

## 2019\_05\_15\_Prominent Jewish Figures Warn About the Perils of Weaponizing Identity

### **Muslim Leader Concur: “Overcoming White Supremacism, Antisemitism and Islamist Extremism Will Require Courage, Honesty and Compassion”**

In the weeks following white supremacist Brenton Tarrant’s live-streaming of his brutal slaughter of Muslims at prayer in New Zealand, Jews, Muslims and Christians have all fallen victim to shocking acts of terror. In response to these tragedies, a number of prominent Jewish figures have joined Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf—General Secretary of Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world’s largest Muslim organization—in urging religious, cultural and political elites to end the practice of weaponizing identity, which exacerbates communal hatred and short-circuits analysis of the complex phenomena that contribute to ethnic and religious violence.

“Solidarity across racial, religious, cultural and political lines to address this global crisis is the only answer,” says Mr. Staquf. “The cycle of mutual recrimination and bloodshed we are witnessing is deeply rooted in history, including ancient animosities and ‘tribal narratives’ embedded within the collective memory of entire ethnic and religious groups. We must understand what fuels these hatreds, which extremists seek to awaken through heinous acts of terror, such as those which occurred recently in New Zealand, Sri Lanka, America, Nigeria and Burkina Faso.”

Mr. Staquf’s observation is borne out by the example of John Earnest, who on April 27, 2019—six weeks after Brenton Tarrant committed his atrocity against Muslims in Christchurch—attacked a synagogue in Poway, California, citing Tarrant as his inspiration and explicitly referencing Christian scripture as part of his justification for murdering Jews. A number of publications honed in on this fact, including the [Washington Post](#). In a piece titled “The alleged synagogue shooter was a churchgoer who talked Christian theology, raising tough questions for evangelical pastors,” the article examined how Calvinist theology, mixed with white supremacist beliefs, motivated Earnest in his targeting of both Jews and Muslims, and how ministers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in America are responding to this disturbing reality.

The attack in Poway came less than five months after white supremacist Robert Bowers massacred eleven Jews at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, while in recent years, Jewish communities in Europe have endured similar horrific attacks at the hands of Muslim extremists, including the murder of young schoolchildren in Toulouse and an elderly Holocaust survivor in Paris. These tragedies illustrate the perils of weaponizing identity.

As the 2018 [Nusantara Manifesto](#) states: “In the Western world, Islamist terrorism—and, in the case of Europe, the influx of refugees and migrants from the broader Middle East and Africa—have significantly contributed to a profound polarization that threatens the integrity of those

societies' democratic systems. On both the political left and right, attitudes towards Islam have become a proxy battleground in a wider struggle for power that politicizes Islam and renders Muslims highly vulnerable to any breakdown in political order.”

“We believe that Muslims and non-Muslims should have equal rights as citizens in modern nation states, subject neither to preferential nor discriminatory treatment,” says Mr. Staquf. “It is extremely short-sighted, and indeed highly dangerous—not only for Muslim immigrants living in the West, but for their host communities as well—to permit Islamist extremists to form an ‘alliance of convenience’ with one end of the political spectrum to vilify and attack their opponents, and thereby exacerbate the intense polarization that is roiling Europe and North America. The entire world is at risk if we fail to summon the courage, honesty and compassion required to transcend our past grievances and embrace one another as fellow human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion.

“This is why we call upon people of goodwill of every faith and nation to join in building a global consensus to prevent the political weaponization of Islam, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, and to curtail the spread of communal hatred by fostering the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.”

Writing in *The Jewish Chronicle*, public intellectual, journalist and commentator Melanie Phillips argued that the “Jewish community is making an unwitting contribution” to lethal ethnic and religious hatred:

The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) provides an invaluable service translating material from Arabic into English and thus lifting the curtain on the deranged antisemitism coursing through the Arab and Muslim world.

Recently its founder, Yigal Carmon, observed that this Jew-hatred had spread to America and Europe where it was turning into “really violent threats based on Islamic texts.”

“And yet,” he added, the American Jewish community targeted by such attacks was silent. “Not a protest, no public activity, nothing at all. They are afraid to be thought of as Islamophobic”...

Worse still, people on the left are now smearing all anti-Islamists by lumping them together with white supremacists under the labels of “far right,” “alt-right” and “Islamophobes.”

After the New Zealand mosques massacre a stupendously brave Muslim leader, Yahya Cholil Staquf, wrote: “It is factually incorrect and counter-productive to define Islamophobia as ‘rooted in racism’. In reality, it is the spread of Islamist extremism and terror that primarily contributes to the rise of Islamophobia throughout the non-Muslim world.”

Furthermore, the antisemitism of the left is being fuelled by the antisemitism of the Muslim world — which is in turn emboldened and incentivised by the refusal of the non-Muslim world to condemn it.

These are the vicious and lethal circles to which the silence of the Jewish community is making an unwitting contribution.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Associate Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and historian Dr. Harold Brackman called on all religious communities to have the “courage and clarity” to acknowledge and address supremacist hatred, whatever form it may take:

Tarrant is an Islamophobe who proudly calls himself in his deranged manifesto “an ecofascist”; who also lauded Dylan Roof for slaughtering innocent African American Christian worshippers in Charleston; who hopes that his mass murder will provoke a race war in the US.

Muslims and Jews must unite with Christians against the hydra-headed threat posed by global hate and terrorism against minorities around the world, personified by Tarrant. This threat is hydra-headed for Muslim and Jewish minorities because they are both targeted by the same white supremacists seeking to reestablish a world order where non-Christians and nonwhites were barely tolerated as second-class citizens.

Tarrant’s greatest nightmare was pluralism and tolerance in democratic lands like the U.S. and New Zealand. It is the wrong answer to criminalize reading Tarrant’s hate manifesto. You don’t defeat Nazism by banning *Mein Kampf*. It is also a mistake for one religious minority in our countries to demonize another son of Abraham.

And we won’t defeat burgeoning hate by embracing soothing but dishonest political correctness. Just days after the New Zealand attack, a Turkish-born terrorist in the Netherlands murdered and maimed new victims.

Muslims, Jews, and Christians should take their cue from Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama, the world’s largest Islamic organization based in Indonesia. He wrote in London’s *Telegraph* how Muslim extremists exploit outworn religious supremacist doctrines going back to the medieval Caliphate to justify twenty-first century violence, just as Brenton Tarrant used the medieval Christian Crusades to justify his anti-Muslim atrocity. Both use the internet and social media to promote an age-old cycle of religious violence.

Moderates have to find the moral courage to speak out when their own religions are hijacked by extremists, just as Mr. Staquf has. When his courage and clarity become the norm we may have the chance to slay the dragon of hate.