

## COMBATING ISLAMOPHOBIA AFTER THE AL-AQSA FLOOD

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Received on: 15-10-22      Accepted on: 19-04-24

<https://doi.org/10.57144/hi.v47i3.953>

### Abstract

The present study aims to examine the increasingly widespread phenomenon of Islamophobia linked to the *Al-Aqsa* Flood in 2023. National practices worldwide convincingly demonstrate that Islamophobia has increased since Israel launched its war on the Gaza Strip, breaking international laws egregiously and depriving Palestinians of their rights. In addition to this, cases of hate crimes directed at Muslims have now hit peak levels. Therefore, the current study aims to discuss the origin, motivation, and consequences of Islamophobia, probing international efforts to stop it and analytically examining the impact of the war in Gaza on the worldwide diffusion process of Islamophobia. In other words, a critical reading of Islamophobia is presented in line with a descriptive-analytical and historical approach, asserting that incidents of attack, hatred, and incitement against Muslims related to Islamophobia have risen abruptly since the start of Israel's war on Gaza, heating the anti-Muslim sentiment and raising transnational Islamophobia. Ultimately, the study found that effectively combating Islamophobia associated with the recent war in Gaza requires taking all necessary steps to end the war and shielding Palestinian people from Israeli strikes. Accordingly, the study recommends suggestions for effective strategies to deal with, counter, and lessen Islamophobia's negative consequences in a manner that complies with international law standards.

**Keywords:** *Gaza War, Human Rights, International Law, Islamophobia, Israel-Palestine conflict, Muslim*

## **Introduction**

Incidents of Islamophobia have increased dramatically since the beginning of the most recent Gaza conflict, almost reaching a point comparable to post-September 11 worldwide suspicion and doubt against Arabs and Muslims. More importantly, this comparison highlights how crucial it is to address Islamophobic prejudices and gain protection from them.

The recent conflict in Gaza has deepened Islamophobia in the West to a newer level, enhancing the policies biased toward and against religions and leading to a war of racism and stereotyping in the name of a war against terrorism. Specifically speaking, Muslims are usually depicted as enemies and fanatics in most instances, which only serves to isolate them further so that they are deprived of equality and justice. This will not only flare already existing prejudiced feelings but also violate basic human rights and principles to live peacefully and harmoniously<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, this study adopts a historical perspective for understanding Islamophobia by tracing its formation, outlining its roots and contemporary unfoldings, and examining how this war affected the situation of Muslims in Western societies and contributed to the rising global spread of Islamophobia.

## **Literature Review**

Muzayyanah, Rosyidah, and Purwati emphasize that harmful stereotypes and discriminatory acts in Muslim communities in addition to political rhetoric associated with terrorism are major causes of the spread of Islamophobia. This goes on despite noting that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the whole world, and discrimination has been more focused on them rather than on their counterparts of other faiths. According to the authors mentioned above, the basis of such stereotypes and prejudices is historical, so Islam was already presented and clichéd as a cultural and symbolic threat even in ancient times or in times of the Crusades.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, Gada argues that Islamophobia is a worldwide problem that threatens democracy and the rule of law, going beyond simple bigotry. In light of Western prejudice, which links terrorism to specific groups and blames the whole Muslim community, this expert argues that this ideology has been used to fight terrorism on a worldwide scale.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, as Hadinezhad states, Islamophobia has grown out of the false belief that Islam is more of a political ideology than a religion and that this political ideology can never be good for or compatible with Western societies. Undoubtedly, catastrophes such as September 11 and the emergence of terrorist groups like ISIS have contributed to the spread of this false belief.<sup>4</sup>

Correspondingly, Ciftci claims that Western people perceive the Muslim community as revolving around violence and terrorism. A common misconception is that all Muslims are or have the potential to be extremists, terrorists, or sympathizers with terrorist organizations. Consequently, according to the writer, Muslims endanger Western people's security and survival of their traditions and ideals.<sup>5</sup>

Since September 11, there has been a noticeable increase in what was perceived as permissible hate speech directed at Muslims and tying other human flaws to Islam and its followers. As Olowo points out, Islamophobia, defined as long-term hate and terror, has been around for a while, even if it gained increased visibility in the twentieth century. As a feature of contemporary bigotry, Islamophobia has evolved through a complex web of cultural, historical, and geographical influences.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, it is worth notifying that the media frequently portrays violent extremism, intolerance, and terrorism among extreme religious groups. As Daud argues, the media contributes to the promotion of Islamophobia. Neglecting basic human rights norms, this slanted news promotes authoritarian government policies. The media must balance between protecting human dignity and promoting free speech if they fulfill their role as guardians of democracy and human rights.<sup>7</sup>

