

Azhar Grand Imam sparks controversy with remarks on polygamy

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CAIRO: The grand imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar Institution, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb, has sparked a debate on social media with comments on polygamy, saying it can be an "injustice for women and children."

Al-Tayeb, a leading Sunni scholar, said the practice came from "a lack of understanding of the Qur'an."

"Those who say that marriage must be polygamous are wrong, we have to read the (Qur'anic) verse in full," he said.

Speaking on his weekly television program and on Twitter, Al-Tayeb said that monogamy was the rule and polygamy was an exception.

He said Islam requires the condition of fairness, and "if there is not fairness it is forbidden to have more than one wife."

The Imam also advocated a broader revamp of the way women's issues are addressed.

"Women represent half of society, if we don't care for them it's like walking on one foot only," he posted on Twitter.

The comments sparked a fervent debate on social media, prompting Al-Azhar Institution to clarify that the grand Imam was not calling for a ban on polygamy.



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[OIC foreign ministers condemn Israeli violations against Palestinians](#)

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Sun, 2019-03-03 20:09

ABU DHABI: A high-profile meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has pledged its commitment to establishing an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Delegates at the 46th session of the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers concluded their two-day conference in Abu Dhabi by issuing a declaration

condemning Israeli violations against the Palestinian people.

And ministers agreed to set up an endowment fund to guarantee future finance for the aid activities of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

According to the UAE news agency, WAM, the declaration also called on Iran to start peace talks with the UAE and international community, aimed at ending the Iranian occupation of three Emirati islands.

A reaffirmation of support in finding a political solution to the crisis in Yemen was agreed, and issues surrounding Syria, Libya and other countries were also covered.

On the situation over Palestine, the OIC statement reaffirmed that the Palestinian issue was central to both Arab and Muslim nations and reiterated the organization's position to strive to reach a permanent solution to the matter "and to establish an independent Palestinian State according to the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital."

The declaration condemned "all Israeli violations against the brotherly Palestinian people," and pledged backing for UNRWA while urging "the international community to fulfill its commitments regarding the Palestinian issue and Palestinian refugees."

On Yemen, the foreign ministers affirmed their "commitment to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial independence and integrity" of the country.

They said only a political solution would resolve the crisis in Yemen and they renewed their support for the efforts of the UN, its special envoy for Yemen, and coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia.

The declaration praised the efforts of the OIC over five decades to address the challenges facing not only the Muslim world, but the international community in general.

The agreement said: "(OIC members) affirm our commitment to respect the security, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of member states, and believe in the necessity of resolving existing and emerging litigations and conflicts through negotiation, mediation and reconciliation by adopting diplomatic solutions based on the principles of international law."

The OIC will mark 2019 as its golden jubilee year with member states urged to organize national programs to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

OIC Secretary-General Dr. Yousef Al-Othaimeen said the new endowment fund, to be set up to guarantee sustainable financing for UNRWA activities, would be run as a trust fund under the umbrella of the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank.



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Foreign minister Qureshi says OIC endorsed Pakistan's position on Kashmir
OIC foreign ministers to map out Islamic road to prosperity

[Egypt court upholds prison term for former anti-graft chief](#)

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Sun, 2019-03-03 13:31

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Sunday upheld a five-year prison sentence for the country's former anti-corruption chief, found guilty of insulting the military, legal sources said.

A military court rejected Hisham Geneina's appeal and confirmed his sentence,

a judicial source said, over comments made in an interview with the news website HuffPost Arabi.

Geneina was head of Egypt's Central Auditing Organization until he was sacked by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in 2016 for allegedly exaggerating the cost of corruption.

He subsequently became a top aide to former military chief of staff Sami Anan, who planned to challenge El-Sisi in presidential polls but was arrested.

Geneina claimed Anan held documents on "political events and crises that Egyptian society has passed through" since the 2011 uprising.

He said the documents could be released if Anan – who remains in jail – was harmed.

Following the interview, Geneina was detained in February 2018 and sentenced last April to five years in prison for "spreading news that harms the armed forces."

Sunday's ruling "could be challenged before a higher military court," Geneina's lawyer Ali Taha said.

Moataz Wadnan, the journalist who conducted the interview, was also detained but has not yet been put on trial, according to rights lawyer Negad Al-Borai. Without any serious challenger at the ballot box, El-Sisi won a second four-year term last March with 97 percent of the vote.

Egypt's parliament, packed with El-Sisi supporters, is seeking to institute constitutional amendments that would extend his rule beyond 2022.



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Wounded and alone, children emerge from last Daesh enclave

Author:

Sat, 2019-03-02 22:52

DEIR EZZOR, Syria: Hareth Najem fled Daesh's last enclave in eastern Syria wounded and alone. The Iraqi orphan's family had died two years earlier in airstrikes across the border in Al-Qaim region.

"I had two brothers and a sister. They all died, and then I was by myself," Hareth told Reuters, tears filling his eyes. "My little sister, I loved her a lot. I used to take her with me to the market."

Lying in a cattle truck beside another injured boy at a desert transit point for US-backed forces, he huddled under a blanket. His face was covered in dirt and the side of his head wrapped with bandages covering wounds incurred days earlier.

Hareth was 11 years old when Daesh carved out its proto-state in Iraq and Syria, killing thousands of civilians and attracting an array of enemies that have fought from the air and on the ground to uproot the militants.

