

HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
Warsaw, 24 September 2013
Working session 2: Tolerance and non-discrimination II

Although Islamophobia has a long history, it became a significant political tool and discourse in recent decades. It manifests itself mainly in media and furthermore becomes a legal matter in the context of human rights.

Islamophobia is deemed as a human rights issue because of its implication on intolerance, exclusion and discrimination culminating in hate speech and hate crimes towards Muslims. Today, all Muslims around the world call for recognition of Islamophobia as a hate crime and Islamophobic attitudes as human rights violations, highlighting the legal dimension of the issue. Therefore, existing relationship of Islamophobia with human rights and universal law appears to be an important subject requiring to be scrutinized.

The media coverage on Muslims and Islam is directly responsible with the spread of Islamophobia and the social problems that it tends to lead. Anti-Muslim representations through images and language used by the visual, print and social media play efficient role in creating the social repercussions of Islamophobia.

Although there are internationally recognised principles and recommendations against religious and ethnic hatred such as the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, there are still grey areas like the interface between freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of religion that have clearly emerged as issues of valid but at times competing concerns. Thus, the question becomes whether it is a matter of implementation or reformulation of law to combat Islamophobia in a stronger way by what the legal experts call "the soft law".

Contemporary Islamophobia is not new and unique to the current or recent setting because history and the eternalised nature of its stories, myths and narratives continue to substantiate and shape contemporary meaning about Muslims and Islam.

Islamophobia can now be concerned with every means of thought, deed and action that relates to or references Muslims or Islam, whether true or untrue, fact or fiction, real or imaginary. Islamophobia can also no longer be – as indeed Muslims and Islam are no longer – something that exists marginalised on the fringes of society because of a lack of understanding. Now there is enough understanding of it. One of the most pressing challenges in our understanding of Islamophobia-related issues is the question of "how does one identify and describe legitimate criticisms or anxieties on the one hand and hate-filled or irrational criticisms and anxieties on the other, in the media, law or politics?"

It is in order to address this fundamental question that the "Tarabya International Conference on Islamophobia: Law & Media" has brought together in September 2013 distinguished scholars, diplomats, NGOs and media experts to further discuss the relevance of the definition of Islamophobia to the question of Islamophobia as legal matter as well as the question of whether the existing international and national laws are sufficient to combat Islamophobia, media ethics, political language, discourse, culture and mechanisms.

The knowledge, the goodwill and the determination that emerged from this conference can and will lead to properly act upon the better implementation processes supported by constructive discourses. EMISCO as a partner of this Conference will follow the issue closely.