

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH AYAAN HIRSI ALI

SUBJECT: IS ISLAM A RELIGION OF TOLERANCE?

MODERATOR: KEITH HILL, TREASURER NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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**KEITH HILL:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Keith Hill. I'm an editor, writer with BNA and Treasurer of the National Press Club. I'm filling in today for our President, Alan Bjerga. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and are committed to our profession's future through our programming and by fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our website at [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). To donate to our program, please visit [www.press.org/library](http://www.press.org/library).

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speakers and attendees at today's event, which include guests of our speaker as well as working journalists. I'd also like to welcome those watching on C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. After our speech concludes, I will ask as many audience questions as time permits. Now, I'd like to introduce our head table guests.

From your right, Janice Trey, Executive Director of Global Internet Freedom, promoting internet freedom throughout the world; Viola Gienger, reporter for Bloomberg News covering defense policy and the Pentagon; Marilou Donahue, executive producer, Artistically Speaking; Jamila Bey, freelance reporter and Chair of the National Press Club Freelance Committee; Chris DeMuth, D.C. Searle Senior Fellow with the American Enterprise Institute, and a guest of our speaker; Andrew Schneider, associate editor of Kiplinger Washington Editors, and chairman of the National Press Club Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker, Doris Margolis, president of Editorial Associates, and the National Press Club member who arranged today's luncheon. Thank you, Doris. Christina Sommers, resident scholar, American Enterprise Institute, and a guest of our speaker; Simon Denyer, Thomson-Reuters Washington bureau chief; Carlos Hamann, an editor and reporter with Agence France-Presse; and Myron Belkind, professor of journalist at George Washington University, former bureau chief, AP, New Delhi, London, Tokyo, and now Secretary of the National Press Club. (Applause) Just as an aside, Myron was also president of the Foreign Correspondents Club in Tokyo, correct?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1969. When she was very young, her father was jailed for opposing the country's dictatorship. He later escaped from prison and fled into exile. When Miss Hirsi Ali was eight, her mother took her and her siblings to Saudi Arabia to live with her father. The following year, the family was expelled from that country and moved to Ethiopia where her father's opposition group was headquartered. After 18 months there, they moved again, this time to Kenya. In 1992, Miss Hirsi Ali stunned her family by fleeing to The Netherlands to escape an unwanted arranged marriage. She earned an M. A. degree from The Netherlands Leiden University and served in the Dutch Parliament from 2003 to 2006.

In Parliament, she worked on furthering the integration of non-western immigrants into Dutch society and defending the rights of women in Dutch Muslim society. In 2004, together with Director Theo Van Gogh, Miss Hirsi Ali wrote and produced a now-famous film "Submission" about the oppression of women in conservative Islamic cultures. The airing of the film on Dutch television resulted in the assassination of Mr. Van Gogh by an Islamic extremist and a letter threatening Miss Hirsi Ali's life.

In 2006, Miss Hirsi Ali moved yet again, this time to the United States where she is now a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C. Her work involves researching the relationship between the west and Islam, women's rights in Islam, violence against women propagated by religious and cultural arguments, and Islam in Europe. In 2007, she and her supporters founded the AHA Foundation to help protect and defend the rights of women in the west against militant Islam. Through education, outreach, and the dissemination of knowledge, the foundation seeks to combat crimes against women such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, honor violence and honor killings, such as what's portrayed in the chilling film, "The Stoning of Saraya," previewed by standing room audience at a National Press Club screening last year.

Miss Hirsi Ali's appearance today comes four months after publication of her latest book titled *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*. The book is a second volume of her autobiography. The first volume, *Infidel*, chronicled her life up to her departure for America. Her earlier book was *The Caged Virgin*. She was named one of *Time* magazine's 100 influential people of 2005, has received numerous human rights awards. Today marks Miss Hirsi Ali's second appearance at the National Press Club podium. The topic she has chosen for this

afternoon is, Is Islam a Religion of Tolerance? Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in a warm National Press Club welcome for Ayaan Hirsi Ali. (Applause)

