

Press Statement

'Crackdown' on Hizb ut-Tahrir & implications for Muslim community and wider society

The world is at a historical juncture. We all witness its problems, but few of us are in a position to propose new solutions. Given the gravity of what confronts us, those who can offer alternatives should speak up. It is not just a question of rights, but one of duties.

Since its inception in 1953, Hizb ut Tahrir has paid a heavy price for expressing itself. The Western backed dictators that litter the Muslim world could not tolerate a principled voice amongst it, so from the onset Hizb ut-Tahrir was subject to the worst forms of state persecution.

Decades later, Hizb ut-Tahrir would again pay a heavy price for expressing the same views in front of those who falsely claim an Islamic Caliphate.

Now the world has come full circle, with democratic states now seeking to follow the footsteps of both dictators and faux Islamists.

The Prime Minister's threats against Hizb ut-Tahrir would be laughable if they were not so serious. On what basis exactly does Tony Abbott plan on 'cracking down' on Hizb ut-Tahrir, and if a ban is on the table, what exactly would Abbott be banning?

Hizb ut-Tahrir is not a registered political party in this country. It does not possess a broadcast licence or operate a printing press. It does not operate schools, mosques or businesses, and it certainly is not in receipt of public funds. The threat to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir is laughable, for Hizb ut-Tahrir is nothing but its ideas, and it would be disingenuous to believe one can ban ideas.

It is not difficult for any government to manufacture or exaggerate a threat. Australia has long been held ransom to the perils of dog whistle politics, with all sides of politics engaging in a seemingly perpetual race to the bottom.

The target of this government is not just Hizb ut-Tahrir. In fact, it is not even just Muslims. The current spotlight on the Muslim community is symptomatic of a wider politics of scapegoating minorities. But there is no pride in demonising the already marginalised. Perhaps in the mindset of Abbott, it is still a whole lot easier than addressing real issues like domestic violence, mental health, youth suicide or substance abuse.

The government's approach to Islam is one of institutionalised state paternalism. Muslims are defined through the prism of national security which introduces the need for state policing. Every aspect of our Islam is subject to government scrutiny, from our dress codes, mosques, schools, homes and even the food we eat.

The government is so ingrained in its manufactured paternalism that even the Mufti, Dr Ibrahim Abu Muhammad, was chastised by no less than the Prime Minister for having the audacity to express a view contrary to the Prime Minister's, despite such a view being framed upon an entirely democratic basis. Dr Ibrahim's crime was to bring into question the master slave relationship successive Australia governments have sought to manufacture with the Muslim community. Would Abbott dare to engage other community leaders in a similar fashion, especially if they were patronised by the likes of Delhi or Beijing?

There is no doubt Abbott is hitting the terror button for purposes of political pragmatism. His announcements have little to do with national security and everything to do with personal job security. Why should Muslims be held hostage to the narcissistic machinations of any politician or political party? The disastrous long term implications of such an approach to politics have yet to be fully realised. But if the experience of other nations is any indication, then the future looks grim.

Bill Shorten was right when he accused Abbott of being, “an extreme government motivated by an extreme ideology”. But what is the nature of this ideology and who are its proponents? Is it this ideology that will lead Australia down an irreversible path?

Abbott could not succeed in his fear mongering unless he was supported by a reliable pool of willing accomplices. It seems some in the media are the disciples of Abbott’s extreme ideology. But the media must accept responsibility for the lies it spreads, the hatred it breeds, the lives it harms and the cohesion it destroys. Hizb ut-Tahrir is no stranger to media fabrications, but the question is: who is going to wrest the hand of such dangerous ideologues?

Despite the potential short term benefits to Abbott’s position, the politics of terror is not a partisan issue. The War on Terror is part of a wider US effort to alter the victim aggressor paradigm.

Importantly, the rhetoric around terrorism is subtly shifting. In this country, we have moved from ‘engaging in terrorism’ to ‘advocating terrorism’ and now Abbott is seeking to introduce the offence of ‘justifying terrorism’.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has always maintained the War on Terror was always an attack on fundamental Islamic ideals under the pretext of fighting terror. The ‘war on extremism’ is a testament to this position, with the US and its allies seeking to undermine key Islamic beliefs that would enable Muslim world to challenge the status quo. The government’s own definition of ‘extremism’ as articulated in the Defence White Paper 2010 makes this even more abundantly clear.

One of the disastrous consequences of the War on Terror is the coopting of independent states to adopt the war as its own. Anti-US sentiment around the globe is so potent that not even America is in a position to confront it alone. Smaller states like Australia have been bullied into inheriting the burden of America’s crimes around the world.

In line with this policy, George Brandis, the federal Attorney General, has flown to the US this very week to receive instruction on how to wage America’s latest ‘war on extremism’. This comes on the back of US sponsored resolutions at the UN on the same subject.

Like the War on Terror before it, the War on Extremism is an American war, initiated through American orders to serve American interests. It seems Australia will now be used as a test case in the latest American experiment, irrespective of the consequences to Australia.

It seems the devil that instructs the tyrants in the Muslim world to suppress legitimate Islamic political dissent seems to be the same devil now whispering in the ears of Australia’s policy makers. By hook or by crook, Australia now seems determined to criminalise any form of Islamic political dissent.

One of the unique features of Hizb ut-Tahrir is the notion of adoption. You will only ever find one opinion of Hizb ut-Tahrir on any given subject, expressed through its global leadership structure.

To reach the level of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, individuals must internalise every single adoption of group. Acting contrary to this will result in discipline or expulsion. I mention this fact because some have deliberately sought to misrepresent the positions of the party by drawing spurious inferences through references to spurious individuals. We are an independent party that has the courage of its own convictions, but we will never accept the charge of guilt by association.

The question may arise: is Hizb ut-Tahrir targeting Australia for systemic change? The claim is absurd from two angles. The first is our firm belief that change can only come through conviction, not coercion, and campaigning for Islamic change in a non-Islamic country is laughably illogical. Secondly, and more importantly, the government seeks to exaggerate the size and influence of Hizb ut-Tahrir to justify its scaremongering efforts against Islam and Muslims.

As a party, we are not part of Australia's political landscape. We do not target this country, its politicians or its policies. You will not find Hizb ut-Tahrir positions on Labour or Liberal, on the GST, Medicare or the NBN. The only time you will hear from Hizb ut-Tahrir in this country is when Muslims feel they are being unjustly targeted by the government.

Hizb ut-Tahrir in Australia is nothing more than a collection of individuals who believe in the sublimeness of Islam. We are concerned like everybody else about the state of the modern world and desire to see positive change. How did it become possible for the government to seek to criminalise these sentiments just because they are expressed by Muslims?

Tony Abbott has sought to deliberately blur the line between political activism and political violence by misrepresenting three key considerations. The first is Hizb ut-Tahrir's position on violence. The second is Hizb ut-Tahrir's position on terrorism, and the third is Hizb ut-Tahrir's position on ISIS. We will now debunk all three.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is an independent political party that speaks for itself alone. Some would like to suggest there is a public position of Hizb ut-Tahrir and then there is the secret private position of Hizb ut-Tahrir. This is absurd, as the one matter for which Hizb ut-Tahrir is constantly praised is the frankness of its message and the courage of its callers. We have always been ready to knock on the door of anyone who is prepared to listen. The invitation list to this press conference is a testament to this fact, where every federal and state politician was invited, along with academics, lawyers, civil society groups and others.

Our work is ideological and political. Our method of change is through conviction, not coercion. Hizb ut-Tahrir has a sixty year track record, operating under the harshest conditions, and has never wavered from its path due to its firm conviction that change must be organic. At the same time, our position rejecting violence as a means of change is a divine one, where we consider it a great crime against God.

Governments and security agencies in this country have consistently attested to our non-violent stance. This much is obvious, but it also explains why the current government has instead sought to create false connotations and draw spurious connections.

The government has flagged the new offence of 'justifying terrorism'. But for the entirety of Hizb ut-Tahrir's existence, the law in this country overtly recognised the legitimacy of our work. It is not that Hizb ut-Tahrir has changed its ways, yet with the stroke of a pen, Tony Abbott is now seeking to criminalise its mere expression. Today it is Hizb ut-Tahrir, but who will it be tomorrow?

Even under the Government's own definition of terrorism it would have to proscribe itself! But the problem is not just the introduction of draconian law; it is also the selective application of such laws. The Foreign Incursions Act is a prime example of such inconsistency.

The charge of 'justifying terrorism' is the latest attempt in a long line of attempts to deny the obvious link between terrorism and Western foreign policy. Stating this point is not condoning terrorism, but merely explaining the structural conditions which give rise to it. That is why the Former French Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, asserted in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks that terrorism is, "the monstrous child of inconsistency and arrogance of Western policy".

As redundant as the word 'radicalisation' is, the irony is that if Hizb ut-Tahrir was a cause of 'radicalisation' as the government suggests, than surely the expectation would be for those we inspire to become like us? But if the end result is not just different but diametrically opposed, then surely the source of 'radicalisation' must lie elsewhere?

What then if those we are charged with 'radicalising' actually turn around and condemn us for our non-violent activism? Even they acknowledge the disconnect with our work. Excuse the expression, but it seems we are too extreme for the moderates and too moderate for the extremists!

The last accusation levelled against Hizb ut-Tahrir is its alleged support of ISIS. This is an outright fabrication like many of the oft repeated fabrications.

Before outlining our position on ISIS however, it must be said that Hizb ut-Tahrir is not interested in the superficial politics of condemnation. We refuse to dignify questions that seek to heap collective guilt upon the Muslim community.

At the same time, our position on ISIS is an exclusively Islamic one, adopted in response to a divine obligation of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, irrespective of the nature or source of that evil. But we will not allow the West to exploit our position for its own duplicitous purposes, rallying the world against ISIS's crimes when it serves it and turning a blind eye when it doesn't.

A snippet of our many pronouncements on ISIS include the following:

On the 2nd of July 2014, the global leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Sh. Ata Bin Khalil Abu Al-Rashtah, issued a detailed position on why the Caliphate announced by ISIS was invalid.

On the same day, the director of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Lebanon, Osman Bakhach said: "Resurrecting the Caliphate should not be accomplished through blood, charges of apostasy and explosions."

On the 21st of July 2014, the Media Office of Hizb ut-Tahrir in Iraq released a statement regarding the expulsion of Christians from the Mosul region. It stated: "The application of Islam is not a sword hanging on the necks of people, and not a way to extort their money through vicious means. Rather it is a mercy to the worlds revealed by Allah, for people to secure their lives, honour and property."

On the 18th of November 2014, the Central Media Office of Hizb ut-Tahrir put out a statement concerning the murder of one of its members by ISIS. It said: "That mob has killed the martyr Mustafa because he exclaimed words of truth in front of them...The words of truth were heavy for them to hear, and it was sharper than the sword and so they killed him...They killed him, and they killed many before him, and they still kill the pure souls just like the tyrant rulers have done. But the crime of ISIS is worse, as the tyrant rulers used to kill carriers of Dawah in the name of Secularism, whereas these kill carriers of Dawah in the name of Khilafah in order to distort its image."

Therefore, Hizb ut-Tahrir is consistent in its opposition to injustice wherever it rears its ugly head and by whomever's hands it emerges. This is a claim Western states will never be able to make.

The fact of the matter is that Abbott's proposals having little to do with terrorism and everything to do with pragmatism. It is a shameful day in the history of this country that its leaders can so openly and unashamedly talk about the introduction of a two tier legal system in this country – one rule for Muslims and another for everybody else.

There is nothing courageous about employing the entire resources of the state apparatus to prevent an already disadvantaged group from merely expressing themselves and their faith. It is a desperate act by a desperate man that reeks of insecurity. Abbott may be Australia's Captain, but under the 'war on terror', he is commanding an American ship, and it is now sailing into very frightening waters.

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