

ON SILENCE

By Emanuel Shahaf

Iranian President Ahmadinejad's recent repeated statements calling for Israel to be "wiped of the map" have met, except for a few but notable exceptions, with a studious, if somewhat embarrassed silence in the Arab and Muslim world, including Indonesia. This kind of "wishful thinking" while being fairly common in the Muslim world and often verbalized in private or in a religious context (sermons in mosques for example), is rarely expressed these days so brutally frank, in public, by politicians and statesmen even if they may privately subscribe to this despicable worldview.

President Ahmadinejad, in addition to espousing racist and hateful ideologies in an international community that is desperately trying to move to a level of understanding by calling for tolerance and mutual dialogue, is doing his country a great disservice. Iran's nuclear ambitions, while just being worrisome before, have become outright threatening and not only to the country that he has marked as his target, Israel. This threat surely will now be dealt with by the international community much more swiftly and painfully for Iran than what was considered necessary before.

Iran's president has also done damage to Islam by threatening (by what authority exactly?) all those Muslim nations that dare to hold a dialogue with the "Zionist Entity". His diatribes are reinforcing the bias of all those non-Muslims, in particular in the West, who view Islam as a threat to Western civilization, have second thoughts about Turkey's admission to the European Union and are less and less inclined to encourage a serious dialogue with the Muslim world. Ahmadinejad's words give support to Muslim radicals who turn life into misery not only for their intended targets but also for many Muslim's whose livelihood is destroyed by the economic fall-out of acts of terrorism committed in the name of Islam.

One has to ask oneself therefore, if President Ahmadinejad's words are so damaging to Islam, why aren't Muslim politicians all over the world more forceful and vocal in protesting, why aren't they putting the record straight ? What would they say if any country would call for the destruction of, let's say Libya? Are these not relevant questions to ask? Don't Muslim leaders know that whatever threat of violence is uttered against a non-Muslim country can be uttered, just as well, against a Muslim country?

Muslims should contemplate whether they would like to live in a world were threats of physical destruction are permissible. Being part of a people that has suffered physical destruction as few others have, and part of whose family was murdered, I can vouch for the fact that mere words can always turn into action. Silence is not the way to react to such threats, not by Muslims and not by anybody else.