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**OIC MEDIA STRATEGY IN COUNTERING ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ITS  
IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS**

**11<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OF INFORMATION MINISTERS**

**(SESSION OF THE NEW MEDIA TO COUNTER TERRORISM AND  
ISLAMOPHOBIA)**

**JEDDAH, KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA  
21 DECEMBER 2016**

## **OIC Media Strategy in Countering Islamophobia and its Implementation Mechanisms**

The 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Conference of Information Ministers held in Jeddah,  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 21 December 2016;

Concerned at the rising intolerance against Islam and Muslims in the West and in many areas in the world, both in the east and the west, exacerbated to a large extent by widespread reporting, writings, articles, interviews, commentaries, editorials, op-eds in some western print and visual media, including social media that has resulted in negative stereotyping and racial discrimination and victimization directed against Muslims and distortion of the Islamic faith, which is based on the core values of peace tolerance, moderations and peaceful co-habitation with all other religions and beliefs. Noting that the above state of affairs poses a grave threat to global peace and security and endangers communal harmony, hindering the growth of a culture of mutual understanding and tolerance among diverse communities;

Taking into consideration the emergence of Islamophobia<sup>1</sup> as a “...contemporary form of racism and xenophobia motivated by unfounded fear, mistrust and hatred of Muslims and Islam... it manifested through intolerance, discrimination, hostility and adverse public discourse. Differentiating from classical racism and xenophobia, Islamophobia is mainly based on stigmatization of a religion and its followers. As such, Islamophobia is an affront to the human rights and dignity of Muslims”;

With reference to paragraph 180 of the Final Communiqué adopted by the 11<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit held in Dakar in 2008 which recognized “...the need to further institutionalize cooperation among Member States to effectively combat Islamophobia, [and] requested for the preparation of a draft comprehensive strategy to combat Islamophobia”;

Noting that paragraph 17 of the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Foreign Minister’s Resolution No. 34/ 38-POL requested “the Secretary General to engage constructively with all stakeholders and influential public opinion makers, particularly in the West, with a view to combating Islamophobia by evolving a comprehensive strategy taking into account the removal of social and economic imbalances in the interest of creating an international environment conducive to interfaith and inter-civilizational harmony”;

Referring to paragraph 6 of Rabat Declaration of 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Conference of Information Ministers which considered that “...efforts to restore the image of Islam in foreign media outlets, display its lofty values, its rich cultural heritage and ancestral civilization, and highlight its contribution in the long course of human history and its creative achievements, can only be fruitful by a wise media interaction with the outer world through adequate message and appropriate communication mechanisms”;

Noting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has consistently urged for debate with and within the western media to show responsibility in combating prejudice against Islam and

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<sup>1</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Report of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory available online in:  
[http://www.oic-oci.org/uploads/file/Islamphobia/2011/en/islamphobia\\_rep\\_May\\_2010\\_to\\_April\\_2011\\_en.pdf](http://www.oic-oci.org/uploads/file/Islamphobia/2011/en/islamphobia_rep_May_2010_to_April_2011_en.pdf)

Muslim communities with a view to developing campaigns to foster respect for cultural and religious pluralism and diversity, while raising awareness of the positive contributions of Muslims, in order to promote tolerance and understanding;

Taking note of the work of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory and its annual reports;

Recalling the establishment of the Contact Group on Muslims in Europe, which was formed during the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan;

And taking into consideration the recommendations and proposals made at the workshop on “Media Misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims” held in Brussels on 15-16 February 2012, by several experts representing Muslim communities in Europe and United States; the Conference took note of the above in its deliberations and decided to adopt the Strategy as well as recommendations of the experts meeting of OIC member states and relevant OIC institutions held on 25 October 2016 to review the OIC Media Strategy in Countering Islamophobia and its Implementation Mechanisms based on a conceptual paper on this issue prepared by the Information Department in the General Secretariat, the Conference took note of the above in its proceedings and decided to adopt the following Strategy:

#### **I. Short Term:**

1. To raise funds for media campaigns to prevent and counter intolerance against Islam and discrimination against Muslims. The results of the executed campaigns should continuously be measured in accordance with responses that would generate news, and the social media may be the right tool to quantify/qualify the success of the said campaigns. In this regard, OIC Member States are urged to sustain political and resource commitment for initiating, implementing and following-up these media campaigns.
2. To increase the interaction with media outlets and professionals, while encouraging accurate and factual/portrayal of Islam. Emphasis should be directed at avoidance of any link or association of Islam with terrorism or the use of Islamophobic rhetoric in the war on terror, such as labeling criminal terrorists as “Islamic” fascists, “Islamic” extremists.
3. To enhance the presence of Muslims on the internet and benefit from the experiences of successful Islamic institutions in this regard, as the success of Islamophobes in the West is the failure of Muslims online. However, extra care should be considered while investing on this enhancement, as there is a need to be aware of unintended consequences of the increased presence of Muslims on the internet. In addition, there is a need to identify and support non-Muslim bloggers and researchers from outside the mainstream media positively disposed towards Islam and Muslims.
4. To create, in cooperation with an experts committee consisting of scholars, legal experts, psychologists, sociologists and communication experts, powerful, appealing and strong content which is professionally and objectively prepared and unrelated to Islam. Muslims should be able to write or produce stories with media impact, however, having nothing to do with Islam.

5. To develop Muslim's own narrative on daily issues. There should be stories giving the Islamic perspective on daily issues, such as, environment, climate change, social justice, development, poverty, etc.
6. To encourage media outlets and professionals to report stories related to discrimination against Muslims from the victims' perspective. Such reporting, giving priority to grassroots' stories, may take into consideration the abuse of Muslims' human and basic rights, such as, xenophobic and discriminatory practices vis-à-vis Muslims in employment, housing, access to services, and other aspects of social life.
7. To engage with professional survey researchers who have sufficient good Islamic awareness. This engagement may be helpful in promoting media content from survey results that would support the media campaign.
8. To address the "OIC-phobia" a new ramification of Islamophobia, related to OIC efforts in countering this malaise. In this regard, there is a need for a new public relations restructuring in the West with a view to disseminating a modern and moderate image of the OIC.
9. To devise a mechanism within the OIC Information Department for distributing every morning, news reviews on Islam and Muslims to identified audience in the west.
10. To support publishing of books, memoirs, fictional materials, etc, by Muslims and non-Muslims. Preference may be given to presenting Islam as a religion with values and principles applicable on sciences and other issues of concern to the West: human rights, democracy and good governance.

## **II. Medium Term:**

1. To implement media literacy programs in schools, particularly at the secondary level, to help develop a discerning and critical approach to news coverage by media consumers. The OIC Member States should devise initiatives to promote media awareness and develop Internet literacy to combat misperceptions, prejudices and hate speech.
2. To invite different scholars, academics and media professionals to form a pool of experts to be visible in the media. This group should not be necessarily composed of Muslims. It is also preferable, in order to secure diversity, that messages given on behalf of the OIC be inclusive of other Abrahamic religions, and, even beyond.
3. To cultivate relationships with media professionals and outlets through informal gatherings. These events may be OIC sponsored annual dinners that would be attended by journalists writing in Western media with the objective of building confidence between them and the OIC, as well as for them to be requested to pay unbiased attention to the cultural, intellectual and civilizational achievements of Islam and Muslims.

4. To use success stories in the Muslim world as a means to show that the interests of Muslims are similar to the rest of the world when it comes to democracy, good governance and human rights.
5. To develop a rapid media response project for Muslims to react to serious manifestations and incidents of Islamophobia. This mechanism may also be responsible in disseminating articles on importance of Islamic occasions, including Ramadan and Hajj when appropriate.
6. To promote, through media coverage, Muslim students' activities in western countries' campuses. The Islamic Awareness Week, being held annually in several US and UK campuses, may be one of those events to be highly promoted, as the diversity of themes would help displaying the real image of Muslims therein. In addition, there is a need to support websites run by students to counter Islamophobia.
7. To invite Muslim celebrities, and non-Muslims celebrities who are sympathetic to Islam and its followers, to be the face of media campaigns. These campaigns should be well designed providing a true picture about the different aspects of Islam and dispel any misconceptions and misinformation. In this regard, the heads of states and governments should play an important role accordingly.
8. To include other OIC institutions. Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), Research Center For Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYFDC), International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), International Islamic News Agency (IINA), Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF) or Islamic Union of Muslim Scouts (IUMS) may be among those initiating media campaigns on their own targeting their areas of activities.
9. To launch awards for excellence in unbiased journalism, reporting, photographing and publishing. The prize may be awarded to articles, documentaries, series, photographic exhibition, and books on Islam and its followers.
10. To establish academic fellowships at communication faculties of major world universities to study this phenomenon and means to combat it.

