

Written Testimony

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U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Hearing

Rising Anti-Muslim Hatred: FoRB Violations Against Muslims Abroad

Distinguished Commissioners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to have the opportunity to submit this testimony on an issue of growing urgency, yet one that is still too often denied or downplayed: anti-Muslim racism.

Anti-Muslim racism in Germany is not an abstract concern, nor a marginal issue. It is a reality that is visible, measurable, and lived every single day by millions of people. Despite overwhelming evidence from academic research, civil society monitoring, and lived experiences, it continues to be minimized, rationalized, or outright denied. This denial is not neutral. It is part of the problem.

Historically, racism in Germany was most visibly and violently driven by extremist ideologies, particularly during the Nazi era, when hatred was explicit, organized, and unmistakable. Society knew where the danger lay. Today, the situation is different.

Racism has not disappeared; it has shifted. It has moved from the margins into the center of society. It no longer always appears in the form of open hatred, but often manifests through rhetoric, political narratives, institutional practices, and everyday assumptions. Precisely because it is less obvious, it is more easily ignored and more difficult to confront.

There have been repeated scandals involving extremist networks, racist communication, and discriminatory conduct within security authorities. When prejudice enters state structures, it is no longer just a social issue: it becomes a direct threat to the rule of law.

Equally concerning is the question of political accountability. There are instances in which individuals who have been explicitly named in reports by independent expert bodies on anti-Muslim hostility have nevertheless risen to high political office, including positions such as State Secretary. This raises serious concerns. What message does this send? It suggests that such findings carry no real consequences. It signals to affected communities that their experiences are acknowledged rhetorically, but disregarded in practice. These are warning signs of deeper structural failures.

What makes this development particularly alarming is that hostility toward Muslims, in many of its forms, has become socially acceptable. It is often expressed under the cover of so-called “criticism of Islam,” where sweeping generalizations and dehumanizing narratives are framed as legitimate debate.

While critical engagement is a fundamental part of democratic societies, there is a clear line between critique (which is constructive) and discrimination (which is destructive). This line is increasingly being crossed in public discourse, contributing to the normalization of prejudice.

This normalization is further reinforced by narratives that deny the very existence of anti-Muslim racism. Some argue that there is no such phenomenon, claiming instead that only “Islamism” exists, and that anti-Muslim racism is an invention designed to distract from

security concerns. Such claims shift blame onto those affected and reinforce dangerous stereotypes, including the claim that Muslims as a group are inherently suspect.

When such positions are voiced or tolerated in positions of political responsibility, it sends a devastating signal: that discrimination can be dismissed, that affected communities will not be taken seriously, and that accountability is optional.

During my position as General Secretary of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, I addressed this issue directly by sending letters to the Federal Ministry of the Interior as well as to the interior ministries of all German states. In these letters, I called for the appointment of a Commissioner for Muslim Life and for Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination.

Numerous letters were sent. However, to this day, not a single such commissioner has been appointed.

In Germany, there are commissioners for many different societal concerns and groups. Yet when it comes to Muslims, structural recognition and institutional representation remain largely absent. This discrepancy raises fundamental questions about equal treatment, visibility, and the seriousness with which anti-Muslim discrimination is addressed.

When an entire group is placed under general suspicion, when their dignity is questioned, and when their experiences are invalidated, the core principles of the constitutional order are undermined: human dignity, equality before the law, and freedom of religion. These are the foundation of our democratic society. And they are erased when racism becomes normalized.

The consequences are far-reaching. When individuals lose trust in institutions, when they feel unprotected or unfairly treated, social cohesion begins to break down. A democracy cannot thrive when segments of its population are consistently pushed to the margins.

The question, therefore, is no longer whether anti-Muslim racism exists. The debate is over.

The real question is: how long can we afford to ignore it?

Ignoring it does not make it disappear. It normalizes what should never be normal and legitimizes what should never be accepted.

Germany, and Europe more broadly, stands at a crossroad. Either we continue to downplay this issue, risking further division and injustice, or we confront it with honesty, courage, and decisive action.

This requires concrete measures: independent monitoring mechanisms, transparent documentation of anti-Muslim incidents, binding anti-racism strategies within state institutions, and, above all, the clear recognition of anti-Muslim racism as a distinct and dangerous form of group-based hatred.

Anything less would amount to complicity.

The strength of a society is not measured by how it treats the majority, but by how it protects its minorities.

Thank you for your attention.