

## A plea to American Muslims

By Muqtedar Khan,  
Created 2001-10-24 23:00

I am writing this memo with the explicit purpose of inviting the American Muslim community to engage in soul-searching, reflection and re-assessment.

What happened on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington DC, will forever remain a horrible scar on the history of Islam and humanity. No matter how much we condemn it, and point to the Koran to argue that Islam forbids the killing of innocent people, the fact remains that the perpetrators of this crime against humanity have indicated that their actions are sanctioned by Islamic values.

The fact that even now several Muslim scholars and thousands of Muslims defend the accused is indicative that not all Muslims believe that the attacks are un-Islamic. This is truly sad.

Even if it were true that Israel and the US are enemies of the Muslim world, a response that mercilessly murders thousands of innocent people (including hundreds of Muslims) is absolutely indefensible. If anywhere in your hearts there is any sympathy or understanding with those who committed this act, I invite you to ask yourself this question: would Muhammad (praise be upon him) sanction such an act?

### A selectivity of concern

While encouraging Muslims to struggle against injustice (Koran 4:135), Allah also imposes strict rules of engagement. He says in unequivocal terms that to kill an innocent being is like killing entire humanity (Koran 5:32). He also encourages Muslims to forgive Jews and Christians if they have committed injustices against us (Koran 2:109, 3:159, 5:85).

Muslims, including American Muslims, have been practicing hypocrisy on a grand scale. They protest against the discriminatory practices of Israel but are silent against the discriminatory practices in Muslim states. In the Gulf one can see how laws and even salaries are based on ethnic origin. This is racism, but we never hear of Muslims protesting against them at international fora.

The Israeli occupation of Palestine is perhaps central to Muslim grievance against the West. While acknowledging that, I must remind you that Israel treats its one million Arab citizens with greater respect and dignity than most Arab nations treat their citizens. Today Palestinian refugees can settle and become citizens of the United States but in spite of all the tall rhetoric of the Arab world and Koranic injunctions (24:22), no Muslim country except Jordan extends this support to them.

While we loudly and consistently condemn Israel for its ill treatment of Palestinians, we are silent when Muslim regimes abuse the rights of Muslims and slaughter thousands of them. Remember Saddam and his use of chemical weapons against Muslims (Kurds)? Remember the Pakistani army's excesses against Muslims (Bengalis)? Remember the *Mujahideen* of

Afghanistan and their mutual slaughter? Have we ever condemned any of these for their excesses, and demanded international retribution against them?

Do you know how the Saudis treat their minority *Shia*? Have we protested the violation of their rights? But we all are eager to condemn Israel. Not because we care for the rights and lives of Palestinians; we don't. We condemn Israel because we hate "them".

### **An Indian Muslim in America**

Muslims love to live in the United States but also love to hate it. Many openly claim that the US is a terrorist state. Yet their decision to live here displays their preference. As an Indian Muslim, I know for sure that nowhere on earth, including India, would I get the same sense of dignity and respect that I have received in the US. No Muslim country will treat me as well as the US has.

If what happened on 11 September had happened in India, the world's biggest democracy, thousands of Muslims would have been slaughtered in riots on mere suspicion, and there would be another slaughter after confirmation.

But in the US, bigotry and xenophobia have been kept in check by media and political leaders. In many places hundreds of Americans have gathered around Islamic centers in symbolic gestures of protection and embrace of American Muslims. In many cities Christian congregations have started wearing *hijab* to identify with fellow Muslim women. In patience and in tolerance ordinary Americans have demonstrated their extraordinary virtues.

It is time that we acknowledge that the freedoms we enjoy in the US are more desirable to us than superficial solidarity with the Muslim world. If you disagree, then prove it by packing your bags and going to whichever Muslim country you identify with. But if you do not leave, and do not acknowledge that you would rather live here than anywhere else, know that you are being hypocritical.

It is time that we faced these hypocritical practices and struggled to transcend them. It is time that American Muslim leaders sought to clarify the attitudes of their community.

### **A culture of violence**

For over a decade we have watched as Muslims, in the name of Islam, have committed violence against fellow Muslims and other peoples. We have always found a way to reconcile the vast distance between Islamic values and Muslim practices by pointing out the injustices committed upon Muslims by others.

The essential point however is this. Our belief in Islam, and our commitment to Islamic values, is not contingent on the moral conduct of the US or Israel. And, as Muslims, we cannot condone inhuman and senseless waste of life in the name of Islam.

The biggest victims of hate-filled politics, as embodied in the actions of several Muslim militias all over the world, are Muslims themselves. Hate is the extreme form of intolerance, and when individuals and groups succumb to it they can do nothing constructive. Militias like the Taliban have allowed their hate for the west to override their obligation to pursue the welfare of their people. As a result of their actions not only have thousands of innocent people died in America, but thousands of people will die in the Muslim world.

Already, half a million Afghans have had to leave their homes and their country. The war has only just begun, and it will only get worse. Hamas and Islamic Jihad may kill a few Jewish

women and children with their suicide bombs and thus temporarily satisfy their lust for Jewish blood, but many more Palestinians then pay the price for their actions.

This culture of hate and killing is tearing away at the moral fabric of Muslim society. We are more focused on “the other” and have completely forgotten our duty to Allah. In pursuit of the inferior jihad we have sacrificed the superior *jihad*. Islamic resurgence, the cherished ideals of which pursued the ultimate goal of a universally just and moral society, has been hijacked by hatred.

If bin Laden were only an individual then we would have no problem. But unfortunately bin Laden has become a phenomenon – a cancer eating away at the morality of our youth, and undermining the spiritual health of our future.

Today the century-old Islamic revival is in jeopardy because we have allowed insanity to prevail over our better judgment. Yes, the US has played a hand in the creation of bin Laden and the Taliban, but it is we who have allowed them to grow and gain such a foothold. It is our duty to police our Muslim world. It is our responsibility to prevent people from abusing Islam. It is our job to ensure that Islam is not misrepresented. We should have made sure that what happened on 11 September could never have happened.

### **A call to peace**

It is time the leaders of the American Muslim community woke up and realized that there is more to life than competing with the American Jewish lobby for power over US foreign policy. Islam is not about defeating Jews or conquering Jerusalem. It is about mercy, virtue, sacrifice and duty. Above all it is the pursuit of moral perfection. Nothing can be further away from moral perfection than the wanton slaughter of thousands of unsuspecting innocent people.

I hope that we will now re-dedicate our lives and our institutions to the search for harmony, peace and tolerance. Let us be prepared to suffer injustice rather than commit injustices. After all it is we, not others, who carry the divine burden of Islam. We have to be morally better, more forgiving, more sacrificing than others, if we wish to convince the world about the truth of our message. We cannot even be equal to others in virtue, we must excel.

It is time for soul-searching. How can the message of Muhammad (pbuh) who was sent as mercy to mankind become a source of horror and fear? How can Islam inspire thousands of youth to dedicate their lives to killing others? We are supposed to invite people to Islam not murder them.

The worst exhibition of Islam happened on our turf. We must take first responsibility to undo the evil it has manifest. This is our mandate, our burden and also our opportunity.

---

#### **Source URL:**

[http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-islamicworld/article\\_91.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-islamicworld/article_91.jsp)



Copyright © Muqtedar Khan, . Published by openDemocracy Ltd. You may download and print extracts from this article for your own personal and non-commercial use only. If you teach at a university we ask that your department make a donation. Contact us if you wish to discuss republication. Some articles on this site are published under different terms.