### **III. Long Term:**

1. To call media professionals to develop, articulate and implement voluntary codes of conduct to counter Islamophobia. The OIC and its Member States should be vocal in calling media professionals to use the power they have with responsibly through accurate reporting.
2. To assess successful media campaigns with a view to understanding the strong factors to be replicated and review the unsuccessful ones for avoiding the weak contents and procedures.
3. To engage with western governments in creating awareness against the dangers of Islamophobia by addressing the responsibility of media on the issue.

4. To encourage scholarship programs for westerners to study in the Muslim world and disseminate this information throughout media outlets. The scholarships should focus on Islamic education, and it is advisable that the same subject is funded in western universities.
5. To encourage reporter-exchange programs between the Muslim world and the West.
6. To encourage training programs to help Muslim civil societies in the West to understand journalistic critical international issues – particularly in those fields where politics and religion intersect – and enhance their capacity to inform the public accurately and in a balanced way.
7. To take into consideration the following proposals on media highlighted in the High Level Group Report on Alliance of Civilizations<sup>2</sup>:
  - A collaborative and reciprocal initiative for monitoring media coverage of Islamic-western relations should be started to provide a comprehensive review of media outlets and to reward efforts that aim to improve coverage of relations between Muslim and western societies. Critical reciprocal reviews and awards presented by a broadly representative coalition of monitoring agencies – such as those run by the European Union, the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation and select civil society organizations - would generate a higher public profile and greater legitimacy than individual efforts that focus on only one community's media.
  - Developing training programs for foreign journalists for capacity-building on mechanisms to deal with the phenomenon of hatred and defamation of the Islamic religion.
  - Preparing a guide for world media on most important issues and terms which are usually misunderstood. The experience of *Dar Al-Iftaa Al Masriyah* in Egypt could be beneficial in this regard.

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<sup>2</sup> The document was adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in November 2006 and is available online in: [http://www.unaoc.org/repository/HLG\\_Report.pdf](http://www.unaoc.org/repository/HLG_Report.pdf)

## **Mechanisms to Implement the OIC Media Strategy in Countering Islamophobia**

### **1- Project Background**

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which represents the Muslim world, has frequently expressed its true worries about the rising tide of Islamophobia across North America and Europe. In fact, the OIC has called since 2005 for taking concrete measures to deal with the phenomena of Islamophobia in different fields, including in the field of foreign media. Several Summits and Ministerial Resolutions were adopted since then.

Underscoring the urgent necessity of developing a proactive short and long-term media and public relations campaigns to correct the image of Islam and Muslims in the West, the Information Department at the General Secretariat of the OIC, with assistance from prestigious public relations companies such as UNITAS Communications which is based in London, UK and Golden Cap based in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, developed a comprehensive mechanisms directed at dealing with the symptoms and the root causes of misunderstanding of Islam that exist across many parts of the western world.

This campaign proposes that the OIC plays a leading role in fostering effective anti-Islamophobia initiatives across the western world and achieve through a range of interlinked actions designed to accomplish both short-term and long term-targets. These include seeding a proactive anti-Islamophobia grassroots media network in the United States and specific European countries, overseen by OIC – appointed regional public relations offices (PR); researching and identifying the key misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, and refuting these through a comprehensive online resource supported with social media; building alliances with scholarly, journalistic and media communities, and civil societies.

In addition, the project would seek to develop an “Ambassadors’ Programme” or “OIC Friends Program” to recruit local public figures and celebrities to support the initiative; organize key engagements between western delegates and figures from the Muslim world; create a fund to support local anti-Islamophobia initiatives; media monitoring and high impact media positioning to place commentary and news stories in key western publications; arranging a high profile advertising campaign to leverage this work through mass market publicity, and developing broadcast quality documentaries to explore how Islamophobia has affected Muslim communities and western societies alike.

### **2- Project Objectives**

- Identify key misconceptions and stereotypes concerning Islam and Muslims that require urgent refutation.
- Develop an ongoing campaign to tackle Islamophobic discourse in the US, UK, and European media.
- Develop partnership with western academic and civil society institutions to counter Islamophobic discourses.

- Forge better working relations between the OIC and non-political western institutions to facilitate mutual understanding between Muslim communities and others.
- Foster a network of high profile western public figures supporting efforts to combat Islamophobia in politics, journalism and civil society.

