

## **Joint declaration on the freedom of religion and the right to conversion (2007)**

### **Introduction**

*Since 1993 important processes of interfaith dialogue have taken place between the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. In this dialogue work, freedom of religion is a core issue.*

*This ongoing dialogue is based on the fundamental values of mutual respect and trust. Its purpose is to prevent conflicts and to create space for understanding between Muslims and Christians as they relate to each other and to Norwegian society in general. A particular task has been to challenge prejudices and stereotypes in their conceptions of each other and to combat islamophobia and discrimination of the Muslim minority in Norway.*

*In Norway there are few conversions from Christianity to Islam or vice versa. Nevertheless the two bodies underline that there should be no doubt that freedom of religion, with the right to conversion, is a fully acknowledged principle, reflected in attitudes and accepted in practice, both by the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations.*

### **Joint Declaration**

The Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations jointly declare that everyone is free to adopt the religious faith of their choice. We denounce, and are committed to counteracting all violence, discrimination and harassment inflicted in reaction to a person's conversion, or desire to convert, from one religion to another, be it in Norway or abroad.

We interpret our religious traditions such that everyone has the right to freely choose their religious belief and faith community, and to practice their religion publicly as well as privately.

Missionary activity and information to others about our faith must be done according to ethically accepted standards, that is, without the use of any form of force or manipulation. If freedom of religion is to be upheld, all conversion must happen freely.

As religious communities we experience joy within our respective contexts whenever a person wishes to share our faith and join our religious community. Therefore we also respect a person's right to convert to a different religion than our own.

Oslo, 22nd of August 2007

Shoaib Sultan, General Secretary Islamic Council of Norway

Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations

## **Say NO to violence! (2009)**

Joint Statement on Violence in the Family and in Close Relationships,  
by the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and  
International Relations

### **Introduction**

*Since 1993 a Contact Group between Islamic Council of Norway and Council on Ecumenical and International Relations of Church of Norway has met to discuss various issues concerning religion and society. The group works for greater understanding between Christians and Muslims and seeks to further the contribution of these religions to the community at large.*

*For a long time the Contact Group has discussed issues concerning gender and equality. The dialogue has shown that both Christians and Muslims regard human integrity and freedom from violence as fundamental starting points for approaching these issues.*

*Nevertheless, violence in families and in close relationships is a serious social problem in Norwegian society. Suffice to say that one out of four women is exposed to violence in the family and in close relationships. Therefore, in our capacity as religious communities, we want to contribute positively to the struggle against the violence in family and in close relationships, both by our attitudes and our actions.*

### **Statement:**

Violence in families and in close relationships is a major social problem in Norway, which occurs at all levels of society and within all religious and cultural communities. It affects both sexes, especially women. Examples of this violence can be intimidation, deprivation of liberty, infringement upon integrity, physical assault, sexual harassment and even rape and murder. Doubtlessly, violence of this kind represents brutal abuses of basic human rights and has destructive consequences for individuals and society.

Violence in families and in close relationships also affects children. Children are either direct victims of physical and non-physical violence or have to suffer its horrors indirectly by being witnesses to violence towards others.

Violence in families and in close relationships is a criminal act which goes against our religious teachings and the human rights. This applies both in Norway and globally.

As Christians and Muslims, we believe that man and woman are created equal, and that none of them has a right to exercise violence against the other. In unambiguous terms we especially denounce violence against women since women are most exposed to domestic

violence. We believe that both of our religions can provide sources of inspiration and counsel that can lead to a better life filled with love and mutual respect. We believe that the home should be a safe and pleasant place for children to grow up – without violence. Last but not the least; we strongly condemn any misuse of the teachings of our religions in order to legitimize violence in the family or in close relationships.

Since our human and religious values encourage us to adopt positive principles and ethical responsibility within society we, as Christians and Muslims in Norway, will prevent and resist all shapes and shades of violence in families and in close relationships.

We:

1. encourage our respective congregations/communities to counteract violence in the family and in close relationships and clearly express a position of no tolerance in this area,
2. encourage politicians to put the problem on their agenda and to work for effective political action and no tolerance of violence in the family and in close relationships,
3. appeal to the Norwegian society in general to address this as a common problem and to take part in the struggle against violence in the family and in close relationships.

Oslo, 9th of November 2009

Shoaib M. Sultan, General Secretary, Islamic Council of Norway

Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations

# **Joint Statement Opposing Religious Extremism**

By the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations

## **Religious extremism**

Religious extremism has various and alarming results. The world community has witnessed tragedies such as the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India in December 1992 and the violence that followed, the massacre of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in July 1995, the aircraft that were flown into the World Trade Centre and Pentagon on 11th September 2001 and the terror in Oslo and on Utøya 22nd July 2011. Religious extremism is part of the global reality. But religious extremism also threatens the life, welfare and rights of human beings in many local situations and in many ways, without being given the same attention as these vast tragedies, for example by religiously legitimized violence in close relationships, the desecration of holy places and threats to those who take part in public debates. Whatever the extent, we cannot accept that individuals or groups in various ways are made the victims of religious extremism.

Extremism involves the use of violence, force or threats to promote the extremists' ideal society or to attack individuals or groups. This often happens without religion being involved. But some use religion or religious rhetoric to explain or justify extremism, for example by interpreting religious writings so that they seem to support extremist attitudes and actions. This is what we mean by religious extremism, which we as religious leaders have a special responsibility to oppose.

## **Characteristics**

Religious extremism has many characteristics. We mention especially these:

- Extremists believe that they are alone in interpreting their own religion correctly, so that they cannot cooperate with others who think differently, even though these belong to the same religious tradition.
- Extremists are convinced that there are groups of people that it is impossible to coexist with, and which they must therefore oppose or remove, either from society as a whole or from certain places or areas.

- Extremists reduce human dignity for groups that they oppose, and reject the idea that human rights apply to these groups.
- Extremists accuse those who think differently of having certain political, ethical or religious opinions, without allowing them to define for themselves who they are or what they believe.
- Extremists use gender-based hierarchies and power structures in which women are denied human rights and human dignity on the same level as men.
- Extremists use a language of hate, inciting to conflict with certain groups of people and with those who disagree with their convictions.
- Extremists are willing to use terror, violence or other forms of compulsion in order to enforce the consequences of their religious views on others.

This is not intended to be a complete list, but includes what we think are important characteristics of religious extremism. The more of these characteristics that are present in a specific case, the more serious it is. Each of these characteristics can be present with different degrees of seriousness. We therefore believe that it is important to identify and oppose tendencies to religious extremism as early as possible.

With this in mind, it is also clear that there is no reason to use the term “religious extremism” for everyone who is strongly committed to his or her faith and who lives out this commitment in different ways. To have a sincere and intense commitment to one’s faith has in itself nothing to do with religious extremism, as long as it is combined with respect for the dignity and human rights of others and is not combined with attempts to force the consequences of one’s religious or ideological convictions on others.

### **Joint appeal**

The Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations reject all forms of religious extremism. Religious extremists put themselves in the place of God and believe that they are fighting on behalf of God against the enemies of God. Religious extremism is therefore contrary to the teachings of our religions, especially with respect to the basic dignity and rights of all human beings. The idea of forcing one’s opinions on others is fundamentally opposed to the responsibility and right which we believe that God has given to all human beings, to make their own decisions. To live in peace and reconciliation with one another across the boundaries of culture and religion is in

fundamental harmony with the basic values of our religions.

The Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations are especially concerned that possible tendencies to religious extremism in our own ranks should come to light. We therefore urge Muslims and Christians to prevent and oppose all forms of religious extremism both in their respective communities and in their fellowship with one another.

- We urge religious leaders to continue to raise these questions in their preaching and teaching, in order to reject and prevent extremism in their own ranks.
- We urge religious leaders and faith communities to join together and speak out publicly against religious extremism.
- We urge religious leaders and faith communities to develop contingency plans to prevent and oppose extremism.
- We urge congregations and assemblies to raise these issues in study groups, plenary sessions and dialogues.
- We urge religious leaders, congregations and assemblies to protect one another's members, holy places and other institutions which could be threatened by religious extremists.
- We urge religious leaders, congregations and assemblies to expose and oppose the use of holy writings and religious rhetoric in a way that can create conditions for the development of religious extremism.
- We urge religious leaders, congregations and assemblies to speak out against hateful and threatening descriptions of others, not least in the media and on the internet.
- We urge religious leaders, congregations and assemblies to oppose hateful descriptions and harassment of women.
- We urge the media and other public bodies to present a nuanced picture of religious belief when violence and force are committed in the name of religion.
- We urge the various faith communities to use their international contacts and networks to strengthen the struggle against religious extremism nationally and internationally.

Oslo, 22nd November 2011

Mehtab Afsar, General Secretary Islamic Council of Norway

Berit Hagen Agøy, General Secretary, Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations