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***Newsletter "Intolerance and Discrimination Based on
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RUSSIA

Alexander Dvorkin, Vice-president of FECRIS, criticised for "controversial" lecture on Islam

HRWF (21.03.2013) - Alexander Dvorkin is already well-known for his aggressive speeches and writings against Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Falun Gong practitioners, Hare Krishna devotees and other religious groups that fall outside of his Orthodox world. However, in February 2013, Dvorkin shocked Russia's leading Islamic authorities, when he gave a lecture at the University of Arkhangelsk on the topic "Origins of Islam - Untold Stories." During his presentation, he made several hostile and unscientific comments about the Koran and Prophet Mohammad.

Dvorkin's remarks provoked numerous reactions from the Russian Muslim community on Islamic websites. Two Muslim leaders openly criticized Mr Dvorkin, who is also the vice-president of FECRIS (European Federation of Research and Information Centres on Sectarianism) and president of the Justice Ministry's Expert Council for Conducting State Religious Studies for the Russian Federation. *The following response was written by Sheikh Nafigulla hajjs Ashirov, Chief Mufti of Dumachr and Co-chair of the Council of Muftis of Russia:*

Alexander Leonidovich, you know undoubtedly that your lecture about Islam is quite controversial and at the time was met by strong reactions in the Muslim community. It was especially evident amongst Islamic youth, who actively visit various Internet resources and participate in discussions on the subject of Islam and interfaith relations.

Your last speech in Arkhangelsk to a student's audience was met by a strong reaction, as illustrated by numerous responses and discussions in blogs.

The special attention to your statements is due to the fact that you - an Orthodox priest -, awarded numerous times by the Russian Orthodox Church and president of the Expert Council for Conducting Religious Studies at the Ministry of Justice - dare to take such a controversial position concerning Islam.

Considering your statements in "Islamic History from an Orthodox Sect Expert," your position on the history of Islam and life of the Prophet, peace be unto him, is devoid of any objectivity, especially taking into account your public functions and your responsibilities as a minister of religion. Your statements on our religion as an Orthodox figure are not only incorrect; they are offensive to millions of Muslims who have been living together with Orthodox people within the same country for centuries.

In your arguments, you have contradicted the official history of Islam, claiming in your speech that the prophet Mohammed, Allah bless and welcome him, contrary to general understanding, was illiterate and that Mecca - the sacred city for all Muslims - does not correspond to the actual geographical position described in the Koran.

Moreover, you have claimed that many Muslim customs are actually customs of other religions and borrowed by prophet Mohammed, Allah bless and welcome him, for specific goals which you do not specify.

Concerning Muslims in Jerusalem, you quote the Western bishop Arkulf, who is an insult to Muslims, stating pejoratively: *"they put some shed on the Temple mountain, which they name the prayer house and whose appearance is ridiculous because it is half... to the point of collapsing and awfully ugly."* In our opinion, the principal spirit of your lecture was an attempt to expose and criticise Islam.

In your speech, you make statements about the Messenger of Allah that attempt to humiliate this great person. Your inappropriate irony and accompanying tactlessness were also evident in the words you put on the lips of his wife Aisha:

"I will admit that this man can make compliments."

You also misinform your listeners, saying cynically that the prophet Mohammed, Allah bless and welcome him, was successful only due to his ability *"to plunder caravans and to violently turn people toward this new belief and all this to earn him a well-deserved booty."*

Concerning the revelations of the Muslim prophet, Allah bless and welcome him, you offend Muslims' understanding of their origins, quoting certain Byzantine Fathers, who held that:

- *either Mohammed had an illness and had painful visions;*
- *either he was demon-possessed;*
- *or he was some kind of story-teller who invented it all;*

You added that *"combinations of all three options are possible and other combinations are possible."*

At the conclusion of your lecture, you point to the source of your "discoveries" - the British horror writer Tom Holland, author of the scandalous documentary film, "Islam: the Untold Story," which similarly received a huge number of negative responses in the Islamic world and was sharply criticised by experts on Islam. In response to the film's release, the Islamic Educational and Research Academy (IERA) even issued a special press-release where historical inaccuracies of Holland's work were related in nine detailed points.

Despite these refutations, you continue to offer students and your listeners this false and dubious interpretation of Islam, giving way to these venomous comments concerning the prophet Mohammed and his actions in history. You, being an official representative of one of the Christian faiths, have allowed incorrect criticism of Islam, forming thereby a negative and prejudiced attitude in your listeners toward our world religion.

On the basis of the above considerations, I request further clarification on your stated positions and retraction of your offensive statements concerning our religion, the description of life and activity of the prophet Mohammed, Allah bless and welcome him, published under the heading, "Islamic History from an Orthodox Sect Expert."

See: <http://golosislama.ru/news.php?id=15910>

<http://www.islamnews.ru/news-138841.html>

<http://echo.msk.ru/blog/stiepanov75/1031470-echo/>
