

O Muslims: Closing Prayer Rooms Is an Attack on Islam and Must Be Confronted with Strong, Collective Political Resistance

(Translated)

After a negative political focus on prayer rooms, the administration of the University of Copenhagen decided at the end of November to close the so-called “quiet rooms,” which Muslims had been used for more than twenty years, without any problems, by students and staff to perform the daily prayers. This decision once again sparked a debate about these rooms and about whether there should be space for Muslims to perform their prayers in educational institutions.

Earlier this year, the University of Southern Denmark in Odense closed its “contemplation room,” following a controversy over the fact that the room was used primarily by Muslims and was no longer considered “neutral.”

These decisions issued by university administrations are without any doubt the result of anti-Islamic political pressure that has intensified in recent years specifically regarding prayer rooms. This pressure has been exerted by prominent political actors, including the Prime Minister, through false claims alleging that these rooms have been exploited to practice oppression against Muslim girls and what is referred to as “social control.”

The Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, exploited Constitution Day in the summer to exercise a form of value-based authoritarianism and coercive surveillance against Muslims. She stated to the Ritzau News Agency on 5 June that the existence of prayer rooms in a number of educational institutions is “highly problematic,” arguing that students must be “free from religious pressure.” She added: “This cannot be achieved if, for example, there is a prayer room for Muslims from which social control and repression emanate within educational institutions.”

At the same time, she announced that the Ministers of Schools and Education must clarify, through dialogue with universities, that prayer rooms should not exist in educational institutions. In addition to this, the Prime Minister sought to expand the face-veil ban issued in 2018 to also include educational institutions.

If there remained any doubt about what the political attack on prayer rooms is targeting, the former Minister for Integration, Kaare Dybvad Bek, clarified it in his statement to the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) in the wake of the closure of the room at the University of Southern Denmark, when he said that prayer rooms “create a space for an old-fashioned culture that has nothing to do with how Danish society functions today.”

In the shadow of such demonizing statements issued from the highest political levels in the country, and the subsequent “dialogue” with state institutions, the university administrations in Odense and Copenhagen found themselves compelled to trample on their own dignity, as well as on the values of inclusivity and diversity they claim to uphold, transforming into extended executive arms of the government in its political crusade against Islamic identity and values.

O Muslims: The closure of prayer rooms in universities is neither incidental nor a purely administrative matter. Rather, it is part of a political trajectory based on the systematic restriction of Muslim rights and constitutes an attack on Islam in the public sphere. For years, our Islamic values and practices have been questioned, portrayed as a problem, and made targets of discriminatory laws and hate speech. Today, the turn has come for prayer—one of the pillars of Islam, which admits no compromise.

It is necessary to emphasize here that this issue does not concern Muslim students alone, nor does it represent a struggle that they are expected to face on their own.

The closure of prayer rooms follows the same political logic that stands behind the Imam Law, the face-veil ban, proposals to ban the hijab in primary schools, and other discriminatory measures directed against Muslims in Denmark.

It is a fully exposed strategy: our limits are tested, our pulse is measured, and trial balloons are launched. If these measures are not met with a clear and firm response, they become permanent, and politicians move forward toward the next ban or coercive step. We are facing a gradual and increasingly explicit constriction of Muslims' ability to live according to their values.

At the same time, a troubling culture of negativity is forming in society toward Muslims' practice of their rituals—foremost among them prayer—a reality that has already become tangible, for example, in the labor market.

O Muslims: How should our response be to systematic attempts to suffocate our Islamic identity?

As Muslims, we have red lines that must be protected and must not be violated. Prayer is one of these red lines, and when it is violated, this requires a clear, collective, and public response based on condemnation, confrontation, and protest.

The mosques of the Muslims, their organizations, and their public voices must realize that they bear a special responsibility to express a strong and clear position when the fundamental rules and values of Islamic life are attacked. If we do not move as a collective when even prayer becomes subject to questioning and criminalization, then when?

It is also important to remind that the values and rulings of Islam cannot, and must not, be defended by relying on false secular ideals such as “freedom of religion” or so-called liberal values, which are fundamentally incompatible with Islam. We must also keep in mind that the hypocritical attempts by politicians and other power holders to restrict our commitment to Islam are nothing but an expression of moral bankruptcy and a deep intolerance toward Islam and Muslims.

Therefore, we must proceed exclusively from Islam as the foundation of our identity, and likewise as the basis for our political action and engagement with society.

And to the young generation of Muslims in particular, we address a clear message: Hold fast to your pure Islam, and never feel that you must apologize for any part of it. Do not compromise your identity, no matter the challenges you face. Protect your values and your commitment to Islam by strengthening your connection with Allah (swt), through unity and cohesion, and by resisting every attempt to strip you of your Deen.

Place Islam above everything, and Allah (swt) will grant you success and triumph, in this world and in the Hereafter: **هُوَ سَمَّاكُمْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى** **النَّاسِ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ** **“He has named you Muslims before and in this, so that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people. So establish prayer and give zakah and hold fast to Allah. He is your protector; and excellent is the Protector, and excellent is the Helper.”** [Surat Al-Hajj:78].

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Hizb ut Tahrir

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