

November 28, 2005

## **Christmas Tree or a Holiday Tree?**

### ***A Muslim perspective on Political Correctness***

by Jihad Aliweiwi

Here we go again. To call a Christmas tree or not to call it a Christmas tree. It is a Christmas Tree for Christ's sake, pardon the pun. I, for one, a Muslim, am not offended by the presence of a beautifully decorated tree adorning homes stores and offices. It's rather pleasant to look at, to say nothing of the goodies underneath it.

That renaming the Christmas tree as a Holiday Tree as a sign of inclusivity, is so ridiculous of a notion, I am tempted to completely dismiss it if it was not serious.

Call it what it is and please, all of you smiley faces on cash and service counters, wish me a Merry Christmas when you ring in my coins in and part me from my money, even if I am paying the stuff the day after, at half price.

I am not offended if you wish me a Merry Christmas, neither as a Muslim nor as a Canadian. I am offended at the fact that there are increasing numbers of people in Toronto who live below poverty line. I am offended that the season to be jolly is the most challenging time for hundreds of working Canadian families of all faiths who see their disposable income steadily declining, and struggle to buy a gift, a turkey, a lamb or eggnog.

We all should be offended that homeless Canadians are increasing. Surely one must be enraged, not by the pleasant cashier wishing you "Merry Christmas", but rather by the fact that in Canada today some of us have no choice but to be begging for pittance at entrances and exists of malls and department stores especially during Christmas.

We should be more offended that many Canadians depend on food banks. We should be moved to action by the increasing number of abandoned, lonely, disregarded and disenfranchised Canadians. That 19% of eligible voters voted in a by-election is not generating the same debate as what to call a tree erected in the family rooms of millions of Canadians during a holiday marking the birth of a religion's most revered symbol is really offending me.

There are many ways of celebrating Christmas; we should learn some of these ways: for example how do Iraqi Assyrian Christians, one of the earliest Christian Churches, celebrate their Christmas. Or why don't we ask a Buddhist monk, a Muslim imam or an atheist to turn the light on for Rideau Hall Christmas Tree lighting ceremony. The new Governor General's first order of business should have been hosting an ethnic Christmas dinner with plates and costumes from Peru to Palestine, Haiti to Holland, and from Malawi to Mozambique. Please teach me how Aboriginal Canadians celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. I am fine with that, in fact, I would love to know how natives became Christians in Canada.

Ask me how I, or people of my community, Palestinians, celebrate Christmas, and I will tell you its very lovely. I especially love aunty Em Ziad's exquisite turkey stuffed with rice, pine nuts and lean ground beef (who thought that stuffing turkey with bread is a good idea?) I will also tell you about Arabic Christmas Carols breathtakingly sang by Fairuz, the foremost Diva of the Arab World today and recited by enchanted believers and non-believers alike. Diversity is about exchanging meaningful things like traditions, recipes, music, phone numbers e-mails and MP3 files; it is certainly not about expunging existing ones. Diversity is about acceptance not tolerance: one can tolerate a headache but must accept a neighbour who speaks another language, light a different candle for Diwali or cook lamb for Christmas and not turkey. I personally like lamb for Christmas just as much as I like it for Eid.

The challenge of diversity and multiculturalism is to incorporate new ways into our social, political cultural and religious fabrics without denigrating existing, predominant ones. Doing away with Christmas makes a mockery out of diversity and plurality while providing us a false sense of comfort that we are an inclusive society. That's offensive.

So, from me to all of you, Have a Merry Christmas with or without a tree, after all it's a Pagan thing, isn't it?

- 30 -