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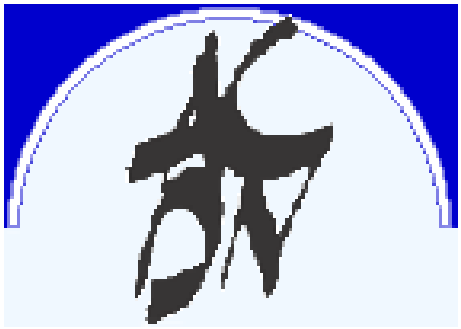

Iran's Dress Code

WHO IS LYING? AND FEEDING DISINFORMATION? WHO IS OPPRESSING WHOM?

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According to an article by Amir Taheri, published on May 19 in the *National Post* (Canada) and on 20 May in the *New York Post* (USA), the new "dress code" adopted at the start of the week by the Iranian parliament (Majlis) proposes to impose on Muslims, both men and women, a type of dress that conforms with islamic and Iranian tradition, and imposes on non-muslims the wearing of distinctive signs: a yellow band for Jews, a red one for Christians, and a blue one for Zoroastrians. Italian television, among others, passed on this news item. But according to an official Iranian denial today, it is "quite simply ridiculous" disinformation.

The matter is serious, of course. It's enough to reject Iran out of the civilized world and even to justify any "preventive strike", particularly by Israel. However, somewhere somebody is lying. But who? Only an exact knowledge of the text adopted - and the debate that accompanied it - would give clarity. Meanwhile we offer you the two incompatible versions (below).

Let us remark however that the dress code that will be adopted in autumn - if indeed it is - whether or not it includes items discriminating between religions, will impose on Muslim men and women a highly controversial normalisation of dress and will also result in distinguishing them from other Iranians (believers in other religions or non-believers). This could turn into a instrument for discrimination, even confrontations or pogroms.

With such a law Iran, a nation wanting to be modern (even if, in our view, it is a mistake to see nuclear technology as a sign of modernity) is plunging back into archaism, if not the barbarism seen in instances where (this is only one instance) homosexuals are executed for their homosexuality.

On March 20 last we invited Iran's ambassador to France to come to the 2nd Rally for international disarmement - nuclear, biological and chemical (RID-NBC) in Saintes and present the Iranian viewpoint about the nuclear crisis. We wrote to him then:

"This concern to make known the Iranian view of the crisis (among others) and to contribute to its peaceful resolution should not in any way be seen as approval for the entirety of the government's policies, or of the principles and practices of any state whatsoever that imposes rules of a particular religion on all its citizens.

"We protest especially and most vigorously against the grave infringements of the basic rights of men, women and children, and against attacks on the freedom of conscience and expression of individuals and minorities in Iran.

"Likewise, we have difficulty believing in Iran's peaceful intentions when we hear its president call for Israel to be wiped off the map. Such statements lead us to doubt the assurance your country has given that it will not use for military ends the know-how and technical means it is using first for purposes of 'civilian research'. The fear expressed by numerous governments, as by the IAEA, that Iran may one day follow the detestable example of North Korea does not seem to us totally baseless.

"We therefore object in advance to any use of the present letter that would retain only the passages favourable to Iran's views and would ignore the serious concerns we have just formulated."

The visit of Mr Moujani, interim head of the embassy, to the 2nd RID in Saintes, and the subsequent debate - both free and courteous - have changed nothing in our position. A theocratic state of any kind (Christian, Muslim, Jewish

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of other) can only be a source of intolerance, discrimination, repression and violence. Only open and tolerant secularism (which is not itself sectarian) permits the respect due to national and religious traditions to be harmonised with respect for human rights.

This remark applies equally to Israel, another virtually theocratic state - in passing we record our regret that its ambassador in France did not see fit to reply to our invitation to speak in a different debate. The authorities in Israel itself, to whom we later sent our invitation, did not reply either.

To convince people wary of blind passions that Israel has a right to exist and to defend itself, would this nation (itself far from respecting the human rights of Palestinians) prefer disinformation to open debate, discussion and dialogue? One may at least wonder.

As for respecting human rights, we have asked Israel and Iran for two concrete gestures: we asked again recently (as often in the past) that the Israeli authorities lift its restrictions on the freedom of Mordechai Vanunu; we asked recently that the Iranian authorities release the Iranian philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo and abandon its charges against him for "espionage" and "attacks on state security". These are the same accusations that caused Vanunu to rot in prison for 18 years. But they cannot be taken seriously, even less than in Vanunu's case. Vanunu had denounced Israel's secret nuclear weapons, as Israel now accuses Iran's nuclear research and threatens to wage war on these grounds; Jahanbegloo denounced President Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust and the regime's authoritarian drift. Both men want democracy, truth, reason, and peace. Well then, be they false spies or true spies, let Israel and Iran do a "spy swap" as used to happen during the Cold War: Vanunu's freedom in exchange for Jahanbegloo's.

