

Helsinki 13.2.2006

Dear Sir,

I have followed with growing concern and alarm the repercussions of the publication in Denmark several months ago of insulting caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed and their subsequent republication by some other European newspapers and the violent acts that have occurred in reaction to them.

From the Finnish perspective, a country where no pictures so far - to my great satisfaction - have been published in newspapers, I would like to emphasise that intentionally hurting the religious feelings of anyone is unwise and deplorable.

Liberty of expression is a fundamental value and a democratic right in our society to which governments in our societies are committed to. Its responsible use entails promoting the respect of religions and the spiritual feelings of people belonging to all religions. If mistakes are made it is but common sense to regret and apologise for them made and for the injuries incurred.

While the publication of the cartoons was unwise it is necessary to underline that the reaction, when it has taken violent forms, including the burning of diplomatic missions and aggressions against international peace keepers, is unacceptable. Violence is contrary to the basic values we all share irrespective of our cultural backgrounds and does not solve anything in this situation but leads us into a spiral of further confrontation with untold consequences.

These events make the need for renewed and international dialogue, among and between communities of different faiths and authorities of different countries, all the more urgent. I would like to appeal for mutual restraint and calm, in the spirit of friendship and mutual respect. The situation will not be improved by any kind of retaliatory measures which would show disrespect for the People of the Book, be it Muslim, Christian or Jew. Such unacceptable measures can only fuel intolerance and violence when we need to show more respect, dignity and tolerance vis-à-vis one another.

During the past 10 years important steps have been taken in promoting intercultural and religious dialogue between our great civilisations. Our true objective should be to get back on course, build bridges and interact with respect with one another. Finland will be chairing the European Union later this year. One of our main objectives during this time will be to seek a strong engagement with the Islamic world.

Yours Sincerely.



Erkki Tuomioja
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland