

Press Release

## Innocent until proven Muslim

According to a survey by 'de Volkskrant', conducted in 25 municipalities in The Netherlands, at least 160 Muslims are monitored through the so-called person-oriented approach "preventing radicalization and extremism" (PGA). The PGA approach has been used since 2015 by police and intelligence, as well as partners such as municipalities and health organizations, who are monitoring Muslims through probation service, youth care and youth workers. What is striking about the survey, is that merely 9 out of 25 municipalities were eager to publish the numbers. For example, The Hague, where many Muslims live, merely stated that a few dozen are involved, without publishing the exact numbers. So, the inevitable question is, if at least 160 Muslims are monitored in 9 municipalities, how many Muslims are monitored in The Netherlands (contains 380 municipalities)?

The national PGA approach was inspired by the Top 600 in Amsterdam, which was established in 2011 in order to reduce crime (burglaries, robberies, youth gangs, vandalism and violent crimes) by monitoring repeat offenders and people with a criminal record. The national PGA approach applies the same method and also includes Muslims with so called 'radical ideas' to this category of criminals. Even if they have not committed violence or are planning to use violence.

Nevertheless the 'violent aspect' predominates the PGA narrative. It is presented as a justified tool to prevent attacks, by linking this approach to the so called "teruggekeerde Syriëgangers" (the ones who returned to The Netherlands after joining the war in Syria). While in The Netherlands there are only 55 of these so-called "teruggekeerde Syriëgangers". Therefore, it was not surprising that two weeks ago the PGA-approach due to the arrest of Hardi N. and six others who apparently had advanced plans for an attack, was breaking news. While no court ruling is issued until now, in order to prove whether the suspects are actually guilty. But this did not stop some Dutch institutions from directly labelling it as a terror cell.

In 2015 for example, a man and a woman were arrested in Huizen. A lot of fuss was made. They were also monitored by the authorities. They were suspected of plotting an attack, following a sound clip of "an Arab radio or TV news broadcast being played in the background", which lasted only 17 seconds and the quality was terrible. However, it later turned out that this family had nothing to do with so-called terror acts and was unjustly arrested, but also in the first place has been wrongly spied on. The reason to keep an eye on the Muslim family was because the man is a practicing Muslim who refuses to shake hands with women and the woman wears a headscarf, and has a long and deeply cherished desire to live in an Islamic country. According to the authorities, this was a signal of radicalization and therefore reason enough to be watched.

This approach through which Muslims with 'objectionable' ideas are treated in an extremely discriminatory way, is a dangerous trend that is gaining ground. One tries to justify this injustice by linking ideas which are deemed 'objectionable' to negative connotations and violence. This is really oppression and deception.

The PGA approach is merely part of the greater anti-Islam policy that The Netherlands has been pursuing for some time. In the wider approach of the so-called 'radical' Muslims. The entire Muslim community is regarded as a possible breeding ground for 'radicalization'. Muslims who are trying to hold on to Islamic norms and values that do not conform to the dominant secular norms and values, are portrayed as 'radicals' or 'extremists'. So, they have to be fought using preventive and repressive measures.

In 2014 we initiated an intensive awareness campaign called: "Together Against Anti-Islam Policy" to put this issue on the agenda of the Muslim community. We have tried to unite the Muslim voice against this oppressive policy. And in 2016 we launched an initiative called "Call to Unity" to unite the different groups and organizations in the Muslim community, on the basis of Islamic concepts and to act against these draconian measures.

As long as we do not realize this as a Muslim community, we will constantly fall prey to the anti-Islam policy. We must act in a unanimous and proactive manner to pursue our interests, in order to be able to transfer our banner confidently to the generations after us insha Allah.

**Okay Pala**

**Media Representative of Hizb ut Tahrir in The Netherlands**