



THE PRIME MINISTER

Copenhagen, 20 FEB 2006

H.E. Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey

Dear Prime Minister Erdogan,

Thank you for your letter of February 10th.

The concerns voiced by many Muslims all over the world over the drawings in a Danish independent newspaper of the Prophet Muhammad have been heard and are taken very seriously by the Danish Government.

The Danish government condemns any expression, action or indication that attempts to demonise groups of people on the basis of their religion. I have also made it clear that personally I would never depict any religious figure in a way that could hurt other people's feelings.

I am deeply distressed that these drawings have been perceived as a defamation of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam as a religion. Even more so, when the issue in the Muslim world is sometimes wrongly portrayed as part and parcel of a smear campaign against Muslims, supported by the Danish Government and the Danish people. I cannot stress sufficiently that this is not the case. The Danish Government does not condone expressions that demonise or discriminate people on the basis of their religion.

On the contrary, I have constantly appealed to the Danish population that we maintain a decent tone in the public debate and abstain from any kind of incitements to hatred among people, cultures and religions. I am pleased that Jyllands-Posten has issued an unequivocal apology for the offence caused by the drawings. Freedom of expression is an indispensable right as defined in the European Convention for the protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, but we are all responsible for administering this freedom in such a manner that we do not incite to hatred and fragmentation.

Please rest assured that the Danish Government respects Islam as one of the world's great religions. We have no wish and no agenda to insult, mock or in any other way behave disrespectfully towards Muslims.

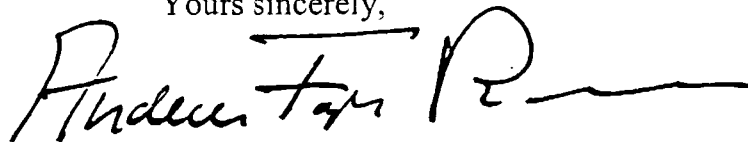
I fully agree with you that nothing can excuse or legitimise the violence committed against European Embassies and that those who provoke violence undermine their own cause.

Freedom of expression, tolerance, mutual respect and dialogue are crucial values in the Danish society. In this spirit, I have launched a series of initiatives to reach out to Muslims in Denmark and internationally, as well as to strengthen the dialogue. I have also initiated a comprehensive effort to strengthen the knowledge and insights in Danish society of Arab and Muslim culture, people, and history in recognition of the importance to build bridges of understanding between Europe and the Muslim world. In line with this, I fully support your initiative to create an "Alliance of Civilisations" and my Government stands ready to join you in your efforts to realize this important initiative. Many societies both in East and West need improved tolerance of religious minorities and equal treatment of all religious communities. I would like to inform you that, contrary to certain media reports, in fact, the regulations for the 19 officially approved Islamic religious communities in Denmark are exactly the same as for all other approved religious communities.

As you know, Dr. Solana is travelling in the Middle East region and the EU is engaged in furthering the dialogue. His efforts are based on the tri-party joint statement from the OIC, UN and EU that sends an important conciliatory message. We appreciate the constructive role played by Turkey in the OIC.

It is my sincere hope that Denmark can contribute to the further development of the "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative. Only increased cooperation - politically, culturally and economically - can help us address the many challenges of the 21st Century.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anders Fogh Rasmussen'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen