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## **MOROCCO: Morocco's policy against radicalization and the EU**

EU Observer (27.12.2018) - <https://euobserver.com/opinion/143795> - Just before Christmas, two young Scandinavian women were brutally murdered in the Atlas mountains where they were hiking.

Four men said to commit the murder were quickly arrested.

They had videoed their murder and decapitation of the two women and posted the video to the internet.

One of them has a criminal record and since 2013 has been known to the police for his extremist views. He is said to have instilled violent jihadist beliefs into the three other suspects, according to Boubker Sabik, spokesperson of the General Directorate of National Security and Territorial Surveillance (DGSN).

As many other Muslim-majority countries, Morocco has been infiltrated by the Salafist ideology in recent decades.

Morocco's formal response to terror threats began after the 2003 Casablanca bombings, which killed 33 people and wounded over 100 others.

The aftermath of an April 2011 terrorist attack in Marrakesh that killed 17 people saw enhanced prevention efforts.

During the past 15 years, Morocco's government tightened its security apparatus, increased control of its borders, asserted authority over the religious sphere, revised religious education at school and created an institute for the training of imams.

To tighten security, Morocco launched its own version of the FBI, the Bureau Central d'Investigation Judiciaire (BCJI).

Since its creation in 2015, it reportedly uncovered 40 terrorist cells, including a ten-women IS group, arrested almost 600 people and helped several EU countries to arrest suspects with ties to terrorism.

Official sources list 1,692 Moroccans as fighting with ISIS in the Middle East and Rabat arrested 242 fighters on their return home.

Returnees typically receive sentences ranging from 10 to 15 years in prison.

### ***Safer than most EU states***

To place this all in context, the recently published Global Terrorism Index 2018 listed Morocco at 132 out of 163 (the higher the number the lower the impact of terrorism).

This puts the North African country among the nations least affected by terrorism, safer than most EU countries.

In an effort to prevent the salafisation of its youth, Morocco began 10 years ago to educate its own imams.

In 2015, the country opened the Mohammed VI Institute in Rabat where imams from all over the world can study and teach moderate Islam.

The school currently hosts 250 Moroccans (100 of whom are women) and 675 students from Mali, the Ivory Coast, France, Niger and French Guinea.

With the same goal, the ministries of national education and vocational training and the religious endowments and affairs reviewed school materials to promote education on the Islamic values of tolerance and coexistence with other cultures and to encourage openness to the modern era.

The Salafist movement resisted the changes in education materials when members learned that "Islamic education" would become "religious education."

Some Salafist groups also criticised one of the pictures on the cover of a new textbook, which shows boys and girls of different races holding hands in front of the sun.

Bilateral security cooperation is central to Morocco's relationships with European countries.

In recent years, Morocco established partnerships with many EU member states to prevent terrorism.

These are beneficial to both sides. France, Spain, Germany, the UK and other European countries have made particular effort to reinforce their security cooperation with Rabat.

Morocco's domestic security is a key element of human security in Europe.

Anti-terrorist cooperation between vulnerable EU member states and the north African kingdom needs to be further developed.

Willy Fautre is director of Human Rights Without Frontiers in Brussels

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## **BELGIUM: Citizenship deprivation against dual nationals recruiting young Muslims to fight in Syria, an efficient measure?**

**By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers***

HRWF (27.10.2018) - On 23 October 2018, the Court of Appeal of Antwerp stripped dual national Fouad Belkacem of his Belgian citizenship, leaving the leader of Sharia4Belgium with his sole Moroccan nationality. He was accused of recruiting young Muslims as jihadists for the Islamic State. In 2015, Fouad Belkacem was sentenced to 12 years in jail and fined 300,000 euros for being the leader of a terrorist outfit. Without his Belgian nationality, Fouad Belkacem can be expelled to Morocco but he can still take the matter to the Court of Cassation where procedural issues are settled. Belgian Asylum Secretary Theo Francken has welcomed the news on social media. On Twitter he wrote: "Terrorist leader loses nationality. Excellent, but it should happen automatically in the event of a terrorism conviction."

