Muslim to kill other people.

The killer was eventually shot in a gunfight during which several other police officers were wounded. He had past

convictions for robbery, violence and drug dealing.

In 2015 a Brussels-based Islamic State (IS) cell was involved in the attacks on Paris that killed 130 people in 2015, and in the 2016 attacks in Brussels, which resulted in the death of 32 people.

A Belgian 'convert' to Islam

The killer's name is Benjamin Herman, a typical Belgian name. He was born in 1982 in Belgium and his parents are not Muslims. He had past convictions for robbery, violence and drug dealing. During the shootings, Herman was on a penitentiary leave, which had been the case a dozen times before, and not always without problems.

Herman is suspected of having been 'radicalised' in prison by Fouad B. who has been again arrested on 7 June.

Fouad B. was sentenced for acts of violence in 2002 and 2005. In 2006, he committed a robbery at gun point in a night shop in Verviers, a small city in the east of Belgium where an extremist cell was dismantled and an imam was recently deported. Fouad B. was sentenced to a suspended sentence of two years but shortly after assaulted a man on the street and was sent back to prison.

More names of detainees said to have radicalised Benjamin Herman have emerged in the media, such as Yassine Dibi and Joey Leclercq.

It has been known for years that there are strong links between radical Muslims claiming to be pro-jihad and criminals. The meeting place between these two worlds, which are otherwise light years away from each other, is within the penitentiary system. It is in prison that Benjamin Herman began to practice Islam. A former cell-mate testified on a Belgian TV channel that Herman was praying five times a day and scrupulously observing Ramadan.

Conversion to a peaceful religion or to a deadly political ideology?

Recruiters for Islamist ideology in prisons are not spreading a peaceful and loving Islam among other detainees, which would make them better citizens, better husbands, better fathers. Instead, they spread an ideology of hate, segregation, exclusion and self-exclusion, and indiscriminate violence. They misuse Islam and exploit the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of other detainees to try to transform them into potential time-bombs and kamikazes once they are released, as the Islamic State propaganda teaches and preaches online.

Guards in prisons say that the profile of prison populations have changed. While in the past gang leaders were imposing their rule on other prisoners, Muslim criminals have now taken their place and force others to abide by their religious norms. In some prisons, Muslims are in the majority and as a dominant group, impose their rule. In a TV program, a former prisoner testified that he had been under pressure not to be naked while taking a shower. Another prisoner said they were told they would have to join the group if they want to safely use the prison yard.

Which solution? To isolate radicalisers?

Prison guards admit that it is difficult to identify signs of radicalisation of prisoners who were originally mainline Muslims or who were not Muslim. The rule of law in democratic societies prohibits the 'monitoring' of the conversations between prisoners. Moreover, many detainees speak Arabic or other foreign languages amongst themselves. Sudden intensive practice of Muslim rituals (prayers five times a day, observing Ramadan, and so on) may cause the raising of guards' eyebrows but this is questionable.

Some propose to strictly isolate radicalising and radicalised

prisoners so that they cannot communicate with each other and infect other potential victims, but this method has a price. Building more prisons takes time and money. Building one cell in the prison of Haren (Flanders) costs 1 million EUR. The accommodation of one detainee costs the state and society 170 EUR per day. Are the tax-payers ready to finance specific and costly detention facilities for such prisoners?

New threats in the near future

Returnees from the battlefields of Iraq, Syria, and other conflicts are perceived as potential threats for the security of populations in Europe, but there is another threat that is rarely discussed: the release of prisoners who have been radicalised during their detention. In France, 450 radicalised prisoners will be released next year at the end of their term. In Belgium, it is estimated that 28 radicalised prisoners will be freed this year. When Benjamin Herman was granted some freedom, we saw what happened. What will the next released individuals do?

Some conclusions

Prisons have become places of recruitment and training of future 'soldiers' at the service of a deadly ideology, but other sectors of our democratic and open societies have also been infiltrated by this ideology (internet, social media, schools...). The problem of Islamism must be tackled upstream and not downstream. This ideology must be treated with the appropriate antibiotics and vaccinations; however, the medicines have yet to be created.

If you want to be regularly informed about security x religion, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries:
<http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/womens-rights-gender-equality/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various
faiths in 20
countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

FRANCE: An Algerian imam faces deportation

HRWF (15.04.2018) – The French government is trying to expel El Hadi Douidi, an imam preaching a fundamentalist form of Islam contrary to human rights. On 8 March, a Commission composed of administrative and judicial magistrates opened the way to the deportation of the controversial imam after it identified cases of hate speech in the numerous sermons of the imam. Jews are “unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs,” he said. Adulterers “must be punished by stoning to death or decapitation,” while women “must not leave the home without authorization.” The apostate “needs to be eliminated by the death penalty, to protect Muslims.” Most damning, the Commission report said, Imam Douidi “explicitly” justified jihad.



El Hadi

Doudi, an imam who preaches a fundamentalist form of Islam, at a courthouse in Marseille, France, in February. The French government is trying to expel him. Credit Anne-Christine Poujoulat/Agence France-Presse – Getty Images

Imam Doudi, 63 was born in Algeria and is not a French citizen. As he is very active on internet, his influence extends not only in France but also throughout Europe. His lawyer said he is the only imam authorized to issue fatwas. Over 37 years, he has often criticized Jews, women and the modern world, yet former governments have long tolerated his hard-line sermons. President Macron is adopting a tougher line, especially about hate speech.

However, France had never been lax in its fight against extremism and terrorism. From 2012 to 2015, the then Interior Ministry kicked out 40 Muslim clerics, and another 52 people, including clerics, were also deported over the last 28 months.

“It’s not just the terrorist organizations, the armies of Daesh, the imams of hate and death that we are fighting,” Mr. Macron said, referring to the Islamic State, in a speech last

week honoring Lt. Col. Arnaud Beltrame, a police officer who died in terrorist attack at a supermarket in southern France after swapping himself with a hostage.

“What we are fighting is also this subterranean Islamism, which advances through social networks, which accomplishes its task invisibly, which works silently on the weak and the unstable, betraying even those it claims to represent, who, on our very soil, indoctrinate through proximity and daily corrupt,” Mr. Macron said.

The expulsion of Imam Doudi was recommended by the Marseille authorities under a French law regarding “deliberate acts tending to provoke discrimination, hatred and violence toward an individual or a group.”

Marseille – France’s second-largest city, one-fifth Muslim – is not especially radicalized. Other cities in the south of France, like Nice, have had higher numbers of young people leave to fight in Syria, and greater proportion of Muslim residents on the government’s terrorism watchlist. However, almost all of the fines in Marseille for wearing a face-covering, head-to-toe veil – which is illegal in France – have been imposed in the vicinity of Imam Doudi’s mosque, the police say. The authorities are growing increasingly concerned about the potential for radicalization – especially since two young women were killed in a knife attack at the city’s main train station in October.

