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A call for action on Islamophobia

Marking the UN's International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Zara looks at the global phenomenon of Islamophobia, how it manifests and what can be done to tackle it.

The term Islamophobia was first coined in the UK by the [Runnymede Trust](#) in 1997. With anti-Muslim prejudice on the rise, the race equality organisation defined it as "an outlook or world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination".

Two decades on it is even more pervasive in society, with much of it embedded deep into political and social structures and systems.

Following two years of consultation, a [new definition was formed in 2018 by the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims](#): "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."

This new definition also captured how even those perceived to be Muslim also faced discrimination, with Islamophobia experienced in many guises.

Dehumanisation

At its core, Islamophobia is about the dehumanisation of Muslims. It can be seen all over the world and throughout history, from the genocide in Srebrenica of Muslim men and boys to Donald Trump's Muslim ban, from the mistreatment of Indian Muslim minority communities to the rise of far-right parties in Europe that have used anti-Muslim rhetoric and even Quran-burning as campaign tactics.

Most worryingly, we see the growing threat of an extreme far-right ideology which targets Muslim communities, not least in the New Zealand Christchurch terror attacks, where an extreme right-wing terrorist livestreamed his horrific attack on mosques.

In the UK, Muslims are often demonised by media headlines, political rhetoric and policies like PREVENT, which is a counter-terrorism and anti-radicalisation programme that has consistently scapegoated and criminalised ordinary Muslims.

A culture of suspicion disproportionately targets Muslims, who are often treated as inherent risks to national security simply because of their religious beliefs and the colour of their skin.

Recent statistics show that Islamophobic hate crime incidents have increased by over 300% since October 7, in light of what is going on in Gaza. Prior to that, the Home Office revealed that over 40% of all religiously-motivated hate crime targeted Muslim communities.

Sadly, much of this hatred is directed at Muslim women. Muslim women regularly experience physical and verbal attacks in public, and are perhaps most marginalised when it comes to employment opportunities.

A significant contributing factor to islamophobia is an anti-Muslim bias in the media, [a report by the Centre for Media Monitoring found](#). The report showed that over 60% of reporting examined was negatively biased against Muslims. This media bias is not helped by the fact that Islamophobia runs deep within the government and the Conservative Party.

Former prime minister Boris Johnson referred to Muslim women as letterboxes and bank robbers; the former Home Secretary Suella Braverman peddled hate tropes about “Islamists are in charge of Britain”; and the former deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, Lee Anderson, recently attacked London mayor Sadiq Khan for being controlled by Islamists and giving “our capital city away to his mates”.

In fact, a survey by [Hope Not Hate](#) found that 58% of Conservative party members think Islam is a threat to the British way of life, with only 18% believing that the two are compatible. The examples of Tory Islamophobia are as endless as they are depressing.

Islamophobia in the workplace

In workplaces, Islamophobia is a particular challenge, affecting individuals with a perceived Muslim appearance as well as those who identify as Muslim. Discrimination in employment opportunities, biased treatment, and verbal harassment can contribute to a hostile work environment for Muslims.

Muslim employees often navigate a delicate balance between expressing their religious identity and avoiding potential backlash. Stereotypes perpetuated by islamophobia can lead to discriminatory practices, hindering career growth and professional development for Muslim workers.

The marking of the UN's International Day to Combat Islamophobia should be a real call to action. Islamophobia is not a Muslim problem but a societal evil which we all must work together to tackle.

In order to do this, we have to challenge narratives and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, as much of what fuels this hate is irrational fear and hatred. Part of it will be overcome by better understanding Islam, building greater ally-ship and awareness as well as having a zero-tolerance policy to hate in our workplaces and in wider society.

We have to work together to challenge the rhetoric, ideologies and individuals that seek to divide us. On this year's Day to Combat Islamophobia, we recognise that we all have a role to play in rooting out Islamophobia.