

# Anti-Semitism



In the name of Allah,  
the Compassionate, the Merciful

Anti-Semitism is defined as “hostility towards or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group.” Technically speaking, this term is a misnomer because Jews are not the only Semitic people; Arabs too are Semites, even though the term “Anti-Semitism” is never applied to hostility or discrimination against Arabs. However, since the term “Anti-Semitism” is now universally understood as denoting irrational hatred and prejudice against the Jewish people, we too will use it only in this sense.

Three points should be noted regarding Anti-Semitism:

## **1. The Qur’an neither teaches nor condones Anti-Semitism.**

The Qur’an teaches that all humanity has descended from Adam. This means that all people are members of the same family—irrespective of differences in race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, or other markers of identity. One of the central corollaries of tawhid—the imperative to believe in and worship only the One True God—is the radical egalitarianism (social equality) of all human beings. In his farewell address, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: **“O people! Your Lord is One, and your father is one; all of you are from Adam, and Adam was made from the earth. The noblest among you in God’s view is the one who is most pious. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, except in piety.”**

In light of these teachings, there is no religious or moral justification for a Muslim to hate an individual or a community on the basis of racial or religious differences. The Jews, furthermore, are particularly close to Muslims because they are the descendants of the monotheistic community established by the Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him), who has been much praised in the Qur’an as the “friend of God” and as “leader of humankind.” The Qur’an acknowledges that God had chosen the “Children of Israel” over all other nations and had blessed them both materially and

spiritually. There is more space devoted in the Qur'an to Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) than any other figure.

It is true that the Qur'an criticizes the "Children of Israel" for their repeated transgressions of divine commandments and for their opposition to prophets. More specifically, the Qur'an criticizes the Jews of Medina, who were contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), for their opposition to Islam and for their violations of the peace-and-cooperation treaty that they had made with Muslims. These criticisms, however, are not racially based; they are based on the same moral principles that Muslims too are required to uphold. Jews have not been reprimanded in the Qur'an just because they are Jews; rather, they are admonished because of their breaking of promises and other unrighteous attitudes and actions, i.e., for their violation of the Torah. Because the Qur'an takes a consistent and impartial moral stance, it praises the faithful and righteous among the "People of the Book," just as it admonishes some Muslims for their moral shortcomings.

## **2. Anti-Semitism has no precedence in the Islamic tradition or in Muslim history.**

The actual historic record confirms the fact that Muslims as a whole had never been anti-Semitic. The history of Muslim-Jewish relations before the twentieth-century provides ample evidence that Muslim societies were much more tolerant and respectful towards their Jewish residents than to comparable Christian societies. It is certainly true that non-Muslims had a second-class status under Muslim rule, but one should remember that a lower status for minorities was the norm in all pre-modern societies.

Historically speaking, anti-Semitism had always been a uniquely Christian problem, and its roots can be traced to the New Testament itself. The very existence of Jewish communities in their midst created a theological problem for many medieval Christians, some of whom periodically sought to exterminate all Jews. Muslims, on the other hand, did not face a similar theological

problem; they could accept Jews (and Christians) as "People of the Book" without feeling that their religion requires them to exterminate these religious "others." Consequently, nothing even remotely comparable to the widespread massacres of Jews who lived under Christian rule ever took place in Muslim lands. In fact, Muslims and Jews suffered similar treatment in the wake of the Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula; it is well known that the expelled Jews subsequently found a safe haven in Muslim lands. No Muslim society would have justified the kind of Nazi policies that led to the horrors of the Shoah during World War II.

## **3. Anti-Semitism among contemporary Muslims has political causes.**

We do not deny the existence of anti-Semitism among contemporary Muslims. However, it is very important to recognize that the hatred of Jews that one sometimes finds in Muslim societies has no roots in Islamic scripture, theology, law, or in Muslim history. Instead, it is a product of specific political events of the twentieth-century, i.e., the Israel-Palestine issue. Several Jewish historians have acknowledged that there was no anti-Semitism in Muslim societies before the nineteenth-century and very little before the twentieth-century.

To understand the origin of anti-Semitism among Muslims, one must recognize the blurring of the boundary between scripture-based religion and secular nationalism that has taken place in modern Judaism. Even though Zionism began in the nineteenth century as a secular and socialist movement among non-religious Jews, it has now become part of the religious identity of a large proportion of the Jewish population.

Due to this blurring of the boundary between religion and nationalism, political debates frequently take a religious hue. Similarly, religious sentiments are often invoked when the issue in question is purely political and ought to be addressed on pragmatic grounds alone. Another very unfortunate side-effect of this blurring is that a principle-based moral criticism of specific political policies can be easily misunderstood or misconstrued as religious or racial hatred.

In light of these three points, IONA's position on anti-Semitism should be very clear. We believe in the essential unity of humankind, and we reject any hatred, prejudice, or discrimination that is perpetrated or justified on the basis of the racial, ethnic, or religious identity of any individual or community. We denounce anti-Semitism just as we denounce all other kinds of racism and racist ideologies directed against any group of people. We reject the irrational hatred of the Jewish people just as we reject Islamophobia—the irrational hatred aimed at Islam and Muslims.

We take this stand publicly because we are commanded by the Qur'an to "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" and to "stand up for God as witnesses of justice." For the same reason, we also take the principled stand that our respect for any religious tradition or any ethnic/racial group does not require us to suspend our right and obligation of moral criticism.



### About IONA

The Islamic Organization of North America, IONA, is an organization dedicated to reviving the Qur'an in the hearts of Muslims while bringing its message to non-Muslims.

The obligations of a Muslim, as ordained by the Qur'an and Sunnah, can be understood as having four levels:

1. A Muslim is required to develop real faith and conviction in one's heart – **Iman**
2. A Muslim is required to live a life of complete submission to the will of Allah (SWT) – **Ibadah**
3. A Muslim is required to propagate and disseminate the message of Islam to humanity as a whole – **Shahada 'alan-Nas**
4. A Muslim is required to try his/her utmost to promote and struggle for the establishment of Justice – **Iqamat-ud-Deen**

The objective of IONA is to assist North American Muslims in fulfilling the above obligations as well as inviting non-Muslims toward Islam, for the sake of our salvation in the hereafter and for seeking the love and mercy of God Almighty.



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