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THE PROBLEMS OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD: A VIEW FROM TURKEY

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This policy brief investigates the problems Muslim world is facing today and discusses the contributions The Parliamentary Union of the Islamic Cooperation Member States can make for the solutions of the problem. Primarily the policy brief states that the tragic events happening in the Middle East and the rest of the world feed the xenophobia and Islamophobia and that the instability is spreading around the Middle East every day. From this point of view, the study points out the contributions The Parliamentary Union of the Islamic Cooperation could make in overcoming these problems, bringing peace, justice, stability, and security at an international scale. Moreover the need for progress in bringing common contemporary standards and values to the Muslim world is also emphasized.

This brief is based on the speech delivered at the 10th session of Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Member States.

Muslim world is going through an extraordinary time in which everybody must be very careful and discreet in their messages. In numerous parts of the world, with terrorist attacks on one hand and Islamophobia and anti-foreigner campaigns on the other, there are efforts to create a conflict among religions, sects, and civilizations. Against this serious threat it is crucial for all of us to react with a common mind, perception, and reason.

Today, most of the member countries of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Asia, Africa and Middle Asia joined the world of free nations with their honorable war against the imperialism in the 20th century which aims to assimilate our religion and identity. But, the ignorance, poverty, diseases, terrorism, extremism, and sectarian conflicts that are feeding on

the devastation of the imperialism have become the biggest problems of some regions in the Muslim world in the 21st century.

The Need of a United Stance against Terrorism and Xenophobia

There are two threats all humanity is facing today. These are terrorism and xenophobia. Because the threat of terrorism has become global, the cooperation against terrorism can have to be undertaken in different directions. Turkey, being one of the most affected countries from terrorism, continues its activities vigorously, via both international institutions and in its bilateral relations. In the international scale, campaign against terrorism continues under the United Nations (UN) with a universal approach. We should be careful that the increasing number of platforms and

institutions handling the global campaign against terrorism might face weakness.

All the terrorist acts in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Nigeria, and Paris causing deaths of many innocent people should be condemned. Terrorism is a crime against humanity which should be condemned by everybody without adding extra definitions or adjectives to it. The common ground of religions believing Allah all mighty and his prophets Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses, is to ban violence, murder, and terrorism and promoting giving life to people. Thus, in any part of the world, for whatever reason, people partaking in terrorist acts cannot be part of any religion. These terrorists primarily harm the people of the religion of which they are using the symbols and the name.

However, if the same reaction given to the Paris attacks is not given to the

attacks in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Nigeria, it means there is a problem. If the people do not show a united stance and struggle against all kinds of terrorism, it is impossible to defeat the enemy of terrorism. The situation only encourages the terrorist groups. If there are double standards to terrorist groups and some are treated like charities, all humanity will lose against terrorism. Turkey suffered against the double standards of the international community especially regarding the PKK. Today the biggest test of humanity in its fight against terrorism is giving away the double standards towards terrorist groups and reacting with a full unity and support against any type of terrorism.

The second big threat for humanity is the spread of xenophobia, discrimination, racism, and especially Islamophobia and hatred which have been on the

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rise recently. The situation is one of the primary reasons threatening the cooperation among civilizations. Speeches that blame or hold Muslims responsible for Paris attacks cannot be accepted and these speeches cannot contribute to the war against terrorism. Members of a religion cannot be blamed because of the actions of a terrorist using its symbols and name. Politicians, intellectuals, scientists, religious leaders, and press members addressing the society should be very careful not to make comments attacking any religion. Otherwise, they might contribute to the aims of the terrorist who are

trying to spread fear and hatred among people. At this point, cooperation between religions and civilizations is crucial.

In one sense, the history of human civilization is the history of struggle to gain and protect freedom. Without freedom, humanity cannot exist and human values cannot be protected. Today the biggest threat against freedom is the abuse of freedom. Using freedoms, especially freedom of speech, in a manner that insults and attacks personal rights, honor of a person, especially the values and beliefs of societies and people, cannot be accepted. Such kinds of

attacks are primitive and vulgar.

Islamophobia, which is a type of racism and xenophobia, is a primary issue for Turkey which has many citizens living outside its borders. In the spread of these ideas, prejudices which are rooted in history and social memory play a crucial role. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, perception of Islam and Muslims has changed dramatically into a negative direction in the minds of Westerners. The recent events in the Middle East are also observed to increase Islamophobia. Such tendencies, which are not matching with the values of the 21st century modern society principles, also contradict with the main idea of Abrahamic religions. These tendencies also affect the efforts of immigrants to integrate and contribute to the society.

Turks constitute the majority of the Muslim

population in many European countries. Thus, the increase in Islamophobia affects the Turks primarily and it demolishes the feeling of security in the societies they are living in. The votes of parties who portray the immigrants as the primary cause of unemployment, poverty, crime, security issues, and other social issues, are increasing, while the main political actors fail to react to such extremist ideas due to the danger of losing votes.

Meanwhile, Turkey continues membership negotiations with European Union (EU). The success of this process will show how sincere Europe is in its call for cultural diversity. In this respect, the process of Turkey's membership is a test for the EU which is a project of peace and civilization. Also, membership of Turkey is an opportunity to create dialog between civilizations and religions

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by bringing West and Islam together. We are concerned to see that after the European Parliament elections in May 2014, some extremist parties that positioned themselves against integration, EU project and immigration increased number of seats in the parliament. Turkey, as a country in the negotiations for membership, constantly reiterates the need for developing tools to fight against increasing racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia to the EU officials.

Turkey and Spain started the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative in 2005 to improve understanding between cultures and create mutual respect. High interest in the Alliance of Civilizations shows that common values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law are stronger than the cultural differences among societies and countries. I believe that in the struggle against discrimination and xenophobia

the Alliance holds a crucial role.

ISIS as the Reflection of the Syrian Crisis

Recently, the terrorist group ISIS has become the main threat to stability and security in Turkey's neighbors and friends Iraq and Syria. Campaign against ISIS terror has to be conducted in a coordinated and effective way by considering conditions which create and feed the terrorism in the region. Muslim countries should know that crimes committed by ISIS in the name of religion of peace Islam, threatens the Islamic civilization. Thus, they should fight against extremism in this mindset.

Especially, the example of Iraq in the war against ISIS shows the need of promoting common values by putting aside artificial differences and discrimination among the sects. Turkey welcomes the steps taken by the new Iraqi government

to include all parts of society in politics. Turkey also believes that such actions should be supported.

International community should fight against every type of terrorism with such kind of determination. Another terrorist group that has adopted violence as its main strategy like ISIS is the PKK which has caused deaths of thirty-five thousands people over thirty years in Turkey. The PKK is rooted in Syria and Iraq, and is a terrorist group similar to the ISIS. The PKK cannot be allowed to gain legitimacy on the basis of its claim that it fights against ISIS. Unfortunately, international media and some opposition groups contribute to the terrorist propaganda from time to time. Terrorist and criminal groups involved in and sustained by violence, murder, drug and human trafficking, money laundry, robbery, and kidnapping should not be excused by the international community. On the contrary,

every terrorist group should be considered equally dangerous.

The role of Assad regime and its share in the destruction, chaos, and instability in the Syrian crisis cannot be put aside. Assad regime has used ISIS against opposition groups and it allowed the group to get bigger and stronger in Iraq and Syria.

The Chronic Topic That Disturbs the Muslim World: Palestine Question

Even if the imperialist exploitation ended in the 20th century, unfortunately Palestine still continues the fight for freedom and self-determination for the whole Muslim world. The source of all problems in the Middle East, Palestine, is an open wound in the conscious of humanity. Besides the previous attacks by Israel, the devastation and humanitarian crisis caused by the last attacks on Gaza in July-August 2014 are

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still fresh memories in our minds. Israel, encouraged by the non-reaction of international community, accelerated its invasion of Palestinian territory and is building illegal settlements. Besides, Israel took irrational actions to change the status of Jerusalem and Temple Mount which has brought the region on the edge of instability. The attack of Israeli Army on Al-Aqsa in November 2014, which insults the holiness of the area and Islam, gives an example of the actions of Israeli government harming the peace negotiations.

Palestinian Question staying unsolved, and continuing destruction, torture and murders mean to harm the honor of Muslims. Besides, this situation creates an environment from which racism, hatred and terrorist movements have been feeding in the Middle East. However, Western world is a passive bystander to the destructive manner of Israel causing the non-solution in the region, while talking about the security needs of Israel. We should remind ourselves that the main issue in the Middle East is the continuing invasion of Israel.



The decisions of the United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council on Palestinian Question are not implemented. It is impossible for the region to solve the Middle East issue or bring peace and stability to the region without bringing justice according to international law, which requires establishing a free, self-governed and livable Palestinian state according to the 1967 borders with capital East Jerusalem taking its place in among the free nations of the world. As the Muslim countries, we have to continue our struggle with determination to bring a solution, which includes a free Palestinian state in which our Palestinian brothers can live in peace and freedom.

Other Current Issues and Stance of Muslim World

In the North Africa and Middle East, the change and

transformation in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen and Syria continues. Demands of the nations in these regions are real. The demands are based on the ideas in the core values of Islamic civilization. Naturally, the demands and reforms to address them will be unique to each culture. Anyhow, these countries have started on a process which is long and challenging, full of opportunities and tests. It is natural that there will be ups and downs in the process.

The important issue in the process is to sustain stability, integrity and social peace, and prevent religious, ethnic or sectarian polarization in these countries. There should be united stance against groups that try to evaluate and explain the events in Middle East based on sectarian conflict and religious war. It should be shown that religious beliefs can have a role in bringing people together and

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uniting nations instead of discriminating and dividing the society.

Today, Iraq faces one of the most important tests in its history. Turkey gives great importance to Iraq's political and territorial unity. Turkey also does whatever it can to help Iraq become a democratic, stable, and peaceful country that provides peace for its citizens and neighbors. Turkey supports Iraqi government's war on terror and provides help for the Iraqi people during these hard times.

It is desired that in Egypt democracy can be brought again, protection of human rights can be sustained, a united and non-discriminative political arena can be established, and the future elections can be completed with the involvement of all groups in the society. Tunisian people accepted their new constitution through social dialog and consensus, and conducted their

presidential and parliamentary elections, accordingly. Thus, they have provided a recent example of a good transition to democracy. Turkey will continue developing its cooperation with Tunisia in every aspect.

Libya has been going through tough times. The transition process after the revolution in 2011 has brought challenges. The conflicts which started in May 2014 deepened the political polarization in the country. All member countries of OIC are responsible in terms of honor and conscious for bringing stability to Libya. Actions to bring security, stability, and prosperity to Libya should be done considering the benefits of Libyans.

The recent developments in Yemen, which had been conducting a successful political transition process with the initiatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council, are raising concerns. It

is necessary that all parties should abstain from unilateral actions that might cause sectarian conflicts and give Al-Qaida opportunity to use the situation to spread its ideology. Also everybody should contribute to the process of a united country and spreading a legitimate government authority all around the country.

The continuing political transition process in Afghanistan is welcome. Afghan people showed their trust in democracy, by joining the presidential elections at a high rate. Afghan people show the eagerness of claiming their future and reinforcing the hopes for the future of the country. However, gains of the last 13 years still have a fragile nature. Thus, international community must maintain its help to Afghanistan in terms of security, improvement of capacity, and development. Also, it is crucial to continue peace and compromise

process to sustain political stability. Problem in Kashmir should be solved justly and permanently in a way that satisfies Pakistan, India and most importantly people of Kashmir.

There is considerable progress in Somalia since August 2012 in terms of politics and security. Constituting a parliament, electing the president, assigning a prime minister and bringing together a government constitute important steps in the political and democratic history of Somalia. Terrorist acts in the northeast of Nigeria are concerning. Recent terrorist attacks conducted by Boko Haram, which resulted in deaths of many Muslim brothers and sisters, are causing anger in Turkey. Turkey has been providing all the support it can for the efforts to bring security, peace and stability to Nigeria. Moreover, Turkey will remain in cooperation with

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Nigerian people in their war against terrorism.

Muslim nations should be in full cooperation to contribute to bringing peace and stability to African continent, supporting the economic, social and political development of African countries, and improving resources in Africa in way that benefits African people. Lastly, one of the important issues Muslim world should pay attention is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is thought-provoking that a problem that was considered the main obstacle to bringing stability to Southern Caucasus has not been resolved over the last twenty years. We find the current situation unacceptable in which twenty percent of Azerbaijan land is under invasion. The primary precondition to peace, stability, and prosperity in Southern Caucasus is to solve Nagorno-Karabakh issue in a way that protects the integrity and sovereignty

of Azerbaijan. Also it is a humanitarian obligation of international society to show the attention and sensitivity they deserve to over a million refugees and displaced who have to leave their land and homes. In this respect it is crucially important to bring Nagorno-Karabakh issue in all perspectives to the agenda of OIC. Turkey will continue to support the righteous case of Azerbaijan, and keep it in the agenda at all platforms.

