

Mr. Hanel Muhammad, these are my questions and thank you in advance for your cooperation

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Questions

- 1- Three years after the successful of minarets initiative, how do you think this initiative has affected the life of Muslims in Switzerland?

On the one hand, Muslims of Switzerland are disillusioned concerning their status in the country. They realized that they are not really welcomed here, just in being faithful to the basics of their religion. Some sort of discouragement took place in interacting with nonmuslims. On the other hand, they also had to reflect on how to understand and implement the true values of their religion in the context of a modern and basically secularized world. Being of so many different ethnic origins and influenced by cultural and traditional inclinations, they might have to rediscover the universal essence of Islam and find proper ways to reconcile traditional Islamic teachings with open minded, future orientated interpretations, still rooted in the base islamic doctrine.

- 2- Do you think that initiative has helped Muslims to get rid of the sense of victimhood or in contrast has strengthened the feeling of being a vulnerable and targeted minority?

My answer to your first question already tends to suggest, that a majority has validated their suspicion being a vulnerable and targeted minority. Nevertheless has a motivated minority within the Muslim society, especially the younger and better educated generation, which sees itself as an integrated part of Swiss society, took up the challenge, got rid of the burden being victims of any kind and works hard to prove to themselves and the outer world, that Islam and Muslims are enrichment to modern societies.

- 3- To what extent has the initiative accelerated and enhanced the dialogue between Muslim community and the authorities in Zurich?

The initiative has neither enhanced nor worsened the dialogue between Muslim community and the authorities in Zurich. In fact the dialogue between

these two parties had been and is still ongoing on a very intense, constructive and positive level.

- 4- What are the main issues on the agenda of the dialogue today between Muslims and the Authorities in the canton of Zurich?

To organize graveyards for Muslims, school and integration issues and interfaith cooperation on all levels are the main issues shortly said.

- 5- Does your organization apply for recognition of Islam as an official religion in Zurich? And what is the response of authorities?

No, we are currently not applying for a recognition as a religious community. Firstly, because an attempt in that direction was politically clearly rejected a few years ago and secondly, because we think, that to be successful in this respect, there has to be done a lot more of work also within the Muslim society.

- 6- Do Muslims have in Zurich specific cemeteries? If the answer is yes, How they get it?

No, there are no Muslim cemeteries.

However, there are integrated sections for Muslims within the public cemeteries in Zurich and according to planning soon in Winterthur.

Basically, the public administration is therewith closing gaps in public services, providing basic infrastructure to the needs of nowadays Swiss society, with about 10% Muslim population in Zurich.

Long negotiations and trustworthy cooperation with the authorities make many opportunities come true.

- 7- One of the lessons learned from the minaret initiative is the negative image the Swiss people have about Islam, What is VIOZ doing to change this negative perception?

VIOZ is not only continuing but even more engaged in partaking on different events, like podium discussions, lectures, meetings and debates with politicians and different authorities and institutions, organizing the "Day of Open Mosques" and so forth. The cooperation with Swiss Media has been widened up and VIOZ is much more present in public newspapers or TV as it is documented on the VIOZ homepage. May these humble efforts meet the goal to change the negative image of the Muslim society.

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- 8- Do you have any activities open to the local citizens and do you invite local authorities to attend your cultural and social ceremonies?

Constantly we organize visits to the mosques (approx. 50 per year) mostly we welcome teachers with their pupils. On the 10th of November we have an advertised "Tag der Offenen Moschee". But actually we do feel, that we have to become more creative and engaged in that field.

- 9- To what extent minaret initiative has pushed Muslim community to enhance dialogue between themselves and to strengthen the cooperation between different groups?

In fact it had a slight positive effect in this respect. VIOZ could increase and is currently increasing its number of members.