**AYAAN HIRSI ALI:** Miss Doris Margolis, Mr. Keith Hill, thank you very much for having me here at the National Press Club for the second time. It's an honor and a pleasure to be here. My dear friends, Chris DeMuth, the man who brought me to the United States of America, and Christina Sommers, my dear friend from the American Enterprise institute for also working on feminism, my security coordinator, Amanda, my assistant, thank you for coming with me.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's topic is the statement we often hear, Islam is a religion of tolerance. You hear it in different ways, Islam is a religion of peace. Is it a religion of tolerance? It helps to define the terms of the statement first. Tolerance in English, as I understand it, is an attitude. It is an attitude, the disposition to allow freedom of choice and behavior. But an attitude is also different from behavior. It's also an act, not to believe that one should allow it, but to actually do it. For instance, if you are opposed to smoking, you may think of yourself to be tolerant of smokers. But it's different if you allow a smoker in your house to smoke, or light a cigarette for him. It's that level where there's a difference between attitudes and behavior.

Religious tolerance has a long philosophical history, which I'm not going to enter into. But in general terms, it has come to be understood as the willingness to recognize and respect the beliefs and practices of others. That willingness in a liberal democracy is not absolute. It has its limits. When I lived in The Netherlands, I remember that the legislators used to try and find a tradeoff between very orthodox protestant Christians who did not want to vaccinate their children using religious arguments and the right of the child to be vaccinated against such horrible diseases as polio. Fortunately in that setting, the legislators chose to protect the interest of the child. That's just to give you an idea.

The term religion is commonly understood also as a quest for a higher being. It has three aspects. It's a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe attributed to a super human agency. A second aspect is such rituals that pertain to death, birth, food, clothing, et cetera. And it's that aspect, and I think in the topic of today, much more important aspect, is the model framework that governs the conduct of human affairs, as is derived from that super human agency and the morality attributed to being the source of that human agency, of super human agency.

Islam is an all-encompassing moral, legal, political, social and cultural framework. It's both a system of belief and a system of practice. And the word means submission; it is submission to the will of Allah. It's very important to distinguish the Muslim, the one who confesses to adhere to the belief system from the belief system Islam. It's important to make that distinction because belief systems do not act; human beings think and act, and human beings can also change their minds. Human beings invent belief systems, belief systems do not invent human beings.

There are a list of arguments, and there are very many, I'm not going to exhaust them, that I used to defend the assertion that Islam is a religion of tolerance in our day, a religion of peace. For instance from scripture, we now know the famous assertion, the famous verse, "unto thee thine faith, and unto me my faith." That is a statement in the Koran. It is revealed to Muhammad, and the context was when the polytheists of Mecca tried to convince him, and sometimes to force him, to give up his concept of one God and go back to the concept of many gods.

The assertion that Islam is a religion of peace is also defended in the historical context that compares Islamic history to Christian history. We are told that Christians and Jews, when they lived under Islamic domination, were given a protected status. That status was people of the book, and that meant that they didn't have the same rights as Muslims, but they could believe, they could continue to worship their gods and live peacefully. And if you compare that to the experience of Jews and protestants and the Catholics who, in that same period we are told that Jews were persecuted, massacred, often killed, the same happened to protestants. Historians also compare and come up with when Christianity, especially Catholicism, was dominant, and they compare it to when Islam was dominant. And they say the intolerance that Catholics, for instance, had toward thinkers and innovators, if you compare it to Islamic dominance, that that was very different in a Muslim world at that time. Mathematicians, scientists, astronomers, poets could thrive. That was at the time when the Catholic church was burning thinkers, was hanging them, and was frustrating their work.

Women, the status of women under Catholic rule a long time ago, and probably not so long ago, and maybe even under protestant rule, the prominent protestants were dominant, you will find some historical material that shows some women were regarded as witches, they were burned, they were hanged. They were denied or drowned. They were denied all kinds of basic rights that men enjoy. And some Muslim historians will say that Islam at that time was actually much friendlier to women. Muhammad was. When he came on the scene and became a ruler, he stopped the practice of burying young girls who were considered to be superfluous. You were superfluous to a family pre-Islam if you were the third daughter or the fourth daughter.

Before we get into arguments of for and against, and before we examine whether those assertions that I just made are historically accurate or not, I would like first of all to say a few words about what is absolutely not disputed. Not disputed among Muslims, not disputed among western experts who study Islam. It's not disputed that Islamic jurisprudence is derived from four sources; the Koran, the holy book, or the revelation to Muhammad, the Hadith, the acts, the thoughts and deeds of Muhammad as recorded. And in those recordings there are six compilations that are not considered controversial. The term "qiyas," [?] an Arabic term meaning reasoning through analogy, matters that are not explicit in the Koran and explicit not in the Hadith, and that reasoning by analogy is done by experts, ulamas, or scholars. And ijma is another term, fourth, and that is consensus. But it is a consensus among the learned ones. And again, that consensus or agreement among the learned ones, has to do only with what is not explicit in the Koran and in the Hadith.

Sharia, or Islamic law, is derived from these four sources of Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Qaeda, the 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Conference and the entire 1.57 billion Muslims, believe in the legitimacy of all four sources of this jurisprudence. Now to believe is not the same as to know; to believe is also not the same as to act on those beliefs. And again, that is why it's very important that we maintain that conceptual difference between Islam, on the one hand as a set of beliefs, and the Muslim on the other hand as to the individual human being who may or may not adhere to those beliefs.

In order to determine whether Islam is tolerant or not, I urge you first to examine other sources of Islamic jurisprudence. Read them for yourself, don't depend on other experts to translate them for you. Don't depend on believers to tell you what's in them. You are a literate and a privileged group, and most of these things-- in fact all of these things-- are translated into English. So I urge you to read them and make up your mind what you find in there, whether it's all tolerant or not.

I also urge you to examine the history of Islam, Islam as a government system, and as a governing system, from its founding up to today, and the actions of believers today. I have done that. And in the four sources of Islamic jurisprudence, I found explicit commands to conquer, guidelines on how to go about that, details of how Muhammad defeated his enemies. He headed over 60 military campaigns and they were very successful. And I don't think he got where he got by offering his enemies candy. In the jurisprudence and in that history, I also found war tactics. I found the concept of "taqiyya," [?] or deception. That is, when you are in a weak form and your enemy, the infidel, is stronger, then it is justified-- in fact it is obligated-- to lie. And that lie is to deceive until Islam dominates.

I found in scripture also how to persevere when faced with adversity. I found in there the extensive rewards that will be bestowed upon those who die in the battlefields, and the dire punishments of those who betray the causes of Islam or refuse to fight. I also found in those four sources of jurisprudence what to do once people are conquered. And that was practice; that is either to convert them to Islam, and given exception to the people of the book, again in that demi status or that protected status, the prohibition of "rida" [?] or interest.

I found legislation on crime prevention and the punishment of behavior considered to be criminal, such as the amputation of the limbs of thieves, the beheading of murderers, the hanging of apostates, the flogging and stoning of adulterers and fornicators. I found in their laws that govern family matters such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. These are precise prescriptions that tell the Muslim what actions, and even thoughts, that are permissible thoughts and actions that are urged, thoughts and actions that are discouraged, thoughts and actions that are forbidden. And in any country where this system is implemented, I've seen an expression of that.

Now, to test tolerance, take a look at the plight of those who deviate from the path that is prescribed in the scripture. A closer look of the sources of jurisprudence, the history of Islam, and the actions of many Muslims led me to conclude that Islam is not a religion of tolerance. But please don't take my word for it. Again, I invite you; go ahead and do your own study.

I found that there were different periods. There were periods of relative tolerance, and there were periods of extreme intolerance. And again, I want to emphasize that there are, and in fact most Muslims, are tolerant. Most Muslims, like most Christians, most Jews, most Buddhists and Hindus, I think are peace loving. I lived among Muslims when I was in Somalia, in Saudi Arabia, in Ethiopia and in Kenya. And most of the people who were around me were not violent and did not want to be violent. But many of them ceased to be tolerant and became violent once they were confronted with the commands and the demands in their faith.

Even though Muslims, and most Muslims are peace loving, it is the religion that Muhammad brought that defines the state of peace, the state of tolerance, as a moment when the entire world population submits to Allah and embraces Islam. And it's only then that peace is possible. So the end game, the end goal, is to attain that status of peace, which can only be attained after the entire world has been Islamicized.

Now, that peace, the word peace and the word tolerance, is not defined in Islam as you define it here in the United States or in the west. Peace in Islam does not mean a ceasefire, it doesn't mean a compromise. Ceasefires and compromises are temporary statuses. Now, how do you achieve that goal? It's through "adowa" [?] or preaching, through jihad, or holy war, through "hejira" or settlement, and through the institution of Sharia or Islamic law in the lands that are conquered that that peace can be achieved. Before that state of universal Islamization is achieved, it is the duty of every Muslim male to wage war. War doesn't mean you carry a gun and you go about killing people. War in this case also means you preach, you persuade, you set an example, you give charity. But you focus on the end goal. Don't forget the end goal. That is what it means in that context.

I find Islam today to be a threat to the west, and western civilization, in two ways. One is on the level of ideas. The agents who do want Islam to dominate want to replace the language of the constitution of liberty with the language of the constitution of Islam. On the second level, it's the institutional level. The agents who want Islam to dominate want to sabotage the institutions of liberty and destroy them from within. If they succeed, they will replace those institutions with Islam institutions.

The next question is what means will they employ to get their stated goals? Now, within Islam among the agents of Islam who do want Sharia, who do want a caliphate, there is no agreement on the means to the ends. To answer that question, we must first ask ourselves who are the agents of the constitution of Islam? I found the three categories. The first one are the armed militias, the revolutionary-minded. Think of the names like al-Qaeda, Lashkar e Taiba, Hamas and Hezbollah. They can be local, they can

be regional, they can be international. What distinguishes them from the other two is that their mindset is all focused on the short-term. It is through a quick, violent revolution that they want to achieve their goals.

The second category, you may be familiar with the term the Muslim Brotherhood, of which I was a member in 1985, or a sympathizer. This group is more insidious. They have given up violence for the longer term, or, rather, they have postponed violence. They apply what I call the termite method. It's very slow. These are nongovernmental organizations. They practice dawah, or the preaching. That's what they focus on, the settling, the infiltration and the sabotage, are more effective methods. They see that as the more effective method. And these are methods that have worked in Muslim countries.

The third and last group are the state actors. These are organized in an institutional body called The Organization of Islamic Conference. And these state actors have a both short-term mindset and a long-term mindset. The constitution of liberty, in other words western civilization, is thus attacked simultaneously from three different sides and in three different ways. There is no central planning from the agents of the constitution of Islam in their attack on the west. What unites them is the shared objective. Central planning, as you know in this country, is far less successful than decentralized activities, left to humans to attain a common goal by using their resourcefulness. The main thing is that the goal remains clear. The members in the different categories of radical Islam, I call it Islam, but radical Islam, may collaborate. They may fight amongst one another. They may kill one another. They may even have no contact at all with one another.

Think of the term homegrown, the phenomenon, homegrown terrorism and how it fascinates and puzzles experts that an individual in Alabama or in Texas who has had no connection at all with al-Qaeda goes out to perform the very same objectives. Nothing illustrates the common outlook of these three agents of Islam more than when Islam's founder is criticized or mocked, Muhammad. The members of the Network of Muslim Brotherhood Organizations, for instance, will take the offending text or drawing here in the west, and bring it to the attention of the larger UMA. They post it online, translate it from the language in which the criticism was given. They lobby the state agents, and then they use public relations methods to stigmatize those who try to expose the Islamist agenda as being Islamophobic, racist, and so on. That's one level.

The second level, when Muhammad is mocked, the clergymen of the militias announce a fatwa. And even put a bounty on the head of the alleged offender. Think of the Swedish cartoonist who drew Muhammad as a dog and al-Qaeda puts \$100,000 on his head, \$150,000 if his throat was slit. Now, you want to know how did al-Qaeda find that out? Obviously, members of the Muslim Brotherhood put that out to them.

The state actors send diplomats to the governments of the offender in a liberal democracy and demand some form of retribution. The person who drew it goes to jail, or the newspaper that published the drawing is put away, et cetera. And recently, the Organization of Islamic Conference, the state actors, have successfully lobbied to

criminalize some of the criticism of Islam, to criminalize it. I think it's more successful in Europe as discrimination and as defamation of religion.

So the proposition that Islam is tolerant is not only fallacious, but it's also dangerous. Why is it dangerous? For instance here in the United States, policy measures focus only on the fast growth, the militias, that are seen as a fringe. When they're operating on the domestic level, the so-called homegrown terrorists, then that becomes the business of the Secret Service and the FBI.

The second group of agents, the Muslim network, is overlooked. When they're overlooked, they can focus on their activities of indoctrination with virtually no challenge from outside. In other words, there's no counter balance. On the level of the state actors, we have an alliance, a formal alliance, with I think almost all Muslim countries except Iran and Syria. With Syria, things are thawing. That on the one hand is military; on the other hand, it's diplomatic. So, on the one hand, Saudi Arabia is an ally; on the other hand, it's financing the discourse to destroy America, a discourse of hostility and animosity towards the west and the U.S.

In short, if you look at those three groups and those three categories, they apply the instrument of divide and rule by exploiting the local differences within the west. And it's very fascinating for people who study politics and power to observe this. You will see the differences between liberals and conservatives get more conflated than between Islam and the west. The differences between Christians and atheists in the U.S. is sometimes made into this huge thing that you think that either one of them is the one that is going to destroy America: the differences between urban interest and the interest of people in rural areas.

Just how dangerous the assumption of Islam as a peaceful and tolerant religion is that it's hijacked by a fringe is demonstrated by the war on terror. We have entered the tenth year since 9/11 and that start of the war. We have sacrificed the lives of thousand and spent trillions on military and in aid to the Muslim world. And yet, here in Washington, ask anyone what the status is on the war on terror, and what you get is all around confusion, incoherence and frustration. There's no shared definition of who the enemy is. There's no agreement on what victory is, and what defeat is. There is a bitter debate on whether to stay and nation build in Afghanistan and Iraq, or to get out at the stated deadlines.

Pakistan, a nuclear power in a state of anarchy, is openly dubious in her alliance with the U.S. Pakistani authorities will tell the Americans, "Yes, we like you when you give us your money. And yes, maybe we'll help our Taliban brethren, or maybe we won't. It all depends on how gullible you are." Turkey, a member of the NATO and a prominent member of the Organization of Islamic Conference-- in fact, I think the chairman at the moment is Turkish-- is openly moving toward Islamism and away from the west. There's still, again, that bitter debate here in America on whether the war on terror is a criminal issue or a military matter.

And just to increase the level of drama, we are on the verge of another military confrontation with another permanent member of the Organization of Islamic Conference, Iran. The idea that Islam is peace, tolerant and compatible with western political theory and values, I think, is seen to be useful more as a strategy and not as a pursuit of the truth. And what is that strategy? It goes as follows: given the fact that there are over a billion Muslims in the world, a billion and a half, given the fact that the world is globalizing at a very fast pace, given the fact that America has an interest in those places and that America is a model empire meaning we do not wipe out our enemies in the same way that the Athenians wiped out Carthage, or that Muhammad wiped out his enemies, we should practice self restraint and with our restraint we should use our political skills, we should use diplomacy, tools of persuasion and other resources until we're able to get around this conflict.

The hope is we will be able to pacify Islam if we do not anger Muslims. And there is nothing that angers Muslim elites more than the criticism of Islam because you're taking away their objective, you're challenging the object. Unlike Christians and Jews, Muslims do not appreciate question marks on the moral perfection of the Koran and Muhammad. So in communicating with that large party of Muslims, we are told we will create the image, or go along with the image that Islam is perfect. And if we communicate that to them, we don't blame their religion, we will be able to persuade the masses to take our point of view. We shall give them financial aid and we shall address the day-to-day problems. It's not a war on terror anymore, it's a chronic problem.

That is the policy of enticement that has been in place since 9/11. That policy of enticement has failed. The question now is are we ready to acknowledge that failure and are we ready to explore alternatives? Thank you very much. (Applause)

**MR. HILL:** We have quite a few questions here, so let's get started. First, why did you select the topic of Islam and religion for your speech today?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** Why did I what? Sorry?

**MR. HILL:** Select the topic of Islam and religion for your speech today?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** I selected the topic of Islam and religion as my topic today because I'm frustrated by the continuous belief, and I think self delusion, that Islam is only a religion. Islam is more than a religion. It is a religion, it does have a spiritual dimension; prayer, fasting, again the rituals of life and death. None of us is opposed to that, and that part of Islam fits very well with the American constitution and can be protected by the-- and is protected by the-- First Amendment. But there is another dimension to Islam, there is the political dimension. And I wanted to talk about that, to highlight that. And the political dimension now has been the gist of my speech.

And often in my other work, when I speak to audiences both here and in Europe, I talk about the social dimension. And that social dimension regulates, or governs, the

relationship between men and women and the family. And in that I find a great subjection of women to very old, outdated and human rights violating ideas.

**MR. HILL:** Global public opinion polling has shown President Obama's policies and his Cairo speech haven't improved the view of the United States among the world's Muslims. Why do you think that is?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** I know that the questions were written before the speech. But I think that my speech completely answered this question. Because the objectives of the agents of Islam on the state level, on the militia level, and on the nongovernmental level, is not to give up Islamic jurisprudence. It's not to westernize. It's probably to modernize and use modern means to make Islam dominant. If that is your goal, then why would you suddenly say, "Okay, we are Muslims. We'll all gather in Cairo and we are going to take another look at the national interest of the United States, but only this time because it's communicated by a black man whose middle name is Hussein. We are going to change our minds about that." That doesn't make sense. That doesn't make sense to me, it doesn't make sense to any intelligent person.

The thing that we need to be doing, and I think that President Obama and his administration should have done, was examine closely what now are the objectives of these countries? What are the Muslim masses told to believe in? And that is, I think, why his popularity hasn't increased any more than that of President Bush.

**MR. HILL:** In your book *Infidel*, you state that you, "first encountered the full strength of Islam as a young child in Saudi Arabia." Could you please elaborate on this?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** Well, in Somalia, first of all, I think I was too little at the-- I think I was about eight years old and wasn't clever enough to engage in philosophical questions regarding which kind of Islam and so on. In Saudi Arabia, before we went to Saudi Arabia, Somalia was under secular rule. We were ruled by a dictator who was inspired by the Soviet Union. In our daily lives, we did see what that meant. But the state laws pertaining to women at the time didn't exist. Women and men theoretically were treated the same. The different clans in Somalia and the different tribes had another idea on that. I was treated very differently from my brother, but it wasn't state imposed.

When we went to Saudi Arabia, what I saw and what I experienced was Sharia, or the state prescribing how exactly I should dress, or my mother should dress; whether we can get out of the house or not with or without a guardian. What our testimony means, what our inheritance-- there was a gender apartheid that was imposed by the state and that was given to us as Sharia law. And that's very different from being in Somalia, it was different from being in Ethiopia, it was very different from being anywhere except where Sharia law is actually practiced and enforced.

**MR. HILL:** There have been several questions wanting your views on the firing of Juan Williams for his comments and-- well, they want to know what you think about the recent firing, and also about his comments?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** The firing of?

**MR. HILL:** Juan Williams.

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** Oh, yes. NPR, yes, he must be a very famous person because I only heard about him after he was fired. It immediately reminded me of Europe and the things that are going on in Europe where the lobbying and the intimidation tactics of both the two categories, the Muslim Brotherhood Network plus the states to criminalize any criticism of Islam. But it's not just legal criminalization, it's also to stigmatize socially; to say there is a social ill. Somebody who says, "There must be something wrong with him," that that has been very successful in Europe, and almost all critics have been silenced, I think, in my country except Geert Wilders in The Netherlands. And I came here and got an open podium to carry and say whatever I want and write whatever I want.

And Juan Williams has met with the success of that policy within NPR. So what it demonstrates to me is the National Public Radio here in the United States has successfully accepted the premise that if you criticize Islam, you are racist or Islamophobic, or you are causing social upheaval, you're generating intolerance towards Muslims. And so from that logic, the thing for them to do was to fire him. And I think it's great because it has exposed that seed is there, and I've read in the *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, people say, calling to privatize that radio, which I think is better for it.

**MR. HILL:** So no more government money for them?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** If government instruments are used to silence reporting, reporters. (Applause)

**MR. HILL:** Okay. We don't want the government silencing reporters, particularly here. That would not be very nice. What advice can you give the west regarding the successful integrations of Muslims in our society? The questioner says, "I agree with you that this is the utmost importance." Do you have any suggestions as to what each of us can do as individuals?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** That is a fantastic question because it comes to the heart of that nongovernmental Muslim Brotherhood Network. And one of the reasons why they want to silence you when you criticize Islam and call us Islamophobics, et cetera, is because they want to have complete ownership, complete monopoly on Muslim immigrants who first came to the United States not to spread Islam, not to settle or infiltrate, but to lead normal, peaceful lives. And for them to incorporate all those diverse ethnic groups, they need to get to those communities first and convince them of the caliphate agenda, of the Sharia agenda.

What we can do is to open up competition and say in a country like the United States, you are free to peddle your political theory and your political philosophy for society, but we are also free to do the same. And we are going to go to those same

communities and we are going to educate them on other competing political philosophies. And that entails not only a defense saying America is good, I think that part-- a bit of it has been, "Look at me. We are Americans, we like you, la, la, la." But it's also a challenge of the principles of Islam and that challenge on the principles of Islam, that is what the Islamists do not want to do. That is what the Network of Muslim Brotherhood do not want to do. Because every rational human being, if you assume that Muslim individuals are rational, too, once they are provided with those alternatives, there is a possibility that they may reject Islam and adopt a constitution of liberty.

So what you can do is start that competition. And you can start it from any philosophy; as a Christian, as a humanist, as a feminist. Let's get going. (Applause)

**MR. HILL:** As one of the most prominent and respected non-theists in the world, you could imagine the surprise and disappointment of many in the secular community when you advocated for the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Why advocate for religious dogma over reason and secularism? How might we get you to change your position?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** I am not advocating religious dogma. I'm not advocating religious dogma of reason and secularism. What I'm admitting is that religions are different. I have observed and read about and experienced Christians and Jews and even Hindus and Buddhists who have evolved from absolutism to tolerance, to compassion to peace. I've also observed, unfortunately, that most people don't really want to be atheists. I would like them to be atheists. I wish I had a magic wand, I could make everybody a reasonable secular atheist. But I can't. Most people who read *Infidel* who are Muslim who write to me have not converted to atheism, even though they've gained a full insight, not from my book but on their own experiences. They relate to me and they say, "I don't want to be a Muslim. I completely understand why Islam is not a moral guideline for me."

But there I am, will you not consider Christianity? Or will you not consider something else? Even be an agnostic, but don't become an atheist. So, I have to acknowledge that human beings are not inclined toward atheism, it's only a minority. Given the challenge that we are faced with, given the resources that the agents of Islam are putting into their message, given the fact that this is almost a losing battle because we are not taking them on, and given the fact that there are very moderate Christians who offer that combination of a spiritual satisfaction with modernity and the respect and sacredness of life and liberty and human rights, I think it would be wrong and neglectful not to involve Christians to go after that demography of 1.57 billion Muslims who today, I think, many of them are seeking a concept of God that's humane and are now getting only Allah. And Allah wants only one thing: domination, submission and violence. And I think other concepts of God also need to get into the marketplace of spirituality.

**MR. HILL:** What is your opinion of the Madrasah schooling that some Muslims receive in our country? Does this education skew the views of America and Americans? If so, what do you recommend we should do?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** Well, we have ample evidence on what is taught in Madrasah, Muslim centers, mosques. Some of it is what I would consider put again in that category of purely spiritual; the calls to prayer, to fasting, et cetera. But a large part of it is criminal, describing America as the great Satan. Imams telling American Muslims not to integrate, but to infiltrate. The way we find out about these things is through raids done by the FBI. It's not something that you get-- or infiltrations done by the FBI. It's not as if the Islamists will come out and say, "This is what we preach." But given the fact that we have this evidence, again I'm a liberal, a classical liberal. I don't believe in banning books. I don't believe in banning speech. I think there should be a competition of ideas. And you want to peddle your idea in a Madrasah or in any other institution, that Islamic philosophy is the best way to live together, great. Go for it. But I also want to go and peddle my idea to the same audiences and let them decide.

And I'm not going to use the ad hominem (sic). I'm not going to call you a racist or this or that, all kinds of nonsensical names. Don't do the same. You may if you want, but I want to be protected from that.

**MR. HILL:** We have another question about Christians converting Muslims. How do you explain your position that Christians should proselytize Muslims so that the Muslims might convert? Isn't this simply trading one belief simply trading one belief system predicated upon a benevolent God who will destroy infidels for another?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** As you've said a number of times, I'm an atheist. One thing that means is was God now-- is it God that's created mankind, or is it man that's created God? And obviously, I believe until there's enough evidence to show otherwise, that man created God. And it's not only one God, there are different concepts of a God. I'm not advocating religious dogma. I'm just saying given the fact that there are different concepts of God, given the fact that most human beings want a concept of a god, then a human God. A God that allows the equality of men and women, that allows the equality of heterosexuals and homosexuals, that is tolerant of other people's beliefs.