Problems of Muslim Minorities and OIC

One of the primary topics of Muslim world's cooperation under OIC is the problems of Muslim minorities and groups. It is crucial for us to sustain our support and attention to the Muslims who are trying to defend their identities and religious practices under prejudice, intolerance, discrimination, and cruelty. Muslim world's main approach to this issue

is that Muslim minorities and groups should be given their deserved social-political status, and their basic rights and freedoms to live in peace while keeping their identities.

The situation of Rohingya Muslims in the Arakan province of Myanmar and other Muslim population in this country is followed with concern. Every effort should be shown to protect the rights, primarily citizenship rights and freedoms of Rohingya Muslims, and provide them peace and security.

Crimean Tatars, who have experienced tragic mass exiles and pains throughout history, keep their search of rights in peaceful and democratic manner after the illegal annexation of Crimea. Despite their peaceful struggle, Muslim Crimean Tatars are under oppression by the *de facto* administration in the peninsula. Crimean Tatar leaders are banned from

entering their mother land Crimea. Crimean Tatar National Parliament is closed. There have been attacks on mosques, schools and some houses by the security forces. There have been reports of suspicious disappearance or death of people in the peninsula. Unfortunately, Muslim Crimean Tatar people are not sure of their future under these circumstances. The support of Muslim countries to the righteous case of Muslim Crimean Tatar people should continue stronger than before. It is crucial that the topic should be kept on the agenda and followed closely.

Unfortunately, there is no improvement in the conditions of Muslim Turkish minority in Greece; there are even new breaches. Against the existing bilateral and international agreements, Greece continues to prevent Muslim Turkish minorities from using their religious freedom and other minority

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rights. The regulation accepted in 2013 known as “240 Imams” is a striking example of that policy. It is important to keep the victimization of the Turkish Muslim minority in Greece on the agenda of OIC Parliamentary Union.

Turkey continues its devotion to find a permanent and comprehensive political resolution to the problem, which had been ongoing for 50 years, in Cyprus based upon the idea that two nations on the island are the main founders, both are equal owners of the land, and they are politically equal. Turkey desires that peace will be reached on the island as soon as possible. We keep supporting any good natured approach and the works of UN on this issue. Turkish Cyprus, with the continuous support of Turkey, shows the political willpower to complete the negotiations as soon as possible. However, it is not

possible to reach a resolution only with the efforts of the Turkish Cyprus. Greek side should show sincere efforts for a resolution as well.

Natural resources in East Mediterranean and the project of carrying water from Turkey to the island should be considered as encouraging elements for the resolution. Managing the resources in East Mediterranean in a way that protects the rights of both sides can be a good sincere step of a partnership. It is expected that the support of the Muslim countries will continue strongly on the righteous case of Cyprus Turks until a resolution is reached.

Conclusion

Islam is the religion of the ones who are on the middle way, moderate, away from lavish, failing, discrimination and provocation and all the extremism. All efforts to relate Islam to terrorism should be rejected

categorically. Such efforts to relate Islam to terrorism are the efforts of imperialist, orientalist, fanatic and racist brains' scenarios. It is a shame to talk about the security rights of Israel while avoiding to condemn the actions of Israel killing more than two thousand people most of whom are women and children when turning Gaza into a prison.

After all, we need to put ourselves together and reorganize our social and personal lives as Muslims again by paying attention to education, health, justice, security, women and children. We need to clean up our own houses first. It is vital that we need to be in cooperation with ourselves and the world to define our problems and reach moderns standards on such issues as literacy, women and children's health, scientific research and papers, new technology, justice of punishment, fight against crime and crime against women.

Sectarianism and denying others' religions are the marks of some irrational minds' leftovers and those should be left in the history. Groups like ISIS and Al-Qaida feed from such minds. Killing of 130 students in an attack to a school in Peshawar hurt us deeply, and put us in shame and shock on the name of Islamic world. The bloody murders of Al-Qaida and ISIS have no place in the teachings of Islam; on the contrary they totally contradict with Islam. Of course, acts of violence do not only occur in the world of Islam. Terror and violence are not related to any religion or identity; they are the results of political, social and economical issues.

There are great contributions that can be made by the parliaments of Muslim countries in the national and international scale to establish peace, justice, stability and security. We can succeed in not only dealing with illegitimate, unjust and hostile

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approaches to Islam and Islamic world, primarily the Palestinian Question, but also finding and solving our own social and economic issues. The support

and contributions of Islamic nations, provided that they are in coordination and cooperation, will be vital to overcome these problems.

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