

Table of Contents

- ***Burqa ban in Germany 'wherever legally possible', says Merkel***
 - ***Who are the Salafists?***
 - ***Germany bans Islamic organization and police searched 190 sites***
 - ***Open Doors report about the lack of protection of religious minorities in Germany***
 - ***Ethiopian priest attacked by three pre-teens throwing stones and yelling Allah Akhbar***
 - ***Germany refugee centre an 'example for others' dealing with interfaith conflict***
 - ***Court acquits Afghan charged with attempted homicide against Christian convert***
 - ***The Islamist war against Sikhs is arriving in Europe***
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Burqa ban in Germany 'wherever legally possible', says Merkel

By Harry Farley

Christian Today (06.12.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2hbHxxv> - Angela Merkel has called for a burqa ban in Germany as she stands for her fourth consecutive term as Chancellor.

The German leader told her conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) on Tuesday that she would support a nationwide prohibition on the Islamic full face covering.

"The full-face veil must be banned, wherever it is legally possible," she said to enthusiastic applause from party delegates in Essen. "German law takes precedence over sharia."

She also said the refugee crisis "must never be repeated" in a speech to mark her unopposed pitch to be the party's candidate.

It comes after her close ally and Germany's interior minister Thomas de Maiziere backed a partial ban in August. He suggested a law could apply in "places where it is necessary for our society's coexistence" such as government offices, schools, courtroom and demonstrations.

"We all reject the full veil – not only the burka but also other types of full veil that only leave the eyes visible. They have no place in our society," Maiziere said at the time.

"Showing your face is essential for our communication, co-existence and social cohesion and that's why we're asking everyone to show their faces," he added. "We want to introduce a law to make people show their faces and that means that those who break that law will have to face the consequences."

If Germany goes ahead with the proposal it will be the latest in a list of European countries following France's controversial ban in 2011. Since then Belgium, Bulgaria and parts of Switzerland have fined those wearing the veil in public.

Dutch MP s voted for a similar ban in the Netherlands last month as support for similar legislation increases in Europe.

Merkel is fighting a slump in her popularity after she opened Germany's borders in September 2015. She has refused to back down despite intense criticism that the influx overwhelmed public services and left refugees in under-equipped camps.

But Tuesday's speech marks a distinct change in tone after the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) won support with attacks on Merkel's immigration stance. The populist party supports a total ban on burqas.

"A situation like the one in the late summer of 2015 cannot, should not and must not be repeated," Merkel said of the migrant crisis. "That was and is our, and my, declared political aim."

Who are the Salafists?

HRWF (25.11.2016) - The Salafists have become known as an ultra-conservative movement in the West where it is associated with literalist, strict, and puritanical approaches to Islam and with proponents of offensive jihad as a legitimate expression of opposition to those they deem to be enemies of Islam.

Historians and academics date the inception of Salafism to late 19th-century Egypt. Salafists themselves however believe that the label "Salafiyya" existed from the first few generations of Islam and is, therefore, not a modern movement.

Their doctrine can be summed up as taking a fundamentalist approach to Islam, emulating the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest followers—al-salaf al-salih, the 'pious forefathers.' They reject religious innovation and support the implementation of Islamic law.

In legal matters, Salafists are divided between those who, in the name of independent legal judgement (ijtihad), reject strict adherence (taqlid) to the four Sunni schools of law (madhahib) and others who remain faithful to these.

Salafism is often associated to Wahhabism. Mark Durie, an Australian scholar and vicar of an Anglican Church in Melbourne, considers Wahhabism to be a stricter Saudi form of Salafism. Ahmad Moussalli, professor of political studies at the University of Beirut, tends to agree with the view that Wahhabism is a subset of Salafism, saying "As a rule, all Wahhabis are Salafists, but not all Salafists are Wahhabis."

The Salafist movement is often divided into three categories: the purists (or quietists), the activists, and the jihadists.

"Purist Salafists" focus on non-violent preaching of Islam, education, and "purification of religious beliefs and practices." They dismiss politics as "a diversion or even innovation that leads people away from Islam." They never oppose their rulers, even in autocratic regimes.

"Activist Salafists," unlike the "purists," are engaged in political processes. They advocate political reform but eschew violence. Due to numerical superiority, at times the movement has been referred to as the mainstream of the Salafist movement.

