



**A Spectrum of Light in the  
Middle East**

November - December, 2004

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### **About The Prism Group**

The Prism Group focuses on several key issues and is pleased to see that its efforts are causing "spectrums of awareness" in many places. Our hope has always been to spread light and so in our [previous newsletter](#), we focused on the many good things that are happening, partnerships and joint efforts by small groups in many countries, medical advancements, and more.

This month's newsletter breaks with our normal focus on Middle Eastern events to highlight the current wave of religious intolerance throughout Europe, an intolerance sparking hate crimes that appear to threaten the very fabric of Western society. Although such crimes have been committed on European soil, they are largely motivated by trends whose source lies in the Middle East.

As we issue this newsletter, we can only hope that in the end, peace-loving people from all nations and all religions will choose light instead of darkness, peace instead of war, and tolerance instead of ethnic, racial, or religious differences.

### **When Free Speech Proves Fatal: Democracy under Fire**

On November 2, Theo van Gogh, a controversial champion of free speech, was murdered. He was slain two months after his film 'Submission' was shown on national TV in Holland. The film, whose script was written by Somali-born Dutch politician Ayan Hirsi Ali, centres around Muslim women. Beaten, raped, then forced into marriage, these women are shown in transparent gowns; their bare skin inscribed with verses from the Koran that detail the permitted physical punishments for women who "misbehave".

Subsequent to Submission's screening, both van Gogh and Ali received death threats from Islamic groups. Ali is currently under police protection, as is Dutch MP Geert Wilders, who holds outspoken opinions about what should be done with radical Islam and radical Islamic persons in the Netherlands.

Race relations in historically tolerant Holland are suffering; a number of racially/religiously motivated crimes have been committed including the bombing of an Islamic school and retaliatory arson attacks against mosques and churches.

According to Justice minister Piet Hein Donner: "If this is what has happened to this man, who did nothing but express his opinion, then one can no longer live decently in this land."

Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende told the Dutch Parliament that extremism was undermining democracy.

"It is the joint task of Muslims and non-Muslims to warn young people against radicalisation," he said, according to the Associated Press news agency.

The Dutch Immigration Minister, Rita Verdonk, warns that EU countries are at risk, due to increasing radicalism among young Muslims. She states that member states must act immediately to better assimilate and integrate foreigners. The minister, whose nation currently holds the EU presidency, says that countries must ensure that immigrants learn the local language and accept Western values, but added that the EU also needed to develop, in her words, a common vision of integration.

Tension in Europe has risen markedly. In another instance, this time in Belgium, Senator Mimount Bousakla of Moroccan origin is reportedly under round-the-clock police protection and has gone into hiding. She received threatening telephone calls following her appearance at the Council of Europe on forced and child marriage.

In this context, the views of Helmut Schmidt, the former German chancellor and embodiment of European pluralistic socialism since World War Two, are controversial but interesting. He summed up the dilemmas in an [article](#) earlier this year.

"It needed the Age of Enlightenment 250 years ago, to conceive of equal rights for any human being under a rule of law and democracy. These concepts evolved step-by-step in England, America, Holland, France and elsewhere — and quite a bit later in my own country.

Yet, they did not develop in Arab regions, the Middle East, in Iran, Indonesia, India or China. Enlightenment has not as yet reached most Muslim people. And it particularly has not reached the Islamic masses, altogether about one-fifth of the global population.

I often wonder about our Western attempts to proselyte the Muslim masses into democrats. They will easily accept television, automobiles, Coca Cola — and Western technologies that we export to them.

But to convert them into democrats will take generations — and it will take understanding and economic aid as well as tolerance.

I believe it would already be an enormous success if we could bring all their states and governments to acknowledge and obey the rule of international law — and to obey the Charter of the United Nations.

Abdel Rahman al-Rashed, the general manager of Al- Arabiya news channel, recently published the [following](#) in the pan-Arabic newspaper Al-Sharq Al-Awsat

'It is a certain fact that not all Muslims are terrorists, but it is equally certain, and exceptionally painful, that almost all terrorists are Muslims. The hostage-takers of children in Beslan, North Ossetia, were Muslims. The other hostage-takers and subsequent murderers of the Nepalese chefs and workers in Iraq were also Muslims. Those involved in rape and murder in Darfur, Sudan, are Muslims, with other Muslims chosen to be their victims...Bin Laden is a Muslim. The majority of

those who manned the suicide bombings against buses, vehicles, schools, houses and buildings, all over the world, were Muslim.

... An innocent and benevolent religion, whose verses prohibit the felling of trees in the absence of urgent necessity, that calls murder the most heinous of crimes, that says explicitly that if you kill one person you have killed humanity as a whole, has been turned into a global message of hate and a universal war cry...

We cannot tolerate in our midst those who abduct journalists, murder civilians, explode buses; we cannot accept them as related to us, whatever the sufferings they claim to justify their criminal deeds. These are the people who have smeared Islam and stained its image....

We cannot clear our names unless we own up to the shameful fact that terrorism has become an Islamic enterprise; an almost exclusive monopoly, implemented by Muslim men and women...We cannot redeem our extremist youths, who commit all these heinous crimes, without confronting the Sheikhs who thought it ennobling to re-invent themselves as revolutionary ideologues, sending other people's sons and daughters to certain death, while sending their own children to European and American schools and colleges.

### **In the Arab World: Uniting against Extremists**

Over 2,500 Muslim intellectuals are signatories to a petition to the United Nations requesting an international treaty to ban the use of religion for incitement to violence. The petition, addressed to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and the Security Council, calls on the UN to set up a tribunal for "the theologians of terror", and to prevent its member states from broadcasting the "mad musings of the theologians of terror."

Among those collecting signatures are Shakir Al-Nablusi, a Jordanian writer, Jawad Hashem, a former Iraqi minister of planning, and Alafif Al-Akdhar, a leading Tunisian writer and academic.

"There are individuals in the Muslim world who pose as clerics and issue death sentences against those they disagree with," said Al-Nablusi. "These individuals give Islam a bad name and foster hatred among civilizations."

The petition describes those who use religion for inciting violence as "the sheikhs of death". Among those mentioned is Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian cleric accused of "providing a religious cover for terrorism."

Al- Qaradawi has issued fatwas that:

- Allow the killing of Israeli pregnant women and their 'fetuses' on the grounds that the babies would grow up to join the Israeli Army.
- State that killing "all Americans, civilian or military" in Iraq was allowed.

Other "sheikhs of death", Ali bin Khudhair Al-Khudhair and Safar Al-Hawali from Saudi Arabia have described the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks against the United States as "retaliations", and thus justified under Islamic law.

Another fatwa issued by the Saudi Sheikh Ali Bin Khodair Al-Khodhari approves Al-Qa'ida's 9/11 terrorist attacks:

'It is astonishing to mourn the [American] victims as being innocents. Those victims may be classified as infidel Americans which do not deserve being mourned, because each American, as to his relation to

American government, is a warrior, or supporter, in money or opinion. It is legitimate to kill all of them as combatant; or non-combatant, such as the old, the blind, or non-Muslims'

"We cannot let such dangerous nonsense to pass as Islam," Al-Nablusi says.

Excerpts from the original English translation of the petition may be found at [http://www.memri.org/bin/opener\\_latest.cgi?ID=SD81204#\\_edn1](http://www.memri.org/bin/opener_latest.cgi?ID=SD81204#_edn1)

## **Healing the Wounded**

As catastrophic as the attack or the injury, the wounded often experience another level of suffering after an attack. Months of rehabilitation, treatments, and operations follow until the days and weeks turn into an endless series of doctors and hospitals. Few can argue that Israel has experienced an unprecedented number of attacks in the last several years. She has become expert in treating not only the physical wounds, but also the psychological scars, which often last beyond the wounds that can be seen.

On a bright note, eighteen children who were injured and held hostage during the Beslan siege in Russia last September were sent on a 3-week visit to Israel.

After the Beslan attack occurred, Ashkelon Mayor Roni Mahatzari sent a letter of condolence to his fellow mayor in Beslan. He then invited the children and their parents to visit Israel.

"As a nation that has so much experience in dealing with terrorism, I believe we have something to offer countries such as Russia regarding the treatment of children who are victims of terror," Mahatzari says. "We have so much experience in dealing with terror and trauma, so we want to offer our help to the children to enable them to speed their recovery."

The children began their trip at Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon with medical checkups and psychological evaluations. The program also included art and music therapy, to help them communicate their experiences, since it is difficult for them to verbalize about what happened.

The Israeli organizers hope that the medical and psychological care that the children will undergo will have a long-lasting impact on aiding their overall recovery.

## **The Prism Group Website:**

Please visit our site and help direct others to the existing fact sheets. If you have ideas for fact sheets that you believe we should investigate and compile, please write to us at: [info@theprismgroup.org](mailto:info@theprismgroup.org).

Our web site is [www.theprismgroup.org](http://www.theprismgroup.org).

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