

Islamophobia 'acceptable' in UK

British politician says prejudice against Muslims is now socially acceptable and that country is becoming less tolerant.

Last Modified: 20 Jan 2011 14:27 GMT

Prejudice against Muslims has "passed the dinner-table test" and become socially acceptable in Britain, the chairwoman of the country's ruling Conservative party has said. Sayeeda Warsi, the first British Muslim woman to join the country's cabinet, said in a speech at the University of Leicester on Thursday that Britain is becoming a less tolerant place for believers.

Warsi said that dividing Muslims into "moderate" and "extremist" fuels intolerance as does "the patronising, superficial way faith is discussed in certain quarters, including the media". The Pakistan-born minister has previously criticised parts of British society for demonizing Muslims in response to the threat from small numbers of extremists.

'Challenge for Britain'

In her latest speech she said that attacks committed by a small number of Muslims should not be used to condemn the entire community. But she also urged Muslim communities to be clearer about their rejection of radical acts.

Britain has around 2.9 million Muslims, around five per cent of the population, according to an estimate in 2010 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Anas Altikriti, the director of the Cordoba Foundation, which works toward bridging the gap between the Muslim and Western world, told Al Jazeera that Warsi should be congratulated for her remarks. "What it achieves is basically to place this particular issue and this challenge for British society and Britain as a whole firmly on the table of debate," he said. "I think there is a greater recognition that this is something that has to be addressed in a collective manner." But he added that comments on their own "don't really do much. What we need ... is a set of policies".

Warsi's comments come after David Cameron, the prime minister, said in his New Year message that Britain still faced a serious threat of attack plots. "We must ask ourselves as a country how we are allowing the radicalisation and poisoning of the minds of some young British Muslims who then contemplate and sometimes carry out acts of sickening barbarity," he said. His official spokesperson said on Thursday that Warsi was "expressing her view" and that the prime minister "agrees that this is an important debate".

US pastor banned

Meanwhile, Britain has banned Terry Jones, the US pastor who sparked global outrage by threatening to burn the Quran, from entering the country.

Jones was invited to speak at an event next month, by an anti-immigrant group called "England Is Ours". But the UK's interior ministry said his presence is "not conducive to the public good".