On 1 December 2017, the Court of Appeal in Brussels deprived two dual nationals of their Belgian citizenship. It ruled that Bilal Soughir, who had recruited in 2005 the Belgian and first Western kamikaze Muriel Degauque, would be stripped of his Belgian citizenship and would consequently only retain his Tunisian nationality. It also ruled that Malika El Aroud, a 58-year-old woman convicted of recruiting young Brussels Muslims to fight in the so-called "holy war" in Afghanistan, be stripped of her Belgian citizenship. She now only has Moroccan citizenship. In her case, the proceedings started in 2014 but took three years before the decision of the court because her solicitor had taken the case to the Constitutional Court. At the Court of Appeal, the Advocate-General said that Ms El Aroud no longer deserved Belgian citizenship as "for many years she has continually spread jihadism in our country". Malika El Aroud, also known as the "Black Widow of the Jihad", had twice been married to Muslim extremists, both of whom died in the so-called "holy war". She was first the wife of Dahmane Abd al-Sattar, a.k.a. Abdessatar Dahmane, one of the men who killed anti-Taliban leader Ahmad Shah Massoud two days before the September 11, 2001 attacks. Arrested in 2008 for recruiting young Muslims for Osama bin Laden, she was sentenced to 8 years in prison and fined 5,000 euro for terrorist-related offences in 2010.

Recruiting young people for the jihad in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries is a drama for their families and training them on such battlefields for subsequently perpetrating terrorist attacks in Europe constitutes a serious threat to national and human security in Belgium and other European countries. However, court procedures aiming at the deprivation of their citizenship take many years in democratic countries as there are many possibilities of legal recourse. Moreover, such a court decision can only be effective if they are immediately deported at the end of their prison term and if their country of origin accepts them...

### ***Fouad Belkacem: Belgian Islamist leader loses citizenship***

**BBC (23.10.2018) - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45951138> - Jailed Islamist Fouad Belkacem, whose group Sharia4Belgium sent dozens of jihadists to Syria, has been stripped of his Belgian citizenship and faces deportation to Morocco.**

The appeal court in Antwerp ruled that he had fallen seriously short of his duties as a citizen.

Belkacem was jailed in 2015 for leading a terror group, many of whose recruits joined jihadist group Islamic State.

More Belgians per capita went to fight in Syria than from any other EU state.

Some of those who returned to Europe were involved in the Paris attacks in 2015 and the Brussels bombings of March 2016.

Belkacem's Sharia4Belgium originated in Antwerp, recruiting the first Belgian fighters before it was disbanded.

It took its inspiration from Islam4UK, a group once led by Anjem Choudary, a radical preacher who was released from a British jail on 19 October. During Belkacem's 2015 trial it emerged that he had co-founded Sharia4Belgium shortly after spending time at a London mosque.

Another group known as the Zerkani network recruited jihadists, such as Paris attacker Abdelhamid Abaaoud and Brussels bomber Najim Laachraoui, from the Molenbeek area of Brussels.

After he was given a 12-year jail term, Belgian officials began work on removing his citizenship. As a dual national he retains Moroccan citizenship.

Belgian Migration Minister Theo Francken praised the decision to strip Belkacem of his Belgian nationality, but added that such a move should be automatic after any terrorism conviction.

Removing citizenship from jihadists with dual nationality remains controversial. France announced plans to introduce the policy after the November 2015 attacks but dropped them the following year.

Belkacem is not the first Belgian linked to terror to lose his nationality. Malika el-Aroud was stripped of her citizenship last year for leading an al-Qaeda linked group.

He can still appeal against the decision to Belgium's court of last resort, the court of cassation, or to the European Court of Justice.

His lawyer, Liliane Verjauw, said he no longer had any connection to Morocco and considered himself Belgian.

"His family has been here for 50 years, over three generations. His Belgian nationality is part of his identity," she said.

## **UK: Anjem Choudary, radical preacher released from prison**



Anjem Choudary pictured outside a bail hostel after his release (Copyright Getty Images Image)

BBC (19.10.2018) - <https://bbc.in/2Jan8If> - Radical preacher Anjem Choudary, jailed for inviting support for the Islamic State group, has been released.

The cleric was sentenced in 2016 to five and a half years in prison.

He led an extremist network linked to violent jihadists, including one of the killers of soldier Lee Rigby in 2013.

Choudary, 51, has served less than half of his sentence and will complete the rest under strict supervision. Up to 25 measures to control him have been prepared, the BBC understands.

His release from prison comes approximately four months early because of time spent bailed on an electronic tag before his conviction.

### ***Who is Anjem Choudary?***

Choudary, from Ilford in east London, once headed up the al-Muhajiroun network - a leading extremist group which was banned under terrorism laws.

