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Report-Public Talk

Western-Muslim Tensions Key Challenges

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Pictures of the Event





Western-Muslim Tensions: Key Challenges

The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad organised a Public Talk “*Western-Muslim Tensions: Key Challenges*” on April 14, 2016. The guest speaker at the occasion was Mr. Mowahid Hussain Shah, an eminent policy analyst, author and attorney-at-law. Welcoming Mr. Mowahid Hussain Shah, the Director General ISSI, Ambassador Masood Khan, highlighted the importance of the subject, and the challenges facing the relations between Muslims and the Western world.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Mowahid Ali Shah said that the term “terrorism” dominates the tensions between the West and the Muslims. In recent times, there have been constant attacks on Islam, Islamic culture, Islamic luminaries, ethos, philosophy and concepts. He lamented the fact that the language of terror has become more acceptable and more profitable. Referring to the situation in Palestine and Kashmir, he said that more attention is given to individual or group terrorism, but State terrorism escapes the attention of people. Occupation of Kashmir and Palestine are the worst kind of terrorism, but when terrorism is talked about, Kashmiris and Palestinians are portrayed as terrorists.

Muslims are one of the largest communities on earth, yet they are excluded. While explaining the term “Judeo-Christian heritage” which is commonly used in Europe lately, Mr. Mowahid said that it is a term of exclusion as it seeks to exclude and marginalise the Muslim community.

Similarly, discussions on nuclear issues are also one-sided as Israel’s nuclear programme is kept out of any discussions on the subject. This situation encourages home-grown terrorism in Western countries. He also highlighted the problems of the Muslim world which lacks representation and impressive presentation to come out with counter narratives in this battle of ideas. He said that the Muslim elites are busy in portraying themselves as “enlightened”. He recalled that the cartoon issue in Denmark was totally uncalled for. When the Ambassadors from the Muslim world sought a meeting with the Danish Prime Minister, their request was turned down. The Danish Prime Minister later became secretary-general of NATO and no one objected to it. He emphasised that think tanks in general, and ISSI in particular, should play an active role to address this serious issue.

The presentation was followed by a vibrant question and answer session. People from a broad spectrum of society, civil servants, diplomats, lawyers and students raised a number of questions on the current discourse on terrorism in the Western world and how Muslims should work together to safeguard their interest.

A question was raised regarding the possible role of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which highlighted terrorism as one of the challenges.

Mr. Mowahid Shah said that OIC was formed by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. Initially, it worked mostly for the cause of Palestine. However, with the passage of time, OIC has now become part of the problem instead of a problem solver.

A guest from the audience opined that there is a lack of education and democracy in the Muslim world which is fully exploited by the West. Muslims need to address their own weaknesses before pointing fingers towards others.

Mr. Mowahid replied that every society has its own weaknesses. In India, he said, there is a problem of untouchables which has made the lives of Dalits miserable. The renowned Dalit leader Dr. Ambedkar in the later part of his life denounced Hinduism and converted to Buddhism. In the Muslim world, the problem is of avarice.

Another guest inquired whether there is anyone who could lead the Muslim Ummah out of its problems or the Muslims would still find themselves in the similar situation even after 50 years?

Mr. Mowahid said that at the moment there is no collective unity in the Muslim world, but, at the same time it is recognised that the entire Ummah is facing similar problems.

Another guest said that the Muslim world does not invest to make itself economically strong. "West" is a broad term as there is Europe, US, Canada, Russia and China. There is a significant section of Muslim minority in China and Russia, and the Muslim community is continuously growing in Europe. Can these Muslim communities be reached out to come forward for help?

Mr. Mowahid said that people will have to help themselves. Today, there are around ten million Muslims living in the US, but they live in constant insecurity and fear. This situation does not offer any help to the Muslims of the world.

Another guest said that terrorism takes place when incidents like 9/11 or Paris attacks happen. Therefore, Muslims cannot blame the West.

Mr. Mowahid replied that history is written by victors and Muslims are themselves responsible for their difficult situation. Muslims have resigned to their fate.

To a question that what advice he would give to the youth, Mr. Mowahid said that Muslim youth should have command on English language so that they can play an effective role at the global stage. He further advised that Muslim youth should have faith and not lose hope as after every long night, there is a dawn.

Speaking at the occasion, Chairman Board of Governor ISSI, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood said that terrorism is a buzz word and all the blame is placed on Muslims and Islam. Muslims are tarnished as terrorist who commit atrocities, but in reality, it is the Muslim community which is the victim. Muslims are marginalised, excluded and discriminated around the world. However, he also emphasised that Muslims need to do some introspection instead of putting the entire blame on the West. Poverty, bad governance, illiteracy and sectarianism are issues to be addressed. The culture of connivance is even more alarming as sometimes Muslims try to justify a wrong done by them. He emphasised the lack of unity within the Muslim World, as initially it was demanded that Muslims should have representation in the United Nations Security Council but soon that demand turned into an "Arab representation".

Concluding the event, Director General ISSI, Ambassador Masood Khan said that “Clash of Civilisations” will have consequences not only for the Muslim world but also for the West. There are forces of darkness in the West as well as the Muslim world, but there are also forces of enlightenment both in the West and the Muslim world and there is a need to have an interface between these forces of enlightenment through a dialogue between civilizations. For its part, the Muslim world should invest in knowledge and innovation, as well as consolidate the power it has already attained and build on it. He emphasised that Muslims should get rid of the feeling of victimhood and helplessness and take their destiny into their own hands. While referring to the reforms in the United Nations Security Council, Ambassador Masood said that OIC has already adopted a resolution that Muslims should have a permanent representation in the Security Council. He, at the same time cautioned that Muslims should be careful while dealing with this issue as bringing religious dimension in the UN reform process would make Israel and India also qualify on the similar grounds. He thanked the speaker for his thought provoking presentation as well the audience for their active participation.