

## DOHA DEBATES VOTES TO CRITICISE MUSLIMS FOR FAILING TO COMBAT EXTREMISM

- Saudi Arabia charged with ‘totally demolishing’ Islamic heritage
- Support for violence now the ‘default culture’ for those with grievances
- Belief that Islam has done enough to counter extremism ‘myopic and naive’
- Reaction to Danish cartoons evidence of ‘selective moral outrage’
- Negative perceptions in the West the ‘collective fault’ of Muslims

**DOHA, QATAR 4<sup>th</sup> March:** In a landmark event, a public debating forum in the Gulf has voted overwhelmingly to criticise Muslims around the world for failing to combat extremism.

The vote came at the latest session of the Doha Debates, where a former Islamic fundamentalist accused Saudi Arabia of acting like “a machine” in pumping millions of dollars into the support of Islamic extremism.

Ed Husain, a British campaigner against fundamentalism, challenged the many Muslims who travel each year to Mecca to stand up to extremism “right there”, claiming “Saudi Arabia has totally demolished our heritage in Mecca and Medina”.

Such public criticism of the Saudi Kingdom – as well as Muslims in general – is extremely rare in the Middle East.

During the early 1990s Husain was a recruiter to fundamentalist groups at university campuses in the UK. Now deputy director of The Quilliam Foundation, a counter-extremism think tank, he insisted, “Muslims have to change their mindset of blaming others or we will be the laughing stock of the world”.

“The Arab street hasn’t risen up as it should,” he said, adding that extremism was now “the default, violent culture among those who have grievances”.

The motion – ‘This House believes Muslims are failing to combat extremism’ - was carried by over 70% of the largely Muslim audience and supported by US Human Rights lawyer Arsalan Iftikhar, who criticised Muslims for the mass demonstrations over cartoons in Denmark and the comparative silence over sectarian violence in Iraq.

“When the West sees our selective outrage, they are less likely to support us when we need their outrage,” he said.

Speaking against the motion, Daisy Khan, executive director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement, claimed the era of extremism was over. “Soon,” she added, “you will see a tidal wave of visionary Muslim thought.”

Alongside her, Moez Masoud, a Muslim ‘televangelist’, watched by millions in the region, accused the media of ignoring Muslim calls for tolerance, saying: “We may not be doing an admirable job, but we are not failing.”

**ENDS**

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**About the Doha Debates:**

The Doha Debates are a unique forum for free speech in the Arab world. Chaired by Tim Sebastian, the internationally renowned award winning broadcaster, the series has been

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broadcast on BBC World since January 2005. BBC World reaches nearly 300 million people in more than 200 countries.

The Doha Debates are hosted and funded by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. The Foundation is a private, chartered, nonprofit organization committed to the belief that a nation's true wealth is in the potential of its people. Chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned, the wife of the Emir, it seeks to develop that potential through a network of centres devoted to education, public health and research.