

## Editorial

# Sacrilege of Islamic Sanctities under the Pretext of Freedom of Expression

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Some European countries have been allowing extremist groups to spread hatred against Islamic values and sanctities in the name of freedom of expression. As a matter of fact, these countries are institutionalizing anti-Islamism and Islamophobia in their societies in spite of their beautiful human rights slogans; knowing very well that such acts have nothing to do with the freedom of expression and opinion. This also reflects upon the double standards adopted by these countries with regard to freedom of expression, otherwise why would to subject those scholars who have proved the holocaust to be a myth to imprisonment?

On 21 February 2022, in Sweden, in the new wave of anti-Islamism, the Holy Quran was burned in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm. This action was authorized by the Swedish government and police and they justified it under the guise of “freedom of expression”. This is despite the fact that - even according to its very principle - freedom of expression does not mean insulting and offending other faiths and beliefs, and such actions are tantamount to denying freedom. On the other hand, insulting the Holy Quran in front of the Turkish embassy, as an Islamic country, can be considered a political act.

This outrageous act, which was done by “Rasmus Paludan”, the anti-Islamic leader of the extremist far-right Danish political party, “Stram Kurs”, was obnoxiously justified by the spokesperson of the Swedish police - under the pretext of supporting freedom of expression - by stating that “the Swedish constitution strongly supports freedom of expression and it should be known that the value of freedom of expression is very important.

### The Cases of Insulting Islam in the West

This is not the first time that Islam and its sanctities are subjected to sacrilege in Western countries, especially Sweden. One of the first and most famous actions of such sacrileges was the publication of the book “Satanic Verses” in 1988. The book was written by Salman Rushdie, an English-Indian author, which provoked strong protests from Muslims around the world and he was declared an apostate by Imam Khomeini (RA).

The Dutch journalist and filmmaker, “Theo Van Gogh”, repeatedly insulted Islam and Muslims in his writings, and in 2004, he insulted the concepts of Islam and Muslims in his short drama film, “Submission”, which provoked a worldwide protest by Muslims.

In 2005, the Danish “Kurt Westergaard” published a sacrilegious sketch about the Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH) in the newspaper “Jyllands-Posten”. This offensive work of Westergaard was widely published in the media with the support of the Danish government, which resulted in strong protests by Muslims around the world. In this year, there were also reports of insults to the Holy Quran by American interrogators in Guantanamo Bay. This desecration was confirmed by the inspectors of the International Committee of the Red Cross and was responded to by massive demonstrations of Muslims the world over.

In 2006, a short film called “Fitna” (Sedition) was released by Geert Wilders, a member of the Dutch Parliament and the head of the right-wing “Party for Freedom”. Wilders, who is a supporter of the Zionist regime, insulted the Holy Quran in this film in which Muslims were asked to tear up the verses of the Quran and throw them away.

On September 11, 2010, “Terry Jones”, an American anti-Islamic right-wing activist and the pastor of Dove World Outreach Center, a small nondenominational Christian church, planned to burn about 3,000 copies of the Quran but failed to do so due to a large wave of protests. In the same year, a number of other American anti-Islamists tried to burn the Quran. In 2011, Jones set fire to a copy of the Holy Quran in a Florida church and published images of it. This action can be considered as one of the first acts of this kind in the present era, which provoked a strong reaction from Muslims and even non-Muslims in the world. In 2012, Jones was also involved in the production of a film insulting the Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH).

In 2015, the French magazine “Charlie Hebdo” insulted the Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH) by publishing a cartoon. This action created a worldwide protest by Muslims and some people attacked Charlie Hebdo’s office who were arrested and put on trial by the French government. In the same year, a group of French attacked a prayer hall in the Ajaccio neighborhood and after destroying the prayer hall, set fire to the Qurans there.

In 2019, a group of Norwegians threw two copies of the Quran into the trash bin. Lars Torsen, the leader of the Norwegian extremist and anti-Islam group, burned a copy of the Quran. In another demonstration in 2020, this extremist group trampled a number of pages of the Holy Quran.

Apart from the recent incident, Rasmus Paludan had burned the Holy Quran several other times. He committed this sacrilegious act in 2019 in Denmark and in 2020 in Malmö, Sweden. In 2022, he also burned a copy of the Quran in front of a mosque in Sweden, and in the same year, he once again burned the Quran in Linköping, Sweden, under the protection of Swedish police.



In August 2022, some Germans desecrated the Holy Quran and insulted Islamic sanctities in front of the Islamic Center of Hamburg on the day of Tasu'a. And after insulting the Quran in Sweden, Edwin Wagensveld, the leader of the far-right Pegida extremist group, insulted the Quran on 21 February 2022, in the Netherlands.

While European countries justify insulting Islam under the pretext of "freedom of expression", in these countries no one is allowed to insult their political personalities even in the slightest. For instance, following the protests that took place in the streets of France due to the laws related to Covid-19, a French national who had compared "Macron" to "Hitler" on a placard - without uttering a bad word - was, as reported in the EURO NEWS, was fined 10 thousand Euros.

## The Causes of Anti-Islamic Moves in the West

In addition to political issues, anti-Islamic actions and insults to the Holy Quran are of ideological aspects. According to the "Pew Research Center" of Washington, which provides statistical reports on faiths of the world, the population of Muslims in Europe is increasing every year.

According to this American center, the Muslim population of Europe had increased from 29.6 million people in 1990 to 44.1 million people in 2010. In 2011, "Pew" had also predicted that the number of Muslims in Europe will reach 51.6 million people in 2020, and this number will reach 58.2 million people in 2023.

According to these statistics, while Muslims constituted about 4% of the population of Europe in 1990, this number will reach 8% in 2030, i.e. it will be doubled. This American center also points out that while the Muslim population in Europe has always been smaller than in other regions, such as America and Russia, the Muslim population tends to increase in a region of the world that has less Islamic tendencies.

According to the "Find Easy" website, the population of Muslims in Europe reached about 5.5 million people in 2022, which shows that Pew's prediction was close to reality.

According to a report by "Pew Research Center" in 2016, 8.1% of Sweden's population was Muslims, which is a significant number, considering the average of the European region, and ranks first among the European countries.

"Pew" has also predicted that the Muslim population of Swedish origin will reach 11.2% in 2050, and by taking into consideration Muslim immigrants, it will reach 30.6%, which would be first and second in the European region in both cases. The Pew Research Center has also considered the growth of the Muslim population of Sweden to more than double between 2010 and 2030.

According to these statistics and predictions close to reality, the Muslim population in Europe is growing rapidly, and among European countries, Sweden and France are at the top. Based on this fact, it can be said that the increase in anti-Islamic measures with the support of European governments and insulting the Islamic sanctities are planned and enacted with the aim of countering the rapid spread of Islam.

Of course, experience has shown that these measures not only fail to decrease the inclination toward Islam but also make people more inclined to this religion than before. In a report entitled "Increasing the purchase of the Quran in France", the French magazine "Figaro" has announced that following the number of sacrilegious measures against Islam and its sanctities, the sale of the Quran translated into French has increased significantly in the last decade.

The Muslims of the world, thus, expect the Swedish government to prevent the repetition of such anti-Islamism acts and not let those hurting the feelings of Muslims go unpunished. All Muslims in the world will be more united and they will adhere to the Holy Quran by following the teachings of Islam. Almighty Allah has assured that Quran is the book, which will remain strong and everlasting and the efforts of the enemies of the word of Allah will fail. In the words of the Holy Quran: "They desire to put out the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah will perfect His light though the faithless should be averse." (61: 8)