

Groups urge informed reporting on Hirsi Ali visit

Groups concerned about increasing Islamophobia call on the media to ensure informed coverage of the upcoming visit to Australia by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. We believe that on previous visits, her bigoted views about Muslims have gone largely under-reported and unchallenged. In particular, we draw attention to Hirsi Ali's listing as an anti-Muslim extremist by the respected US civil rights organisation the Southern Poverty Law Center, the withdrawal of an offer to award her an honorary degree from Brandeis University and to anti-Muslim comments she has made over the past decade.

For instance, Hirsi Ali has repeatedly claimed that Islam itself or a majority of Muslims support terrorism when ASIO head Duncan Lewis recently stated, "99.9 per cent of Australian Muslims are not involved in activities of security concern in any way and are of no interest to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation."¹ Further, despite describing herself as a champion of Muslim women, Hirsi Ali constantly demeans them by making ignorant comments about their lives, which is why she receives virtually no support from them.

Inaccurate representations of Muslims have consequences that go beyond misinforming non-Muslim Australians. Anti-Muslim attitudes are now held by almost one third of Australians, up from just 3 per cent in 1998.² These attitudes impact behaviour, with 77 per cent of Australian Muslim women being subject to bigotry in public.³ As Duncan Lewis has noted, some anti-Muslim groups and individuals are prepared to use violence.⁴

In Australia, Muslim women have been physically assaulted in shopping centres and on public transport.⁵ Cars have been purposely driven towards them and dogs set on themselves and their children. They have been kicked, slapped and burnt with hot coffee and cigarettes.⁶ In this climate, uncritical coverage of Hirsi Ali's hateful opinions encourages those prepared to take such actions and undermines the efforts made by Muslims and non-Muslims across the political spectrum to protect and enhance Australia's reputation as a multicultural success story.

Supported by: Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, Islamic Council of Victoria, Challenging Racism Project (Western Sydney University), Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (Deakin University), Centre for Human Rights Education (Curtin University), Islamic Council of Queensland, Benevolence Australia, Voices against Bigotry, Muslims for Progressive Values, Australian Jewish Democratic Society and Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity.

Hirsi Ali is recognised as an anti-Muslim extremist

- In 2016, the respected US Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups, included Hirsi Ali in a list of 15 high profile anti-Muslim extremists.⁷
- In 2014, Brandeis University, founded by the Jewish community post WWII, rescinded its offer to award her an honorary degree in social justice after staff and students protested that her Islamophobic statements were incompatible with Brandeis' values of inclusivity.⁸

On conflating Muslim terrorists and Islam

When asked if she was talking about defeating radical Islam:

"No. Islam, period ... we are at war with Islam. And there's no middle ground in wars ... you look them in the eye and flex your muscles and you say, "This is a warning. We won't accept this anymore." There comes a moment when you crush your enemy."⁹

"Violence is inherent in Islam – it's a destructive, nihilistic cult of death. It legitimates murder ... It's not just with extremist elements within Islam, but the ideology of Islam itself ... Islam is the new fascism. Just like Nazism started with Hitler's vision, the Islamic vision is a caliphate."¹⁰

"Islam, even Islam in its nonviolent form, is dangerous."¹¹

"Islam pure taken to its logical conclusion leads to mass murder."¹²

"Hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Muslims are radicalised around the world and in the United States of America ... The people who have that mentality and that mindset are not a minority and they're not a fringe minority ... It is so large that these individuals who ... actually want to kill people, they have a large enough group to hide in ... there is ... a great deal of consensus in terms of belief ... If a fellow believer is doing that ... then who are you as a believer to stop him, or even worse, to report him to the infidel authorities."¹³

On Muslim women

Hirsi Ali has described Muslim women as "held captive in the compound of irrationality and superstition,"¹⁴ as frightened birds trapped in a cage,¹⁵ as kidnap victims suffering from Stockholm syndrome and slaves.¹⁶

"I realize that the women who call themselves Muslims do not understand me yet, but one day their blinkers will drop."¹⁷

"A Muslim girl does not make her own decisions or seek control. She is trained to be docile. If you are a Muslim girl, you disappear, until there is almost no you inside you."¹⁸

"I didn't expect immediate waves of organized support among Muslim women. People who are conditioned to meekness, almost to the point where they have no mind of their own, sadly have no ability to organize, or will to express their opinion."¹⁹

"Islam crushes women."²⁰

"The will of little girls is stifled by Islam. By the time they menstruate they are rendered voiceless. They are reared to become submissive robots who serve in the house as cleaners and cooks. They are required to comply with their father's choice of a mate, and after the wedding their lives are devoted to the sexual pleasures of their husband and to a life of childbearing."²¹

On why Muslims should be converted to Christianity

"I accept that there are multitudes seeking God, seeking meaning, and so on, but if they reject atheism, I would rather they became modern-day Catholics or Jews than that they became Muslims. Because my Catholic and Jewish colleagues are *fine*."²²

"The churches have the resources, the authority, and the motivation to convert Muslim immigrants to a more modern way of life and more modern beliefs. Teach hygiene, discipline, a work ethic, and also what you believe in."²³

On confronting Muslims about their faith

In 2010, she lamented that "the massive public effort to reveal, ridicule, revile, and replace old views has not yet begun."²⁴

She advocated this happen "in the schoolyard. Colleagues confront each other on the work floor, neighbours in each other's kitchens."²⁵

She has criticised public schools that "refrain from openly challenging the beliefs of Muslim children and their parents."²⁶

On Islamophobia

Despite threats, assaults and murders of US Muslims, armed protests outside of and vandalism of mosques, the desecration of Muslim cemeteries,²⁷ the implementation of a travel ban on seven Muslim countries and the public discussion of policies including registers and internment of Muslims, Hirsi Ali has denied Islamophobia is a problem in the US.²⁸

"As long as Muslims say IS has nothing to with Islam or talk of Islamophobia they are a part of the problem."²⁹

Motivation

Political sponsors

Hirsi Ali has built a career working for right-wing organisations hostile to Islam:

- Between 2003 and 2006, she was a politician for the Dutch right-wing VVD party and noted the benefits she provided the party, "Unlike white commentators, who were hamstrung by the fear that they would be labeled racists, I could voice my criticisms."³⁰ She declared, "Right now the media are still lapping it up: a black woman who criticizes Islam."³¹
- Between 2006 and 2014 she was a Fellow at the neo-conservative think tank the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), members of which strongly advocated for the Iraq War.

Policy positions

Hirsi Ali's policy suggestions in relation to Muslims while she was in the Netherlands included: employers questioning Muslims about their religious beliefs;³² closing all Muslim schools;³³ severely cutting unemployment benefits;³⁴ removing the minimum wage;³⁵ cutting funding to all Muslim groups (initially including women's shelters and gay and feminist organisations)³⁶ and subjecting Muslim girls to annual vaginal examinations to ensure they had not been subjected to Female Genital Cutting.³⁷ She also supported a Trump-like immigration policy that favoured entry of Eastern Europeans over people from Muslim countries Morocco and Turkey.³⁸

In 2005, Geert Mak, a popular Dutch historian who initially supported Hirsi Ali, drew parallels between the Dutch debate about Muslims and anti-Jewish sentiment before the Holocaust. He argued that she and other anti-Muslim figures had made expressing "hatreds and prejudices that would previously have been considered out of bounds"³⁹ respectable, and compared her use of

Koranic verses in her offensive film about Muslim women, *Submission*, to the use of Talmudic passages in the Nazi propaganda film *The Eternal Jew*.⁴⁰

Over the past decade, Hirsi Ali has actively sought to influence Western domestic politics on Muslims, issuing advice to Canadian voters on Twitter,⁴¹ making policy suggestions to former UK Prime Ministers David Cameron⁴² and Tony Blair⁴³ and to former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott.⁴⁴

Expertise

Much of Hirsi Ali's credibility on the issue of Muslim women rests on the claims she has made about her own life experiences. Notwithstanding that serious doubt has been cast on some of these,⁴⁵ in no other group would one individual's negative experiences be seen as an authoritative representation of the experiences of hundreds of millions of women living in scores of countries in widely disparate political, economic and social circumstances. Over 300 Australian Muslim women, including prominent academics, writers and activists, recently made it clear that Hirsi Ali does not represent them.⁴⁶

Hirsi Ali is sometimes described as a scholar or academic, but her work at the AEI, Harvard's Belfer Center and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University has not involved conventional academic output. She has written dozens of opinion pieces, but has not published a single peer reviewed paper.

Throughout her career, she has divided entire Muslim populations into categories she has made up, declaring for example: "There are three types of Muslims in the West" (2006)⁴⁷; "I would like to distinguish between five types of Muslims" (2007)⁴⁸; "we can distinguish three different groups of Muslims" (2015)⁴⁹; and "I have come to distinguish between four types of Muslim immigrants" (2017).⁵⁰ All of these categories have been conjured up by Hirsi Ali without any evidential basis.

Hirsi Ali "was named by both Foreign Policy in the United States and Prospect in the United Kingdom in 2008 as one of the world's leading public intellectuals despite her output of one ghostwritten memoir, one collection of heavily edited journalism, and some op-ed pieces."⁵¹

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