



U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Pakistan

U.S. Embassy Islamabad

ISLAMIC SCHOLAR SAYS DIALOGUE, EDUCATION HELP AVOID CONFLICT

(Hendi describes efforts to change image of Islam in U.S.)

[What's New](#)
[Press Releases](#)
[Home Page](#)

March 14, 2002

Washington-- Six months after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there is still a need for continued education and dialogue to prevent future conflicts and misunderstandings between people in the West and Muslims in the East, according to Imam Yahya Hendi of Georgetown University.

The scholar, who is a Palestinian-born U.S. citizen, made his comments to Ugandan and Kenyan radio stations March 12 in a telepress conference sponsored by the State Department's Office of International Information Programs.

Hendi, who led the U.S. House of Representatives in prayer on November 15, referred to the attacks of September 11 as "absolutely immoral, absolutely unethical, absolutely against the teachings of Islam." But since the attacks were perpetrated in the name of religion, there have been misunderstandings about the teachings of Islam, he said.

"I believe in the power of education. I believe education can better enhance the relationship between Muslims in what is called the East and Christians in the West," said Hendi, who has a doctorate in comparative religions.

Both Uganda and Kenya have significant Muslim populations and the questions for the imam were manifold, but focused on Muslim life in America with much curiosity about the freedom of religious practice and the right to free speech in the United States.

In Hendi's view, the telephonic interchange was an example of the type of dialogue that is needed. He said: "We have to have more exchange of ideas. We have to have more people from Africa, from Asia, from other countries come to America to know America from within."

The imam also said that more Americans must "go elsewhere and be ready to understand societies from within rather than from without" because "many Americans ... do not know what is really going on outside their continent."

Americans are not alone in this shortcoming, according to Hendi, who added: "That is also true with people elsewhere and Muslims elsewhere. Many Muslims do not know how we in America live, what it is that we stand for, what it is that we want to stand for."

Hendi also laid blame on Muslims themselves for the misunderstanding of Islam in the United States, saying, "We [Muslims] have not contributed many good examples [of] how Islam is and what Islam is," furthering the misconceptions.

Despite this trend, "many Americans have made the effort to understand the truth of Islam," said Hendi, who said he has spoken at more than 250 churches since September 11 and reached as many as 60 million Americans through his television appearances.

Hendi, who has served as a Muslim chaplain for the U.S. Navy, said that people from different cultures, in dealing with one another, must "start using a universal language" that identifies commonalities but also respects differences.

Citing a verse from the Koran, Hendi said: "Had God wanted or willed, he would have made them [humans] one nation. But he did not want them to be one nation, he wanted them to be different and get to enjoy those differences."

While many harp on perceived differences and describe a conflict and a dichotomy between Islam and the West, Hendi said: "I don't like to call it 'Islam and the West' because that assumes that there is no Islam in the West. That assumes that Islam is elsewhere that has nothing to do with the West. That is quite wrong to assume."

He added, "Muslims are a part of the Western experience, and I do not believe that European and American [history] can be understood or completely analyzed without the Muslim experience in both Europe and the United States of America."

The scholar later said, "Muslims are part of American institutions, are part of the American establishment, are part of the American social fabric, economic fabric, educational fabric" and are "also a part of the U.S. military. There are about 18,000 Muslims in the U.S. military."

In response to a question about the treatment of Muslims in America, Hendi said: "Have Muslims lost their rights as American citizens? I don't think so. Have Muslims been completely [under] siege? No. Have Muslims been in hiding? No. If anything, ... Muslims have been out there [in the public eye] in the last six months more than [they have been during] the 250 years in the history of the United States."

The imam added, "Muslims in America appeared on TV, radio, in churches, synagogues, temples, universities publicly since September 11 [more] than ever before. Muslims have not been hiding."

While some in the United States lashed out against Muslims, the negative cases were marginal, Hendi said. There was a "strong message from those in charge of the [American] government," he said, "that the government will not tolerate any backlash against Muslims in the United States of America. American Muslims are a part of the American fabric and they will continue being that way."

The positive, decisive actions taken by the American government toward Muslims in the United States underscored the "pluralism in America and the freedoms that Muslims in America enjoy," Hendi said.

The scholar is currently awaiting publication of two of his books, "Jesus in the Koran" and "The Women of the Koran."

The U.S. Embassy homepage is maintained by the Office of the Public Affairs in Islamabad. Links to other, non-U.S. Government Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views therein.

Last Updated: April 21, 2003