



CAIRO — Young Muslim leaders from 15 western countries come together in the Danish capital Copenhagen on Friday, July 7, to probe ways of fostering positive Muslim-West ties and discuss the identity of Muslims in Western societies.

"The areas that Muslims feel challenged by right now are the areas of civil liberties and citizenship and their rights as a citizen," Daisy Khan, Executive Director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA), an organizer of the event, said in a press release.

Organized by ASMA and the Cordoba Initiative, the "Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow" forum brings together 100 Muslim leaders from 15 Western countries.

Attendees are discussing a host of key issues such as Muslim integration in the West, Muslim identity, marginalization of immigrant communities and secularism.

Among leading figures in the three-day event are Swiss-based Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, founder of the Cordoba Initiative Imam Feisal Abdul-Rauf and a host of prominent Muslim dignitaries.

Among the meeting's goals is to promote Islam as a religion of peace and harmony, resolve and prevent future conflict through peaceful methods of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue and enhance the intellectual development of the global community through knowledge-sharing.

Khan said the forum is also seeking to reach the Muslim voice to Western societies.

"We are part of the West; we are here as equal citizens, responsible citizens and they need to work with us in order to create change," she added.

IslamExpo, the biggest Islamic cultural event ever in Europe, opened on Thursday, July 6, at Alexandra Palace in London to build bridges with the British community and wash away misconceptions about the Muslim faith.

A recent global poll showed that both Westerners and Muslims share a negative view of each others, with many in the West believe Muslims are fanatical, violent and intolerant while Muslims view Westerners as selfish, immoral and greedy.

Strategy

The meeting is seeking to draw up a strategy against extremist ideologies and energize young Muslim leaders to achieve this goal.

It is also aiming to address the acrimony and mutual mistrust permeating both Western and Muslim societies.

"We are going through a difficult time right now, but we will emerge," Khan said in statements carried by USINFO, a US State Department's news website.

"We feel that we will pass the test because we have a very healthy Muslim community."

Imam Abdul-Rauf believes that West-Muslim relations "can be rapidly improved", encouraging young Muslims to play a key role in addressing the West-Muslim mistrust.

He said that Muslim youth were "deeply frustrated by what's going on in the name of Islam".

"They feel they are paying a price for actions done by a very, very negligible minority, but which capture the attention of the media," he said.

"Terrorism done in the name of Islam has hurt Muslims as much, if not more, than it has hurt Westerners."

Muslim Identity

The Copenhagen meeting is also discussing the Muslim identity in Western societies.

"I don't think of the dual loyalty issue that a lot of people bring up," USINFO quoted as saying one of young attendees, Sayyeda Mirza of the East West Institute.

"I'm comfortable in my own skin," added Mirza, who is of a foreign origin by born and raised in the United States.

She maintained that she feels "fully integrated in my identity as an American, as a Muslim, as a woman, as someone who votes, who is active and engaged in society."

Denmark has been the focus of the Muslim anger after a Danish daily published cartoons mocking Prophet Muhammad last September.

The blasphemous cartoons, including one showing the Prophet with a bomb-shaped turban, were later reprinted by European newspapers on claims of freedom of expression.