

The Muslim Community's Reaction to the Burkini Ban is Insufficient

News:

The banning of the full body swimsuit termed the "burkini" has dominated news headlines over the past two weeks. Around 30 towns have banned the burkini from their beaches, with some mayors linking the bans to the 14 July lorry attack in Nice that killed 86 and the murder of a Catholic priest near Rouen by Islamic State sympathisers.

The controversy over the burkini, the full-body swimming garment, looks set to continue after several mayors said they would ignore a decision by the country's top administrative court to suspend the ban in one Riviera town. Mayors who contest the ban will be backed by Nicolas Sarkozy, the former conservative president who introduced France's ban on the niqab five years ago.

Such an attack on what is seen to be an Islamic way of dressing has naturally warranted a huge response from the Muslim community across the world. Many brothers and sisters expressed their disdain for the ban on social media as well as appearing on national media outlets, highlighting the hypocrisy of the French state in violating the individual freedoms of Muslims to simply wear what they want on the beach. Additionally comparisons were made between other full-body swimsuits that are allowed, whilst the burkini is banned.

Comment:

Whilst the double standards of France can clearly be seen by the entire world, there are many issues with the way in which Muslims have been addressing this issue. The first is that the burkini is not an Islamic dress, and should not be defended as such, as it does not fulfil the requirements of the Muslim woman's dress code as defined by the Sharia. Secondly, the idea of Muslim women swimming in such clothing at a mixed beach amongst others displaying their awrah is not an environment that is recommended for the any Muslim to put themselves in. Therefore this issue from the start was not one that has much to do with Islam itself, but rather the way in which some Muslim women choose to practice.

Furthermore, following the ban, the responses from the Muslim community have also failed to recognise the root cause on such attacks against anything that is perceived Islamic. Many activists have defended women's freedom to wear such a garment, saying this is the hallmark of all modern, tolerant societies. However, as Muslims, the value of freedom is not one we ascribe to or use to defend our actions. If we accept the value of freedom, then we must also defend the right of people to uncover themselves, which cannot be reconciled with the Islamic understanding of hayaa.

Yet this message goes by unnoticed by the Muslim community, who have taken part in protests, such as the one in London, where people were invited to attend dressed however they wished to in support of freedom. Articles and interviews have been given by many prominent female Muslim figures, who emphasise again and again that it is the freedom of all women to choose how they dress and this must be protected.

As Muslims, the correct response to this issue is to show the hypocrisy of the French state, which is happy to violate its own value of freedom in its ideological battle against Islam. However, we must not resort to attempting to defend the burkini under the pretext of those values. Rather we must acknowledge that this is part of a wider agenda, to demonise Islam and Muslims so as to legitimise its reformation in the Western world. Additionally, we must recognise that the narrative of extreme Islam perpetuated in the West, enables the French government to continue its military campaigns abroad, specifically in its involvement in the Syrian conflict, under the guise of combatting ISIS. It is well known that Western airstrikes are not only targeting ISIS, but also other rebel groups in an attempt to crush the sincere revolution of the Ummah.

Until we recognise the broader context of these attacks, the response of the Muslim community will always be insufficient and fail to enlighten the Ummah as to the root cause of such hatred.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Aisha Hasan**