



Position Statement on **Apostasy and Blasphemy**

Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) hereby,

Denounces and wholly condemns the institutionalization of anti-apostasy, anti-blasphemy, and anti-heresy laws and policies endorsed and authorized by state actors that directly target religious, political, and ethnic minority demographics at both state and local levels. These extreme laws and policies enable and sustain cultural atmospheres of discrimination, social exclusion, and civil disorder, and provide lawful justification for inciting violence and hatred. Moreover, this sanctioned demonization is propagated and exacerbated by fundamentalist and extremist religious sects who defend it by citing cultural sovereignty and utilize it as a *theo-political* mechanism to further state and non-state agendas.

Affirms that the utilization of faith and culture as drivers for the propagation of and justifications for discrimination, bigotry, incitement to violence and hate speech is absolutely inconsistent with existing international human rights conventions. MPV asserts that faith and culture can and should be utilized, with respect and recognition given to socially inclusive and egalitarian traditions of faith and culture, as vehicles for sustainable development in accordance with existing international human rights conventions.

Strives for the promotion and protection of pluralistic, egalitarian, and inclusive societies; elimination of dogmatic religious narratives in all academic spaces, and the freedom to publicly engage and disseminate critical analyses of theological scripture without fear of physical or mental harm.

Offers a foundation for the critical analysis of Qur'anic Scripture, rooted in sound and reliable academia, to counter fundamentalist and extremist narratives and ideologies that threaten the promotion and protection of pluralistic, egalitarian, inclusive, and secular societies.

Furthermore, we the undersigned affirm that:

Classical Islamic jurisprudence regarding apostasy is incorrect. Not only is the doctrine of apostasy in direct conflict with the Qur'anic injunction, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256), it is also in contravention of various other passages of the Qur'an which discuss the person who believes and then disbelieves. For instance:

- ⇒ Qur'an 2:217: "...if any of you turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be companions of the Fire and will abide therein."
- ⇒ Qur'an 3:86: "How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their belief and (after) they bore witness that the messenger is true and after clear proofs had come unto them? Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk."
- ⇒ Qur'an 3:90 "Lo! those who disbelieve after their belief, and afterward grow violent in disbelief: their repentance will not be accepted. And such are those who are astray."

Upon critical analyses of these verses, it is made clear that apostasy goes without any worldly punishment, whether divine, governmental, or social. Furthermore it can be understood that any punishment for apostasy is experienced in the hereafter *only*. Accordingly, we uphold the principle that a person's faith is between him or her and their God, and that every individual has the right to negotiate his or her faith and belief according to the dictates of his or her heart and worldview.

Blasphemy, similar to apostasy, is a matter of freedom of conscience, which is guaranteed and safeguarded by the language "no compulsion in religion." It is further bolstered by numerous assertions in the Qur'an that no soul is responsible for another, and that no individual, Muslim or otherwise, bears the authority to punish those who believe differently than they do. See, for instance, Qur'an 2:113, 3:55, 7:87.

Religious institutions and actors, in partnership with progressive faith based organizations, are responsible for promoting egalitarianism and freedom of thought, conscience, opinion, and belief through critical analysis of Quranic scripture and Islamic history. Such imperatives benefit from the precedent set by Morocco's High Religious Committee, which observed that capital punishment for apostasy was administered for political reasons in antiquity and was not invoked against those who left Islam. They ruled that, contemporarily, apostasy is not punishable by death.¹

Without the freedom to think freely, to hold and express unorthodox and critical beliefs, faith has no meaning and instead becomes an empty exercise in conformity rather than the true expression of one's deepest connection to the sacred.

¹ <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/02/207505/moroccos-high-religious-committee-says-apostates-should-not-be-killed/>

Lastly, MPV implores governments and policy makers to:

- **Repeal** anti-apostasy, anti-blasphemy, and anti-heresy laws, policies, practices and *fatwas* that institutionalize the discrimination and persecution of individuals on the basis of religion/faith, ethnicity, or political affiliation, and implement complete moratoriums on corporal punishment in the name of Shari'ah Law, in accordance with international human rights law.
- **Hold** accountable legal institutions and state authorities to ensure they uphold and enforce the rule of law without selective bias to religious, ethnic, or political majorities/minorities and pursue diversity-sensitization initiatives for state-actors.
- **Support** and purposefully engage in civil society campaigns that publicly advocate for and disseminate egalitarian, inclusive, non-violent, and critical interpretations and analyses of theological literature and scripture.
- **Devise** and implement social protection measures to ensure that religious, ethnic, and political minority demographics are granted fair, safe, and equal access to full economic participation and benefit, decent employment, adequate healthcare, and secular education without fear or threat of physical or mental harm, as well as to ensure the aforementioned public services are not denied to any individual on the basis of religion/faith, ethnicity, or political affiliation.
- **Disaggregate** statistical data on the basis of acts of violence committed in state jurisdiction, including on possible religious motivations, as well as data disaggregated on that basis as it pertains to economic participation and the enjoyment of the aforementioned public services.

In conclusion,

We at MPV believe freedom of personhood and conscience are not only essential to all human societies but integral to the Qur'anic view of humanity. All citizens of the world have every right to freely negotiate their faith without fear of threat, punishment, or torture, and to live a life with dignity and with freedom of conscience as the Qur'an demands. Accordingly, we affirm that separation of state and religion is the only way to achieve the Islamic ideal of freedom from compulsion in matters of faith, especially if we wish to see purposeful and all-inclusive global sustainable development. We welcome and encourage all who are interested in engaging us in this discussion, and insist upon the facilitation of interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Let us reclaim our faiths and our cultures and utilize them to strive for the realization of humanitarian values that benefit all.



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