

## Culture and Extremism



**H.E. Hussain Sinjari**

*Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq  
to Romania*

Please allow me not to go into details of academic definition of culture nor that of extremism. Here, in general, culture is the way of life and its effects on their thinking or vice-versa. Extremism, in all those acts and beliefs, is the call for violence rather than coexistence, cooperation, reconciliation and compromise.

Extremism, I divide into two categories: social, including the one based on religion or nationalism, and the second is the ecological or environmental. I believe that these two are, somehow, the two different sides of the same coin. Furthermore, both are related to culture.

This thinking is rather optimistic, because then we can influence both. Culture is not static. What we wore in the past we don't put on now. What we ate, we left behind. Ideas and ethics are different now. We can also, either act positively or negatively towards our ecological system, to a certain degree.

As culture changes, ideas and attitudes may become more humane or more barbarian and beastly. In my part of the world, culture played it catastrophically. What



we see now was growing in the region's womb for generations before the metamorphosis was born.

Hate speech in millions of mosques continued for generations. Sunni and Shia Mullas and Friday preachers were, on every Friday, cursing each other: who had more right to be the Caliph after Mohammed 1400 years ago?! Each considering themselves the bearers of Allah's word and excluding all others within the Islamic faith and, of course, all other faiths. When this is the case of a Muslim toward Muslim, one can imagine hate-speech toward other non-Muslim minorities. School curriculum put more fuel on fire: scientific thinking was not encouraged. Critical thinking was especially negative and intolerable, if not punished. Tolerance faded away and, with reconciliation, compromise and peaceful coexistence, all regarded evil western values. Human rights, women and minority rights, free speech, freedom of expression and worship, were all considered to be evil and "kufr".

Democracy is the work of infidels. All this and more shaped the culture of intolerance we find now. Communal solidarity was especially affected in communities with different religion and ethnic backgrounds, due also to man-made desertification in the fertile lands of Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. Military dictatorships, in many Middle Eastern countries, following bloody coup d'état, never gave attention to ecology. Popular culture considered nature as Allah's work. Whatever happens comes down from divine. Desertification caused the collapse of the social fabric and increased merciless competition on limited resources. More children, to be more numerous as for the family or clan to become stronger, caused less opportunity for schooling, more immigration from country-side into cities with no planning. Cities became large villages. To find solutions to this catastrophe, we must think of establishing a new culture of tolerance, the acceptance of each other. No democracy could be built in our region without this; what I call "the acceptance of each other". It is all intermingled. The acceptance of each other means the culture of the separation between Mosque and State. A civic state is needed to introduce scientific, critical mind, to "Nosce te ipsum" (Know Thy Self), to know the evil inside rather than the search for "conspiracy theories" of blaming our ills on others. Separation of state and religion is fundamentally the condition towards building the society of the acceptance of each other.



Otherwise, masses of illiterates will always vote into office corrupt leaders who claim they are Allah's shadow on earth and their resolutions are unquestionably holly and sacred.

For all of this we need a constructive, objective media reporting.

Millions of Muslims watch satellite TV channels every evening, inciting violence and spreading the poisonous "conspiracy theories" as if the entire world is against Islam. This must be reversed.

People must not be frustrated. When they feel there is no justice, and the trust has disappeared with their leaders, then violence or lawlessness will follow.

All of these interwoven ingredients created the suitable environment for Daish, Al Qaida, Al Nusra, Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations to find popular support by masses of people in Muslim countries. If it was not for this popular support, how could a two million inhabited old or even biblical city like Mosul, to greet Daish entering their city and seizing their mosques? How could we understand neighbours "tolerating" or even participating with full determination, the looting of their neighbours, or worse, kidnapping women and virgin girls to be raped and enslaved? All their shaming barbarity was seen by thousands of clergy men as "Halal", meaning allowed by religion.

When Daish savaged the helpless Yezidis, in my hometown of Sinjar, enslaving thousands of women and virgin girls, including children, there was no one demonstration of condemnation against it by Al Azhar or any other religious institution in the entire Muslim World. How can we understand this, if not culturally?

The modern world culture is the one of human rights, human dignity, women rights, children rights, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, tolerance and the acceptance of each other, respect, reduce, reuse, recycle and solidarity with the poor, with the weak, with the needy and the sufferings of others.

Mullas in the Muslim countries should learn these values by going through serious modern education, so as to preach these values, during their Friday Sermons and other religious events.



This should also be the case with school curricula which should be modernized and reformed alongside with the mass-media in the Arab and Muslim world.

These urgently needed reforms must be carried out so that we shouldn't let our civilization to vanish; we should do all we can to prosper, and to continue to go forward for the benefits of all humanity.