"Jihadist Salafists" began developing an interest in armed jihad during the mid-1990s. According to Mohammed M. Hafez, a specialist on foreign fighters and suicide bombers,

Salafi jihadism is an "extreme form of Sunni Islamism that rejects democracy and Shia rule."

Despite some similarities, the different contemporary self-proclaimed Salafist groups often strongly disapprove of one another and deny the other's true Islamic character.

Salafists are often identified as Wahhabis in Central Asia and Russia, where they are considered terrorists or potential terrorists and prosecuted as such. In France, Belgium, Germany, and other EU countries, their ideology is associated with radical Islam, recruitment of jihadists to the Middle East, or carrying out violent actions in Europe, and is perceived as a major threat to public order and national security.

Salafism's three branches share the same totalitarian ideology, the one implemented by ISIS and other sympathetic armed movements. They share the same objective: to put in place a totalitarian system of governance imposing the standards of their interpretation of Islam on the territories and societies they (would) control.

States and civil societies concerned about or confronted by pernicious totalitarian ideologies that deny in theory and in practice the fundamentals of the international human rights system feel in a situation of self-defense and consider it is both their right and their duty to defend their values, to anticipate their possible future dangerousness and to combat them.

The international human rights community considers that jailed jihadist Salafists cannot qualify as prisoners of conscience as they use or advocate violence. As far as non-violent Salafists are concerned, some human rights movements consider that state repression is unjustified, inefficient, inappropriate, and even counter-productive and that from a legal point of view their freedom of thought, conscience and religion must be respected. Others perceive their ideology as a threat to the secular human rights system which the Salafists reject because it is not rooted in Islam and consider it must be combated.

Germany bans Islamic organization and police searched 190 sites

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (23.11.2016) – In mid-November, the German government banned (*) a Salafist Islamic group named "The True Religion" which is suspected of targeting teenagers as potential foreign fighters for Syria and Iraq. At the same time, police raided about 190 offices, storehouses, mosques, and apartments of members and supporters of "The True Religion" in seven German states. More than 1,000 police were involved in the largest anti-Islamist operation in 15 years.

According to German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere, during searches that took place in 60 cities across western Germany and Berlin, police seized documents, hard drives, smartphones and weapons. In a warehouse near the western city of Cologne, authorities seized about 21,000 German-language copies of the Quran.

The head of "The True Religion" group, 52-year-old Palestinian-born Ibrahim Abou-Nagie, is thought to be currently in Malaysia. In the past, he has repeatedly preached against "infidels" at mass events in Germany and on videos and social media.

Security officials said that the group had about 500 members in Germany, but, all in all, it is estimated that there are about 9,200 so-called Salafists who practice an ultra-

conservative form of Islam that can also turn violent. Their number has almost tripled in the past five years.

Muslims, who make up about five percent of the population in Germany, comprise the third-largest religious group in the country. Of the approximate four million Muslims, only about one percent can be considered Islamist, German security services say.

According to the organization Sekteninfo North Rhine-Westphalia, only about 5,000 of these are Salafists. Of these, 100 are seen as "missionaries," while twenty-four have been labeled as "dangerous."

Recruitment of foreign fighters, including among refugees

The ban came a week after authorities arrested five men who allegedly aided an Islamic State group in Germany by recruiting members and providing financial and logistical help.

The group — also known as "Read!" — has been distributing German-language copies of the Quran across the country. The interior minister said that more than 140 youths had traveled to Syria and Iraq to join fighters there after having participated in the group's campaigns in Germany. All in all, it is believed that some 850 people have traveled from Germany to the Middle East to fight with extremist groups like the Islamic State.

The sudden operation was propelled in part by increasing concern that the Salafists are trying to recruit among the hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees who arrived a year ago, encouraging some to sign up for jihad in Syria and Iraq or to carry out attacks in Germany.

Some 400 cases in which Salafists approached refugees have been reported nationwide in recent months according to Boris Pistorius, the interior minister of the state of Lower Saxony in north-central Germany.

In many of those cases, the authorities were alerted by staff members at refugee centers who had noticed Salafist activists seeking to recruit asylum seekers.

Messages conveying hate speech and fight against the German constitution

In the last few years, Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution has noted "increasing travels in the direction of Afghanistan and Pakistan" from people who come from "milieus influenced by the Salafist ideology."

The German Interior Minister stressed that the ban of the group "The True Religion" does not restrict the freedom of religion in Germany or the peaceful practice of Islam in any way. However, he said the group had glorified terrorism and the fight against the German constitution in videos and meetings. Moreover, "the translations of the Quran are being distributed along with messages of hatred and unconstitutional ideologies," de Maiziere told reporters in Berlin. "Teenagers are being radicalized with conspiracy theories."

One of Salafist preachers using hate speech against non-Muslims in Germany is a 32-year-old Iraqi who goes by the name Abu Walaa and whom the German authorities arrested on 8 November.

Better known as "the man with no face" because he often preached in Arabic and in poor German with his back to the camera, he was identified by officials as Ahmed Abdulaziz A.

He was based in Hildesheim, a quiet city of 100,000 south of Hanover (State of North Rhine-Westphalia), drawing an increasingly devoted following and even offering his own app in 2014. He is considered to be the "chief ideologist" of Salafists in Germany.

A hate crime by a teenager

In addition to the recent arrests, the authorities have begun increasing funding to hire new personnel and to add video surveillance in many public areas. This political decision was taken under pressure of growing criticisms about alleged security lapses which were voiced after a teenage girl stabbed and seriously wounded a police officer during a routine identity check at a Hanover train station in February.

Opposition politicians in Lower Saxony say the authorities missed several clues that the girl, now 16 years old and identified only as Safia S. under German law, had long veered toward jihad. As early as 2009, Safia was seen in a video being paraded with pride by a leading German Salafist convert, Pierre Vogel, as a fine example of a young girl determined to wear the head scarf and live a devout life.

She was also seen at Quran distribution stands in Hanover. So were her brother, an Afghan who has since disappeared, and a young Muslim suspected of links to a thwarted terror attack that led the authorities a year ago to call off a national soccer match with the Netherlands.

More clues to Safia's radicalization may emerge during her trial, which is closed to the public under youth protection laws. But already it seems clear that she had run off to Turkey in January, apparently intending to reach Syria. Her Moroccan mother, who is said to be extremely religious, traveled to Turkey to bring her back to Germany.

According to Stefan Birkner, an opposition lawmaker in Lower Saxony who sits on committees investigating and overseeing police and intelligence work in the state, the police observed the return but later classified Safia as no risk to public security.

Some teachings

Salafists promote the idea that democracy is the "work of the devil," while they believe that jihad is comprised not of religious devotion but armed struggle for the six pillars of Islam. Men and women are not seen as possessing the same rights, and anyone who disagrees is labeled an "infidel."

"It is a very closed and sect-like communal life," said Prof. Ceylan, an Islamic Studies professor in Osnabrück. "The more you enter this circle and integrate into its structures, the less contact with the outside world you'll have."

"It's also the attractiveness of simplicity," Ceylan added, referring to the black and white picture that prevails among extremist groups of all non-Muslims being condemned to hell, while all believers will find paradise.

Risk perceptions

In German public perception, Salafists played virtually no role for a long time. This only changed once they started handing out thousands of Korans in public places and getting into street battles with right-wing extremists of the Pro-NRW movement.

In the last two years, Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution has noted "increasing travels in the direction of Afghanistan and Pakistan" from people who come from "milieus influenced by the Salafist ideology."

Constitutional Protection President, Heinz Fromm, stated that although not every Salafist is a terrorist "almost all terrorists that we know of have had contact to Salafists, or are Salafists."

Friedmann Eißler of the Evangelical Central Department for Questions of Worldview warned of groups, which in their interpretation of Islam "explicitly reject democracy and glorify martyrdom." They refer "statements from the 7th to the 9th Century. That was the golden age of Islam, when politics and religion were intertwined," said Eißler.

Eißler added that the complexity of a globalized world has led some to seek out "simple black-and-white solutions," something which may be contributing to the rise of fundamentalist tendencies in other areas of society.

(*) Other Islamist movements were previously banned by Germany as terrorist organizations or for using/advocating violence: Tauhid Germany (2012), Millatu Ibrahim (2012), DawaFFM and Al-Nussrah (2013), and IS (September 2014). Hizb ut-Tahrir was also banned as a political movement (2003) although it does not use violence but calls for the elimination of Israel and the killing of all Jews. The decision of Germany's Federal Administrative Court and Federal Constitutional Court was unsuccessfully challenged at the European Court (Court decision on 14 March 2013). See Hizb ut-Tahrir and Others v. Germany (Application no. 31098/08).

