

PRESS STATEMENT

India: IMSD deplores the demonisation of sexual minorities by Kerala's rightwing Muslims

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Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy (IMSD) strongly condemns the concerted effort by the Muslim rightwing in Kerala — including leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), and some Muslim-run websites — to ridicule, vilify, denigrate and demonise Muslims who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

It is a tragic irony that while the minority Muslim community in India is itself the target of rampant Islamophobia, the conservatives among them are hurling hate speech at the sexual minorities (minority within the minority). What logic or ethics makes Islamophobia wrong but homophobia, queerphobia or transphobia right? Not surprisingly, the Muslim right has much in common with the Hindu right.

The latest trigger for the fulminations is the news last month of a transgender couple from Kerala — Zahad Fazil, a trans man and Ziya Payal, a trans woman – having decided to be biological parents of a baby. The couple reportedly took this decision because adoption is not an option for transgender persons.

What perhaps added to the fervour of the self-appointed custodians of morality is the fact that Kerala's health minister Veena George promptly congratulated the couple on the phone and directed the Kozhikode Medical College to provide all treatment for free. She also arranged for breast milk to be provided to the baby from the human milk bank.

Being targets of hate politics themselves, Muslims should know the difference between free speech and hate speech. Comparing homosexuality to paedophilia, targeting members of the LGBTQIA+ community with words and expressions such as “a shame”, “mentally ill”, “worst kind of people”, “people in need of treatment” etc. are hate speech, not free speech.

The very Constitution which guarantees to Muslims the right to freely profess, practice and propagate their faith cannot but also guarantee to sexual minorities their right to publicly proclaim their presence, hold a Pride Parade.

The United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) begins with the recognition “of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family...” So says the Constitution of India too.

Even as the humiliated, bruised and battered Indian Muslim community struggles for its own right to a dignified life, it must learn to respect and uphold the “right to dignity” of all citizens.

March 17, 2023

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