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Statement by the National Executive of the Red-Green Alliance of Denmark on the situation ignited by the Muhammad cartoons

The Cartoons Are the last symbolic Straw that Breaks the Camel's back

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The widespread protests against Denmark are an unmistakable sign that the political course of Denmark and the West must fundamentally change. The protests are to be seen in the context of the general political atmosphere, as well as of Western policy in the Muslim part of the world. The cartoons are but the last symbolic straw that breaks the camel's back.

During several years xenophobic views have been given more and more space in public debate in Denmark. All around the world, Denmark has become known as a country with very negative attitudes to immigrants and refugees. It is in this context that the publication by Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of the 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad should be seen the paper explaining this on the grounds that Muslims should be prepared to put up with "insult, derision and ridicule" (quoted from the article in the paper introducing the cartoons).

Jyllands-Posten expressed this xenophobic line on the pretext of defending the freedom of expression. The publication of the cartoons is of course within the boundaries of the right to freedom of expression, but *Jyllands-Posten* mismanages this freedom in a deeply irresponsible way.

The Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and the Government should have dissociated themselves clearly and unequivocally from the expressed aim of the cartoons - without disputing the unreserved freedom of expression of *Jyllands-posten* subject to the consequences of the law. This could have averted the crisis.

However, the Prime Minister chose to appeal to xenophobic currents within the Danish population by only defending the freedom of expression of *Jyllands-Posten* - without in any kind of way addressing the content of the cartoons. As part of this pandering to xenophobic attitudes the Prime Minister chose arrogantly to reject a meeting with the ambassadors from a number of Muslim countries. A rejection that is quite unheard of when the ambassadors of other countries request a meeting.

To explain his rejection the Prime Minister claimed for months that the ambassadors had demanded of him in their letter to intervene with the newspaper. Instead it has turned out that the ambassadors wished to have a dialogue with him against the background of the harsh debate in Denmark on the issue of immigrants and refugees, not least by the rightwing Danish People's Party, and the cartoons were only one of several points mentioned by them in their letter. By rejecting meeting the ambassadors the Prime Minister chose confrontation instead of dialogue and is therefore responsible for deepening the crisis.

The cartoons have become a symbol of how many Muslims see themselves treated in Denmark and in

other parts of the world,

- where Muslims are exposed to hatred
- with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan
- with Western countries supporting Israel, whereas Palestinians are humiliated and denied a state of their own.

Western conduct is therefore part of the background for the massive protests among Muslims. These protests have comprised quite legitimate forms of expression, including the boycott of goods, which is annoying, but peaceful and acceptable, contrary to quite unacceptable forms such as threats against persons and the burning of embassies. In several countries the massive show of protests can as well be seen as a reaction to dictatorial and incompetent regimes, which have often been installed by the West and are allies of the USA or other Western countries.

Resolving this crisis will be a huge task, even when the demonstrations against Denmark have subsided.

Right now the Danish Government must take the consequences of the cartoons being part of failed and humiliating asylum and migration policies. The Government must take steps to promote reconciliation with the minorities in this country affected by these policies, Muslims and others. Such an admission of fact and such an initiative would signal to the rest of the world that we take this problem seriously and that we will do something about it.

The Government must take the initiative in abolishing the discriminatory laws affecting immigrants and asylum seekers, as for example the prohibition of marriage and the introduction of an exceptionally low social security benefit. There is a need as well to legislate to secure equality between all religions.

To be able to ensure such a development the Government will have to distance itself from the policies and rhetoric of the Danish People's Party with regard to immigrants and refugees. At the same time we call upon Muslims to dissociate themselves from extreme fundamentalist Islamic positions. This would be the start of establishing a debate on immigrants and refugees, which would not be restricted to the circles of the most extreme forces on the Danish right wing and among Muslims.

Globally there is a need for

- A speedy end to the occupation of Iraq. Denmark must withdraw its troops immediately from Iraq and Afghanistan
- New and efficient steps must be taken to secure the right of the Palestinian people to a state of their own
- World trade must be changed so that the poorest countries, among them some of the Muslim countries, can improve their chances to create an independent economic development
- Increase the support to strengthen the development of democracy in Arab and other countries, as opposed to Western propping up of reactionary regimes as in Saudi Arabia.

The National Executive of Enhedslisten/the Red-Green Alliance. February 12, 2006