

## First Speech in the Conference: 'The Muslim Youth... Pioneers of Real Change' The Global Challenges to the Islamic Identity of the Muslim Youth

Dear sisters, Allah (swt) says in Surah Al-Anbiyah,

﴿لَا تَقْدِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ وَلَكُمْ آتَوِيلٌ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ﴾

***“Nay, We hurl the Truth at the falsehood so that the Truth crushes it (falsehood), and lo! it (falsehood) vanishes.”*** [Al-Anbiyah: 18]

In this verse of the Qur'an, The Almighty, the All-Wise tells us that there will be a struggle between the Haqq (the truth) and the Batil (the falsehood) from the beginning till the end of time. Today sisters, there is no doubt that there is a global ideological struggle being waged by international secular organisations and Western governments aided by the non-Islamic regimes of the Muslim world against Islam. One of the key goals in this struggle is to win the Muslim youth to the secular liberal way of life and system. This was expressed in clear terms in a letter written in 2004 by Sir Andrew Turnbull, former Cabinet Secretary in Britain's Foreign Commonwealth Office where he called for a blueprint to win the *“hearts and minds”* of Muslim youth. The goal of this agenda is simple – to prevent the revival of Islam globally and its establishment as a political system in the Muslim lands that would challenge the hegemony and threaten the political and economic interests of Western governments internationally.

This year, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2016, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon spoke to students in the University of Jordan, Amman, and said the following, *“In my ten years as Secretary-General, I have made cooperation with young people a priority for the entire United Nations system. An unprecedented number of United Nations programmes and initiatives are now directed at young men and women. Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the leaders of today. And you are part of the biggest generation of young people in history. In many western countries, the median age is over 40. But throughout the Arab world, the median age is under 30. Here in Jordan, it is 22. That is what demographers call a ‘youth bulge’”*.

Indeed, 60% of the Arab population alone, equating to 200 million people are under the age of 25. This large populous of Muslim youth who represent the energy, vitality and future direction of this Ummah, coupled with an increased attachment of many young Muslims to Islam, in the East and West, made them prime targets of secular governments and international bodies who devised an intensive strategy aimed at shaping their thoughts, lifestyle, aspirations and allegiances upon Western liberal ideals and distancing them from their Deen.

In 2004, the RAND organization, a global policy think tank funded by the US government published a report entitled, *“How the West can Promote an Islamic Reformation.”* It argued that ‘modernists’ who support the reformation of Islam along Western liberal lines should be encouraged to write for the youth and their views should be introduced into the curriculum of Islamic education. It stated that secularism should be positioned as a counterculture option for disaffected Islamic youth and that an awareness of their pre- and non-Islamic history and culture should be facilitated in the media and curricula of relevant countries; and it promoted delivering messages to young people against those who advocate Islamic law and Islamic governance. The RAND organisation linked to the Atlas network is comprised of over 400 different organisations in over 80 countries! It is clear to see how many millions of Muslim youth just one organisation can reach. Indeed, its reach and influence is so wide and varied that most likely many of us or our children have already been in contact with their programmes without even knowing it.

Over the last decade and more, international bodies and governments across the world have pursued a strategy towards Muslim youth, mirroring the RAND objectives. UNESCO for example, the UN agency that is comprised of 195 member states and that promotes collaboration amongst nations through education and culture launched a global initiative last year to use youth to fight against so-called “extremist” messages online. In November last year, it also hosted with the US State Department a high-level event that urged the education ministries of its member states to use education in national strategies to address the causes of radicalization in youth. Interestingly, Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, when speaking about this plan said, *“One of our biggest roles, in effect, is to transform societies...”* Transform societies into what you may ask. Well, Julian Huxley, the first head of UNESCO stated, *“The task before UNESCO...is to help the*

*emergence of a single culture with its own philosophy and background of ideas and its own broad purpose.*” This single culture, sisters, is that based upon Western secular liberal ideals – beliefs such as individuals having the sexual freedom to have any relationship they wish; the belief that democracy where people make the laws, not God should define the politics of states; that men and women should have the same rights and duties according to gender equality; the belief that religion should not affect the affairs of society, and that allegiance should be to one’s country over one’s Deen. Indeed, in 2011, following the Arab uprisings, UNESCO announced its roadmap to support a secular, democratic future for the states of the region, using Arab youth as the key player in this plan. Its stated actions included, providing training in education “*with the view of establishing a critical mass for the implanting of democratic culture*” within societies.

This agenda to secularise Muslim youth can also be clearly seen in the policies and actions undertaken by secular governments. In Britain for example, last July, the government introduced the Counter Terrorism and Security (CTS) Bill that made it a legal obligation on teachers, doctors, social workers, local authorities and even nurseries to monitor Muslim children for signs of so-called “non-violent extremism” and if necessary refer them to the government’s counter-radicalisation programme ‘Channel’. Those Muslim parents suspected of instilling Islamic ideas labelled as radical face the risk of their children being taken away from them and placed in state care. The CTS Bill, which is the culmination of the UK government’s decade long counter-extremism strategy PREVENT, has essentially forced all those working with Muslim children to view them as potential terrorists and through the spectacles of criminality. It is a strategy that has tarnished core Islamic beliefs and practices of Muslim children and the community at large with the brush of ‘extremism’. According to official figures published by the National Police Chief of Council, since 2012, half of the 4000 people who have been referred to the Channel programme have been under 18. 1500 children between the ages of 11 and 15, and 400 under 10 years have also been referred, with the youngest being just 3. Reasons for suspicion include asking to pray or fast at school, not wanting to attend music classes or mix with the opposite sex, wearing a ‘Free Palestine’ badge, girls starting to wear Islamic dress of hijab, or even children saying Alhamdulillah! One school boy was questioned by police after taking leaflets promoting the boycott of the Jewish entity into school, while another who spoke about the great Islamic civilization of the past for a school project was deemed as having radical views. Universities have also been instructed to root out ‘extremist’ ideas from their campuses. The government itself has made very clear what it terms as extremism or radicalization – including voicing opposition to Western foreign policy in the Muslim world; rejecting Western democracy, liberal values, homosexuality or gender equality; practicing Islamic social laws such as gender segregation or wearing niqab, and support for the concept of a global Ummah, Shariah or the Khilafah (Caliphate).

