

## Input for Report on Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination

by Nafisa Gudal

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This consultative input is partly informed by research gathered for my MA Human Rights and Cultural Diversity thesis, currently being completed at the University of Essex.

The input outlines the implications of conceptualising Islamophobia and anti-muslim hatred. Subsequently, it references the *consequences* of Islamophobia for Muslims in the UK. References made in this input will be based predominantly in the UK and Europe, however, concerns raised illustrate the increasingly overwhelming case of Islamophobia in many parts of the world.

### A) The issue

**'Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism'**  
(Runnymede Trust, 2017, p.7)

Islamophobia is deeply rooted in racism and must be recognised as a culturally racist phenomenon. In many instances, Islamophobic sentiment is excused under the guise of intellectual debate and free speech. Nevertheless, anti-Muslim sentiment reflects the racist rhetoric that has existed in European societies for a long time.

The growing intolerance towards Muslims in the last couple of decades is often explained in the context of the *War on Terror*. The events of 9/11 brought an onslaught of government policies aimed to address and prevent acts of terrorism. Counterterrorism policies are often cited as further exacerbating the *othering* of Muslims in Western societies. Government strategies, such as Prevent in the UK, have been criticised for suspicious surveillance and alienating British Muslims. Consequently, Muslims are seen as a threat to national security and the way of life in the West.

In addition, the demonisation and vilification of Muslims in the media have dire consequences for Muslims and those 'perceived' as Muslim. A range of studies and research show that the representation of minority groups, including Muslims, are highly racialised. The depiction of Muslims as 'terrorist' or perpetrators, and portraying Muslim women as *helpless* victims of Islamic patriarchy, is attributed to cultural racism.

Nevertheless, Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon that suddenly occurred post 9/11. In fact, Islamophobia is the intolerance of the *other*. The *other* instance being the Muslim, who is from a distant culture, and a culture that *clashes* with Western civilisation. This form of racism is deeply connected to imperialism and historic structural racism. There needs to be recognition of the history of colonialism in producing an Orientalist approach to interacting with *different* cultures. Whilst racial intolerance based on race is now mostly undebated, the cultural element of racial

discrimination is mostly denied. However, before counterterrorism policies, the concerns were discussed in the context of migration policies and whether multiculturalism was really working in Europe. Racism is not new in Europe. Islamophobia thrives due to the sustained systems of oppression that have subjugated many black and minority groups.

The conceptualising of Islamophobia is complex and multi-layered, and one must move away from treating it as an issue with one homogenous group. Instead, Islamophobia points to a deeper racial issue and inequality, which impacts Muslims socially, politically, economically and culturally. It is with this understanding that I move onto defining Islamophobia.

## **B) Defining Islamophobia**

This input adopts the following definitions of Islamophobia. Firstly, the definition of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims.

*'Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness' (APPG Report, 2018, p.11)*

Secondly, the definition in the 2017 Runnymede Trust's report on Islamophobia

*'Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.'*  
(Runnymede Trust, 2017, p.7)

The above definitions capture the argument of this input: first, Islamophobia is a culturally racist phenomenon; and second, Islamophobia is supported by systemic structures of oppression that hinders the enjoyment of human rights for Muslims.

The report by the Runnymede Trust further discusses the limitations of the term *Islamophobia*. Nonetheless, the term is now widely understood as referring to the above definition - it is harmful to Muslims. At this point, any further resistance and disagreement on the term may, in fact, become an unnecessary distraction to tackling Islamophobia.

Whatever the academic disagreements about the term may be, the reality is that Islamophobia is a social issue that has imminent consequences for the freedom of religion.

## **C) Consequences of Islamophobia**

As mentioned previously, the prevalence and increasing intolerance of Muslims has numerous consequences too long of listing in this input. However, outlined below are some consequences of Islamophobia on Muslims and broader society.

The report commissioned by the Runnymede Trust explains, and exemplifies, the obstacles Muslims face in the UK in overcoming the structural and institutional barriers of cultural racism. The report shows that the profile of Muslims in education and employment shows a disadvantaged picture when compared to other minority faith groups.

The definition of Islamophobia above points out the implication of being perceived as a Muslim. This reveals the inherent issue of cultural relativist, thinking that Muslims are treated as a homogenous group - and that they are portrayed as *bad* for society. Subsequently, this has worsened existing social inequalities for minority groups around employment, education, housing.

The following quotes are from Muslims who shared their experiences in the report:

#### Institutional barriers to employment

'As a black British Muslim woman, I face multiple challenges when it comes to my career opportunities and progression...When I compare myself to white friends and colleagues I notice that I need to work twice as hard for what I want to accomplish. Maybe it's my non-English name which means my CV gets overlooked. When I do manage to get through to interviews, the fact that I am an ethnic minority who also wears the hijab makes them less likely to offer me a job...There are so many institutional barriers that mean people like me are not given jobs based on our merits and skills. This makes me disillusioned with all of the promises made to me during university and leading up to graduation about what to expect in the world of work. Institutional, systematic racism and Islamophobia are prevalent but I refuse to give up.'

#### Racism in healthcare

'For example, I had a middle-aged man who had various medical issues and he refused to acknowledge me as his nurse from his first night. When I asked why he told me to 'fuck off back to your Paki country'. When I explained I'm not Asian and I'm only here to help him he got increasingly abusive, calling me a 'Terrorist bitch', 'Terrorist cunt', asking me whether I was having intercourse with Osama Bin Laden and taunting me throughout the night about me wearing the hijab. He refused to take any of the medication I had given him and said that he would 'rather die than be nursed by a terrorist'... When I asked to be allocated a different patient my manager told me that it was unprofessional of me to make such a request.'

#### Social intolerance

'I have been the target of much Islamophobic verbal, and sometimes physical, abuse in the streets, shopping centres and hospitals, so much so that I don't know what life is without it. I have had people call me a 'terrorist', 'bomber' or shouting, 'Go back to your country!' with such vitriol and even grossly swearing at me. It is excruciating to live with...I just don't want anyone to go through what I've been through. I want to see Muslim women confident within their identities, unapologetic about their choices, successful in every aspect of their lives, contributing to society and participating in public life.'

The report provides further data capturing the inequalities in numerical terms.

The above quotes demonstrate the importance of understanding the impact of Islamophobia through intersectional lenses. Decision-makers must understand how multiple forms of discrimination are being experienced by Muslim women, children, those with disabilities and racial, ethnic groups such as Black Muslims.

#### **D) Recommendations and conclusion**

This input welcomes the consultation being conducted by the Special Rapporteur on the freedom of religion or belief. The following recommendations are made in light of the explanation above:

**1 - State to adopt the definition of Islamophobia explained above and to recognise Islamophobia as an ongoing race issue**

**2 - States to tackle Islamophobia in their national education curriculums to ensure social change**

**3 - Encourage states to take a proactive approach in data collection in line with the definition of Islamophobia**

**4 – Investigation into the media’s role in demonising Muslims and Islamophobia**

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