Here, it is important to mention that Aziz and Plitnick notice that there is an interesting double standard when it comes to the freedom of speech. For example, concerning the white, Jewish, or Christian communities, the right to free speech is mostly protected. Still, Muslim minorities are considered security and cultural threats, deserving social stigma or even criminalized for breaking laws and trying to harm the community. Rather than expressing support for human rights and the ongoing implementation of international law, Muslims are frequently believed to be anti-Semitic when they speak out in favour of Palestinian rights or against Israeli policies.<sup>8</sup>

According to Benlahcene, the idea of Western civilization's superiority over Islamic society is the foundation of hate speech directed against Islam and Muslims. To gain a more nuanced

knowledge of Islam apart from the difficult historical context of the Crusades and colonial eras, Benlahcene proposes a philosophical and theological assessment, indicating that it is crucial to encourage cohabitation and cultural collaboration to create a peaceful society that takes interdependent destinies into account.<sup>9</sup>

In almost the same way, Sarjito claims that Islamophobia threatens basic freedoms such as religion, expression, and fair trial. It has far-reaching effects on politics, society, economy, as well as on public and national security. The media, government agencies, and law enforcement should champion tolerance and diversity to foster mutual understanding and promote discourse.<sup>10</sup>

Contrariwise, Hancock describes policies that unfairly target Muslims and exacerbate religious tensions as examples of Islamophobia. Domestic and foreign state policies have the power to promote religious tolerance and pluralism or deepen existing societal conflicts. Instead of fostering hatred and intolerance, he pushes for policies that respect religious diversity and encourage people to live together peacefully.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, Tariq and Iqbal state that Islamophobia conspicuously became a weapon for Western Imperialism in the Islamic world when Orientalism, which was used as a justification for European political operations against the Ottoman Empire, evolved into its modern form. Fears stemming from Islamic identity fuel modern-day Islamophobia, which shows up as discriminating speech, behaviours, and hate crimes. This new form of Islamophobia, they argue, is being practiced in the West and by some politicians who use it as a power-gaining tool and then remain in power by creating an anti-Islamic mood in society.<sup>12</sup>

Abou Adel et al. concluded that one of the reasons behind the spread of Islamophobia in European societies is the exploitation of exclusionary policies and the use of repressive measures against Muslims under the pretext of protecting national and social security. This exploitation extends to criminalizing individuals in advance based on their identity as Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

Historically speaking, Itaoui and Elsheikh claim that the Crusades, as well as the colonization of the Muslim regions, started at the beginning of the late 19<sup>th</sup>. Century and remained until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Century, are responsible for Islamophobia. The colonial masters, in most cases, used the stereotypical images of Islam as a superpower and conquest as an excuse for exploitation and control over Muslim territories, according to the authors.<sup>14</sup>

One of the critical worldwide threats based on misconstructions and discrimination against Muslims / Islam is Islamophobia. Hayat and Malik elaborate that Islamophobia is not just a problem affecting Muslims but stretches much further to global peace, pluralism, and human rights. They claim that global islamophobia, understood as the negative stereotyping of Islam as instituted in fear, loathing, and hostility, generates things like the abuse of human rights, terror against Muslims, and other kinds of religious tolerance against them. They assert that human rights and religious tolerance must be decisively placed on the international agenda.<sup>15</sup>

In a few words, the literature about Islamophobia covers its meaning, history, causes and impacts. Therefore, this paper joins the discussion by analyzing how the war on Gaza and other recent wars have fueled the phenomenon. Thus, it shed light on the view that more knowledge on this issue is needed alongside concerted efforts to stem its expansion.

## **Methodology**

This study relies primarily on descriptive, analytical, critical and historical methodologies. It seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of Islamophobia, focusing on its roots, motivations and impact on Muslim societies. The study accurately describes the effects of the *Al-Aqsa* Flood on the rise of Islamophobia and how Western societies have interacted with this phenomenon. The analytical approach is employed to understand the impact of the war on Gaza on increasing Islamophobia and to study the factors that have contributed to its reinforcement within Western societies. After describing and analyzing the phenomenon and monitoring potential biases in dealing with it by various parties, current policies are critically evaluated to understand their effectiveness and impact on Muslim societies. Furthermore, the study adopted the historical methodology to study the phenomenon of Islamophobia, investigate the historical origins of the emergence of negative stereotypes about Muslims and understand and analyze the history of this phenomenon, starting from the Middle Ages and the Crusades' epoch, continuing at the colonial period and reaching the modern era with events such as September 11, 2001, the Arab Spring, *Al-Aqsa* Flood and the war on Gaza.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of information, findings, and recommendations presented, the research is chiefly based on primary sources that focus directly on the topic of Islamophobia, such as specialized books and academic studies. This guarantees in-depth authentic information about the phenomenon

studied. Secondary sources were also utilized, including articles published in prestigious international academic journals and reports issued by international organizations, to provide a broader context and comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with Islamophobia. In the process of collecting references, academic databases such as Google Scholar and Research Gate were used to ensure access to high-quality, peer-reviewed research. In addition, emphasis was placed on selecting recently published research in internationally recognized journals to keep up with the latest developments and updates related to Islamophobia and the war in Gaza.

## **Discussion**

### **The Historical Framework of Islamophobia**

The conflict in Gaza has served to heighten existing Islamophobia, deeply rooted in centuries of friction between Islamic and Western civilizations and highly connected to some significant historical events.

The period between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13th centuries witnessed the Crusades, which were based on territorial ambitions and religious fervor. The Crusaders' battles were fueled by Christian beliefs about Islam being a dangerous threat and their desire to dominate and possess the holy places in Jerusalem and its surroundings. The Crusades aimed to not only establish Christian power but rather create long-lasting sources of strife and hatred among Christian and Muslim communities.<sup>16</sup>

During the Orientalism era, which lasted from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Westerners began to see their people, culture, and institutions as inherently better than those in the Islamic world. This set the stage for the negative stereotyping of Muslims that pervaded Western thinking at that time.<sup>17</sup> Simply put, Westerners adopted misconceptions about Islam and a negative attitude toward it.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that once formal colonialism ended, the West's attitude toward Islam and Muslims became even more hostile throughout post-colonial periods. Western animosity and misperception of Islam and Muslims were exacerbated by post-colonial geopolitical disputes, wars, and Muslim nationalism's ascent to power.<sup>19</sup>

Correspondingly, during the Cold War, Islamophobia gained prominence in public debates. Politically and geographically, it was considered a tactic. Within this context, the West's consistent backing

of pro-communist authoritarian governments in Muslim nations has resulted in silencing Muslim voices and repressing Islamist groups. Thus, Islamophobia sprang from preconceived notions about Muslims and Islam as well as a legacy of Orientalism.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the Iranian Revolution and the Gulf Wars strengthened the increasing wave of Islamophobic attitudes and stereotypes in Western societies. Political rhetoric has obviously tied Islam to terrorism, and the media's obsession with terrorist attacks, committed by people pledging to do it in the name of Islam, has only augmented Islamophobia. Other events which contributed to such a phenomenon were September 11, and the resulting rise of ISIL and other Islamic radicals that launched terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Islamophobia has relatively surged since the political mayhem in the Middle East, which ensued the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war in 2011, causing large numbers of Arabs to flee to European nations. The anti-Islamic sentiments rekindled after that wave because of the rise of ultranationalist parties with their racist and anti-immigrant policies resorted to anti-Islamic slogans<sup>22</sup>. The increasing number of Muslim refugees was accompanied by fears that Muslims would become a majority in Western Europe due to their high levels of fertility. Consequently, there has been an increasing panic among Europeans over the growth of Islamic identity in their countries. Unfortunately, Europeans deem the spread of Islam as a threat, and they are working hard to stop it. By doing so, they are demolishing the supposedly inherent values in European societies, such as equality, justice, tolerance, non-discrimination and freedom of religion.

It should be declared that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has negatively affected Western perception of Muslims and Islam for decades. Accordingly, the impact created by the long-year brutality of the conflict has dictated that fear and trauma dominate the interaction of Muslims with non-Muslims.<sup>23</sup>

In 1897, the First Zionist Congress sparked broad opposition from Palestinians against Israeli rule, leading to the First Palestinian Intifada and further intensifying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is frequently seen as a humanitarian catastrophe. In 1947, Resolution 181 of the United Nations General Assembly called for the partition of British-mandated Palestine into two Arab and Jewish states. This resulted in the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians when the region was split into the State of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip on May 14, 1947. Tensions between Arab nations and Israel grew worse during the following years.