The father-of-five did not organise terror attacks, but is considered one of the UK's most prominent radicalisers.

He has been described as a "hardened dangerous terrorist" and someone who has had a "huge influence on Islamist extremism in this country" by former Met Police terror chief Richard Walton.

### ***What happened while he was in prison?***

The BBC has learnt from counter-extremism sources that Anjem Choudary refused to take part in deradicalisation courses or exercises while serving the custodial part of his sentence.

He spent most of his time at HMP Frankland, County Durham, where he became the first inmate to be held in a separation unit, designed for the most high-risk terrorism offenders who are capable of radicalising others.

On a number of occasions, Choudary was offered opportunities to speak to mainstream religious leaders and other experts who have successfully turned around the mindset of other extremists.

But on each of those occasions, Choudary refused.

Nevertheless, the prison authorities were not able to delay his release.

### ***Why is he being released now?***

His departure from Belmarsh prison came automatically under legislation that allows prisoners to serve the second part of their sentence "on licence" in the community.

This means he will not be free but must comply with a list of conditions. If he breaches them, he risks being recalled to prison.

### ***How will he be monitored?***

Police will be closely monitoring Choudary - through probation officers and a requirement that he report to officials.

Choudary is staying at a bail hostel in north London.

He will be in a probation hostel for six months, the BBC understands. The conditions he must obey include:

- A ban from preaching at or attending certain mosques
- He will only be allowed to associate with people who have been approved by the authorities
- He will be allowed one phone and is banned from using an internet-enabled device without permission
- Use of the internet will be supervised
- He cannot travel outside Greater London's M25
- He will not be able to leave the UK without permission.

Earlier this week, it was announced Choudary had his assets frozen and **was listed on a global record of known terrorists** overseen by the United Nations Security Council.

The asset-freezing order means he will be under extremely strict financial controls which typically mean the authorities will be alerted if he tries to open a bank account or move money.

Prime Minister Theresa May said on Thursday that authorities including the police, prison and probation service had "significant experience in dealing with such offenders".

But John Woodcock, a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee, **tweeted that his release was "wrong", "crazy" and "puts the public in danger"**.

Calling on Home Secretary Sajid Javid to take a tougher counter-terror approach, using Australian law as an example, Mr Woodcock added: "He needs to act fast to protect the public from terrorists being released back onto British streets."

Sir Mark Rowley, the former UK head of counter-terror policing, said it is important "not to overstate his [Choudary's] significance".

"At the end of the day he's a pathetic groomer of others, that's what he has done in the past," said Mr Rowley. "He's not some sort of evil genius we all need to be afraid of."

### ***Analysis: What impact has Choudary's sentencing had?***

**By BBC home affairs correspondent, Dominic Casciani**

When Choudary was charged in 2015 with inviting support for IS, it was a moment of great success for counter-terrorism chiefs - and they were already trying to build cases against other associates.

Some, including close confidantes, were jailed. At least four others, who cannot be named for legal reasons, were subject to a Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measure (TPim), a form of control that places two years of restrictions on the movements and activities of terrorism suspects who have not been charged with a crime.

Detectives also looked for evidence of standard crimes - such as fraud - as a means to further "disrupt" the network.

The insider view is that this work has been generally successful because it made the targets aware they could no longer act with impunity.

In theory, it created space for the security service MI5 and their police detective colleagues to focus on more urgent threats.

### **HRWF Comments**

**Anjem Choudary** was born in London on 18 January 1967. He is the son of a Welling market trader and of Pakistani descent. He is an Islamist social and political activist. He was convicted of inviting support for a proscribed organisation, namely the Islamic State, under the Terrorism Act 2000. He was previously a solicitor and served, until it was proscribed, as the spokesman for *Islam4UK*.

With Omar Bakri Muhammad, Choudary helped form an Islamist organisation, *al-Muhajiroun*. The group organised several anti-Western demonstrations. The UK government banned Al-Muhajiroun and Choudary was present at the launch of its



intended successor, *Ahlu Sunnah wal Jamaah*. He later helped form *Al Ghurabaa*, which was also banned. Choudary then became the spokesman for Islam4UK.

Clearly, banning controversial movements is not an effective solution to the threats posed by homegrown Islamist propagandists as their inspirers can repeatedly create new ones with other names and some cosmetic changes in their bylaws.

Choudary has been denounced by mainstream Muslim groups, and has been largely criticised in the country's media.

A critic of the UK's involvement in the wars in Iraq (2003–2011) and Afghanistan (2001–2016), Choudary praised those responsible for the 11 September 2001 in New York attack and the 7 July 2005 attack in London (52 were killed, and more than 700 were injured). He supports the implementation of Sharia law throughout the UK. He marched in protest at the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons controversy, following which he was prosecuted for organising an unlawful demonstration. During a protest outside Westminster Cathedral in 2006, Choudary told demonstrators that the Pope should be executed for insulting Islam.

On 6 September 2016, Choudary was jailed for five years and six months following conviction for inviting others to support the proscribed organisation ISIS.

This case raises a lot of questions. Some say the sentence was too mild, his release was premature and British justice is naïve.

**Anjem Choudary** has refused in prison to be 'de-radicalized'. At the time of his final release – very soon – the very strict restrictions to his freedom of movement and communication will expire, he will gain back his full freedom and will go on representing a danger for society. He will certainly try by all means, in due time and in the legal framework, to continue his fight against democracy, any non-Islamic rule of law and 'secular' human rights. He will be an 'example' for his followers and his four children that he will go on educating in his Islamist ideology.

The United Kingdom is not the only country in Europe where jihadists, hate preachers and recruiters have in their own way contributed to the implementation of ISIS political agenda, have been imprisoned for their activities and have been released or will be in a foreseeable future. France, Belgium and other countries are experiencing the same situation with that type of Islamist political prisoners. The question about "What to do with them?" remains open as our democracies have never faced such a challenge and cannot rely on any precedents.

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## **WORLD: Religion & the prevention of violent extremism**

***The authors highlight that one of the more sensitive topics in discussions on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has been the relationship between violent extremism and religion, and the implications for P/CVE programs. In response, our authors here offer five tips for Western governments for a religion-sensitive approach to P/PVE, which include the need to 1) engage with religious viewpoints; 2) address the context-specific social, economic and political drivers that influence extremist groups; 3) avoid linking religious identities and violence, and more.***

By Owen Frazer and Anael Jambers

Center for Security Studies (CSS) (10.10.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2AdnHOV> - The international policy excitement around preventing and countering violent extremism



(P/CVE) has faded since the latter days of the Obama presidency. However, the fundamental challenges P/CVE seeks to address have not gone away and P/CVE programs and policies continue to be developed and implemented. After more than a decade of experiences and reflection, and the growth of a veritable P/CVE industry, a number of lessons have been learned and insights gained. One of the more sensitive topics in P/CVE discussions has been the relationship between violent extremism and religion and the implications for P/CVE. In this short piece, we summarize five key insights about this topic that we think governments and policy-makers would do well to remember.

### ***Do Not Ignore Religion***

Although the term “violent extremism” has no agreed definition, it is generally applied to the phenomenon of groups engaged in violent activities in pursuit of a political ideology that is outside of the mainstream, often because it excludes certain groups, cultures or identities. P/ CVE emerged in a post-September 11 policy context largely due to concerns about the threat posed by violent groups who grounded their ideology in Islam. However, with some exceptions, policy-makers and commentators are generally careful to emphasize that extremism is not something specific to Islam, nor indeed to religion in general. The term has been used to describe groups as diverse as Islamic State, the Buddhist nationalist group MaBaTha in Myanmar, right-wing groups in the US and the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland. Yet, recognizing that not all extremism is religious should not lead to us ignoring when it is. Religion is a complicated topic and we need to pay special attention to handling the intersection between religion and violent extremism.

The presence of a strong secular culture in Western policy circles leads to discomfort with discussing the links between religion and violent extremism. In some cases, this is for fear of causing offence by implying a causal link between religion and violent extremism. In others, it is based on the conviction that religion has no explanatory value, and only distracts from standard social, political and economic explanations for violent acts. A common opinion is that religion is only being instrumentalized and that violent groups’ use of religious language is simply a mobilizing tool. While fears about mishandling the relationship between religion and violent extremism are well founded, ignoring religion is not the answer. Understanding the appeal, motivations and logic of violent extremist groups that adhere to a religious ideology requires genuine engagement with the religious discourses they use. Tackling violent extremism requires a serious analysis of political and social demands expressed in religious language or inspired by religious ideas. This implies a sincere effort to understand and to enter into dialogue with groups using religious language. Only by demonstrating a willingness to engage with religiously-inspired agendas, and to negotiate living together in a democratic space, can the use of violence in the name of religion be delegitimized.