### **3- Project Actions**

- Establishment of a Consultative Council to be comprised of voluntary Member States, the OIC relevant institutions and the General Secretariat along with representatives of press and media institutions, to assume the follow-up of the implementation of the OIC Media Strategy and its implementation Mechanisms against Islamophobia and to submit periodical reports thereon.
- The Member States and the OIC subsidiary organs should designate focal points in their Information Ministries or in their institutional structures and Information Departments to facilitate contact and coordination regarding the strategy and its implementation mechanisms.
- Benefiting from modern information technologies, including social media, in view of their efficiency and speed in conveying messages and information, all within the framework of the mechanisms for the Strategy's implementation to counter Islamophobia.
- Inviting the Member States' ambassadorial groups to consult and coordinate among themselves on ways to counter the discourse of hatred and extremism and the spread of Islamophobia in the West.
- Involve civil society and Muslim academia and youth in the West in the elaboration of plans and programs to counter Islamophobia.
- Launching a Web Portal to offer content and programs provided by the Member States and OIC institutions on their efforts and activities in countering Islamophobia, with a view to ensure wider benefit among the Member States, OIC institutions, researchers and interested parties.
- Inviting relevant institutions to consider having the scientific researches on Islamophobia translated into the OIC official languages for posting in the above-mentioned Web Portal.
- Benefiting of the help of the OIC satellite channel, once it has been launched, in countering Islamophobia.

### **4- Responsibilities of the Consultative Council**

- To meet twice every year to assess implementation of the OIC Media Strategy and its Implementation Mechanisms.
- To devise a media plan and public relations and to determine the implementing parties which can be public relations companies, governments or civil society institutions.
- To choose the public relations companies which will implement the OIC Media Strategy and follow up on their performance.



- To launch a pioneering project (pilot project) which can be chosen from the proposed projects in the Strategy and to explore ways to finance it in consultation with the Member States and the institutions willing to provide funding for the project.
- To provide regular media monitoring of Islamophobic media content for each country. The OIC Islamophobia Observatory will also send out regular updates to the members of the Consultative Council.
- Identify Ambassadors or OIC Friends who are vocal against Islamophobia and who can cooperate with.
- To propose ways of developing required resources to implement the OIC Media Strategy and its Implementation Mechanisms and support efforts in this regard.

#### **5- Anti-Islamophobia Ambassadors or OIC Friends Network**

- Identify and recruit leaders, opinion-formers and public figures in western politics, media and the art for the anti-Islamophobia "ambassadors" network.
- Apply "ambassadors" network to other aspects of internal OIC anti-Islamophobia work.
- Engage with specific projects, events, and other publicity generating activities elsewhere that are suitable for ambassadors.

#### **6- Anti-Islamophobia Independent Projects Fund**

- Determine scope and potential recipients for anti-Islamophobia fund.
- Create application materials, determine application process, and solicit projects.
- Determine methodology for assessing projects and selecting recipients.
- Disburse grants on the basis of assessments and determine criteria for delivery.
- Institute review / monitoring and evaluative mechanism of the process of media campaign and apply to recipients to ensure delivery of results within deadline.

#### **7- Examples of Mass Media Campaigns and public relations**

- A two-week television campaign and a two-week advertising campaign targeting public transport (bus and metro), famous newspapers and magazines for each country two times in one year.
- Produce and/or commission and television and transport media campaigns.
- Promote media campaigns through social media, ambassadors, and through secondary or internal networks.
- Reporters Exchange program (ten reporters and journalists per year)
- Arranging three talk shows per year in key TV channels in US and Europe about Islam, with the participation of selected members from the Muslim countries.
- Holding ten lectures per year in each country (universities, unions and suggested important centers) about Islamic role in building cultures and connect between religions.

- Visits to schools and universities and educational search by specialist team from our side.
- Arranging 100 Guest programs per year to be organized through the OIC with the Cooperation of its Member Countries to host a 100 – western activist from various fields in selected Muslim countries where they can interact with intellectuals, politicians, media figures, and religious scholars.

#### **8- Documentary Productions**

- Produce a broadcast quality one-hour documentary examining the growth of Islamophobia in the West and its impact on Muslims around the world and interfaith relations.
- Facilitate broadcast on mainstream networks such as Britain's BBC and Channel 4 or America's PBS.
- Promote documentary through social media, conventional advertising, ambassadors, and through secondary or internal networks.

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