Open Doors report about the lack of protection of religious minorities in Germany

Religiously motivated attacks on 743 Christian refugees in German refugee shelters

Open Doors (11.2016) – *Open Doors* has just published a 65-page report in English and in German (<http://bit.ly/1rs8y4j>) about religiously motivated attacks against religious minorities in Germany. Here is the table of contents:

1 Introduction

2 Results of the report in brief

3 Registration, assessment and first measures

3.1 Systematic registration of religiously motivated attacks

3.1.1 Difficulties in registration

3.1.2 Issues concerning the non-registration of religious motives

3.2 Assessments and measures on federal level to date

3.2.1 Exhaustive registration of refugees

3.2.2 Intensified research

3.2.3 The German integration law of May 25, 2016

3.3 Assessments and measures on state level to date

3.3.1 Relativizing the problems (Lower Saxony, Hamburg, Bremen, NRW)

3.3.2 State Parliament rejects request for better protection of Christians (Thuringia)

3.3.3 Putting limitations on religious freedom (Bavaria) 3.3.4 Catalogue of measures for the prevention of religious conflicts (Hesse)

3.4 Assessments of the state churches

4 Data acquisition

- 4.1 Concept of the questionnaire
- 4.2 Timeframe and geographical scope of investigation
- 4.3 Implementation
- 4.4 Hürden bei der Erfassung der Übergriffe
 - 4.4.1 Sprache und Kultur
 - 4.4.2 Zeitlicher Aufwand
 - 4.4.3 Angst der Flüchtlinge
 - 4.4.4 Challenges during the registration of the attacks

5 Evaluation of the extended survey

- 5.1 Statistical framework
- 5.2 Allocation of affected parties according to federal states
- 5.3 Characteristics of discrimination and violence
- 5.4 Handling of attacks
- 5.5 Attacks on Yezidis
- 5.6 Structural problems
 - 5.6.1 Criminal charges with no results
 - 5.6.2 Discrimination by facility personnel
 - 5.6.3 Islamic-influenced structures and mentalities
 - 5.6.4 Lack of sensitisation of religious motives
- 5.7 The victims' recommendations

6 The unique situation of converts

7 The first survey – retrospective and reactions

8 Positive approaches in preventing religiously motivated attacks

- 8.1 Berlin
- 8.2 Stuttgart
- 8.3 Bad Homburg
- 8.4 Rotenburg a.d. Fulda
- 8.5 Schloß Holte-Stukenbrock/Guetersloh district
- 8.6 Rottach-Egern

9 Attacks on refugees in other EU States

- 9.1 Austria
- 9.2 Switzerland

9.3 France

9.4 United Kingdom

9.5 Sweden

9.6 The Netherlands

9.7 Italy

9.8 Spain

9.9 Greece

10 Conclusions and Demands

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

1.1 Blank questionnaire

1.2 Completed questionnaire in Arabic

1.3 Translation of completed questionnaire into English

Appendix 2 – Handling of attacks: Experiences of the ZOCD-Staff

About Open Doors

Other organisations involved

Ethiopian priest attacked by three pre-teens throwing stones and yelling Allah Akhbar

Intolerance against Christians (25.10.2016) - The Ethiopian vicar, dressed in traditional priest's clothing and wearing a cross around his neck was visiting the town of Raunheim near Frankfurt when three pre-teens threw stones at him while yelling "Allah Akhbar".

The 47-year-old priest was walking to a Russian Orthodox chapel with a local priest when he was attacked. Both priests tried to take photos of the children, estimated to be between 10 and 12 years old, with their mobile phones, but they ran away too quickly.

Alexandra Rang, a Russian Orthodox hotel owner who built the chapel a few years ago, said she could not believe what the two priests told her at first. She said to be pelted with stones is the "worst thing a priest can imagine".

Raunheim social worker Dr Isack Majura said he was going to do everything possible to identify the children. He called the attack "absolutely unacceptable," but also said he thought it was an isolated incident and pointed to positive Muslim-Christian dialogue in the community.

Source: Intolerance against Christians (The title was slightly modified by HRWF)

The case was reported by the Protestant Press Agency IDEA (<http://bit.ly/2fnXCRk>), Main Spitze (<http://bit.ly/2eUtA77>)

Germany refugee centre an 'example for others' dealing with interfaith conflict

World Watch Monitor (24.10.2016) - A week after a new report claimed that life for some Christian refugees in Germany is "still unbearable", a case study has been released as an example for other refugee centres to follow.

