



Donald Trump and Islamophobia

Islamophobia is “an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from social, political, and civic life”. It is not a hidden phenomenon anymore and has turned into a common feature of contemporary political discourse. The phobia is partly fueled by the media coverage of the statements made by political figures because famous characters can influence the mindset of their fans and followers, exacerbating xenophobic feelings that can be reflected in violent behavior.


In a very recent example, the new president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, has repeatedly used the Islamophobic rhetoric in his remarks and advocated policies that target Muslim Americans. Trump’s anti-Muslim policies are proven to be supported by 25 percent of Americans .

There is also evidence indicating that Trump’s viewpoints on Muslims are associated with recurring cases of harassment against Muslims in the country. Within one week after the elections, the Council on American-Islamic Relations recorded more than 100 incidents of Muslims harassments . Such circumstances made Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York to establish a special police unit to address the increase in hate crimes across the state . Also, according to the report of a non-profit Alabama based organization, the number of anti-Muslim hate groups in the USA has tripled since the presidential elections of Donald Trump in the country. On Mid February 2017, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) reported that

the number of anti- Muslim organizations in the country leaped from 34 in 2015 to 101 in 2016. The same organization has documented 900 cases of Muslim harassment within 10 days after the presidential elections pointing out the fact that this is only a small proportion of the number of hate crimes on the ground since many cases remain unreported.

Fanning the flames of hate crimes goes hand in hand with the president’s failure to introduce any policy for preventing violence against millions of American Muslims. His only answer to the repeated questions of worried Muslims about his plans on how to deal with hate crimes is that they need to report cases of crime. The new president, who feels free to associate “Islam” with “terrorism” doesn’t seem to be specifically bothered about protection of millions of American Muslim minorities. In many occasions his speech has triggered hate against Muslims to a point that he has earned fame as the Islamophobic president. His executive order that ban Muslim from travelling to the United States, which was also condemned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, clearly reflects his strong bias against Muslims .

Xenophobic remarks are proven to be an important root cause of crimes against Muslims. The results of a recent study released by California State University-San Bernardino’s Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism indicate that political rhetoric can trigger hate crimes. The study shows that Trump’s anti-Muslim remarks could have contributed to a backlash against American Muslims. Using the official data of twenty US



states and drawing on numerous studies conducted on the feeling of hatred toward Muslims, the study suggests the widespread Islamophobia across the country .

Hate speech and xenophobic expressions have been frequently referred to as sources of serious concern by the UN experts, specially the UN Special Rapporteur on “Minority Rights” , the Special Rapporteur on “Freedom of Religion and Belief” , Special Rapporteur on “Contemporary Forms of Racism” , UN Special Rapporteur on “Human Rights of Migrants” and Special Rapporteur on “Freedom of Opinion and Expression” . The experts consider expression of hate as a major root cause of various forms of violence and crimes. Moreover, the UN has been striving toward combatting xenophobic language in the media and fostering inclusive integration of minorities in societies. Ban Ki Moon has warned that negative remarks against migrants are reaching levels of frequency and public acceptance . Also, in a high-level event on combating anti-Muslim discrimination, the United Nations Secretary-General António has strongly criticized expressions of Islamophobia, encouraging the world to follow “the principles of inclusion, tolerance and mutual understanding to recognize the value of diversity.”

In addition to igniting hate speech, the new president started discriminatory measures against Muslims including a travel ban against Muslims leading to revocation of 60,000 visas . Following the lift of the travel ban by a court sentence, the president made a new decision on how treat Muslims in the country. A Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act bill was sent to the congress which according to the critiques has

the power to intimidate, silence, and imprison Muslims for being politically engaged .

The President’s unrelenting attempts to marginalize Muslims is contrary to the values of the modern globalized world which is against intolerance and for cultural diversity. Encouragement of mutual trust and protecting minority rights promotes social integrity, a feeling of social inclusion, and social belonging as compared to marginalization of vulnerable groups. It is regretful to see the top political figure of the most powerful country of the world has chosen a rhetoric contrary to that of the United Nations standards and values, while the shapers of public opinion must be more committed to encouraging equality, countering stereotypes and promoting solidarity.

International community and the human rights organizations are on a turning point. Therefore, they should unite under a common mission to stand against the new waves of hate words and discriminatory ideas. They should echo the UN High Commissionaire’s remarks against Donald Trump’s ban on travel to the US from some Muslim-majority countries, since it is “mean-spirited” and violates international human rights law . Human rights NGOs should open new venues in the Human Rights Council to study the best practices of countering politicians’ hate speech which is setting a new precedent in official violation of UN standards. The Council should initiate the Special Procedures to create a database and record all cases of Islamophobia and the relationship between “politicians’ hateful remarks” and “escalation of hate crimes against minorities”. Such initiatives will definitely limit the use of hateful remarks by political figures who shape public opinion and trigger hate crimes.