That concept of a God is very, very attractive, way more-- it's just like going to the spa sometimes. You get all kinds of treatments. And I think if you get a treatment that tells you, "We're going to cut you open and straighten you out," I think most people find that extreme. Allah, at this point in history, is extreme. Other concepts of God, of a God, might be more appealing. Why don't we just open that up to them? I'm not advocating dogmas and intolerance and the replacing of one intolerant God with another God. I'm only acknowledging that the Christian God has gone through the reformation, has gone through the enlightenment, has evolved in general. Doesn't apply to every single Christian, but in general things have evolved to a point where I think that the Christian religion, especially as it is practiced in the west, is much more attractive, much more humane and far less dangerous than the Islamic God.

**MR. HILL:** What is the AHA Foundation and how can people join or help out?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** The AHA Foundation is inspired by American friends here, who have they read *Infidel* and two of them are here with us today, said, “What can we do?” And explained to me that in the U.S., it’s not only-- you don’t change injustices on society only by using government instruments, but civil society has its part. So it is a private foundation. And our mission statement is to protect the rights of Muslim women living here in the U.S. from militant Islam and tribal custom. Some of the practices, some of the violations which were mentioned earlier, female genital mutilation practiced on little children, honor killings, honor violence, young women that are pulled out of school, that are forced into marriage. If they refuse and resist, they’re taken, transported back to the countries of origin.

And if you in America think that it doesn't happen here, then please look at the examples in Texas. There were two girls in Texas who were killed by their father, a cab driver, because of their chosen lifestyle. And that chosen lifestyle was that of the average American teenager. A girl in Arizona who was run over by her father because of her lifestyle. A woman in Georgia who was forced into marriage by her father, who accepted it, couldn't live with the husband her father chose for her. And when she left and went back to her father, he stabbed her because she shamed him.

I'm talking about that and a myriad of hidden injustices you can't see. All the little girls who are pulled out of school here in the United States. That's what the AHA Foundation wants to focus on, to create an awareness that was absent in Europe in the 1960s and in the 1970s and the 1980s. And later when we found out, in The Netherlands, it was too late in some cases because (a) people had died. But (b), the practices had become so entrenched that some of the European legislators were actually considering simply recognizing it, recognizing informal Sharia. And the mission of the AHA is to prevent Americans from doing that and choosing to help the girls.

**MR. HILL:** So, participants have an aha moment?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** Yes.

**MR. HILL:** We're almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, there are a couple of important matters I need to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you of future speakers. On November 10<sup>th</sup>, Jeff Bridges, the Academy Award-winning actor, will be here to talk about efforts to combat hunger. On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, Muhtar Kent, CEO of Coca-Cola, will be speaking here. Ready for your final Jeopardy! Question? Your life story would make a most compelling and educational movie. Are you considering this idea? And I'd like to add, if so, who do you want to play you?

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** This is the most challenging question I've ever had in public. *Infidel* is in the hands of my agent, who is talking to people in Hollywood and who might take it from that story into a screenplay. I haven't been following the status of it, so I can't tell you the movie is going to be released then and then. Who do I want to play me? I don't know. You'd be surprised. The first time I met Meryl Streep I told her, “Can you please play me?” [laughter]

**MR. HILL:** She probably could.

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** And she said, “No, because that's just not how it works in Hollywood.” And I was not looking at my skin color, I was only looking at actresses I like who I find convincing, and I find her very convincing. But if we can find a black actress who is convincing like Meryl Streep, then I would say yes.

**MR. HILL:** Before you go, I have to present you with our traditional Press Club mug.

**MS. HIRSI ALI:** Thank you, it's my second. [applause]

**MR. HILL:** I would like to thank our National Press Club staff, particularly Melinda Cooke, Joann Booz, our executive director Bill McCarren, plus our library and broadcast center for organizing today's event. For more information about joining the Press Club, or on how to acquire a copy of today's program, please go to our website, [www.press.org](http://www.press.org). Thank you very much, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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