



THE DANISH GOVERNMENT RESPECTS ISLAM

Ambassador Hans Klingenberg, Ambassador of Denmark to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, announces that the Danish Prime Minister, Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, in a televised speech on the occasion of the New Year condemned any expression, action or indication that attempts to demonise groups of people on basis of their religion or ethnic background.

These comments were a reaction to a heated debate about freedom of expression and limits to freedom of expression following the publication of 12 caricature drawings of The Prophet Mohammed in one Danish newspaper, Jyllands Posten. This paper is a private and independent newspaper that is neither owned by, nor affiliated to, the Government or any political party in Denmark.

In some contexts the issue has unfortunately been portrayed as if the drawings were part and parcel of a smearing campaign against Muslims in Denmark. This is certainly not the case. The Danish Government respects Islam as one of the world's major religions.

In letters of January 6th 2006 addressed to the Secretary General of the Arab League, H.E. Amr Moussa, and to the Secretary General of the Organisation of The Islamic Conference, H.E. Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, H.E. Per Stig Møller, expressed that the Danish Government understood that Muslim circles had felt hurt and offended by the Danish Newspapers' drawings. The Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs has personally in an Op Ed on January 4th in a Danish national newspaper warned against disrespect among religions. It was, however, also underlined that freedom of expression is a vital and indispensable element of Danish society and that the Danish Government cannot influence what an independent newspaper chooses to bring.

The Prime Minister's speech has been transmitted to all concerned authorities namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Organisation of Islamic Conference and to the Arab League.

The speech as well as the Foreign Minister's letters of January 6, 2006 is available on the Embassy website www.ambriyadh.um.dk

Embassy of Denmark, Riyadh, January 28, 2006