The study, which profiles a refugee centre in the central German town of Rotenburg an der Fulda, notes that "much action is needed" and demands there be "no more integration experiments at the expense of Christians".

A list of recommendations is given, including an increase of non-Muslim staff; training for staff about the history of and potential for inter-religious clashes; and education for asylum seekers about religious freedom.

The centre is praised for its response to incidents in June and July, when what the local press initially reported as a "drunken brawl" between refugees was later discovered to have been religiously motivated.

In July, Christians were evacuated from the centre after a message was written on a wall, saying, "To all Muslims: now is the time to behead the unbelievers".

Open Doors Germany, author of the case study and co-author of the initial report, praised the decision to evacuate the Christians and the subsequent "firm address" to all Muslim staff, in which it was stressed that "such attacks should not be allowed to happen again". The next day, the Christians were returned and the centre manager told the staff he would be "keeping his eye on them". Since then, no incidents have been reported.

Open Doors acknowledged the sensitivity of reporting religiously motivated violence, and the possibility some will "exploit" it to feed right-wing or anti-Islamic agendas, but stressed that "the human right of religious freedom and the protection of victims in a country like Germany – that is a constant admonisher of human rights abuses on an international scale – should not be sacrificed for political objectives or the interests of individual groups.

"It is therefore everybody's duty to take action, so that the protection of the victims can be guaranteed. To remain inactive, to trivialise or to remain silent due to political or other reasons, is to be just as guilty as those who exploit the situation for political reasons".

'Slim chance of help'

The charity said that, in most centres, "Christians have [a] pretty slim chance of getting help" because "the victims of religiously motivated attacks are a minority, and the reasons why Muslims attack Christians and other religious minorities are not well known to facilities' operators and management.

"For this reason, religiously motivated attacks are either not recognised or they are deliberately trivialised as general conflicts between refugees. The families of the predominantly Muslim support staff, i.e. security personnel and interpreters, will tend to side with their fellow believers in religious conflicts or in some cases even become perpetrators themselves, as experience shows."

Thirty-two of the 49 Christian refugees living in the centre at the time of the study (out of a total of around 700 (70% Muslim, 10% Christian, 20% other) agreed to be

interviewed. Open Doors praised their “courage ... [in relating] their experiences of religiously motivated attacks”.

Open Doors noted that the tension in the centre had increased around the time of Ramadan, when hunger and thirst among the Muslims led to heightened emotions.

One interviewee said that, during Ramadan, “The Afghans does not want [sic] to use the same washing machine we wash with because to them we are unworthy and impure. From the moment the Afghans knew that we are Christians, they disinfected the bathroom every time we used it. They call us infidels, *neciz* [impure], won’t shake our hands and are very careful to not have any physical contact with us.”

Open Doors added that, “In general, the Muslim refugees avoided any contact with non-Muslims during Ramadan – fearing defilement and becoming impure. They said it would render the validity of their fasting null and void... Muslims avoided touching any common objects (e.g. body contact with toilet seats) so that they had no indirect contact with ‘infidels’. Sanitation became extremely poor. It was unclear who was going to be responsible for cleaning up the faeces, which then led to frequent conflicts within the community.”

The charity said it was particularly important for staff to recognise the challenge of dealing with an influx of refugees from Islamic nations.

“If we take a look into the mainly Islamic countries from which many of these refugees come, and consider how they treat religious minorities, it is obvious that their understanding of Islam is most definitely not compatible with the idea of religious freedom and the equality of all people,” the study noted. “Thus, it is justified to speak of systematic attacks, because the cultural and religious influence of a large number of refugees is based on the teachings of the Quran, something which is deeply ingrained.”

Open Doors added that refugee quarters “are much more aligned to the needs of Muslims, which then often has substantial side effects for the other residents”.

“The situation in the Rotenburg reception centre is no different from many other, comparable facilities where Muslims has been living long enough to establish their own Islamic parallel society,” noted the study. “Because of their faith, Christians are devalued to become second-class citizens and are branded ‘impure’ and ‘apostates’, while enduring physical assaults whenever they offer resistance. The same mind-set is also expressed by moderate Muslims, due to the fact that, according to Muslim thinking, Islam is the superior religion, which pursues the submission of all people to Allah.”

Another interviewee reported: “Every day the same group of Muslims from different countries walks through the quarters and forms a Sharia council, consulting on what they should do with us and according to which laws they are planning to sentence us. The council consists of Sheiks und Mullahs.”

Many of the Christian refugees who have fled to Germany have left nations where persecution against Christians is “severe”, according to Open Doors. The 49 Christians in the Rotenburg reception centre are from Iraq, Iran, Eritrea and Ethiopia. On Open Doors’ 2016 World Watch List, the annual ranking of the countries where Christians face the worst persecution, Iraq is 2nd, Eritrea 3rd, Iran 9th and Ethiopia 18th.

Recommendations

Open Doors listed these recommendations for other centres:

- The percentage of non-Muslim security staff must be adequately increased. Christians and members of other religious minorities should be employed [as staff] at all levels.
- For the asylum process, all Christians must have Christian interpreters.
- Christians [should be] connected to local churches ... [and] Christian contacts [should be assigned] whom Christians can turn to when affected by persecution.
- In the case of any family affiliation between refugees and support staff, it is vital that religious impartiality is guaranteed and that effective supervision is employed on a regular basis.
- The facility's management and staff members must be informed about the religious motives behind discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities by Muslims whose native countries have an Islamic majority.
- With the help of a pre-prepared guideline within the framework of integration, all asylum seekers in the quarters must be educated explicitly about religious freedom and specifically be informed on the rights of Christians and other religious minorities (including moderate Muslims) within refugee facilities and reception centres.
- Preventive measures [should be implemented], ensuring the protection of religious minorities during the entire process of asylum-seeking and integration.
- The proportion of Christians and other religious minorities [should] correspond with that of Muslims in shared accommodation.
- Christians and other religious minorities who have already been victims of persecution and discrimination should be given separate accommodation. This should include the possibility of decentralised accommodation [e.g. outside main reception centres]. Authorities must refrain from categorically blocking decentralised accommodation, especially if such living quarters are available for affected Christians.

Court acquits Afghan charged with attempted homicide against Christian convert

Intolerance against Christians (08.09.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2cZ2rBU> - Christian leaders and the Christian Police Union criticized the acquittal, noting that all of the witnesses were Muslims - many of whom helped the accused flee after the incident.

On October 18th, an Afghan refugee hit a 24-year-old Iranian Christian convert, Amir H., with a baton inside a refugee accommodation. The victim was badly injured and the offender fled. Two months later, the Afghan was caught by the police. The victim said that the Muslim had attacked him because of his own conversion from Islam to Christianity.

Court said that the offender had hit the Iranian's head multiple times, but they couldn't see a motive for homicide. It said there could be reasons why the offender had acted in self-defense, though Amir H. said that the perpetrator had shouted "Allahu Akbar" and had threatened him with death because of his conversion. None of the witnesses would confirm Amir's statement. The Afghan, on the other hand, assured the court that his father "fought against the Taliban, why would he then be against Christians?"

The leader of the Pentecostal Church "Alpha & Omega International", Pastor Albert Babajan said to the evangelical news agency idea that all the evidence presented tried to

make the case seem harmless. But, he asked, why would the Afghan flee if he had not been the offender? Babajan: "I hope that this verdict does not cause Muslims to further attack converted people." Babajan also said that Amir had left Germany months ago because he was scared of the Afghan.

According to the Christian Police-Union (CPV), the problem with this case was that all of the witnesses had been Muslims. They had helped the Afghan to get away before the police arrived. The CPV also said that attacks against converted Muslims continue to be a problem.

The Islamist war against Sikhs is arriving in Europe

By Hardeep Singh

The Spectator (02.09.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2cFuZkR> - Terror attacks in Germany are becoming remarkably unremarkable. So when a bomb went off in the German city of Essen, near Düsseldorf – and killed nobody – it barely registered. The three teenagers who detonated the device were all members of a Whatsapp group called 'Supporters of the Islamic Caliphate', so their intentions seemed pretty clear: they wanted to wage war against the infidels of the West.

But their target – a Sikh temple – was striking. While initial reports suggested there was 'no indication' of a terrorist incident, any Sikh reading the news would have understood the motive, just as any Jew or Christian would have understood precisely why Islamic extremists target synagogues or churches. It was a religiously motivated attack, designed to remind Germany's Sikh community that they should also be fearful.