Internal divides, security concerns, and deep-rooted distrust inside both Palestine and Israel have caused peace efforts to repeatedly fail, despite many summits and conferences, such as the 2000 Camp David summit and the 2007 Annapolis conference.<sup>24</sup>

After former Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon's September 2000 visit to *Al-Aqsa* Mosque triggered the Second Palestinian Intifada against the Israeli Armed Forces, Palestinian complaints escalated. A wall around the West Bank was built by the Israeli government in 2002. Hamas took over the Gaza Strip after it won the legislative elections held by the Palestinian Authority in 2006. Unfortunately, the election results were disregarded by Western nations due to Hamas's status as a terrorist group. A semi-civil war started between Fatah and Hamas as a result of these political tensions and lasted until 2014.<sup>25</sup> As a result, Israel sealed off Gaza in 2007, making life considerably more difficult for the Palestinians, thereby cutting off their access to essential humanitarian supplies, restricting the movement of products and people, and cutting off the region from the rest of the globe.<sup>26</sup>

In 2014, the Israeli army and Hamas rekindled their battle, when the latter launched approximately 3,000 missiles at the former while the former engaged in harsh military operations against the Palestinian people. Yet, a truce in August 2014 brought an end to the hostilities, which had caused widespread Palestinian displacement and infrastructural damage. Israeli soldiers murdered 183 Palestinians in 2018 during a nonviolent rally in which a small number of protesters managed to breach the border barrier separating Israel and the Gaza Strip.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, in an attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, Hamas killed 1,139 Israelis, wounded 3,300, and abducted 240 more. The Israeli government imposed a total embargo on Gaza the day after declaring war on Hamas. At least 8,500 children and 7,000 women were killed in the bombing campaign that followed. The people of Gaza were robbed of safety and life-sustaining resources due to the siege.<sup>28</sup>

While pro-Israel activists see the events of October 7, 2023, as terrorist attacks and the worst crime against Jews since the Holocaust, calling for a military response from Israel, anti-Israel activists see the Israeli assaults on Gazan civilians as the second *Nakba*, similar to the events surrounding the establishment of Israel and the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948.<sup>29</sup> Unquestionably, Israel violates international laws by its recurrent incursions into the plaza of the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque and attacks on Palestinian civilians in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and other occupied areas. Nonetheless, Palestinians

think that these practices justify *the Al-Aqsa Flood*. In response to Israeli efforts to delegitimize the Palestinian struggle, confiscate further Palestinian territory, and convert it to Judaism, *Al-Aqsa Flood* is deemed to be a vital step toward reclaiming *Al-Aqsa Mosque* and other sacred sites from Israeli control and lifting the unfair siege on Gaza. In other words, to put an end to the occupation, restore national rights, and create an independent Palestinian state with Al-Quds as its capital, Hamas's operation against Israel is evidently crucial.<sup>30</sup>

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the longest conflicts in modern history. There have been many attempts to find a resolution to this complex issue. This conflict is not merely about territory but involves a complex mix of historical, political, religious, cultural, and social factors. In addition, the conflict concerns a wide range of actors, including governments, political movements, armed factions, the international community, influential media, and public opinion.<sup>31</sup> This requires taking more effective measures to end this ongoing conflict, prevent further loss of life and property, and promote peace and prosperity in the region. It is essential to support the legitimate rights of Palestinians and their aspiration for independence and freedom, recognize East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine under occupation and address current issues on the ground, most notably the recent inhumane practices by the Israelis.

### **Contemporary Islamophobia and the Impact of the Gaza Conflict**

An Islamophobe is someone who has an unreasonable and hostile attitude toward Muslims or Islam. Included in this category are feelings and thoughts about Muslims and Islam, as well as aversions to bigotry and prejudice. Religiously driven anti-Muslim discourse can have its roots in extreme religiosity, bigotry, fanaticism, and a lack of knowledge about Islam and Islamic cultures. It also involves the marginalization of Islamic cultural practices, beliefs, and symbols, viewing them as incompatible with society's prevailing values and ideas.<sup>32</sup>

Verbal abuse, physical assaults, and institutionalized prejudices in the workplace and classroom are all ways in which Islamophobia takes shape. Both Muslims and society as a whole are marginalized by this prejudice, which in turn reinforces negative perceptions. Beyond cultural and structural racism, these crimes attack symbols of Muslim identity, driven by institutional, political, ideological or religious hatred.<sup>33</sup> This demonstrates the relationship between institutional levels of Islamophobia and the manifestations of these kinds of attitudes against the victim's Islamic identity.

As a combination of the English words “Islam” and “phobia,” the term “Islamophobia” has been used since at least 1923, indicating “intense dislike or fear of Islam, esp. as a political force; hostility or prejudice towards Muslims.”<sup>34</sup> To put it another way, a prejudice against Islam, hate of Muslims, and pathological fear of Muslims all point to a lack of tolerance and acceptance of Muslims. Attacking someone only because they are Muslim, regardless of gender, is acceptable. The phrase “feelings inimical to Islam” was the popular choice of the English-speaking world until it was revived in 1976 by an article by Georges Chahati Anawati. The term “Islamophobia” was originally not used in Muslim countries but was translated into Arabic as “*ruhāb al-islām*” (رُهابِ الإِسْلَام) in the 1990s, meaning “phobia of Islam.”<sup>35</sup>

In 1997, a landmark study entitled “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All” defined Islamophobia as “an outlook or world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination.” The report said, “anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed.”<sup>36</sup> The study brought attention to other misconceptions about Islam that are linked to Islamophobia. These include the idea that Islam is resistant to change, has radical intellectuals, and is incompatible with other civilizations, especially Western ones. It painted Islam in a negative light, calling it a violent religion that promotes terrorism and demeaning women and girls. It went on to say that ‘Islam was irrational, barbarous, and a tool for political and military power.’ Such claims of persistent anti-Islamic prejudice can be used to justify discrimination against Muslims and their exclusion from mainstream culture, normalizing such prejudice as a natural phenomenon.<sup>37</sup>

By scrutinizing the previously mentioned information, it is found that prejudice, misinformation, unwarranted bigotry, and factual misrepresentation are primary causes of dread and anxiety toward Muslims and Islam. Contrariwise, the current study is mainly targeted to clarify that Islam is a religion of progress and development, affirming that Islamic law can make changes over time and accommodate different communal needs. The Holy Qur’ān says that killing one person is like killing all of humanity, so Islamic teaching does not condone terrorism; instead, it points out that human life is sacred.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the Holy Qur’ān prohibits causing chaos and corruption in the world, admonishing followers against spreading harm or destruction.<sup>39</sup>

Besides, Islam provides a code of conduct that has been paraded by ethical and moral principles that characterize piety, justice, equity, truth and righteousness. Fairness, respect, and

tolerance are all concepts that have been upheld, thereby agreeing with the general goals that Islam was founded to promote peace and understanding.<sup>40</sup> Hence, Islamic law prohibits all deliberate attacks and killing of innocents regardless of the reason or motive behind such deeds, whether political, social or religious.

False accusations that Islam inherently promotes violence or that Muslims are prone to terrorism frequently lead to prejudice against Muslims in the West. Internalized Muslim stereotypes, such as those that lead to discrimination and slurs from outside sources, can also contribute to the development of Islamophobia. Racism is a direct outcome of these prejudices and preconceptions. According to the International Journal of Islamic Thought, “Islamophobia” was invented “by fascists and used by cowards to manipulate fools.” This fact must be emphasized.<sup>41</sup>

It is essential to recognize that attributing Islamophobia to the false assumption that Islam is a violent religion, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is a misleading interpretation that stems from misconceptions about Muslims. This approach serves specific agendas and interests and should not be relied upon to completely comprehend the issue. Portraying Muslims as violent extremists is a misleading and unjust generalization that leads to the stereotyping of one-fifth of humanity, in both the East and West, into a reprehensible mold. Moreover, Islam condemns all forms of aggression and terrorism and is committed to establishing relations with others based on peace, even with those who differ from Muslims ideologically and politically.<sup>42</sup>

Islamophobia takes many forms, including personal beliefs and actions and institutionalized bias. Microaggressions, hate crimes, and hatred toward Muslims are examples of how they individually manifest as violence and harassment. Muslims face discrimination in many forms, including the denial of their right to free speech and assembly, as well as exclusion from public policy meetings (even those concerning fiscal policy). Harassment and intimidation also start happening to them in school, on the job, and in their communities.<sup>43</sup>