Now 16, he was among the children swept up this week in the civilian evacuation of Baghouz, the last shred of land under the militants' control where they are on the brink of defeat at the hands of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Some of the children are foreigners whose parents brought them to be raised under Daesh rule, or child fighters conscripted into what the group dubbed "cubs of the caliphate." Others, including members of the Yazidi minority, were enslaved by the militants.

Many have seen their parents die in the fighting or be detained by rival forces. As Daesh faces territorial defeat, their fate remains uncertain. The SDF investigates all men and teenage boys arriving from Baghouz to determine possible Daesh links.

'These kids have nobody'

Around 20 children crossed the frontline on their own this week, including Iraqis, Syrians, Turks and Indonesians, said SDF commander Adnan Afrin. The fathers of some were identified as Daesh militants and arrested immediately.

"These kids have nobody. They need somebody to take care of them, to provide mental health support," said Afrin, adding that some had gone hungry for a

long time. The SDF plans to hand over the children to aid groups, he said.

Hareth said his family had been running a market stall when Daesh overran their town and they had no links to the group.

After his family was killed in an aerial bombardment, he crossed into Syria with other Iraqis who feared Shiite militias advancing against Daesh would take revenge on them – a fear that other Iraqis have cited as their reason for entering Daesh-held Syria.

Hareth said he tried to avoid the militants and denies attending their schools or receiving military training. Their morality police would sometimes arrest and whip him.

“They gave speeches at the mosques, jihad and whatnot,” he said. “I was scared of them. My whole family died because of them.”

When he reached Baghouz, he worked in a field in return for a room to sleep in. He tried saving enough money to go home, but said the militants stopped him.

Hareth was wounded last week when a shell fell near where he was standing along the Euphrates River, injuring his ear, hand and stomach. He wants to get medical care and return to relatives still in Iraq.

“I want to go look for them ... When I get better and my body recovers, when I can walk,” he said. “I want to go back, to become a young man again, to build a future again.”





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Kurdish forces battle into last Daesh pocketDaesh faces final territorial defeat in eastern Syria battle

[Kurdish forces battle into last Daesh pocket](#)

Sat, 2019-03-02 22:47

NEAR BAGHOUZ, Syria: Kurdish-led forces battled militants defending their last village on Saturday as the operation to flush out Daesh from eastern Syria resumed after days of humanitarian evacuations.

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) pushed into Baghouz, a tiny hamlet near the Iraqi border where Daesh militants are making a desperate

last stand.

As the sun rose above the palm trees lining the Euphrates River, the crackle and thud of gunfire and shelling echoed across the farmland while SDF artillery units could be seen taking up positions, AFP journalists near the front line reported. An SDF officer said he saw fighters moving between empty buildings and a makeshift camp on the edge of the village where it is feared civilians might still be hunkered down.

“The fighting is intense at the moment,” the officer said. “Our forces are advancing from two directions.”

The SDF announced the launch of an assault on Daesh’s last redoubt late on Friday after a week-long exodus that saw thousands of people flee the enclave dried up.

While Daesh militants, who have been besieged for weeks in an ever-shrinking pocket, are vastly outgunned, their use of tunnels, booby traps and suicide bombers is hampering the SDF advance.

“We can’t put a time frame on this battle – two weeks, three weeks or a week – it will depend on the surprises we get along the way,” SDF spokesman Adnan Afrin said.

“Those who have not surrendered by now will meet their fate there,” he said.

Most of the more than 50,000 people who left the very last rump of the Daesh proto-state in recent weeks were women and children.

Some of the evacuees however were suspected fighters either surrendering to the SDF or attempting to slip back into civilian life.

The militants are cornered in a bend of the Euphrates, with Syrian regime forces and their allies on the west bank of the Euphrates blocking any escape across the river and Iraqi government forces blocking any move downstream.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group said seven Daesh militants were shot dead by Syrian forces.

Only a few dozen people were evacuated by the SDF on Friday in the smallest convoy in days, prompting the Kurdish-led force to close the humanitarian window and resume their offensive.

The assault will deal a final death blow to Daesh supremo Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi’s caliphate, which was proclaimed in mid-2014 and once covered territory larger than Britain. At its peak, the militants’ proto-state covered large parts of Iraq and Syria, administered millions of people, minted its own currency, levied taxes and produced its own textbooks.

It effectively collapsed in 2017 when Daesh lost major cities such as Mosul and Raqqa following massive offensives by government armies and their respective international allies in both countries.

While the last remains of Daesh's statehood experiment are about to disappear, the group remains a potent force in both Syria and Iraq, where it carries out deadly attacks.

Its brutal legacy is still raw and the scope of the atrocities committed under its rule continues to emerge, even in areas where its fighters were defeated long ago.

The SDF this week announced that yet another mass grave was discovered, this time near Baghouz, and that the severed heads of women were found in it.

While the victims were not immediately identified, local fighters believe the executed women are likely to be members of the Yazidi community.

The mostly Iraq-based religious minority are considered heretics by Daesh, which tried to exterminate them in 2014 with massacres that were among the reasons the United States intervened militarily.

Many of the thousands of women abducted and enslaved by Daesh then are still missing today and it is feared some may still be held captive in Baghouz.

Nadia Murad, the current laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize and herself an Iraqi Yazidi who was kidnapped and raped, urged the US-led coalition backing the SDF to help secure their safe return.

"The Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh must have a plan to help rescue Yazidis that are still missing," she said in a statement Friday.

Some of them managed to slip out with the thousands of civilians who were evacuated over the past 10 days.





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