

Islamophobia on the Internet: The growth of online hate targeting Muslims



Foreword to the report

By Ghaith Krayem, Secretary, Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV)

Today's Australia is committed to the tenets of multiculturalism. The foundation of our national psyche has this at its core. Prejudice, however, continues to exist and together we must do more to overcome discriminatory perceptions in Australian society. The Muslim community is one of the segments of society that has been affected by misrepresentation and at times vilification. This report highlights some of the messages of hate about our community that can be found online. We may either choose to ignore such messages, or we may choose to challenge and correct them. We believe no community in Australia should be subjected to the sorts of attacks highlighted in this report. Such attacks are at odds with Australia's proclaimed ideals.

In speaking out against this hate speech, we also recognise that there is a balance to be struck between freedom of expression and freedom from hate. Preventative measures that safeguard our peaceful coexistence without overly restricting self expression are needed. It is not enough for individuals to try and overcome such challenges alone, laws that protect against hate speech are needed and send a message about the values of our multicultural society. Victoria is one step ahead of the rest of the country in this regard, as religious vilification has been declared unlawful

Australia's newly elected coalition Government has expressed interest in reworking the Commonwealth Government's stance on the Racial Discrimination Act. We would like to

emphasise the importance of this law, and any amendments that reduce the scope of this law could detriment the efforts of the community in upholding our multicultural ideals..

As the peak Muslim body in Victoria, the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) believes it is vital that the Federal Government extends greater protection to religious minorities under the laws of the Commonwealth to prevent vilification and discrimination on the basis of religion. The type of vilification that is documented in this report undermines the substantial efforts of Muslims, alongside other faith groups and organisations, to challenge prejudice in society.

The content of this report is integral to furthering our understanding of the hate that continues to spread through social media platforms like Facebook. It shows the hate our community is exposed to, especially young adults who are often left to grapple with the aftereffects of viewing such hate directed against them and their community. Like all hate speech, such content creates a sense of alienation and exclusion from society for those targeted. Facebook must recognise its responsibility for rectifying this problem. It must take action in a timely manner as the damage that such material causes can spread when the messages are left online. A failure to take action also has the potential of appearing to exonerate those who publish and endorse such hate speech.

The Islamic Council of Victoria believes that this report has opened an important discussion about a topic of great concern and would like to thank the Online Hate Prevention Institute (OHPI) for their efforts in producing this report; it has become vital in our appreciation of the severity of this issue.

We would like to thank the other religious, ethnic and cultural organisations and community groups who we work with in efforts to strengthen multiculturalism and tackle the persistent issue of hate directed against minority groups. While this report focuses on online hate against our community, the problem of online hate affects all of us. Previous reports we have seen from the Online Hate Prevention Institute show how other groups such as Indigenous Australians and the Jewish Community have been similarly targeted by online hate. Tackling such hate is not only a concern for each of our communities individually, it is also a concern for us collectively, and for Australian society more generally.

The Islamic Council of Victoria is pleased to have been consulted throughout the production of this report, and in seeing the final report, we are pleased to endorse it and to play a part in ensuring its dissemination. We hope this report provides a basis for further discussion, and that we are able to work with other well meaning Australians to better tackle the problems of hate speech in general, religious vilification in particular, and of online religious vilification as a particularly dangerous manifestation of this problem.

(For more about this report, please see: <http://ohpi.org.au/islamophobia-on-the-internet-the-growth-of-online-hate-targeting-muslims/>)