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## **NETHERLANDS: Muslims file UN complaint about state discrimination**

### **NETHERLANDS: Muslims file UN complaint against parliament, citing discrimination**

*Dutch parliamentary committee on unwanted foreign influence is accused of waging a 'witch-hunt' against the country's Muslim community*

By Areeb Ullah

Middle East Eye (25.04.2023) – A coalition of Muslim groups in the Netherlands has filed a complaint with the United Nations against a Dutch parliamentary committee tasked with investigating the influence of foreign funding on mosques and Islamic associations.

The Ummah Project, a group based in the Netherlands that is spearheading the effort, filed an 82-page complaint with the UN Human Rights Committee on Monday, accusing the Dutch parliamentary committee on unwanted foreign influence (Pocob) of waging a “witch-hunt” against the Muslim community.

The Muslim leaders who are part of the complaint include Hamid Tahiri, Jacob Van Der Blom, and Nasr El Dalmanhoury, who held leadership positions in various mosques and Muslim associations across the country.

The men were called before Pocob in 2020 after the Dutch parliament began investigating the influence of money from a list of “unfree countries” – including Kuwait; Morocco; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Turkey; and the United Arab Emirates.

Pocob focused only on Muslim organisations in Holland and refused to broaden its scope to include the possibility of influence from other foreign countries.

The three men, summoned by the committee as witnesses, risked possible imprisonment if they failed to testify.

Clips from the committee hearing showed Muslim witnesses enduring an intense line of questioning from parliamentarians.

At one point, a witness who challenged the inquiry’s line of questioning had their microphone switched off.

Samira Sabir, a Dutch barrister who filed the case on behalf of the Ummah Project, said the three men had been forced to defend themselves as suspects against highly incriminating

allegations despite committing no crime.

Sabir added that the witness testimonies were carried on a live stream that was picked up by several TV channels. Since then, the men and their places of worship have faced negative backlash, the Ummah Project said.

“Not only does the question arise as to why such a heavy-handed instrument was used to investigate foreign influence, but the disproportionate instrument used, in which the witnesses were publicly interrogated as suspects and under oath, was completely unnecessary,” Sabir told Middle East Eye.

“They were not heard as witnesses but as suspects and had to defend themselves unprepared without being given a chance to be truly heard.

“This summons had the character of a criminal investigation rather than a democratic parliamentary inquiry.”

Jacob Van De Bloom, the chairman of the Blauwe Mosque in Amsterdam, said the line of questioning against him and the other witnesses was illegal and went against the Netherlands' constitution.

“In the constitution here in the Netherlands, we agreed to not treat each other differently based on religion or colour [but] this is clearly happening here,” Van De Bloom said in a statement.

“[Even before we appeared on the committee] they had already decided upon the outcome and all the questions, the speakers and the order of the meetings. All they had to do was their part to reach this outcome. Now they have a report where they can claim that there is ‘unwanted influence’ by foreign financing.”

MEE reached out to Pocob for comment but did not receive a response by the time of publication.

## **Widespread Islamophobia**

In 2021, local media revealed that at least ten towns and cities in the Netherlands used private companies to secretly investigate mosques and Islamic institutions.

Mosque officials, members active in the Muslim community and the local daily, NRC Handelsblad, were investigated by Nuance Door Training and Advice (NTA) on behalf of municipalities, using unlawful undercover methods.

NTA staff reportedly entered mosques and visited community leaders without revealing their true identities in municipalities including Rotterdam; Delft; Almere; Huizen; Leidschendam-Voorburg; Zoetermeer; Veenendaal; and Ede.

The UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion, Ahmed Shaheed, also noted in 2019 that Islamophobia was “widespread” across the whole of the Netherlands after a visit to the country.

“Members of the Muslim community reported that they are being perceived or stigmatised as terrorists and targeted as such,” Shaheed noted in his assessment.

“Such a climate highlights the need for Government to ensure that negative attitudes towards Muslims in society, sometimes encouraged by political parties, do not foster Islamophobic incidents and a sense of alienation in the Muslim community.”

*Photo: Muslims take part in morning prayers on Eid al-Adha at The Mevlana Mosque in Rotterdam, on 20 July 2021 (AFP)*

**[Further reading about FORB on HRWF website](#)**

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