

Statement on Homosexualist Campaign against Muslim Scholar

5th Shawwal 1425 / 17th November 2004

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

The visit of the respected scholar Yusuf Al-Qaradawi to London in July 2004 came amid a media storm, in which numerous allegations were made against him, including that he has incited hatred and violence against homosexuals. Long after his visit, these claims still feature in the news due to an ongoing campaign now centred on London Mayor Ken Livingstone. He is under fire for hosting the Sheikh, and a coalition of "Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, gay people, students and some Muslims"¹ has compiled a 214-page document² detailing his comments allegedly "endorsing the use of suicide bombers as well as the vilification of homosexuals and Jews".

The StraightWay Foundation have observed the ongoing debates with some concern, and we present this statement in an attempt to clarify fundamental issues as well as to present a balanced Muslim view on the relevant issues.

Two points should be stressed at the outset of this statement:

1. It is not a defence of Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who can doubtless speak for himself³, and has supporters who should take on that noble task. Our main concern is removing the confusion surrounding Islam's position on homosexuality. Therefore we shall refrain from refuting the aforementioned 214-page barrage of falsehoods and fallacies.
2. We speak only for ourselves, i.e. the StraightWay Foundation. Our organisation (see page 2) is composed of a wide variety of Muslims, and we have no particular doctrinal or political affiliation, other than those which constitute the defining points of the Islamic way of life.

We have been particularly concerned at the statements of "gay Muslims"⁴ and other homosexualist campaigners such as the notorious Peter Tatchell. They (and indeed their present allies) are attempting to drive a wedge between Islam and its sources, and between Muslims and their scholars. The use of terminology such as "fundamentalist", "radical", "extreme", "intolerant", "backward" and many more play a central role in this campaign of confusion.⁵

¹ 'Livingstone faces formal investigation':

http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1348032,00.html

² Accessible via <http://www.londoncommunitycoalition.org>

³ He does so on his official website (in Arabic): <http://www.qaradawi.net>

⁴ See page 4 for comments on this term.

⁵ This point was touched upon by MAB in 'If Qaradawi is an extremist, who is left?':

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1257426,00.html>

The StraightWay Foundation: < Background, Aims and Activities >

The StraightWay Foundation was established in Ramadan 1423/2002 in recognition of the absolute lack of Islamic guidance available to Muslims experiencing same-sex attractions (SSA). Prior to this, discussion of the issue was dominated by groups who are intent on twisting Islam to suit their desires.

The following are our broad areas of work:

Information

We make authentic Islamic rulings available on issues related to homosexuality, while also presenting a balanced understanding of these rulings. In this regard, we respond to fallacious claims made by Muslims or non-Muslims about Islam and homosexuality. Furthermore, we aim to increase awareness about the dilemmas faced by same-sex attracted (SSA) Muslims.

Guidance

We provide advice and support to brothers and sisters who come to us, and make such advice available on our website. Compassion is our keyword, as condemnation helps no-one. We affirm that change is possible through personal effort and Allah's help; yet even those who are unable to achieve complete healing can live their lives in a way pleasing to their Lord.

Consultation

There is widespread ignorance about homosexual issues, even among Muslim scholars and leading organisations. We hope to guide them to more correct discourse about these issues, as well as advise them on proper strategies.⁶

Dialogue

Our views are mainstream Muslim ones, even though our discourse may differ from what people are used to. We hope to reach mutual understanding with fellow Muslims, whether 'orthodox' or 'progressive', and with non-Muslims who are interested in Islam's stance on these issues.

Our membership is global, and is not restricted according to sect (e.g. Sunni/Shi'ah), gender or level of Islamic practice. We are united on the belief in the truth of Islam, its prohibition of homosexual acts, and its role in guiding us to the best of physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

As well as the website (currently awaiting update), we run an e-mail support group in which a diverse network of Muslims from many countries share their experiences and emotions and find advice from fellow Muslims, including trained psychologists.⁷

We appreciate all feedback, which can be sent to info@straightway.org.uk .

⁶ A policy document is to be sent to leading Muslims in the UK in the near future, if Allah wills.

⁷ The group has restricted membership and is located at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/straightstruggle>

< What Does Islam Say About Homosexuality? >

In addressing this question, we first must consider what “Islam says” about anything. The real question is what the **sources** of Islam say. The universally agreed sources are the Qur’an (Allah’s revealed book) and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him (i.e. what he said, did or approved). Then there is the issue of interpretation. As is the case with any issue requiring specialisation, we should refer to sincere and erudite scholars to gain a proper understanding of explicit or implicit rulings from Islam’s textual sources.⁸

So what do the Qur’an and Sunnah say about “homosexuality”? The fact is that this term (or any Arabic equivalent) is found neither in these basic sources, nor even in the books of Islamic jurisprudence. This is because the term is a recent Western coinage, arising within a specific cultural context and therefore bearing specific meanings.

The conclusion we have come to is that it is mistaken to say that “Islam forbids homosexuality”. Rather, we teach that “Islam **rejects** ‘homosexuality’ as a concept.”⁹ Therefore, it is not ‘homosexuality’ that should be described as sinful; rather, this applies to homosexual **actions**.

This is not to deny the genuine feelings of any person, but rather to call into question the philosophical assumptions of the entire discourse over the issues (as there are numerous issues being conflated behind terms such as “orientation”). We welcome rational debate over this position; we maintain that such a debate has not taken place. Attempts to propose alternative ways of looking at the questions often result in accusations of homophobia.

Sensible questions

Rather than asking about ‘homosexuality’ as such, areas such as the following can be evaluated in the light of the Shari’ah (Islamic law from its sources):

1. Sexual attraction to members of the same sex.
2. Sodomy and other sexual acts between members of the same sex.
3. Gender-blurring lifestyles, e.g. effeminacy in men.

On the following page, we present a compact summary of Islamic rulings related to 1 and 2, particularly in the context of the present allegations against Islam and one of its eminent jurists. More rulings and explanations can be accessed via our website and upon request from the StraightWay Foundation.

⁸ It is worth noting Dr. Azzam Tamimi’s comment on Sheikh Al-Qaradawi’s verdicts: “He is a jurist. If you ask him about these issues he will tell you the Islamic position of the Koran. These aren’t his views. **He is not a politician.**” (Emphasis added)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardianpolitics/story/0,3605,1257396,00.html>

⁹ A detailed explanation of this position is available on request from the StraightWay Foundation.

< Islamic Rulings and their Philosophy >

Islam (along with most religions) promotes the beauty of the creation of the male-female pair, which is the basis for humanity's growth. The institution of marriage has an elevated status, and many rules in the Shari'ah are designed to protect this sacred bond (e.g. the prohibition of adultery or even excessive mixing between sexes). Homosexual relationships go against the natural order and harm both the individuals involved and society at large.¹⁰

Homosexual relations

Any relations of a sexual nature between members of the same sex are sinful. This applies particularly to sexual acts such as anal penetration. The Qur'an expresses this mainly in reference to the people to whom the Prophet Lut (Lot, peace be on him) was sent. One such passage is 7:80ff, where he addresses the males saying, **"Do you commit lewdness such as no people in creation committed before you? For you practise your lusts on men in preference to women: you are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds."**¹¹

Same-sex attractions (SSA)

The attractions in themselves do not make the person experiencing them sinful, as Allah judges people solely on what they have control over. SSA may develop early in childhood, due to various causes.¹² At the same time, they should be understood as a test from Allah. It is incumbent on a Muslim to seek spiritual and psychological solutions, or at least to practise chastity in his/her efforts to please and obey Allah.

Self-identity as "gay Muslims"

This term is confused due to the conflicting philosophies behind its constituent parts. That is not to say that a 'gay' person cannot be a Muslim. Rather, we maintain that someone who **thinks** as a Muslim realises that "being gay" is a concept alien to the Islamic worldview. Therefore such labelling does not befit a Muslim; however, thinking of oneself as a "same-sex attracted (SSA) Muslim" does not contradict Islam.

The question of punishment

Islam prescribes punishments to protect society; these are applied only in the context of a state based (not superficially) on the Shari'ah. They include strict measures against fornication and adultery. Sodomy is somewhat analogous; hence the head of the Islamic state may opt for punishment against people who commit sodomy, based on the precedent of the Prophet's companions. However, the lack of textual evidence for a worldly punishment has caused disagreement, with most scholars agreeing that such should be applied. They differ as to its exact nature, with many stating that the death penalty should be applied; others have suggested alternatives.¹³

¹⁰ This statement and those that follow can be supported by the Islamic sources as well as other means of evidence and reasoning. In this document, we simply present them with very little corroboration.

¹¹ There are numerous similar passages, notably 11:77ff, 26:160ff. The community were destroyed for their sins, the chief of which – abundantly clear in the Qur'an – was their homosexual relations. There are also numerous statements of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) forbidding such actions and stipulating punishment.

¹² We do not agree that there is a biological basis for SSA, while recognising that Islam may not reject it outright.

¹³ For more details, see <http://straightway.sinfree.net/rulings/fatwas3.htm#2>

< Our Religion, Our Stance >

What we have presented here is a frank discussion of what the Islamic sources say. Without going into detail, it is obvious that anybody who sincerely follows the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) should absolutely avoid homosexual relations, no matter how attractive they may be. A Muslim who is attracted to the same sex should seek means to purify his/her heart, as SSA are an affliction – and to say so is not to imply a disgrace for the person, as each of us faces a unique set of tests in this life, which is nothing but a testing ground for the Hereafter.

The homosexualist campaigners (and their allies) have presented the statements of Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi as though they are his personal opinion, and as though they can be separated from Islam or from Muslim beliefs. They ignore the fact that all his views are soundly based on the universally agreed sources of Islam, and that all scholars (from official state muftis to local imams) condemn homosexual acts as sins against Allah and crimes against nature. Are they all “radical” and “extreme”?

The fact that the Islamic view discords with the prevalent views in the West today should hardly be surprising; neither should it be a cause for distress. What it indicates is the pressing need for dialogue, in order to establish mutual understanding. Describing Islam as “backward” for its stances does not help. We should remember that ‘homosexuality’ was considered in this country to be abnormal and sinful just half a century ago, and psychiatric bodies considered it to be a “disease”.

Should we not, therefore, ask why official and popular views have changed so dramatically since then? Were we all mad/stupid/bigoted, and saw reason? Was there informed debate involving all spheres of knowledge? Or was the change due to a sustained campaign, particularly in the media (including TV entertainment programmes)? If the latter, then surely there is still room for respectful dialogue with Muslims and others who maintain a principled stance on this issue.

Muslims around the world have had little chance for internal debate over the issue of homosexuality, as they have faced more pressing issues related to basic freedoms and national integrities. Yet British and other Western Muslims should now engage in proper dialogue, involving ‘gay Muslims’ and the wider society, in order to maintain harmonious integration without compromising Islamic faith and life.

Certainly Islam does not call for British Muslims to attack ‘homosexuals’, any more than it calls for them to persecute people who have sex before marriage, or who wish to! Rather, we have a message to share; and we will stand firm in our view that Islam is a way of life designed for the well-being of the individual and the whole society.

As for labels of “fundamentalists” and the like: we stand aloof of them. The Muslims’ position regarding the Qur'an and Sunnah is clear, and that is what we aim to abide by with integrity.

May Allah accept this effort from us, and may He guide us always to the best of speech and actions.