The Sounna mosque where Imam Doudi preached, on the Boulevard National in the Third Arrondissement of Marseille, was closed by officials in December on the grounds that his sermons could “provoke acts of terrorism.” Five members of Imam Doudi’s flock left to fight jihad in Syria, according to the police.

His sermons are “exactly contrary to the values of the Republic,” said Marseille’s prefect of police, Olivier de Mazières, a terrorism specialist who has led the case against

the cleric.

INDIA: HINDU TEENAGER IS ARRESTED FOR ARSON ATTACK ON PRIESTS CAR

British Pakistani Christians (19.12.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2krHMsp> – All 32 Indian Christians from Madhya Pradesh who were arrested for blasphemy and false conversions on Thursday 14th December whilst singing carols were set free from Satna Jail on Friday after intense police questioning. Eight priests who were sent to help release the 32 victims from prison on Friday morning were also arrested despite being victims of violence that resulted in their vehicle being torched.

They have now also been released, however 6 of the 8 priests have been placed on bail with an impending court hearing regarding an alleged forced conversion.

In more promising news an 18-year-old was arrested on Saturday 16th December for setting fire to the vehicle of the 8 priests who were accused by rightwing group Bajrang Dal (Hindu Nationalist Group) of forcing religious conversions.

The incident all began after a group of men linked to Bajrang Dal stormed the venue of a pre-Christmas celebration at Bhoomkar village on Thursday evening, and alleged that religious conversions was being organised there. The event, had been organised for children by the Syro-Malabar Church and had been a tradition for over 30 years.

A mob of over 100 Bajrang Dal activists allegedly assaulted the Christian groups outside the police station and inside the

station right before the eyes of local police officers, but no arrests have taken place for any of the attackers.

A case has been filed against an elderly priest named M George, who teaches at St Ephrem's Theological College and 5 others, following a complaint by a local, Dharmendra Dohar, who alleged that he was illegally converted on December 10 and was paid Rs. 5,000 for it. They were booked under the Freedom of Religion Act and Sections 153-B (disharmony) and 295-A (religious blasphemy) of the Indian Penal Code.

"He was given a holy dip in a pond and his name was changed to Dharmendra Thomas, the complainant said. They also asked him to pray to Lord Christ," Superintendent of Police DD Pandey told press on Friday. A surprising comment considering Catholics do not practice full water immersion for the ritual of Baptism – a practice common in protestant churches.

In an interview on India's NDTV Dharmendra Dohar was asked if he had, indeed, changed his religion, Dharmendra Dohar – who claimed to have been a member of the Bajrang Dal for a year – told reporters, "I can't speak on this... If I do, I will get embroiled in the issue... it will be said that I'm changing my statement". The "group", he said, doesn't want "such people (Christians) to come in here". The comment was noted to be a stark change to his original adamant behaviour and comment at the time of the arrests and Mr Dohar could be seen looking sheepish throughout the interview.

Madhya Pradesh is ruled by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and has strict religious conversion laws. The central Indian state is one of five Indian states where missionaries need permission to try and convert individuals. In order to change religions, citizens must give a formal notice to local administrators at least one month before changing their faith officially.

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the BPCA, said:

“These fortunate Carol singers have been released from prison before Christmas and can now spend time with their families and with God, as they put the nightmare persecution they faced behind them.

“Father George and the other 5 accused under overtly false allegations must now face a trial despite the change of stance from the original material witness, who described a ritual practice that is not pertinent to the Catholic faith. This legal faux pas emphasises the pathetic nature of India’s judicial process.

“The teenager caught being involved in the arson attack must be prosecuted with the utmost severity that is possible. It is the aura of impunity that exacerbates zealot passion and this can only be curbed through the rule of law.

“It raises my ire that no other members of the violent mob have been arrested, the innocent Christian men were brutalised by a mob in excess of 100 hysterical Hindus, who seemed intent on extra-judicial murder. The attack occurred before police yet they were unable to identify any of the perpetrators. I have to summarise, that it probably did not help the investigation when some eyewitnesses noticed that some of the police were complicit with the crime.

“I will be praying for the brave Indian and Pakistani Christians who continue to uphold God and practise their faith, despite the overt persecution they suffer. Their brave example is a reminder to us all that nothing on this earth can terminate God. No man can defeat our sovereign Lord who reigns eternally.”

PAKISTAN: MOURNERS BURY 11 KILLED IN QUETTA CHURCH SUICIDE ATTACK, AS 50 INJURED

World Watch Monitor (18.12.2017) –

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/12/pakistan-bomb-attack/> – Worshippers were lining up to take the Holy Communion when at least two men, armed and wearing suicide vests, attacked Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in western Pakistan's restive city Quetta on Sunday morning. They left at least eleven dead and more than 50 injured, many in a critical condition, unofficial local figures say.

“It was a pleasant morning. We had sung songs and children had presented a Christmas program. Pastor Simon Bashir had finished his sermon and we were moving towards the altar when we started hearing gunfire outside the church,” said Sohail Yousuf. His 13 year-old daughter Mehak lost her life; her 16 year-old sister Wasika is critically ill after an operation in Quetta's Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

Yousuf, a manager in an insurance company, migrated 16 years ago to Quetta from Punjab after his wife, a government schoolteacher, was posted there.

“We bolted all the doors and were praying that God would protect each of us. Then a suicide bomber blew himself up at the main door. The explosion shattered the door and injured many inside. When some rushed outside, they were injured by gunfire as the terrorists were on the church lawn. But soon the situation was brought under control by the volunteer

church security guards and police present there.”

Caritas Executive Director Sheezan William told World Watch Monitor that the first person killed was the church security guard George Masih, who tried to stop the men advancing towards the church.

“I came to know what was happening while the exchange of fire was taking place. I phoned two youths in the choir. I could hear gunfire on the phone and then rushed to the church,” he said.

[Leading Pakistani newspaper 'Dawn' also confirms that police intervened after the church security guard scuffled with one attacker.](#) About two hundred congregants were inside the church, beautifully decorated for Christmas, when the terrorists unleashed their attack. [Islamic State \(IS\) has claimed responsibility but provided no evidence for this claim.](#)

“The injured were taken to the Civil Hospital, CMH, Akram Hospital and other private hospitals. Relatives picked up two bodies from the church and took them away, which is why they are not counted in official numbering.”

Retired Brigadier Samson Simon Sharaf, a political analyst who is close to security agencies, told World Watch Monitor the attackers were four in number. “They were equipped with ample ammunition supply and were aiming to take worshippers hostage and kill them one by one, prolonging the scene of terror as much as they could.”

Video footage shows a church security guard was quick to close the door when he saw two men approaching. This provided more time for local security personnel to plan.

“One terrorist was shot in the compound before he could blow himself up inside the church. Meanwhile, the other one rushed to the church entrance where he blew himself up,” said Sharaf.

“The agencies chased the other two who fled, and a search operation is ongoing.

“The incident has taken place close to the sad day in the country’s history, December 16 [when Pakistani forces were defeated in 1971, leading to East Pakistan becoming Bangladesh]. Our enemy keeps reminding us of our history. This time Christians are targeted who stand united with other Pakistanis against the menace of terrorism.”

William added: “A team of about 70 youths is working day and night to provide blood supplies, food or any other assistance to the injured, and coffins for the burial.” He told World Watch Monitor that seven families living in the church compound, including that of Pastor Simon Bashir, were told to vacate their houses. “All of them have moved to relatives until the area is given clearance.”

Al-Jazeera reports Moazzam Jah Ansari, police chief of Balochistan province, as saying: “We have cleared the immediate area around the church, and we are now clearing a peripheral area”.

Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan, is situated along the Afghan border. The mineral rich, mostly hilly, region – the least populated area in the country – is where an insurgent separatist movement has long been going on. Most Christians in this province have migrated from Punjab but mostly remain unharmed by the separatists, though the separatists are against Punjabis, believing they are doing an injustice to them by controlling their land and resources.

The Quetta Methodist church, established in 1959, came under the control of the Church of Pakistan in 1971 after six Protestant denominations, including the Methodist Church, united as one denomination.

Ten days ago, a seven-year-old boy and two others were killed during a hand grenade attack on the gates of a Christian

colony in Chaman, also in Balochistan, south-western Pakistan.

Punjabi Christians staged a protest, about the way they feel the government does not do enough to protect them against radical Islamic militant extremists, outside the Lahore Press Club a few hours after the Quetta attack.

Last week, the EU Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Jan Figel, was in Pakistan, and took part in the set-up of an inter-faith advisory commission. Its main aim is to help stop misuse of the blasphemy law.

Since 9/11, Christians are the main religious minority that has come under both communal attacks on the pretext of blasphemy, and by terrorist attacks on their places of worship. Immediately after 9/11 there were six attacks on churches, Christian hospitals and educational institutions. Such attacks re-surfaced again in [2013 with the suicide attack on All Saints' Memorial Church in Peshawar](#) province, which is also on the Afghan border. About 90 people died in that incident, including many children.

Then on 15 March 2015, [just before Easter, two churches in a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore](#) came under twin suicide attacks. About 25 people died. In 2016 in Lahore, Punjab – where the largest Christian population lives – [a suicide attack took place on a park, killing mostly Christians as they celebrated Easter](#). This year, security was on high alert at Easter. In March, [Pakistan's military agency, to prevent an attack, killed a husband and arrested his wife, who'd been trained in Syria by IS](#). (She [was later released by security agencies](#).) Security agencies are on high alert for Christmas.

The worst attack in Pakistan's history (which changed the course of the country by triggering new anti-terrorism laws after showing the population how ruthlessly Islamist militant radicals could behave), took place exactly three years ago in Peshawar [when terrorists raided an army public school,](#)

[massacring 141, including 132 children.](#)

List of victims (Source: British Pakistani Christians: <http://bit.ly/2z33cAz>)

Below we have a list of those killed and injured with some images of the survivors you may find these upsetting and should stop reading from here is so: List of People who lost their lives during the blast in Church in Quetta 1. Mehak D/O of Sohail Yousaf 2. Akash S/O Naseem 3. Fazal Masih S/o Malik Masih 4. George Masih 5. Gulzar Masih 6. Sultan Masih S/O Siraj Masih 7. Sona Nazaf D/O Noaf Hameed 8. Madeeha Barkat D/O Barkat Ali List of people who were injured: 1. Ashraf S/O Manzoor 2. Sultan S/O Mizaj 3. Saiqa wife of Sohail 4. Aaliya Naeem 5. Nadia 6. Mekal 7. Saima 8. Sunil 9. Shamim 20. Yasir Naveed 21. Shezadi Shamshad 22. Adil 23. Khushi 24. Salma 25. Hanan 26. Sadaf 27. Jospheen 28. Ayeasha 29. Tina Qaisor 30. Ramish 31. Eman Wali 32. Zeeshan 33. Aksa

RADICALISM AND JIHADISM IN AZERBAIJAN

HRWF (28.10.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2xvauwY> – On 21 October 2017, contact.az posted a long article written by Kenan Rovshanoglu entitled “Religious freedom in independent Azerbaijan”. The various sections are entitled as follows:

- Religion in Soviet times
- Legislation in the field of religion
- Import of religion into independent Azerbaijan
- Control increases
- Period of prohibitions (2006-2012)
- First armed religious groups and first arrests

- Jihadism and radicalization
- Government policy in the religious sphere: bans and pressures
- Conclusion

Below, we reproduce his article, except the part on religion in Soviet times.

In the conclusion, the journalist questions the effectiveness of Azerbaijan's fight against radical Islam.

Legislation in the field of religion

In 1991, the independence of Azerbaijan was restored and freedom of religion was declared in the country. On August 20, 1992, President Elchibey signed Decree No. 281, which passed the "Law on Freedom of Religion".

This law, which should be considered one of the most democratic legal acts in the history of Azerbaijan, recognized the freedom of all faiths, restored religious centers to believers, gave believers the right to freely disseminate the principles of their faith and create religious educational institutions. However, not everything in the law was perfect. Fearing the growing influence of the ideas of the Iranian Islamic revolution, the law forbade spiritual figures to be elected to the national parliament of Azerbaijan.

Because of the fear of radicalization of the religious sphere, this law was changed several times in the following years under the current regime: on June 7, November 5 and December 27, 1996, on October 10, 1997, on November 23 2001, in 2009, in 2011, in the year 2015, the law was toughened and restrictions were imposed on it.

Tougher legislation that has taken place in the last 5 years prohibits foreigners from engaging in religious propaganda and people who have received religious education abroad to hold religious posts.

Strongly toughened bans in the religious sphere “Law on Struggle against Religious Extremism”, adopted in December 2015.

Import of religion into independent Azerbaijan

As mentioned above, after the restoration of independence in 1991, freedom of religion was declared in Azerbaijan, and with the fall of the Iron Curtain, missionaries from Muslim countries, especially from Iran, Turkey and the Persian Gulf countries began to come to Azerbaijan.

Charitable foundations, which in the beginning came to the country as humanitarian or charitable organizations, soon began to create religious educational institutions. According to the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cabinet of Ministers, in 1993-2003 there were already about 150 madrassas in Azerbaijan. The activities of foreign funds were conducted by different countries in three main areas. The Shiite current was conducted mainly by Iran, the Sunni movement mainly by Turkey and Egypt, Salafi propaganda was conducted by the funds of Saudi Arabia and other countries of the Persian Gulf.

As already noted, about 65% of Azerbaijan's population consider themselves Shiites or come from traditional Shiite regions: Karabakh; Ganja and the areas around it; Aran; South Region; Mil Mugan; Baku and the surrounding areas are considered Shiite territories. Therefore, Iran's religious activities have become particularly successful in these regions. I agree with official data, out of 150 madrasahs in the country 22 are under the control of Iran, 14 of them were registered by the Ministry of Justice. The most famous among them are madrasahs in Goychay, Lenkoran, Jalilabad and Nardaran.

There are also representative offices in the country

- Ministry of Culture of Iran;
- Propaganda of Islam;

- Madrasah Coordination Organization;
- Organization for International Cultural Relations;
- International publishing house “Al-Khuda”;
- Charitable Foundation “Imdad Khomeini”;
- Representation of “Bali Fagih” (representation of the Supreme Religious Leader of Iran).
- Iran’s prayer house in Baku – “Huseyniyya” is one of the most visited religious centers in the country.

The Ministry of Education of Turkey has opened five schools with a religious bias in the Turkish “Imam-Khatip” type in Baku, Sumgait, Shcheki, Mingechaur and Agdash.

According to the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cabinet of Ministers, in the following years, 26 mosques were built or restored to Turkish charity funds. In these mosques, events are held by Turkish religious figures.

In addition, under the auspices of Turkey in the country operate

- Madrasah “Khafizov and Islamic Sciences” in the cheeks,
- The Aliabad madrasah in Zagatala,
- Madrasah in Agdash
- and madrassas in Badamdar settlement of Baku.

The founders and long-time heads of the Faculty of Theology (İlahiyyət) of the Baku State University were the theologians invited from Turkey, the training was conducted according to the Turkish program, compiled according to the Sunni canons.

Another faculty of Theology was founded in the Guleni University “Caucasus” (today it is closed).

Some of the mosques of Baku Akhunds were appointed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Turkey. Aziz Makhmud Khudai (Youth Support Fund), Nur community (Sunuris), Fathulla Gülen communities developed active religious activities.

After the restoration of independence, especially in the mid-1990s, more than 15 Arab religious charitable organizations began to operate in Azerbaijan. The most active among them were the radical Salafist organizations.

Among the 65 mosques operating with financial support from the Arab countries, the 61st mosque was built by the "Fund for the Revival of the Islamic Heritage". Among them – four mosques are built in Baku.

Other Arab religious charities include

- Organization of Help "Al-Haramain",
- Committee of Muslims of Asia Kuwait (Kuwait),
- International Organization of Islamic Charity (Saudi Arabia),
- The World Islamic Youth Assembly (Saudi Arabia),
- International Islam Najat (Saudi Arabia),
- Dar al-Beer (United Arab Emirates).

Most of these organizations controlled the open or secret activities of the madrassas they built.

Control increases

Since the mid-1990s, the government has gradually begun to tighten religious legislation, but this did not prevent foreign missionaries from freely carrying out religious propaganda. However, since 1998, the authorities began to severely restrict the activities of Arab religious organizations. The most famous propagandist of Salafism in Azerbaijan Sheikh Salim Zaharna (preacher of Arab origin) was deported from Azerbaijan. Pressure on Arab religious organizations increased after the events of September 11, 2001 in New York, many of them were closed, and their leaders were deported from the country. The last Arab organization Dar al Bir was closed several years ago.

It was during this period that the authorities of Azerbaijan

were seriously concerned about the rapid expansion of the religious segment of society. In addition, in those years, reports began to be received that the Azerbaijanis began to join foreign religious armed groups in such regions of the Sunni "jihad" as Afghanistan and Chechnya. Serious concern was also caused by the increased religious influence of Shiite Iran.

The first arrests of radical religious activists began in the mid-1990s. It was during this period that the leadership of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA) was arrested, arrests were also made among members of Islamic extremist groups, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

In 2001, by the decree of President Heydar Aliyev, the "Committee for Work with Religious Organizations" (hereinafter – the Committee) was established. A member of the Academy of Sciences, Professor Rafik Aliyev was appointed Chairman of the Committee. Immediately thereafter, by the government's decision, 14 Iranian-controlled madrassas were closed. Gradually, the authorities closed all the independent and sponsored madrasahs and courses of the Koran, except for four madrasahs in Baku, Zagatala, Aghdash and Shcheka, controlled by the Turkish government.

The Committee received the right to register religious communities, formerly belonging to the Ministry of Justice, the right to examine religious literature, as well as control over the activities of religious communities.

During the times of R. Aliyev, the Committee began to take serious measures to streamline and monitor religious activities. Religious communities and mosques were required to register as official communities and soon more than 400 religious communities were registered. At the same time, according to the requirements of the legislation, the religious activity of foreign citizens was banned and these people began to be expelled from the country. This process

continued until the expulsion of the last employee of the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs from the country.

The Committee also compiled a list of banned religious literature and banned the import and sale of several Islamic and Christian books "for propagating religious intolerance in them." The government annually updated the list of banned literature. In addition, the Committee's expertise department began to censor religious literature imported and published in the country.

Period of prohibitions (2006-2012)

In the summer of 2006, the new president, Ilham Aliyev, freed Rafik Aliyev from the post of the head of the Committee and appointed Hidayat Orujov, presidential adviser on national and religious issues. The period of 6 years after this became a period of restrictions and strict interventions of the state in the sphere of religion. The reason for this was the strengthening of religious radicalism in the Middle East (under the influence of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), the intensification of the propaganda of jihad, the strengthening of radical religious appeals. As a result, bans in the religious sphere of Azerbaijan have become tougher from year to year.

The first acquaintance of our society with the real activity of radical Islamists occurred in connection with the newspaper article of the well-known publicist Rafik Tagi in 2006, in which the author unflatteringly spoke about the Prophet Muhammad. R. Tagi began to receive a large number of threats of violence by phone, and religious activists from Nardaran held a press conference, which already openly threatened Tagi with physical violence. As a result, Tagi and the editor of the newspaper Samira Sadagatoglu were arrested for a short time. On November 23, 2011, Rafik Tagi, who was released, was killed, no killers have been found.

In May 2007, the government banned the transfer of azan (a call to prayer) through radio amplifiers at the beginning in Baku, then and throughout the republic. The ban lasted several days and after a serious discontent of the religious community, the government formally abolished the ban. But despite this, in several mosques, the ban on the adhan still works. In the summer of 2007, the Committee, under the pretext of "the need for a new registration," closed 19 courses of the Koran, working legally. A small number of these courses were registered inside religious communities.

In 2008, the government decided to destroy the "Fatimeï Zahra" mosque in the village of Yeni Gunashli. And in 2009, the mosque "Our Prophet Muhammad" in Baku and the mosque on the Oil Rocks were destroyed, which was accompanied by active protests of believers.

In 2009, the parliament adopted an amendment prohibiting people who received religious education abroad to hold a religious office. The quota for participation in the pilgrimage to Mecca was reduced from 6000 to 2,000 people. Permission to deal with hajj organizations was given only to SAMC, it was forbidden to private companies.

In November 2010, the Minister of Education Misir Mardanov made a statement about the ban on wearing women's head-covers in state secondary educational institutions. This decision caused serious discontent and protests from believers. On December 10, 2010, on May 6, 2011, on October 5, 2012, protests were held in front of the Ministry of Education. Especially memorable was the last action, which ended with a clash with the police. As a result of 36 protesters were arrested.

First armed religious groups and first arrests

Lieutenant Kamran Aliyev, a member of the Salafi group, serving in Geranboy (on the front line with Armenia), fled his

military unit, in October 2007, arrived in Baku and attacked several facilities, including a gas station. Soon he and members of his group were arrested.

On August 17, 2008, a grenade was thrown at the Salafi mosque of Abu Bakr in Narimanov district. The mosque was closed and as a result of the investigation it became known that the terrorist attack was carried out by a group of radical Khawarijas – “The Forest Brothers”. Members of the group were arrested, their leader Ilgar Mollachiyev was killed.

A terrorist of Arab origin named Abu Jafar was arrested in Sumgayit. Two members of the group “Forest Brothers” were arrested in Pakistan and handed over to the Azerbaijani authorities.

In 2003, about 15 Azerbaijani citizens who arrived from the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia to start partisan activities in Karabakh were arrested during the operation in Ganja and Baku. During the operation, a senior police lieutenant was killed. A large number of arms and ammunition were confiscated from the Raf car belonging to the group. Later, the leader of the group called “Karabakh Partisans” – Rovshan Badalov and all members were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. One of the members of the group received a life sentence. R. Badalov was released in 2011-2012, it was reported that he went to fight in Syria, joined there the “Islamic State” and was killed during the fighting.

In 2007, about 30 people were arrested in Baku on the “Said Dadashbeyli case”. Some of the detainees were released after a while, and 11 people from this group of prisoners were sentenced to prison terms of 12 to 14 years

In early 2011, the head of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan Movsum Samedov, senior management and regional representatives of the party were arrested. According to official reports, weapons and ammunition were found in their homes.

Shiites were also arrested, protesting against the ban on wearing the hijab in public schools.

These arrests lasted two years intermittently, dozens of Shiites were arrested under various pretexts. Even the moderate religious preacher Haji Shahin was arrested in 2011 but he was released six hours after the intervention of Sheikh-ul-Islam.

Jihadism and radicalization

The fighting in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria led to the rapid spread of the ideas of jihad. The Sunni groups fighting against Bashar Assad declared their struggle sacred, that is, jihad.

For the first time in May 2013, a group of Azerbaijanis in Syria distributed a video on the Internet calling for compatriots to join the jihad in this country. Since then, it has become obvious that Azerbaijani citizens are participating in armed clashes in Syria. The press reported from time to time that many radical Salafis from the northern regions of the country, as well as from Sumgait and Mushvigabad settlement (near Baku) are or are sent to Syria to participate in the jihad against Bashar Assad.

At first, the authorities looked at the jihadists from Azerbaijan through their fingers, but by 2014 the flow of jihadists had increased, such an increase in extremism began to cause concern to the government. In January 2014, after the retreat of Asadov troops in northern Syria, a war broke out in this region for the supremacy between the radical Islamist groups "Islamic State" and "Front Al Nusra." Soon, media reported about the death of hundreds of jihadists from both conflicting sides, among which about 30 Azerbaijani jihadists were killed.

After that, the authorities began to move. Silent earlier Sheikh-ul-Islam issued a fatwa against jihad in Syria. In the

official press, active propaganda began against the jihadists. The legally operating Salafi of Azerbaijan under the leadership of the akhund of the Abu Bakr mosque Haji Gamet also made a statement that what is happening in Syria is not a jihad but a struggle for power and we should not interfere. Further, the authorities passed a law banning the participation of citizens of the country in illegal military formations abroad. After that, the first arrests began. In recent years, about 100 citizens of the country, who returned from Syria, were arrested.

The bloody clashes between Shiites and Sunnis in Syria and influenced the relationship between these religious communities in the country. Between the representatives of various branches of Islam, hostile appeals, mutual accusations, which could be read in social networks, intensified.

Shiite Taleh Bagirzade (Bagirov), who was released in the summer of 2015, was again arrested on April 26, 2015 during a police operation in Nardaran. During the operation, six people were killed, including two policemen. More than 60 believers were arrested both in Nardaran and in other regions of the country, including in Ganja and Lenkoran. Along with Taleh Bagirzade, activists of the movement "Muslim Unity" Zulfugar Mikayilzadeh and Elman Agayev were also arrested.

Earlier, in 2011, the leader of the Islamic Party Movsum Samedov was arrested and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment; Abgul Suleymanov (arrested in 2011, sentenced to 11 years in prison); Faramiz Abbasov (arrested in 2011, sentenced to 11 years in prison).

Government policy in the religious sphere: bans and pressures

The powers of the country are more often trying to control the situation in the religious sphere through restrictions and prohibitions, generously using the power structures. But a

marked increase in religiosity among the population and the emergence of ever new radical religious leaders cast doubt on the effectiveness of repression. Attempts by the authorities to establish a dialogue with the religious community are limited to communication with legally functioning religious communities and mosques.

Government agencies that are entrusted with the management and control over the activities of religious communities have received from 2014 the authority to conduct religious education and propaganda for the ideas of "true Islam."

On February 28, 2014, the State Service for Multiculturalism, Interethnic and Religious Affairs was established. On May 15, 2014, the "International Baku Center for Multiculturalism" was established by the decree of the President of the Republic.

On October 20, 2014, the head of the Committee Mubariz Gurbanli held a meeting with a group of theologians and representatives of various religious denominations. At this meeting, it was announced that a new "Commission on Religious Studies" had been set up under the Committee, with a view to combating the ideas of religious extremism.

As the government's interference in the religious sphere intensifies, there is a noticeable weakening of the influence, fully supported by the authorities, of the SAMC (Caucasian Muslims Board), led by Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshykyur Pashazadeh.

According to the current legislation, the Government has entrusted the management and control of the activities of the country's Muslims to the Caucasian Muslim Board, which exercises control over mosques, appoints Akhundov and imams, and makes recommendations to government agencies on the registration of religious communities. But recently this practice is being revised. The main role in the management of the religious sphere was transferred to government agencies.

Since 2014, the government has provided financial assistance to religious communities through the State Committee for Religious Affairs, not through the SAMK (the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus), as it was previously.

By the way, the Muslim Board as a non-religious organization, according to the Constitution, should not be funded by the state, but in fact, the state aid is as follows: annual Sheikh apply directly to the president with a formal request for financial assistance, and the President allocates funds from its fund maintenance of the SAMK apparatus 2-3 million manat (1.7 manats – 1 dollar). Akhunds and imams of local mosques work on a voluntary basis and live off donations from the population and payments for religious ceremonies, such as wake ceremonies and registration of religious marriages. In February 2013, 2 million manat was allocated from the presidential reserve fund for SAMK; in the summer of 2015 3 million manats; In the summer of 2015 1 million manat [2].

By the end of 2016, the deputy chairman of the Muslim Board Haji Sabir Hasanli said that only about 600 mosques already assigned akhunds and imams, while about 1,500 mosques expect purposes [3], due to lack of personnel. This shortage of personnel resulted from the above-mentioned ban on the activities of persons who received religious education abroad. That is why, at the end of last year, the management of SAMK announced the creation of seven new madrassas in different regions of the country for the preparation of imams and akhunds for mosques.

According to the law, the akhunds and Imams in the mosque appoint the Caucasian Muslims Board, but this appointment is consistent with the State Committee for Religion. Buildings and land of mosques are considered the property of the state or municipality. According to the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers, most mosques (about two-thirds) are on the balance of municipalities. Municipalities provide these mosques to

SAMC or the relevant religious communities for free rent.

Some mosques are on the balance of the "Office of the State Historical and Architectural Reserve" Icherisheher "(Old Town) in Baku.

Mosques, the architecture of which is of historical importance and considered historical monuments are on the balance of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Communities of mosques are registered in the State Committee for Religious Affairs and must report to this state structure.

So, the mosques and the legal sphere in the sphere of religion are managed by three different structures: **the State Committee for Religion, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Caucasus and municipalities.**

Conclusion

Facing such problems in the religious sphere as extremism and opposition to the authorities, the current government is trying to put religious activity (like any other independent public activity) under maximum control. The legislation is toughened, the possibilities of religious propaganda are limited and rigidly censured, not to mention the use of police measures.

The effectiveness of these measures is questionable because, first of all, the personnel potential and academic centers of the authorities are weak for carrying out an alternative – pro-government religious propaganda. And, of course, it is impossible to change the protest moods in a country that is in an all-embracing crisis with no propaganda. In recent years, independent religious activity has been carried out mainly outside the mosques controlled by the authorities – in illegal communities, prayer houses and independent courses on reading the Koran. Law enforcement structures from time to time expose the secret prayer cells, but this is only a small part in the

overall process of spreading and radicalizing the Islamic religion in the country.

The activities of the State Committee for Religion and the “State Service for Multiculturalism” consist mainly of holding seminars and conferences among official organizations and loyal religious communities. The authorities try to influence the process from above, through the leaders of these communities and pro-government religious authorities. The effectiveness of such a policy is small and then, the last argument of the government in dealing with an independent religious community is the police.

It would seem that SAMK should have an important role in the process of resolving problems in the religious sphere, but this structure, left in the inheritance from the tsarist and soviet times, lost its authority among the population, it is passive and remains outside the process that develops with noticeable intensity.

Some important links

<https://www.azadliq.org/a/prezident-qafqaz-allahshukur/27846544.html>

http://www.az.azvision.az/Prezident_QMI-ye_3_milyon_-65951-xeber.html

<http://scwra.gov.az/vnews/366/>

<http://scwra.gov.az/article/22/>

<http://static.bsu.az/w21/14.pdf>

[1] The Council, consisting of religious authorities

[\[2\]](#)

<https://www.azadliq.org/a/prezident-qafqaz-allahshukur/27846544.html>

[3] <http://az.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/2535176.html>

HRWF recommended reading

La crise syrienne vue d'Azerbaïdjan, Bayram Balci (28.03.2013)

<http://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/fr/content/la-crise-syrienne-vue-d-azerbaïdjan>

USA: MINNESOTA GOVERNOR CALLS MOSQUE BOMBING 'ACT OF TERRORISM'

Reuters (08.08.2017) –

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-minnesota-blast-mosque-idUSKBN1AM0T1>

– Minnesota's governor called the bombing of a mosque outside Minneapolis the previous day "an act of terrorism" during a visit to

the site on Sunday.

Police in Bloomington, Minnesota, were called on Saturday at 5:05 a.m. local time about an explosion at the Dar Al Farooq mosque, after a bomb was thrown through the window of the imam's office while worshipers were gathered for morning prayers. No one was injured.

Governor Mark Dayton, along with a delegation of public officials, visited the mosque on Sunday morning. He called on the community to unite against such attacks.

"What a terrible, dastardly, cowardly act was committed," he said.

"It is a criminal act of terrorism," added Dayton, who also described it as a hate crime that was "unthinkable, unforgivable."

Federal Bureau of Investigation officials in Minneapolis are investigating the incident and declined to provide further details on Sunday.

Mohamed Omar, the mosque's executive director, previously said a member of the congregation saw a pickup truck speeding away from the building's parking lot just after the blast.

Omar told the Star Tribune on Sunday the perpetrator may have known which window was the imam's, who missed the blast by only a few minutes.

Anti-Muslim incidents have risen sharply in the United States over the past year, according to a review by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the Minneapolis-area bomber.

Reporting by Jenna Zucker in New York; additional reporting by Joseph Ax in New York; Editing by Lisa Shumaker

WORLD: SENTENCING PRISON TERMS TO IMAMS EDUCATED ABROAD IS UNFAIR, HOWEVER...

Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l

- Imprisonment of imams educated abroad
- Freedom of religion or belief and the state's duty to protect its citizens
- Freedom of religion and security: responses to radicalization from abroad of cultural Muslims in Western societies
- A missing tool in the fight for human and state security
- Conclusions

HRWF (24.07.2017) – Sentencing 'controversial' imams to prison terms because they have been educated abroad is a violation of human rights, *however* it is the right of a state to protect its population against radicalization and foreign ideologies that promote degrading and inhumane treatments.

Foreign forms of controversial Islamic teachings introduced in various ways in Muslim majority countries threaten their traditional culture of tolerance and the peaceful relations between their various religious communities.

Iran attracts and trains foreign Shi'a theologians to export its theocratic model and Sharia practices, values which are

incompatible with human rights. Salafists and Wahhabis backed by Saudi Arabia and other states of the Arabic Peninsula are increasingly disturbing the homegrown peaceful Islam in Indonesia, the Maldives, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries. The implantation of their Islamic universities and other educational institutions in such countries, in addition to the granting of scholarships for foreign education of imams and young students in theology, are part of their diversified strategies to export forms of Islam that are alien to local Islam and conflict with human rights.

Imprisonment of imams educated abroad

Azerbaijan: The case of Sardar Babayev

On 3 July, an Azerbaijani court handed down a three-year prison term to Sardar Babayev for leading Muslim prayers for he had previously received religious education abroad. The imprisonment of Sardar Babayev on such grounds is clearly a violation of international law.

According to an amendment to the Religion Law adopted in 2015, foreign-educated imams can only lead worship in state-recognized mosques if their appointment has been approved by the state-backed Caucasian Muslim Board and the State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations.

After studying Islam in Baku, Shia Imam Babayev completed theological studies at Al Mustafa University in the Iranian city of Qom in 2000.

Qom is Iran's main theological training center for foreigners^[1]. Its teachings promote theocracy instead of separation of state and religion, and an extreme form of Sharia, as it is practiced in Iran: execution by hanging, stoning, imprisonment of apostates, large scale repression of Baha'is, and so on.

Kazakhstan: The case of Abdukhalil Abduzhabbarov

On 17 February, the Kazakh authorities arrested Sunni Imam Abdukhaliil Abduzhabbarov. He had been the subject of an extradition request from Astana for spreading ideas of so-called takfir^[ii] in western Kazakhstan and for inciting religious hatred in the early 2000s. Additionally, he was accused of 'continued attempts to influence Muslims in Kazakhstan and students who were studying or visiting him in Saudi Arabia' where he had fled in 2006 to avoid prosecution. He had graduated from the Saudi-backed International Islamic University in the Pakistani capital Islamabad in 1999.

In his 2013 paper on the International Islamic University of Islamabad^[iii], Qasir Amir notes that the following teachings of the criminal law are instructed in the said institution:

- Apostasy: death
- Adultery/ Illegal sexual intercourse: stoning to death or lashes
- Theft: amputation of the right hand from the joint of the wrist
- Drinking alcohol: 80 lashes

In July 2017, Satymzhan Azatov was jailed for four years eight months for inciting religious hatred and promoting terrorism, which he denied. He was the fourth Muslim who studied in Saudi Arabia convicted in 2017 in Kazakhstan.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and other countries are confronted with a real threat to public order and state security by the introduction of such ideologies, however harsh repression is not an adequate or efficient response.

Freedom of religion and the state's duty to protect its citizens

States have the duty to protect their citizens and residents on their territory. On the grounds of security, more and more Muslim majority countries try to protect their peaceful

homegrown practice of Islam against radical and extremist movements which use or promote the use of violence. To combat this issue, these countries only allow imams to operate if they were trained at home or in other 'safe' countries or institutions – a sort of security label

Sentencing imams to prison terms just because they were educated abroad in 'suspicious' countries or institutions is a violation of human rights. However, punishing hate crimes and hate speech or the promotion of physical punishments, such as stoning and lashes, is in line with international law.

Freedom of religion and security: responses to radicalization from abroad of cultural Muslims in Western societies

In early May 2017, Denmark banned five Islamic clerics and an American evangelical Christian pastor from entering the country, calling them "hate preachers" who posed threats to public order.

In December 2016, Shayk El Alami Amaouch, also known as Alami Abu Hamza, who had double citizenship (Moroccan and Dutch) through his marriage with a Dutch woman, left Belgium after an expulsion order had been issued against him. He was reproached with making 'Salafist' propaganda, preaching violence, calling for jihad, and recruiting ISIS fighters for Syria. He is not allowed to enter Belgium for ten years.

His family was not concerned by the order. However, his 17-year old son is also under scrutiny of the authorities since he posted a video in which he called for the murder of Christians

(see <https://www.memri.org/tv/youth-walks-down-street-verviers-belgium-cursing-christians-and-praying-their-annihilation>).

However, he cannot be deported since he was born in Belgium. He afterwards said he regretted 'his error'.

France has also deported dozens of imams since 2012. Other EU member states have followed suit.

The deportation policy based on the prosecution of hate speech and incitement to religiously-based hatred can thwart the radicalization of cultural Muslims in Western societies, which has been exported from ISIS and certain countries in the Arabic Peninsula, but other legal avenues need to be explored.

A missing tool in the fight for human and state security

A legal basis for the 'management' of imams and students in theology educated in controversial religious centers exists in international law: Article 5 of the ICCPR which reads as follows:

Nothing in the present Covenant may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms recognized herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the present Covenant.

Under Article 17 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which is identical to Article 5 of the ICCPR, Strasbourg has declared inadmissible the application (no. 31098/08) of **Hizb Ut-Tahrir and Others v. Germany** against the ban imposed on them by German courts on the ground that their ideology aims at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms recognized in Article 5 of the ICCPR or at their limitation.

The groups teachings in a number of foreign countries and religious institutions are in egregious contention with Article 5 of the ICCPR. They promote an "Untermensch" worldview in which Muslims are superior to and have more rights than non-Muslims. They promote segregation between men and women leading to gender inequality. They promote judicial practices which blatantly contradict Article 7 of the ICCPR: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." The UN and its member states, EU member states, the USA, and other liberal

democracies, have not done enough, if any, to reduce and eradicate such judicial practices and their implementation.

Conclusions

Since the beginning of this century, the expansion of violent and totalitarian Islamist political ideologies have been accompanied by the spread and the strengthening of the Sharia law, in its most discriminatory and violent forms, in an increasing number of Muslim majority countries. This has been achieved inter alia by offering young people free education or scholarships for theological studies in Saudi Arabia, in Pakistan, and in Iran, just to name a few countries, which results in fueling the worldwide radicalization of Islam. During their studies, the youth sent to overseas madrasas are converted to Salafist, Wahhabi and other totalitarian forms of Islam that are alien to the traditional Islam of their country of origin. Along with 'returnees' from the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, these educated 'returnees' from radical religious training centers abroad are then expected to import their newly discovered ideology back home.

When these 'returnees' are arrested, they are first and foremost a threat to the international human rights system, which includes the equal right to religious freedom for all, rather than victims of religious rights violations. Organisations and activists defending human rights and religious freedom should keep this in mind.

All states, whatever their political system, should unite their efforts, in the framework of the UN or not, to prevent the expansion of a totalitarian ideology that 'aims at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms' recognized in Article 5 of the ICCPR or at their undue limitation. A black list of countries and religious institutions to be banned from study-abroad options and imposing an embargo for such studies is not to be excluded from the proactive measures to be taken by Muslim majority states and countries with Muslim

minorities.