Other secular states have also demonstrated this extreme monitoring and targeting of the Islamic beliefs of Muslim youth - through the secularization of education curricula; criminalizing those youth who call for Islam; and the intrusive interference in Islamic teaching in madrassahs under the false pretense that they are ‘hot-beds for terrorism’. In Pakistan this January, the media announced that the Punjab government had banned the preaching of Islam in university campuses. The measure is part of the government’s National Action Plan which has clamped down on Islamic expression in the media, social media and the political medium denouncing it as “hate speech” or “radicalism”. It has also shut down over 180 Islamic schools in the country, and criminalized the call for the implementation of Islam leading to the arrests of thousands of sincere Ulema, students, graduates, teachers and other Muslims in the state. Bangladesh has followed a similar path, arresting, abducting, and even torturing countless numbers of students and graduates calling for Islam in the country, including 2 young Muslim sisters who were brutally tortured for giving out leaflets publicizing an online conference about how Islam could solve the country’s political and economic problems. In January this year, Dhaka University expelled 7 students, simply for carrying the dawah for Islam. In addition to this, the staunchly secular Hasina government has forced its National Board for Education to omit texts related to Islam and replace them with writings about Hindu rituals and beliefs. Of the 193 texts that are taught from Class 1 to 10, 137 of them have content related to paganism and works related to atheistic inclination. And in Tajikistan sisters, the parliament is even debating banning Muslim names for babies to counter the increasing attachment of its Muslim population and their children to their Deen. *La hawla wala quwata illah Billah!*

Alongside all this, sisters, the non-Islamic states of the Muslim world are intensively promoting Westernized liberal media in the country which are propagating the most lewd and immoral ideas and lifestyles to the Muslim youth, and working hard to get them obsessed with the entertainment celebrity culture, as well as attacking the ideas of Islam and associating them with violence or barbarity. In Indonesia as an example, there has been an intensive media agenda waged by the liberal media over this past year to promote liberal ideas such as homosexuality to the youth, as well as to demonise the Islamic Shariah laws.

**Dear sisters,** from all this, it is very clear that there is an intensive global agenda to make our youth embrace a secular liberal identity and become ambassadors of the Western way of life and system. It is to make them reject key Islamic social and political ideas and abandon key Islamic practices by linking them to 'extremism' or 'radicalization' and create a future Muslim generation who is terrorized into silence, too fearful about speaking for their Ummah or their Deen. And it is to make them accept a reformed 'moderate' secular version of Islam and see their belief as nothing but an irrelevant, outdated, repressive religion that should have nothing to do with life in the modern world.

However sisters, as an Ummah, we also need to take responsibility for the Identity crisis affecting our youth today. For when we became complacent in the understanding and practicing of Islam in our lives and abandoned the implementation of its rules and system, the Khilafah, in our lands, it allowed non-Islamic ideas – traditional and liberal – to enter our homes, communities and societies. Concepts of accountability to Allah (swt), hayah (modesty) in dress and action, striving for the Akhirah over this Dunya, a fixed moral code for life defined by the Creator, and a clear understanding of Islam's solutions to all the problems of life and this world - became diluted and weakened in our communities and lands. This led to our children admiring and looking to the dominant liberal culture and system that surrounded them for answers to their problems and how to shape their life. Many also came to view Islam as simply a set of rituals and rules and hence irrelevant to their lives, while others became resentful or doubtful about their Islamic beliefs, leading to the abandonment of their Deen. Our children therefore came to be affected by the same vices and problems of those in the West. In Turkey as an example, of the 220,000 people who received treatment for alcohol and drug abuse in 2013, almost 60% were aged between 15-17, while a quarter were aged between 12-14. Many of our youth also became detached from the problems of their community and Ummah and from their duty to bring a solution to these issues through their Deen.

**Dear sisters,** addressing this identity crisis in our youth and understanding how to prepare them to deal with the immense challenges they face in holding on to their Deen and taking up their true role as guardians and vanguards of Islam is one of the most vital matters for us as an Ummah today. It must be placed as a priority subject on our agenda and one that we must exert all efforts to understand and solve with clarity and urgency so that we do not lose the future generation of our Deen as well as the Akhirah for ourselves and our children. Allah (swt) says,

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ﴾

***“O believers, save yourselves and your family from the Hellfire whose fuel is men and stones”*** [Al-Tahrim: 6]

**Written by Imrana Mohammed, Member of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir**

**&**

**Dr. Nazreen Nawaz, Director of the Women's Section in the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir**