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Caricatures and Media Ethics

The IMV [Institute for Media Responsibility] condemns all acts of violence – be they verbal, visual or physical - connected with the drawing and dissemination of cartoons intended to collectively defame individuals or specific groups. Likewise, it condemns the circulation of media portrayals which combine images and text to suggest a connection between a particular group affiliation and criminality [see press codex]. This applies to the current anti-Islamic cartoons as well as anti-Jewish, anti-American and the like. The tacit acceptance of the collective defamation of particular groups by means of stereotyping symbols in the name of freedom of thought and press cannot be tolerated, while this same practice is condemned when done to other groups. The same standard has to be applied to all groups, anything else is not justifiable.

For that reason, the current escalation could also be an opportunity to demand the application of the same standard to that effect, that such pejorative depictions and descriptions should not be propagated for reasons of [media] ethics and historical understanding. The hasty, un-reflected and unqualified commentaries, placing freedom of the press ahead of responsibility, facilitate a contrary development, namely that anti-Jewish statements and depiction and holocaust denial are deemed legitimate, when viewed as expressions of freedom of the press. Whoever permits anti-Islamic representations is implicitly accepting the dissemination of anti-Jewish pamphlets. This fatal development should be prudently avoided, rather than merely demanding prudence from the counterpart. Being fair in this concern would lead to de-escalation in the current situation and, alongside a de-escalation, it would also make it possible to push towards a productive dialogue concerning defamation in general – in Europe, Israel, the Arab countries, Iran, the US and everywhere. At the same time, we cannot allow ourselves to be diverted by the excesses of individuals and specific groups, that are being intentionally stirred up – we must eliminate the breeding ground for further incitement.

We need to understand that it is not weakness to admit to having gone beyond what is permissible. This admission does not address the fanatics, but rather the majority of Muslims and non-Muslims who must learn that it is a matter of equal rights for religious and other groups. In doing this, one must both practice and demand self-criticism. Always. The fact that the current escalation has turned into a 'tit for tat' medieval discussion represents a new quality of this lack of understanding. One over-stepping of a boundary should not justify the next. When we demand the adherence to ethical rules, then this must apply to all of us – beginning with ourselves.

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