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Saudi school lessons in UK concern government

BBC (22.11.2010) / HRWF (23.11.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.org> - The government says it will not tolerate anti-Semitic and homophobic lessons being taught to Muslim children in the UK.

BBC Panorama found that more than 40 Saudi Students' Schools and Clubs are teaching the official Saudi national curriculum to about 5,000 pupils.

One text book shows how the hands and feet of thieves are chopped off.

The Saudi government said it had no official ties to the part-time schools and clubs and did not endorse them.

However, a building in west London where Panorama obtained one of the text books is owned by the Saudi government.

The director of education for the Saudi Students' Schools and Clubs said the Saudi Cultural Bureau, which is part of the embassy, had authority over the network.

'Hellfire'

Education Secretary Michael Gove said there was no place for the Saudi teachings with regard to Jews or homosexuals in Britain: "To my mind it doesn't seem to me that this is the sort of material that should be used in English schools."

He said in light of the BBC's findings, the school inspectorate Ofsted was looking into the possible regulation and inspection of out-of-hours schools and clubs. At present, part-time schools do not fall within Ofsted's mandate.

"Ofsted are doing some work in this area, they'll be reporting to me shortly about how we can ensure that part-time provision is better registered and better inspected in the future," Mr Gove said.

One of the text books asks children to list the "reprehensible" qualities of Jewish people. A text for younger children asks what happens to someone who dies who is not a believer in Islam - the answer given in the text book is "hellfire".

Another text describes the punishment for gay sex as death and states a difference of opinion about whether it should be carried out by stoning, burning with fire or throwing the person over a cliff.

In a book for 14-year-olds, Sharia law and its punishment for theft are explained, including detailed diagrams about how hands and feet of thieves are amputated.

'Out of context'

In a written response, the Saudi embassy said such materials were often taken out of context and often referred to historical descriptions.

But Neal Robinson, an expert in the Koran, said the context in which the materials are presented comes with risks.

"To present it cold, as it seems to be here, just part of the teaching of Islam, no it's not wise. In the wrong hands I think it is... ammunition for anti-Semitism."

The use of these materials in Britain comes three years after a BBC investigation found a Saudi-funded school in west London was using texts that referred to Jewish people and Christians in derogatory terms. That prompted assurances at the highest diplomatic levels that the materials would be removed.

Panorama has also found evidence of extreme views on some private, full-time Muslim school websites, including messages that state: "Our children are exposed to a culture that is in opposition to almost everything Islam stands for" and "We need to defend our children from the forces of evil".

MP Barry Sheerman, former Labour chairman of the Children, Schools and Families parliamentary committee, said politicians had avoided the issue of controversial teachings in some Muslim schools.

"There are some very good Muslim schools but there are some Muslim schools that give me great cause for concern that is often around the ethos of the schools, the focus of the school and the kind of ideology that is concerning."

Dr Usama Hasan, an Islamic scholar and part-time imam in east London, warned of the dangers of segregating young Muslims in Britain, particularly the seminaries where the next generation of imams are being educated.

"They don't interact with people who are not Muslim... they don't learn the ingredients of the western world, so it's very easy for them to read the medieval texts which were written at a time when Islam was under attack and say non-believers are our enemies and we have to fight them."

Conditional release for 12 Filipinos accused of proselytizing

AsiaNews (07.10.2010) / HRWF (11.10.2010) - <http://www.hrwf.org> - Saudi authorities have conditionally released the Catholic Filipino migrant worker arrested on 1 October in Riyadh along with 11 other compatriots - released Oct. 3 -, while attending a Mass along with 150 foreigners celebrated by a French priest. At present, the 12 Filipinos have been entrusted to their employers and representatives of the embassy in Manila in Saudi Arabia are negotiating with the authorities for their repatriation. The fate of the others present at the Catholic mass remains unknown.

According Exxedin H. Tago, charge d'affaires of the Philippines Embassy the 12 are not yet completely out of danger. "It is still unclear - he says - if their case was closed. They

were accused of proselytizing and if the authorities deem them guilty they could return to jail”.

