

# FOREWORD to the MACSA INAUGURAL ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT: 2017-2020

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالصَّلَاةَ وَالسَّلَامَ عَلَى أَشْرَفِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ

I consider myself privileged, honoured and most fortunate to be invited to pen the Foreword to this MACSA INAUGURAL ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT: 2017-2020. We are all aware that the contemporary religio-political phenomenon known as “Islamophobia” has been, and still is, on the rise in different parts of the world. In some nations in the West, the phenomenon is part of the rising tide of white-supremacist populism, far-right fanaticism, neo-fascism and xenophobia. In the Far East, it has become, since the last few decades, a part of a new policy of aggressive atheistic nationalism. In the Indian subcontinent, it is currently being made an ingredient in the boiling propaganda cauldron of intolerant religious and chauvinistic fanaticism of the majority, which makes a mockery of democracy, non-violence tradition of Mahatma Ghandi and universal justice. In Myanmar, it has been part of an insidious and despicable genocide and ethnic-cleansing agenda by the military junta, working hand-in-gloves with militant anti-Muslim Buddhist monks. In expansionist Zionist and colonial state of Occupied Palestine, it has been part and parcel of the Zionist strategy of neo-apartheid, systematic strangulation and gradual suffocation of the original owners of the land of Palestine which possess the largest open-air prison in the world. After all, the irrational and ideological fear of the rise of Islam was part of the grand strategy using “Weapons of Mass Deception” (the “Big Lie”) as an excuse to invade Iraq and Afghanistan. It was launched by the triumphalist Capitalist state of U.S.A. 20 years ago, with the threatening ultimatum “If you are not with US, you’re against US!” as a preemptive attack to turn the tide of resurgent Islamic civilisation and anti-colonialist Islamic revivalist movements in the Middle East and in former colonial countries after the demise of Communism which deprived the West and NATO of the traditional (“Other”) Enemy. A new Enemy had to be created and it was Islam, known then as “The Green Threat”.

Recently a new report from the United Nations highlights “growing Islamophobia and excessive surveillance of Muslims in countries around the world”. The United Nations Human Rights Council report is unsparing in its critique of Islamophobia in the United States and Communist China.

The report, officially titled “Countering Islamophobia/Anti-Muslim Hatred to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion

or Belief,” notes an overall rise in Islamophobic incidents around the globe.....

The U.N. report’s sharpest critiques were for the policies of particular member states, including United Nations Security Council member states. The report noted that many states around the world sought to “restrict the right to freedom of religion or belief of Muslims; curtail the enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief by limiting Muslims’ other fundamental rights; and securitize Muslim communities and/or their organizations.”...The report offered strong rebukes to the United Nations Security Council permanent members such as China and the United States. “In China, allegations have emerged that Uighur women are systematically raped, sexually abused, and tortured in so-called ‘re-education’ camps in Xinjiang Province.” (Joseph Hammond, “Islamophobia on the rise, according to United Nations report”, from [https://religionnews.com/2021/03/11/islamophobia-on-the-rise-according-to-united-nations-report/11 March 2021](https://religionnews.com/2021/03/11/islamophobia-on-the-rise-according-to-united-nations-report/11%20March%202021))

However, the report cautions that critiques of Islam should not “be conflated with Islamophobia”. The Special Rapporteur says:

The criticism of the ideas, leaders, symbols or practices of Islam is not Islamophobic in itself...unless it is accompanied by hatred or bias towards Muslims in general. (“Anti-Muslim hatred has reached 'epidemic proportions' says UN rights expert, urging action by States” from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086452>.)

The latest bloody and insane manifestation of hate-crimes against Islam and Muslims was the cold-blooded premeditated murder of a Muslim family of four in the streets of London, Ontario last Sunday evening, June 7, 2021. So much for the global resurgence of the hatred against Muslims and Islam. What about the situation in Malaysia?; a Muslim majority country in which Islam is the dominant religion as well as the religion of the nation, but other religions have the right to be practised in peace and harmony. Many outsiders would assume that Islamophobia in the sense of “fear of Islam or Muslims” does not exist in this country. But painstaking research would show that manifestations of Islamophobia have emerged in Malaysian politics, media – especially in social media – education, economy and culture, within the last five years. We have to thank MACSA, supported by the Multiracial Reverted Muslim Association for having undertaken a pioneering research to gauge the extent and impact of the phenomenon of Islamophobia in contemporary Malaysia which covered the period of 2017-2020. The period coincided with the coming to power of a new government – the first time in Malaysia’s history -- made up of a coalition of four political parties. With power being held by the traditional opposition parties, the voices of anti-Islamic prejudices represented by hate-speeches, openly disparaging

remarks in the media and among non-Muslim politicians, leaders, professionals and NGOs increased, but the advent of COVID-19 pandemic has helped to make the phenomenon less prominent.

Among the roots of this phenomenon in Malaysia, to my mind, are a) ignorance of Islam and contemporary Muslim societies, b) impact and influence of Western Islamophobia, c) financial, religious and political support from international forces which are against the spread of Islam in the world, d) instigation by fundamentalist or evangelical non-Muslim religions with their own religious or secular visions of Malaysia, e) misconceptions and misapprehensions of Islam and Muslims, f) the sense of civilisational superiority associated with the Chinese culture and civilisation in mainland China, or associated with the popular belief in Hinduism as the oldest religion in human history and India as the land intended by the deities for those who subscribe to the religion and culture of Hinduism, and g) the militant and irrational views of some Muslim extremist groups, as presented by the international media, such as al-Qaeda, ISIS or TALIBAN. More research has to be undertaken to know the deeper or real reasons or factors behind the rise of Islamophobia in 21<sup>st</sup> century Malaysia.

In the meantime, we express our gratefulness to MACSA and its supporters for undertaking the research and publishing their valuable report. I also lend my support to the recommendations made by MACSA in this report and I sincerely hope that the policy-makers and the power-holders in the country would give a serious thought to the recommendations. As peace-loving citizens of Malaysia and as adherents of the mainstream teachings of Islam, we look forward to a better inter-religious understanding and peaceful coexistence between adherents of different religious faiths in our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious Malaysia. *Aamiin.*