[i] Hojatiye School (Qom) was established 70 years ago by a Shia cleric. It had around 600 foreign students in 2010 and 200 professors (<http://hawzahnews.com/TextVersionDetail/233956>). Many well-known clerics have studied in this school including Ayatollah Khamenei, the current Supreme Guide of Iran. Hojatiye School mainly accommodates students coming from other countries while Feyziye School is for Iranian students.

Professors of Hojatiye School are among Shia clerics that have close ties with the Iranian government. Ayatollah Sobhani is one of them. In various speeches he has clarified his ideas about how a Shia society should look. For instance, according to his teachings, police should definitely forbid people from eating and drinking in public places during the holy month of Ramadan.

In addition, he has called western television channels harmful for the Shia beliefs (having access to these channels through satellite is illegal in Iran, although most people watch them). Sobhani has also emphasized the important role of *Velayat-e Faghih* (Islamic government). Referring to the necessity of increasing the Iranian population, as it is the general policy that was determined by the supreme guide, he teaches that abortion is against the policy and regulations of the Islamic Republic (<http://www.asriran.com/fa/tag/>).

The General policies of the school as mentioned on its website

<http://feqh.miu.ac.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=19&pageid=4531>
) include:

- Clarifying and establishing the ideals of Islamic Revolution as well as Ayatollah Khomeini and Khamenei's political and religious opinions

- Training religious scholars for other countries especially Islamic countries for researching, teaching, preaching and translating
- supporting researching projects based on the social and cultural needs of countries

Moreover, the Graduation Office is one of the important departments of the school that it organizes and helps graduated students in their future job. This office has various responsibilities mainly: Identifying and supporting graduated students that returned to their country, organizing them and guiding them (<http://en.feqh.miu.ac.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=19&pageid=6845>)

This footnote was prepared by an Iranian student during her internship with *Human Rights Without Frontiers*.

[ii] The identification by a Muslim of others as being infidels. This term is as strong as “infidel” in English or « mécréant » in French. It presupposes that non-Muslims are second-rank citizens and conveys the concept that they are some sort of “Untermensch”.

[iii] See

<https://www.academia.edu/people/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=International+Islamic+University+in+the+Pakistani+capital+Islamabad>

MALDIVES : USCIRF CONDEMNS

THREATS TO THE LIFE OF UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION

USCIRF (20.07.2017) – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) strongly condemns the verbal and online attacks against UN Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed. The statements by the ruling Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and the online postings of at least one religious scholar include harsh criticism and accusations that Shaheed is an apostate from his Muslim faith. The denunciations of this advocate for religious freedom have even resulted in calls online for his beheading.

According to reports, statements from the PPM, the party of current President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom, accuse Dr. Shaheed of spreading “evil deeds” among Maldivians. “As if this were not enough,” said USCIRF Vice Chair Kristina Arriaga, who recently met with him in Oxford to discuss religious freedom, “the party also called on the public to speak out against Shaheed’s ‘irreligious’ activities, which resulted in online postings accusing him of apostasy and calling for his beheading. Coming from the ruling party, this is nothing less than government-sanctioned incitement to violence. That is unacceptable in the Maldives or any other country.”

Shaheed is currently the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. In this key position, he is mandated to “identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles.” Freedom of religion or belief is intimately linked to freedom of expression. Dr. Shaheed is being attacked by political and religious figures in his home country for exercising his freedom of expression on a variety of issues spanning several countries.

One reported Facebook posting by an alleged religious scholar

called for Muslims who have expressed views such as Shaheed's to "repent," and if they do not, "Their heads will have to be removed [from their bodies] as a non-believer. [This has to be] implemented by the ruler." Postings and statements such as this and those by the PPM have resulted in numerous explicit, violent threats against Dr. Shaheed as well as his family.

USCIRF Chairman Daniel Mark added, "The PPM should retract its statements threatening Dr. Shaheed and condemn in the strongest possible terms any calls for action against him. Rather than inciting violence against a fellow citizen, the PPM should protect Dr. Shaheed and indeed any other Maldivian citizen who exercises his or her right to freedom of expression. A government is responsible for protecting its citizens, not being complicit in threats to their lives."

HRWF footnote:

On 1 November 2016, Ahmed Shaheed who was born in the Maldives in 1964 assumed his mandate as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. He is Deputy Director of the Essex Human Rights Centre. He was the first Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran since the termination of the previous Commission on Human Rights mandate in 2002. A career diplomat, he has twice held the office of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives. He led Maldives' efforts to embrace international human rights standards between 2003 and 2011. See Ahmed Shaheed's full resume at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/Shahheed-One_pageCV.pdf

**TERRORIST ATTACK IN LONDON:
THINGS CANNOT CONTINUE AS**

THEY ARE...

***Human Rights Without Frontiers* presents its condolences to the families who have lost members and the people who have suffered injuries in the horrific terrorist attack at the London Bridge**

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (04.06.2017) – Speaking in Downing Street after a meeting of the government’s emergency Cobra committee, PM Theresa May said the country “cannot and must not pretend that things can continue as they are”. The prime minister said the country must “pull together” and unite to “defeat our enemies” and said [“things need to change” in the way that extremism and terrorism are tackled](#). She added that there was “too much tolerance of extremism in our country” and while it would involve “some difficult and embarrassing conversations”, that must change.

Towards the end of British multiculturalism?

This new terrorist attack, the third one in three months in the UK, may signal the end of the British multiculturalism model now perceived as inefficient to prevent terrorism. The juxtaposition of religious or ethnic communities inside the British cities and the accommodation of their specificities which were part of the British model are being questioned. “We need to live our lives not in a series of separated, segregated communities but as one truly one United Kingdom,” Theresa May said.

UK Prime Minister said the counter-terrorism strategy would be reviewed and the UK would work with other countries to prevent the internet being a “safe space” for terrorists. She blamed the internet companies and held them accountable for providing that free space to hate preachers and terrorists. Cyberspace needs to be regulated to prevent extremism and terrorism

planning, she said.

The enemy: the ideology of Islamist extremism

The British PM stressed that the common denominator of all the terrorist attacks, whatever their nature and modus operandi, is “the evil ideology of Islamist extremism that preaches hatred, sows division and promotes sectarianism.”

“It is an ideology that claims that our Western values of freedom, democracy and human rights are incompatible with the religion of Islam. It is an ideology that is a perversion of Islam.”

“Defeating this ideology is one of the great challenges of our time but it cannot be defeated through military intervention alone.”

The masterminds of the Islamic terrorist ideology is not to conquer our countries politically or militarily but to fracture our societies and to make us recant our values, some terrorism experts say.

Since 2013 security services in the UK have foiled 18 plots. A large proportion of those have involved suspects who set out to commit acts of violence similar to the attack on Westminster Bridge and London Bridge.

Watch Theresa May's full speech at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3IRKjdyMW0>