Saudi Arabia forbids the construction of churches, and other non-Muslim temples, the wearing of religious symbols, or hanging of images in homes. The religious police (Muttawa) has tightened controls to impose these laws. Only rarely does the government allow the celebration of Mass in private. The availability of work, however, continues to attract migrants who put up with terrible working conditions, the risk of forced conversions and sexual abuse.

In early September, a Filipino nurse employed at the Kharja Hospital died in hospital after being raped and left dying in the desert by her rapists. Two weeks later, again in Riyadh, three nurses in the National Guard Hospital were abducted and raped while returning from work and are now in serious condition.

A total of 8 million foreigners live and work in the kingdom. According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) from 2007 to 2008, migration to the Middle East has seen an increase of 29.5%.

Catholic migrant in Saudi Arabia: Three years without a day of rest and mass

AsiaNews (26.02.2010) / HRWF (01.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - "During my three years working in Saudi Arabia I was never allowed to leave the house or have a day off to go to mass". This is the story of Rebeka Perlas, a 35 year old from the Philippines, who until last week was employed as a maid in a Muslim family in Riyadh to maintain her two sons. "The only thing I could do – she adds – was get up every morning at 3 and recite the rosary on my knees in my room, before beginning my days work."

The woman is one of more than 10 million Filipino workers forced to emigrate abroad to support their families. Of these, over 200 thousand are residents in Saudi Arabia, where there is no freedom of religion and all religions other than Islam are banned by the Wahhabi kingdom.

In Saudi Arabia it is forbidden to build churches and other places of worship, carry religious symbols, or hang images in homes. The religious police (Muttawa) has tight controls to ensure these rules. The government rarely allows the celebrations of Mass in private and in some embassies. However the ease of finding employment continues to attract migrants who support the terrible working conditions, the risk of forced conversions and sexual abuse. There are a total of 8 million foreigners living and working in the kingdom. According to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) from 2007 to 2008, emigration to the Middle East has seen an increase of 29.5%.

Perlas Rebeka says: "My employer was hard on me, but I was never allowed to go to church, despite my repeated requests." The woman says that in these three years it was difficult to not to receive the sacraments, but she had no choice. "I love Jesus and the Virgin Mary and prayed every day during this difficult period. Only daily prayer and faith in God allowed me to survive in the Muslim world. "

The Philippine Church yesterday celebrated the 24th National Day of migrants entitled "Economy and Sustainable Development: the keys to effective reunification of immigrant families."

On this occasion the bishops of the dioceses have invited the faithful to pray and reflect on the plight of workers abroad and their families. "On this day we remember the sacrifice and the difficulties of the millions of migrants abroad - said Fr Gil A. Alingasan of the Archdiocese of Manila - and urge them to stay away from the temptations of material gain that underlie this phenomenon, pointing out their potential in spreading the Gospel. " Through this celebration, the Church has asked the government for more economic measures to increase jobs in the country and stop the Diaspora of the Filipino people.

'Sorcerer' who raped 100 sentenced to death

AFP (21.01.2010) / HRWF (22.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A SAUDI man reported to have raped more than 100 women after posing as a spell-caster to lure them into his clutches has been sentenced to death, Saudi media reported.

The "Qatif sorcerer" was originally sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1000 lashes, but after more victims came forth the sentence was changed to execution, Al-Riyadh newspaper reported overnight.

The man, whose name was not given, terrified women around the eastern city of Qatif for several years.

He first drew them in by saying he could cast love spells, but then surreptitiously filmed their meeting and used his work for extortion and to rape them, according to Arab News. Authorities found hidden cameras and some 200 videotapes and 180 computer disks with footage of his victims in his home, Arab News said.

He may have tricked as many as 350 women, according to Al-Riyadh.

He was ultimately caught when a man related to a woman he had unsuccessfully targeted reported the case to the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and prevention of Vice - the Saudi religious police.

In a sting, a woman contacted him seeking to put a spell on her husband and tape-recorded his demand that she give him a nude picture of herself and 5000 riyals (\$1441), Arab News said.

Al-Riyadh said the rapes had left many women feeling destroyed and led to at least three divorces.

In conservative Saudi society rape victims themselves are often the recipients of scorn and sometimes themselves blamed.

"I have nothing to lose. What happened to me destroyed my life," one victim said, according to the paper.