Socially speaking, Islamophobia manifests as official mistrust and hostility against Muslims, as well as anti-Muslim laws and policies that outlaw women’s burkini, *niqāb*, or *hijāb*. One factor that helps shape popular perception of Islam and Muslims is media bias. The media’s depiction of Islam fosters an unfavourable impression of Islam as a violent religion. Media portrayals of Muslims as extremists, terrorists, or oppressors are common in Islamophobic narratives, which serve to demonize Muslims while

reinforcing negative stereotypes. In most cases, such media portrayals normalize anti-Muslim sentiment in the long term<sup>44</sup>.

Public perception of Muslims is skewed, prejudiced, and misled by government pronouncements and anti-Muslim remarks. Anti-Muslim hate organizations and coordinated anti-mosque activities, such as attempts to destroy mosques or oppose their construction or enlargement, are other visible signs of the societal damage that has resulted. This extends to the destruction of Muslim cemeteries and the forced closure of construction projects related to Muslim communities.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, other common causes of Islamophobia are ignorance and disinformation regarding Islam and its teachings, geopolitical tensions, media representations of Muslims and the attributing of unrelated acts of terrorism to Islam. Religiously motivated anti-Muslim rhetoric can also underpin Islamophobia. Such rhetoric can stem from extreme religiosity, bigotry, fanaticism, ignorance of Islam and Islamic culture, or the rejection of Islamic cultural practices, beliefs, and symbols that conflict with societal norms. Furthermore, although Islamophobia manifests itself in physical attacks, it may also occur online due to the proliferation of social media and the Internet. As a result of these incidents, victims face harsh repercussions, such as being shunned by society, oppressed, anxious, and even violently attacked because of their faith, which violates their human and public rights.<sup>46</sup>

To achieve peaceful cohabitation and social integration, the whole world should combat Islamophobia. Several states have already passed anti-hate crime laws, instituted programs to deter and punish such crimes, and promoted public education campaigns to dispel misconceptions about Muslims and Islam. By unanimous vote in 2022, Resolution No. 76/254 was approved by the United Nations General Assembly to establish March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. On that day, the world finally acknowledged Islamophobia as a serious problem. The resolution states that all religions and beliefs must be respected, that attacks on houses of worship or other religious sites are illegal, and that acts of violence against individuals because of their religion or beliefs are also condemned. Paradoxically, the shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, which took place on March 15, 2019, coincide with the day of the resolution's adoption. Fifty-one Muslims were murdered and forty others injured when right-wing terrorist Brenton Tarrant, motivated by anti-Islam prejudice, carried out the attack. For his role in the terrorist attack, the court handed down a life sentence.<sup>47</sup>

To combat Islamophobia worldwide, a multi-pronged approach is required, targeting individuals, communities and institutions. Activities centered on raising awareness, such as conferences, workshops, seminars and open dialogues, promote true peaceful coexistence and tolerance among religions and cultures and dialogue between communities of different faiths. These events aim to help people gain a correct and impartial understanding of Islam and Islamic culture while differentiating Islam from extremism.<sup>48</sup>

Fighting Islamophobia on a societal level requires more Muslim engagement in all facets of society, from politics to economics to community organizing. In order to combat prejudice and discrimination, it is necessary to promote the creation of social partnerships. For example, the nomination of several Muslim representatives to local legislative and parliamentary bodies helps to foster confidence within the community, as does the increased engagement of Muslim populations in political activities in Western nations.<sup>49</sup>

Additionally, strengthening media campaigns is vital to educate the public about the perils of Islamophobia, correct common misunderstandings and encourage creative works that provide a realistic depiction of Muslims and Islam. Likewise, research and observational facilities in the West should include a broader range of variables in their analyses of Islamophobia. Studies, field research and surveys should be expanded to investigate the context and frequency of prejudice, hate speech, and psychological and physical assaults against Muslims. Since relying only on statistics or yearly publications is inadequate, it is important to publicize these findings regularly. It is also important for various groups to release a report on Islamophobia once a year. In order to promote understanding and respect between Muslims and non-Muslims and to aid in the battle against Islamophobia, this study tracks the phenomenon. It suggests ways to tackle it more broadly.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, yet importantly, organizing international conferences on Islamophobia plays a significant role in addressing this issue. These gatherings aim to spotlight the phenomenon of Islamophobia and explore strategies for its mitigation.

## **Key Findings**

This paper is focused on combating Islamophobia in light of the current onslaught in Gaza, asserting that media and educational institutions should understand how Western nations have reacted against Muslims and Palestinians. For this purpose, testimonies that have been reported by international human rights bodies, as well as

several articles published by global media, have been identified to understand and show the growth of Islamophobia that has kept direct pace with the Gaza conflict. Consequently, Islamophobic acts, involving both verbal and physical attacks upon Muslims and exclusionary behaviour, started to occur in many spheres of life increasingly. This Gaza War-related rise of Islamophobia has caused a wave of violations of fundamental human rights. In Western nations, due to the Palestine-Israel conflict, Muslims are facing increased racism and violence because of religion, culture, or physical appearance while taking sides. In that case, the living conditions for Muslims become more complicated, and their sense of belonging might be diminished in these societies.

Simultaneously, claims of Islamophobia in Western nations spiked during Israel's attack on Gaza. Those who speak out against Israel's "genocide" and support Palestinian independence have faced retaliation in the form of job losses and the cancellation of academic scholarships. Furthermore, accusations of anti-Semitism are leveled in an effort to deflect attention away from the bigotry and xenophobia directed toward Arabs and Muslims and to discredit those who oppose Israel's war crime.<sup>51</sup>

One of the many Islamophobic effects of the conflict is the rise in Muslim employment losses as a result of discrimination or retribution for their political views and sympathy for the Palestinian cause. Israeli authorities canceled work permits at the beginning of the current war, leading to the loss of at least 60% of Palestinian employment in the Gaza Strip and 24% in the West Bank, according to a report issued by the International Labor Organization. A worsening of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the intensification of military operations there are likely to cause these figures to increase.<sup>52</sup>

While this study primarily focuses on the effects of the Gaza war on the occupied Palestinian labour market and livelihoods, Israeli restrictions on the movement of Palestinian workers are connected to public reactions, which could lead to job losses as a punitive measure associated with long-term discrimination against Palestinian Muslims. As an example, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said, "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly".<sup>53</sup> Such statements issued by Israeli officials can be viewed as an implicit call for genocide because they are directed against all Palestinian people without any distinction between them. Therefore, killing Palestinians, deliberately subjecting them to living conditions aimed at their destruction, and inflicting

physical and psychological harm on them is a severe violation of international law and falls within the scope of the crime of genocide.

In simple terms, by using Islamophobic stereotypes, workplace voices that support Palestinian human rights and humanitarian aid in Gaza are censored. Employers have restricted speech critical of Israel and Muslims who sympathize with them. Many Muslim workers have been threatened with termination or even fired for speaking out for Palestinian rights and freedoms on the grounds that employers see criticism of Israel as evidence of anti-Semitism and prejudice against religious minorities.<sup>54</sup> To exemplify, the president of MPAC (Muslim Public Affairs Council) has voiced his worries on the rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes, including instances of job loss, after October 7. The terrible assaults on Palestinians in Gaza make American Muslims feel threatened and alone, he said. Fearing reprisal, Muslim families, students, and workers are hesitant to speak out. Many who have done so have experienced consequences such as termination, censorship, bullying, trolling and even targeted violence.<sup>55</sup>

Amid rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the West, Muslim activists are voicing worries about anti-Islamic activities at educational institutions, according to the head of the MPAC. Some colleges in the United States and Europe have banned social media posts that support the Palestinian cause and other forms of student protest that oppose the Israeli conflict and show solidarity with the Palestinian people. Unfortunately, Muslim students are threatened with expulsion and have their financial scholarships revoked.<sup>56</sup> Harvard University is one such example; after student and faculty groups there made anti-Israel remarks, numerous pro-Israel benefactors withdrew their support, putting pressure on the school to denounce the statements.<sup>57</sup> More precisely, Muslim students in Western schools and colleges face religiously motivated bullying, harassment, and assaults with little to no institutional support for their victims.<sup>58</sup>

Attacks on Muslims have intensified due to the Israeli war on Gaza, with “a continuing wave of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hatred.” Over the last three months of 2023, the Council on American-Islamic Relations reported 3,578 complaints, indicating a 178% increase compared to the same period the previous year.<sup>59</sup> Among the incidences of murdering and endangering Muslims are the tragic stabbing of a six-year-old Palestinian toddler in Illinois last October and the shooting of three Palestinian students in Vermont last November.<sup>60</sup> Comparably, mosques, Islamic centers, and businesses owned by Muslims have all been targets of assaults stemming from the bloodshed in the Gaza conflict. As an example, a man smeared

excrement on a mosque and center located in Ottawa in October.<sup>61</sup> Acts of vandalism, attacks, threats, and harassment targeting Islamic centers of worship are reprehensible acts of violence and hatred that violate the right to practice religious rituals in peace and security.

Additionally, there has been a rise in online anti-Muslim libel and disinformation due to the war. As propaganda weapons, Western media outlets have failed to provide viewers with factual information regarding the situation in Gaza. Instead, they have presented Israeli statements as facts without scrutiny, disregarding fundamental journalistic norms, offering commentary from an Israeli perspective, exacerbating tensions, encouraging violence, propagating enmity and claiming that Hamas forces attacked civilians, raped women, murdered and decapitated children, and mistreated detainees, while systemic Israeli breaches were concealed.<sup>62</sup>

The war on Gaza allowed the suppression of personal freedoms and practices restricting freedom of expression became more widespread. In response to anti-war demonstrations, police violence and investigations into claims of instigation to terrorism or ties to terrorist groups, there has been a broad restriction of free speech. For example, pro-Palestinian protesters have been the targets of both physical violence and the use of automobiles as weapons in different parts of the US.<sup>63</sup>

To sum up, Muslim minorities will always face serious dangers and societal disintegration in Western nations if nothing is done to stop the rise of Islamophobia. Racist acts, including Islamophobia, should be covered clearly. Keep in mind that the bigotry that Muslims endure is no different from the bigotry that other ethnic groups endure because of their faith.

## **Conclusions**

Hatred and intolerance toward Muslims often stem from a lack of proper knowledge and understanding of Islam and its followers. This ignorance leads to negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslims, contributing to the spread of misconceptions that portray Islam as a violent or backward religion and Muslims as intolerant or dangerous. Islamophobia not only harms Muslim communities, who are subjected to discrimination, exclusion, and violence, but also negatively impacts non-Muslim communities. It causes division and increases tensions between different social groups, hindering peaceful coexistence and social cohesion due to a lack of basic human values such as acceptance, tolerance and mutual respect. Therefore, a multi-faceted effort is needed to combat Islamophobia, including tackling prejudice and misinformation,

promoting inclusive policies, encouraging interfaith communication and cooperation, and promoting understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity.

In light of the ongoing conflict in Gaza, this study finds that anti-Muslim sentiment, including violence, bigotry, and incitement, has reached new heights. In addition, Islamophobia has grown on a global scale, and anti-Muslim prejudice has become even more pronounced as a result of the violent struggle. Thus, comprehensive steps to end the war and protect Palestinians from Israeli aggression are required for a proper decrease of Islamophobia associated with the current conflict in Gaza.

Ultimately, many important suggestions for combating Islamophobia associated with the Gaza War emerge from the study's findings as follows:

- Stopping the war in Gaza immediately and making great efforts to address, avoid, and solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict's underlying causes.
- Eliminating human suffering and building world peace and security by protecting Palestinian people from Israeli strikes, establishing a truce, removing the closure on Gaza, delivering humanitarian supplies and beginning reconstruction work.
- Prohibiting the promotion of hate speech or incitement against faiths (particularly Islam) on social media platforms; combating prejudice, stereotyping, and bias; and taking legal action against those who do so.
- Establishing a legally enforceable international agreement to end Islamophobia which will promote tolerance, peace, and religious coexistence, ensuring that Muslims are valued and respected wherever they are and enabling them to participate in civic life fully.
- Abolishing Islamophobia by enforcing international commitments on religious freedom, free speech, and the elimination of discrimination based on race.
- Enacting laws that serve as a deterrent to those who disrespect Islam or Muslims to prevent future conflicts and undermine international stability.
- Dispelling myths and misinformation about Islam and its adherents, as well as bringing attention to the religion's beneficial features, and holding workshops and seminars to educate the public about Islam and its peaceful character.
- Raising international consciousness of the devastating impact of Islamophobia on Muslim communities and their way of life.

- Presenting Islam and Muslims in an unbiased manner by the world's media, showcasing a variety of viewpoints and experiences.

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