

Don't be silenced by extremists

A plea from 11 Canadian Muslim academics and activists:

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A curtain of fear has descended on the intelligentsia of the West, including Canada. The fear of being misunderstood as Islamophobic has sealed their lips, dried their pens and locked their keyboards.

With hundreds dead around the world in the aftermath of the now infamous Danish cartoons, Canada's writers, politicians and media have imposed a frightening censorship on themselves, refusing to speak their minds, thus ensuring that the only voices being heard are that of the Muslim extremists and the racist right.

Emboldened by the free rein they have received, Canada's Muslim extremists and their supporters flexed their muscles at Queen's Park last week, with speakers promising to drown the Danish people "in their own blood".

A protestor carried the sign "Kurt Westgaard - countdown to justice has begun ... it's just a matter of time."

Elsewhere, in Pakistan, a Muslim woman was pictured carrying a sign, "God Bless Hitler," and a Muslim cleric placed a \$1 million reward for the murder of a Danish cartoonist. Embassies were burned, churches ruined and hundreds died in different Muslim countries.

Undoubtedly, Muslims were angered by the insulting cartoons. But the overblown reaction was partly due to their pent-up frustrations, and partly the result of orchestrated mischief by certain Islamist leaders.

Islamic societies, run by variances of autocratic regimes, are in turmoil. Ravaged by rampant corruption, a widening gap between rich and poor, and suppression of dissent, the people in these societies have lost hope in their own futures.

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the unending occupation of the Palestinian territories and the quagmire of the Kashmiri dispute, have led many Muslims and non-religious peoples of Islamic origin, to view the West as the source of their countries' problems.

The growing popularity of the extremists in Muslim societies, the electoral success of the likes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran, Shia radicals in Iraq, and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, rather than signifying the growing religiosity of the peoples of the Middle East, reflect political despair in the region.

In the West, people of Muslim origin, be they religious or secular, are facing growing racism, Islamophobia and discrimination reflected in immigration policies and anti-terrorist legislation.

The cartoon crisis was the straw that broke the camel's back.

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