The first of these nations which proposes this would score a point in its search for democratic respectability. You call yourself democrats, give it a go!

In addition, gentlemen, perhaps you could go further along that line and sit down at the same table (doubtless at first hidden from microphones and cameras) so as to discuss a general and peaceful solution to the problems of your region? You know very well that a large proportion of world opinion wishes for precisely that to happen, as no doubt do the people living in your states. War as a daily or ultimate prospect is not a solution.

ACDN, 20 May 2006

The news item.

Source : Italian agency "Adkronos", Toronto, 20 May.

(Translation)

Iran's new dress code proposes a yellow band to distinguish Jews, a red one for Christians and a blue for Zoroastrians. That's what the Canadian *National Post* said in a long article about the new law on clothes to be worn in public, as passed by the parliament in Tehran. According to the journalist Amir Taheri, the colour code will permit Muslims to easily recognise the followers of another religion so that they can avoid shaking their hands by mistake and thus becoming « naji » (impure). The coloured marker, called a « zonnar », will have the form of cloth band sewn on the front of the clothes.

This measure, which in Europe cannot fail to recall the "yellow star" which the Nazis imposed on the Jews, had been

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presented in 2004 when the president was the moderate Mohammed Khatami, but parliament then blocked it. Nevertheless, it passed last Monday under the pressure of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: a special commission has been asked to specify before autumn exactly what clothes men and women will have to wear. These will then have to receive final approval from the supreme guide Ali Khamenei before having full force of law.

Taheri, an Iranian journalist and writer in exile, explains that the new law is intended to eliminate the « influence of infidels », i.e. the West on Iranian dress. Among other prescriptions, there is a total ban on ties, considered as « a symbol of the cross ». But it is not clearly known whether Christians will be allowed to wear them. This dress code will replace the 1982 law which required women to wear the chador and long clothes. The aim of Ahmadinejad is to impose on Muslims a uniform mode of dress, without class distinction, so as to prepare Iranians for the return of « the hidden Imam », who according to tradition must return to earth and bring justice. The announcement of the colour code will not fail to provoke new polemics, after Ahmadinejad's call for wiping Israel off the map and his statement that the Holocaust is « a legend », which brought protests from the whole world. According to the *National Post,* the Simon Wiesenthal Centre has already written to UN Secretary-general Kofi Annan asking him to exhort the international community to put pressure on Iran to abandon the plan of coloured bands for non-Muslims.

THE DENIAL.

Source : "adnkronos", Tehran, 20 May -

(Translation)

Iran has categorically denied the news reported by a Canadian paper alleging that religious minorities will have to wear coloured bands to distinguish them from Muslims. This is reported by the Iranian press agency Khobar, which calls the story "quite simply ridiculous" and accuses the daily that printed it, the *National Post,* of being a Zionist publication.

Earlier, the Iranian MP of Jewish faith, Maurice Motamed, denied that the parliament had made such a decision while discussing the new dress code. Meanwhile, the MP Imam al Faruj, a supporter of the bill, emphasized that it was not directed against religious minorities, but intended to incite women to chastity and traditional dress. This was broadcast on Israeli radio.

The article that appeared yesterday in the Canadian daily, signed by the Iranian exile Amir Taheri, said that the new dress code law proposed a yellow band for Jews, a red one for Christians and a blue one for Zoroastrians, so as to distinguish them from Muslims. That item, which the paper said was confirmed by Iranian exiles in Canada, provoked immediate reaction around the world, especially because of the yellow band for Jews, which recalled the yellow star imposed by the Nazis. Nevertheless, the same *National Post* today reported a "categorical" denial from the Iranian Embassy in Ottawa and spoke of doubts expressed by various experts on Iran.

The testimony of Motamed, Iranian MP, according to the Corriere della Serra

Tehran. An Iranian MP, Jewish, denies the report that said the Tehran parliament promulgated a law obliging non-muslims to wear distinctive signs in public. "It's an item hastily invented and completely false" said Maurice Motamed. "I was present when the bill for feminine and Islamic clothing was voted on, he added, and it makes no mention of religious minorities".

And according to the weblog of Yedioth Ahronoth.

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ACDN comments: Mr Motamed is the MP for a special electoral college of about 25000 Jews. He confirms the absence of distinctive signs prescribed to other religions in the text of the bill on the Islamo-iranian dress code. Note however that he says he attended the Majlis debate which resulted in the adoption of the text, but not the preparatory discussions. The idea of distinctive religious signs could have been mentioned and rejected then, or its later introduction could have been entrusted to a special dress-code committee set up to make specific code suggestions between now and autumn, a committee including some ministers. If so, the false information put out by Amir Taheri would at least have the merit of ruling out that eventuality, thanks to the reactions it provoked.

The article, New York Post

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