



## **Speech by Shaykh Dr. Umar Al-Qadri at the High-Level Conference on “Tackling intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in the EU” Organised by the European Commission on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018**

Madam Commissioner Jourová, responsible of the European Commission, European Council and other EU institutions, representatives from EU member states and representatives from civil societies,

I greet you with the Islamic Greeting of Peace, Assalamu Alaikum.

As a Muslim religious leader, I thank the European Commission and other institutions and bodies of the EU, especially the Fundamental Rights Agency for their crucial efforts in highlighting, with evidence-based researches, the sad reality of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in the EU.

May I also thank the civil societies present here for the important work they are doing in not only highlighting intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, but also in providing solutions to this challenge.

The European Union is an institution we should be very proud of. It is an institution that has not only prevented conflict in the region but also promoted the values of fundamental human rights which Article 2 of The Lisbon Treaty states in detail.

We are living in times where the importance of this institution and its contribution to Peace and Human Rights is being undermined by creating division in our societies. Division is caused by hatred and prejudice of the other. And often this hatred and prejudice of the other can be eliminated by engaging and interacting with the other.

I would like to share an example here from Ireland, where prejudice turned into appreciation and embracing of the other.

A few years ago, I happened to meet a Jewish holocaust survivor, Tomi Reichental. I invited Tomi Reichental to the Islamic Centre to join us for the Iftar meal in the Holy month of Ramadan. Tomi had never been in a Mosque and was shocked at the invitation. He couldn't believe it. While organising this event, most members of my community were exciting and delighted, a few members of my community raised eyebrows and asked why I invited a Jewish person to the Mosque. This confirmed that there was prejudice and fear of the other on both sides. On one side there was prejudice that Muslims are all anti-Semitic and on the other side that all Jews are responsible for the sufferings of the Palestinians.

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Tomi visited the Islamic Centre at our Community Iftar Dinner despite it being his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on the day we invited him to the Islamic Centre. As we found out about this milestone of his life, we had organised also the celebration of his birthday in the Islamic Centre by ordering a cake, birthday cards and gifts. Tomi spoke on this event about his story and narrated the horror of the concentration camps. Tomi also spoke on the importance of welcoming migrants and how heart breaking he was listening to the rhetoric of certain European politicians. That first meeting and interaction not only eliminated all the prejudice on both sides but also turned into a great friendship between myself and Tomi which has also been documented by our State Television Channel, RTE.

Tomi questions the rhetoric of some politicians about migrants and Muslims and asks where they all want to end. He suggested those that use and print hateful speech against Muslims should visit the concentration camps.

Lastly, Muslims are part of today and of tomorrow of Europe. We are not the enemy but are allies and partners. We also understand and affirm the importance freedom of expression and legitimate criticism of faith or ideologies.

Many of you are in position of addressing anti Muslim rhetoric, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims by implementing policies and enforcing legislation.

On the other side Muslim religious leaders like myself and civil societies are committed to work towards a European society that reflects the values of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men.

Go Raibh Míle Maith Agaibh,

Thank You !