

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**COURTESY TRANSLATION**

FRENCH DELEGATION TO THE NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
President

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**Press release from Mr Pierre Lellouche  
President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly**

For some weeks now, serious incidents have been taking place in some Muslim countries following the publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammed in European newspapers.

The publication of these caricatures poses the classic problem of the exercise of freedom of expression. Is there any need to remind ourselves that freedom and the free communication of thoughts and opinions are among Man's most precious assets? Men and women are still fighting today to affirm these rights, often putting their lives in danger, in Belarus, Burma, North Korea, Syria and Iran, to mention but a few countries.

The freedom of expression need only suffer occasional hindrances, such as those dictated by our own consciences and those put in place in each country by its legislative body. Freedom of expression has to be exercised with a spirit of responsibility. In democratic countries, any conflict between freedom of expression and other principles or values is ruled on by the courts, applying laws and the general principles of law.

The demonstrations that are taking place in certain Muslim countries are only distantly related to the publication of the caricatures mentioned above. The fact that these demonstrations are only taking place now, with a time lag of over four months since the drawings were published, demonstrates that they are by no means spontaneous. On the contrary, they are the work of provocation knowingly organised by certain governments for purposes other than defending the sacred principles of Islam.

Consequently, it is appropriate to remember that setting fire to the Danish and Norwegian diplomatic missions, particularly in Syria and Iran, constitutes an inadmissible act that can only have taken place with the agreement of the authorities in those countries, with no regard for the principles of diplomatic immunity and the fact that embassies and consulates are not deemed to be on the soil of the countries where they are located, as laid down in the Vienna Conventions of 1961 and 1963. I would like to express, in the name of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, my deep solidarity with regard to Denmark and Norway.

We should also remember that there is no incompatibility between democracy, freedom and Islam, as illustrated by the many sessions organised by the NATO PA's Special Mediterranean Group with numerous Muslim countries. During these sessions, dialogue has always been marked with tolerance and a mutual wish to understand the values of each civilisation. It is encouraging to note that the overwhelming majority of Muslims reacted calmly to the publication of these caricatures, whereas they were indeed offensive to their religion. Instead, they preferred to debate and protest by sending letters or by holding peaceful demonstrations, rather than resort to violence.

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