

Tackling Islamophobia Across The OSCE States

The Forum Against Islamophobia & Racism

In light of the increasing Islamophobia across OSCE states, we urge the OSCE states to extend their national initiatives to give emphasize on tackling this growing phenomena and to put into action their commitments at the Maastricht, Sofia and Ljubljana Councils; as Muslims are increasingly being perceived as the 'other' rather than an inclusive element of society in many of the OSCE states.

Much of Islamophobia is based on inaccurate, ill-formed or misunderstood concepts of Islam and/or Muslims and in order to be able to best tackle this form of hate crime it makes sense to tackle its root causes of: misunderstandings, inaccuracies and incorrect stereotypes and this is best done through educational initiatives and raising public awareness.

Education As a Long-Term Solution To Tackle Islamophobia

Islamophobia is becoming an increasingly common phenomena in the west and has dangerously crept into everyday discourse, public opinion and institutions.

In the UK for example, we have noticed an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments by teachers in teaching website discussion boards, much of which is based on inaccurate facts. This in itself is not an offence, but what we find worrying is that such perceived attitudes based on inaccuracies and misconceptions are passed onto impressionable children, a simple solution would be to have available for teachers an educational resource with accurate information on Muslims and/or Islam to prevent such dangerous misconceptions being formed and then more worryingly from being passed onto children in classrooms where early prejudices and biases can lead to hate-motivated crimes.

The UK Ambassador to the OSCE earlier today mentioned the need for educational initiatives to combat intolerance & discrimination and we agree with him this is a very important need; due to an increase in Islamophobia we feel there is a in particular need for educational material tackling Islamophobia and misconceptions about Muslims. We are currently working on such an initiative to tackle Islamophobia in UK schools and have received wide interest by schools and colleges in the UK. We recommend the OSCE to follow up on the issue of Islamophobia through education and we would be more than willing to work with the OSCE on this.

In the UK, as in many of the member states, Muslims are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. They have the lowest education and employment levels

and we call for the OSCE states to address this issue when discussing integration.

Influence of Media on Young People

Anti-Muslim stereotypes are found commonly in popular tv series, films and popular fiction. These images and misrepresentations of Muslims have a direct impact on public perceptions and on the general climate of public tolerance and such material can lead to increased intolerance and divisions and the increasing perception of Muslims as the 'other' especially amongst young people.

Recommendations

We commend the OSCE and member states in leading on the issues of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, and on the commitments set up under the various council meetings. However we strongly recommend the OSCE to follow up on the following issues in relation to Islamophobia:

- Policy Discourse
- Islamophobia and Education
- Islamophobia in the Media
- That Member States Intensify Dialogue with Muslim Communities in their Respective States.