It's a common claim that Christian persecution at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists is overlooked. But after the murder of the French priest Father Jacques Hamel in Rouen earlier this month, it's hard to brush aside the fact that Europe is becoming a religious battleground. The persecution meted out by Islamic State to many minorities in Syria and Iraq is arriving on our shores – and it is a gruesome spectacle. Jews and Christians have felt the brunt, but the Essen bomb was a reminder that Sikhs are also facing up to the menace of Islamic extremism.

Sikhs and Muslims have a long, tumultuous history. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak was a peaceful man who engaged in interfaith dialogue. He campaigned for women's rights, opposed caste discrimination, and spoke up against atrocities committed by the Mughals, India's Muslim invaders. Nanak's followers came from both Muslim and Hindu backgrounds. But history took a turn when Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru, was executed in 1675 for challenging an Islamic policy of forced conversion of Hindu priests. Foreseeing the difficulties ahead, his son Guru Gobind Singh decreed that Sikhs (who he called the Khalsa or 'pure') should always be ready to defend themselves and others against tyranny; India's 'sword arm' was born, and to this day, Sikhs have a reputation for being good fighters.

The Guru's supporters included individuals from Shia and Sufi minorities, sects within Islam. Yet his resistance to totalitarianism came at huge personal cost. Not only did he lose his father but his four sons were martyred, the younger two bricked alive for their refusal to accept Islam. Despite this, the Guru refused to vilify any adherents of Islam, but explicitly instructed Sikhs to 'recognise the human race as one.'

But while Sikhism teaches that all religious traditions should be respected, Islam has a long history of targeting Sikh communities. Even today, persecution still exists. Prior to the collapse of the Kabul government in 1992, there were 220,000 Sikhs and Hindus

across Afghanistan. Only 220 families now remain. Many have fled atrocities and have found sanctuary in the West, for the simple reason they are considered 'Kafirs', a derogatory term for non-Muslims. The remaining Sikhs have been forced to wear yellow patches to identify themselves in public, in a similar way to Jews being made to wear the Star of David under the Third Reich. Kidnappings, violence and compulsion to pay the jizya – a tax imposed on non-Muslims – have almost become societal norms.

Sadly, things aren't much better across the border in Pakistan. While provision is made for Sikhs to make their annual pilgrimage to Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, pilgrims often require armed guards. In 2014, 500 or so Sikh families were forced to leave Peshawar due to a hostile environment and threats from extremists. Worst still Sikhs have been beheaded in Pakistan's tribal northwest – there is little to separate this, and the abject barbarity meted out on Christians and Yazidis by Islamic State.

As Sikhs well know, they are not the only minority group in the region to be targeted by Islamists. Much of the religious brutality that Guru Tegh Bahadur railed against remains to this day. According to Amnesty International, Hindu women are frequently forced to convert to Islam in Pakistan's Sindh province, before being married off to Muslim husbands. Blasphemy laws are used as a tool to persecute minority faiths, including the Ahmadiyya sect, which faces criminal charges for simply practicing their faith.

Much of this has been ignored by the West. But echoes are now being heard across Europe, so it is becoming harder to turn a blind eye. Christians are targeted in Syria – and in France. Ahmadiyya Muslims are persecuted in Pakistan – and in Britain, as the sectarian murder of the Ahmadi shopkeeper Asad Shah showed. And Sikhs are attacked in Afghanistan – and in Germany. The pernicious force of radical Islam is seeping into Western culture and undermining religious freedom.

Faced with this, can Europe's political elite continue to guarantee the safety of church or temple-goers? There are, in reality no such guarantees. France's 40,000 churches can't all be protected. Nor can the thousands of Sikhs who reside in Germany. British counter-terror experts have just advised vicars that churches should ratchet up security measures with bouncers and CCTV. This follows the government's introduction of a security-funding scheme for places of worship, but with the best will in the world it is difficult, if not impossible, to prevent those bent on murder and mayhem from succeeding.

If any good is to come of all this, it could be found in a show of unity from the religious groups under attack from Islamists. In 2008, I attended an event where the former Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks said: 'Sikhs and Jews share a lot in common. They tried to kill us, we survived, now let's eat.' The attack on the temple in Germany is a timely reminder that Islamists don't just see the West as their mortal enemy, but view all who don't subscribe to their warped ideology as fair game.
