

Op-ed: Extreme violence, self-identification and religion

– By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

– The Ummah is torn apart by a theological war. Groups of proponents of a literalist reading of the Qu’ran, who have left their historical lands in the Arabic Peninsula to take power in other Muslim majority countries, do not hesitate to resort to extreme acts of violence and terrorism. The originally intra-Muslim theological competition has become a political and geo-political war in which most of the victims are Muslims.

To a certain extent, a similar situation existed in Christianity at the time of the Protestant Reformation. The theological conflict between Catholics and Protestants got highly politicized and geo-politicalized and led to long wars and conflicts on the European continent. The victims were Christians.

It is in the name of Islam that jihadists wage their war on any battlefield in the world. They assert themselves as Muslims while most Muslims opposed to violence deny them this self-identification.

Ahmadis say they are Muslims, but in Pakistan laws criminalize this claim. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons say they are Christians but mainline Christian Churches do not recognize them as Christians.

It is not the task of human rights organizations, political leaders, journalists or other observers to say who are true Muslims and who are not true Muslims. Self-identification is an internal issue for any group.

The claim that because jihadists resorting to extreme violence and perpetrating crimes against humanity claim to do it in the name of Islam, they should not be considered Muslims, is specious.

The Catholic Church in the past blessed crusades and wars, practiced torture against so-called heretics and Protestants referring to the Bible to justify their actions. Protestant iconoclasts in the past destroyed paintings and statues in Catholic churches and justified their actions with the Bible in their hands. Should those Christians be denied self-identification as Christians now with our 21st lens? Despite their use of violence, nobody has ever cast doubts on their self-identification.