### ***Get the Balance Right***

The danger of labels like “violent extremism” is that they serve to unite often very diverse phenomena into one homogenous category. This encourages a tendency to search for a single cause or explanation. The reality is of course significantly more complex. The constellation of drivers of violent extremism vary from context to context, from group to group, and indeed, from individual to individual. For example, singling out jihadist ideology as the common denominator linking attacks from France to Mali to Syria, and treating them as all part of the same phenomenon, risks over-emphasizing the

role of Islamist ideas and downplaying the role of context-specific social, political and economic drivers.

Religions, just like other belief systems, provide a framework for understanding the world and for acting in it. They can be a source of identity, of language in which grievances can be expressed and actions legitimized, and of social and political ideas about how things should be. However, we must beware of using religion as a shortcut to understanding a particular group's ideology. Religions are open to multiple interpretations. These interpretations vary depending on place and time (the diversity of Christian denominations is telling in this regard – consider the variation in beliefs and practices between the American Amish, the Greek Orthodox, and the Nigerian Pentecostal communities). While understanding these ideologies requires understanding the religion in which they are grounded, these interpretations are invariably contested from within the same religion. So, yes, religions do provide groups with a common framework within which they can develop their political agendas. Yes, they may advocate religiously-inspired "extreme" ideas whose realization is one of their motivations. And, yes, these ideas may need to be challenged. However, over-emphasizing the role of religiously-inspired ideas risks obscuring the important role of other drivers. Most groups also include within their agenda the addressing of grievances such as injustice, corruption, economic inequality and political discrimination. This explains why many recruits to such groups are not religious zealots, but often people who are simply looking for a way to address their marginalization by the political mainstream.<sup>1</sup> Violent extremism therefore needs to be analysed within the specific social and political contexts where it manifests itself, so that PVE programs achieve the correct balance between responding to ideological and structural drivers.

### ***Avoid Linking Religious Identities and Violence***

P/CVE policies and programs have regularly run into problems when they have directly connected religious identities with violence. The UK's PREVENT program and US CVE policies were heavily criticized for stigmatizing and marginalizing Muslim citizens. President Trump's travel ban on nationals from a number of Muslim-majority countries and the continued channelling of US domestic CVE funding towards programs targeting the Muslim community suggest this false association between Islam and violence continues to influence some policy makers.<sup>2</sup> Not only is targeting individuals or communities on the basis of their religion a violation of the democratic principle of freedom of religion and belief, such policies play into the hands of groups like the Islamic State. It gives credence to their claims that the West is at war with Islam, and that Western governments hypocritically preach liberal values while discriminating against Muslims in their own countries.

Even if many policy-makers do reject a causal link between Islam and violence, some remain sympathetic to more nuanced versions of the same argument. They point the finger, not at Islam, but at Salafism, arguing that the texts and doctrines of this particular current within Sunni Islam make its followers particularly prone to violence. This argument ignores the diversity of violent, non-violent, and apolitical Salafi groups

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<sup>1</sup> Luca Rainieri, "If Victims Become Perpetrators: Factors Contributing to Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in the Central Sahel" (London: International Alert, June 2018), <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/if-victims-become-perpetrators-violent-extremism-sahel>

<sup>2</sup> Faiza Patel, Andrew Lindsay, and Sophia DenUyl, "Countering Violent Extremism in the Trump Era," Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, June 15, 2018, <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/countering-violent-extremism-trump-era>

across the world. Similarly, those who condemn Salafism while promoting Sufism as a desirable alternative are ignoring that some of the strongest critics of groups such as Islamic State are Salafi and that there are many cases of armed groups who have justified their struggle with reference to Sufism.<sup>3</sup>

Policy-makers should disabuse themselves of the notion that it is possible to predict violent behaviour based on religious affiliation. Suggestions that certain currents of a religion are necessarily more violent or more peaceful than others ignore that history is full of examples from across all religious traditions of both violent and non-violent movements for social change. The possibility for multiple interpretations of the same religious doctrines means they are not a reliable guide to behaviour. Judgements about social and political groups should be based on what they say and do, not on who they are.

### **Engage Religious Viewpoints**

Part of the P/CVE policy-making debate is not about “violent religious extremism,” but about religious extremism more generally – religious extremism being understood as religiously-inspired ideologies that advocate for policies far from the mainstream or in radical contradiction with the status quo. This debate is founded on three concerns. The first is a security concern that non-violent extremist groups can act as a “conveyor belt,” or stepping stone, with some members moving on to join violent groups with similar ideologies. The second is a concern that religious extremist groups threaten the social fabric by promoting ideas that are perceived as contradicting societal values. In Western societies this is often articulated as a fear that non-violent extremist groups pose a threat to liberal, democratic and secular values. A third concern is that groups may be able to use religious arguments to popularize opposition against the status quo, thus posing a threat to the government in power. Authoritarian regimes in particular that feel threatened by certain religious or political opposition groups have used the “extremist” label, and P/CVE and counter-terrorism discourses more generally, as a means to suppress such groups.<sup>4</sup>

All three of the above concerns can in fact lend support to policies that aim to marginalize or restrict the activities of groups viewed as extreme. Yet, for countries that espouse liberal democratic values, such an approach is not justifiable. The “conveyor belt” theory is disputed, and without proof that groups are engaged in violent activities, restricting their activities on security grounds violates the rights to freedom of association, belief and expression. This year the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief felt the need to remind states that “national security” may not be invoked as a ground for limiting the freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief.”<sup>5</sup> Of course, concerns about threats to the social fabric must be addressed and fears that groups aim to destabilize governments in power may be well-founded. However, these concerns must be met, not with attempts to exclude, but with attempts to engage and

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<sup>3</sup> “Salafi Violence and Sufi Tolerance? Rethinking Conventional Wisdom Author(s): Mark Woodward, Muhammad Sani Umar, Inayah Rohmaniyah and Mariani Yahya,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 6 (2013): 58 – 78

<sup>4</sup> Annelle Sheline, “Middle East Regimes Are Using ‘Moderate’ Islam to Stay in Power,” *Washington Post*, January 3, 2017, sec. Monkey Cage Blog, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/01/middle-east-regimes-are-using-moderate-islam-to-stay-in-power>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief,” Advance Edited Version, United Nations Human Rights Council (Geneva, February 28, 2018), para. 45, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A\\_HRC\\_37\\_49\\_EN.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A_HRC_37_49_EN.docx)

debate. Liberal, democratic societies must remain true to their values and uphold democratic principles at home and abroad. At its heart, democracy is a system for managing differing views in society. It is not about changing people's fundamental beliefs but, through dialogue, finding ways for groups with differing views to live together, while avoiding the development of parallel societies. Irrespective of the religion to which they belong, or how "radical" their ideas are, everyone should have the possibility to participate in social and political life. This is not to say that anything goes. Laws put in place to ensure that all groups in society can participate equally must be upheld, and groups inciting or perpetrating acts of violence, or engaging in other illegal behaviours that diminish the freedoms of others, should be held accountable. Governments and societies need to resist the urge to restrict the religious "other" – instead, they should seek to engage it.

### ***Leave Theological Interpretation to the Experts***

In dealing with groups that incite or perpetrate acts of violence, legal sanctions have their limits. Therefore, considerable efforts have also been invested in contesting the religious narratives used by violent extremist groups. These activities are important, but such programs get it wrong when they make governments and political leaders the messengers. Governments should challenge narratives they find extreme, not by taking theological positions, but by arguing from the core values on which their societies are founded and about which they have legitimacy to speak. For liberal democratic states core values, including principles of non-discrimination, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and belief, respect for international law and inclusive political participation of all groups, are inscribed in laws and should provide the basis of any argumentation.

Governments do not have the credibility to counter the religious narratives of extremist groups on religious grounds. Apart from their policies often being perceived as part of the problem, they lack religious legitimacy. President Obama's condemnation of Islamic State as "un-Islamic" undoubtedly did not carry much weight amongst potential sympathisers of the group. The debates of interpretation are intra-religious, and not ones where a secular state has the competence or credibility to weigh in.<sup>6</sup> Challenging the religious narrative of violent extremists should be left to those with the appropriate religious expertise, who are influential with the people at whom the message is aimed. They should be given the space to do this in their way, including being critical of government actions. Perceptions that they are mouthpieces of governments will only delegitimize them in the eyes of those individuals most at-risk of joining violent extremist groups.

