

## Appendix C: Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf's statement

as read by Trevor Phillips during Policy Exchange's fringe event at Conservative Party Conference

Public Statement on the Subject of Islamophobia

by Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf

General Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council  
Co-founder and Director of Religious Affairs, Bayt ar-Rahmah

Prepared for the Conservative Party Conference

September 29, 2019

The continued targeting of Muslims and Muslim places of worship—as witnessed with the Christchurch and Finsbury Park attacks—comes after nearly two decades during which Islamist atrocities have been a pervasive feature of daily life around the world. Horrors such as the massacre in New Zealand would likely be inconceivable if divorced from this wider context in which Islam has become synonymous with terror in the minds of many non-Muslims.

Among both Muslims and non-Muslims, there is an urgent need to address those problematic elements of Islamic orthodoxy that underlie the Islamist worldview, fuelling violence on both sides. The truth, we must recognise, is that jihadism can be traced to specific tenets of authoritative Islam and its historic practice. This includes those portions of Shariah that promote Islamic supremacy and encourage enmity towards non-Muslims.

There is a desperate need for honest discussion of these matters. This is why it worries me to see Western political and intellectual elites weaponize the term “Islamophobia,” to short-circuit analysis of a complex phenomenon that threatens us all. It is factually incorrect and counter-productive to define Islamophobia as “rooted in racism,” as proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims. In reality, it is the spread of Islamist extremism and terror that primarily contributes to the rise of Islamophobia throughout the non-Muslim world.

That is why it is vital to challenge the mindset of Islamist extremism which has become so pervasive and which is predicated upon enmity and suspicion towards non-Muslims, and too often rationalises perpetrating violence in the name of Islam. Otherwise, non-Muslims will continue to

be radicalised by Islamist attacks.

Stifling this much needed debate with a flawed definition of Islamophobia will do nothing to make Muslims safer, but rather will contribute to an atmosphere in which divisions become more deeply felt, creating greater hostility and inevitably putting both Muslims and non-Muslims at ever greater risk.

Perpetually focusing attention outward—as seen with the endless calls for an Islamophobia investigation into Britain’s governing party—only adds to the problem, by distracting from the need for debate within, and about, Islam. Jokes are not inherently Islamophobic or hateful, and this includes Boris Johnson’s joke about the burqa. Seeking to police what other people think and say is an authoritarian means of preventing free discussion, rather than an expression of compassion.

I commend Policy Exchange for hosting this event. I also commend those of good will of every faith and nation, who seek to prevent the weaponization of Islam for political purposes, and strive to find common ground on the basis of our shared identity as human beings who are endowed with the right to freedom of opinion and expression; a right which includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, impart and receive information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (UDHR, Article 19).

We note from afar your efforts to defend this key element of the humanist tradition, which is under siege by the forces of intolerance. In today’s caustic political environment, it is both seductive and easy to hurl accusations—e.g., of ‘Islamophobia’—rather than present reasoned arguments concerning issues that are of the utmost importance to our respective societies.

Rather than vilify and/or silence those who disagree, let us choose compassion; let us embrace humility; let us be objective in our analysis of circumstances and events; and let us respect the right of others to think and speak freely, for God alone knows the truth of all things.

I believe this is the only way to restore trust and reestablish the bonds of affection that are essential, if we are to acknowledge and embrace our shared humanity.