### ***Conclusion***

The topic of religion's relationship to violent extremism is a sensitive one. However, governments cannot afford to ignore it. They must continue to analyse why, and in what way, it is important. Failure to do so risks enabling discriminatory policies that only fuel the problem. Western governments' most effective tools for preventing violent extremism are the liberal democratic principles on which they are founded. Consistently applying these at home and abroad, and calling out others who do not, is the basis for an effective and principled approach to preventing violent extremism. This must include a nuanced approach to promoting an inclusive politics that gives space to religious voices, avoids the development of parallel societies, and reflects on how national identities can be constructed so as to leave space to integrate non-mainstream actors and cultures in a constructive manner.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Mandaville, "The Future of Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy under Trump" (Brookings Institution, July 3, 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-future-of-religion-and-u-s-foreign-policy-under-trump>

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## INDONESIA: Countering extremism in Indonesia and beyond

Religious Freedom Institute (<https://bit.ly/2KP2a1O>) - Between May 8 and May 14, 2018 Indonesia was hit by a wave of ISIS terrorist attacks, including bombings carried out by families--fathers, mothers, and children together. The principal targets were churches and police stations, including the headquarters of the paramilitary Police Mobile Brigade (which is also where Ahok, the former Governor of Jakarta and a Christian, is serving a sentence for blasphemy). In the wave of attacks, thirteen terrorists and fourteen others were killed, and more than 40 were injured.

The Indonesian government's security forces responded strongly. There were some early arrests and then, on May 31, in a series of raids, anti-terrorist squads arrested 41 terror suspects and killed 4 others. These raids came less than a week after the May 25 passage of a new anti-terrorism law that criminalized overseas terror attacks and allowed for longer detention of suspects. The bill had been languishing in parliament for two years amid controversies over how strict it should be and how to define terrorism, but the wave of deadly suicide attacks persuaded lawmakers the bill should be passed.

But a much more low-key event may signal broader changes in how Indonesia is approaching its effort to combat extremism.

On May 31, Indonesian President Joko Widodo appointed Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf (Pak Yahya) as a member of the Presidential Advisory Council. Pak Yahya is from one of Indonesia's most distinguished Muslim families, is the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization, and is the head of Gerkan Pemuda Ansor (ANSOR), NU's young-adult wing, which has some 5 million members. He is also among the Muslim world's most incisive and outspoken reformers.

NU has long been engaged in ideological combat with Islamist extremism. In May 2017, Ansor called together more than 300 international religious scholars to consider the "obsolete tenets of classical Islamic law" that call for "perpetual conflict with those who do not embrace or submit to Islam." This gathering issued **the Ansor "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam,"** (<https://bit.ly/2MQnRyU>) that built on the May 16, 2016, NU-hosted International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL).

The "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam," is far more self-critical than declarations that have come from the Middle East. It argues that there are elements within classical Islam that are problematic and need to be changed. At the press conference announcing the Declaration, Ansor Chairman Yaquut Qoumas stated "It is false and counterproductive to claim that the actions of al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and other such groups have nothing to do with Islam, or merely represent a perversion of Islamic teachings. They are, in fact, outgrowths of Wahhabism and other fundamentalist streams of Sunni Islam."

Pak Yahya reemphasized these themes and expressed them in an even more radical fashion in a July 18, 2017, address to the Council of the European Union Terrorism Working Party, many of whose members would have accused the speaker of Islamophobia if he had been anyone else. He stressed:

"Western politicians should stop pretending that extremism and terrorism have nothing to do with Islam. There is a clear relationship between fundamentalism, terrorism, and

the basic assumptions of Islamic orthodoxy. So long as we lack consensus regarding this matter, we cannot gain victory over fundamentalist violence within Islam.”

“Within the classical tradition, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is assumed to be one of segregation and enmity.”

“Why, no matter how many [terrorists] we kill or put in jail, new recruits are always coming to join them? Here is the fact: the problem lies within Islam itself. Jihadist doctrine, goals and strategy can be readily traced to specific elements of orthodox, authoritative Islam and its historic practice, including those portions of fiqh-classical Islamic law or shari’ah-that enjoin Islamic supremacy.”

While NU as a whole has not endorsed the “Declaration on Humanitarian Islam,” Pak Yahya told me they are discussing it and he has suffered little criticism for his statements. The arguments that he and Ansor are making are radical, and crucial in the battle with extremism. And they are gaining increasing attention in Indonesia and around the world.

On May 17, 2018, Pak Yahya met with Vice President Pence for the second time. And the fact that Indonesian President Jokowi has now appointed him to his Advisory Council sends a strong signal about Jokowi’s own attitudes.

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## **NETHERLANDS: The Hague City Council is concerned about Salafist activities**

By Hans Noot, *HRWF board member*

HRWF (19.05.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2IVbsLK> and <https://bit.ly/2Gy97kL> - A majority of the City Council of the Hague, the Netherlands, wants to discontinue the annual average €10.000 subsidy for volunteer activities of the Salafist As Soennah Mosque. According to the mayor of The Hague, Major Pauline Krikke, the mosque will no longer qualify for subsidies from the City as it has come under scrutiny after it was revealed that the mosque received financial support to the tune of more than [130.000 Kuwait Dinar](#) (more than € 350.000) from *Al Najat*, a Kuwait charity organization that supports jihadists in Syria. According to a documentary of the Dutch media producers *Nieuwsuur*, the mosque also [received funds](#) from the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS)\*. The Dutch Intelligence Agency (AIVD) had warned the City council of these financial transactions. Members of the mosque council were also recorded expressing pro-jihadi sentiments and advising female genital mutilation.

The mosque was mentioned [in the Dutch media](#) several times during this past year when one imam, Fawaz Jneid, was alleged to have called the Rotterdam Major, Ahmed Aboutaleb, an apostate Muslim, in addition to preaching against homosexuals, and cursing both film maker Theo van Gogh and Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali. There is currently a restraining order against Jneid for the region around the As Soennah Mosque in The Hague.

Since Jneid’s departure from the mosque, tolerance is preached openly. New allegations, however, suggest that behind closed doors, opinions and practices are contradictory.

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The As Soennah Mosque is the most influential Muslim centre in the Netherlands.

(\*) The Revival of Islamic Heritage Society was listed on 11 January 2002 pursuant to paragraph 8 (c) of resolution 1333 (2000) as being associated with Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden or the Taliban for "participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing or perpetrating of acts or activities by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf or in support of", "supplying, selling or transferring arms and related materiel to" or "otherwise supporting acts or activities of" Usama bin Laden, Al-Qaida (QDe.004) and the Taliban.

Source: UN Security Council Committee:

[https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267/aq\\_sanctions\\_list/summaries/entity/revival-of-islamic-heritage-society](https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/revival-of-islamic-heritage-society)

(\*\*) See more information in NL Times: <https://nltimes.nl/2018/03/26/rotterdam-mayor-called-enemy-islam-controversial-imam>

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## **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.

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## **RUSSIA: Terrorist attack on Orthodox church in Chechnya**

RIA Novosti (19.05.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2J03iBQ> - An incident with an attempt to seize parishioners in the church of the Archangel Michael in Grozny is an attempt by extremists to set Orthodox against Muslims, the head of the synod's Department for Relations of Church and Society and News Media of the Moscow patriarchate, Vladimir Legoida, declared.

"Another attempt by pseudo-Islamic extremists to set Orthodox against Muslims," Legoida wrote on Saturday in his account on one of the messenger services.

A press release distributed by the synodal department notes that the attackers tried to intimidate Orthodox believers of Chechnya and sow inter-confessional strife, but they got a worthy rebuff.

"We mourn the parishioner of the church of the Archangel Michael who fell victim to the terrorist act, and also for law enforcement agents who showed themselves to be real heroes and perished in performing their duty of protecting worshippers," Legoida declared, as quoted in the report.

The head of the synodal department expressed confidence that "the act of terror will be unanimously condemned by representatives of world religions in Russia and abroad, as well as by all healthy-minded people."

"Orthodox and Muslims of Russia, as before, will be united in struggle with terrorists, supporting one another in the face of the common danger," Legoida added.

The head of the Chechen republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, reported to journalists earlier that four militants penetrated the church of the Archangel Michael in the center of Grozny and their goal was to seize parishioners. He said that as the result of an immediately mounted special operation, all four were wiped out, one policeman died from wounds, and one parishioner had an injury of moderate severity. According to information of the Investigative Committee of the RF, two policemen guarding the church perished, another two were wounded, and one civilian was killed. (tr. by PDS, posted 19 May 2018)

