



The Netherlands: Tolerating a time bomb

by Leon de WINTER
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Head teacher Jeanne van der Voort was at home watching television when she got the news that her school was on fire.

By the time she arrived at the scene in Uden, a small town in southern Holland, the building was engulfed in flames. It took firefighters until 2am to extinguish the blaze.

No one was hurt, but over 100 children of the Bedir Islamic primary school were left with nowhere for their lessons.

"I was crying and shouting," said Jeanne. "In Uden there was no reason to be afraid. I was shocked this could happen in Holland."

We were shocked when we found out that 10% of Muslim population in Holland are radical Islamists.

It was the latest in a series of attacks on Islamic sites across the Netherlands since the murder of controversial film-maker Theo van Gogh. He was brutally killed a week earlier in Amsterdam by a man of Moroccan origin linked to extremist groups.

One of Mr Van Gogh's last films had caused fury with its criticism of the treatment of women in the Muslim community.

'Emotional damage'

Police in Uden are still investigating the school fire, but the perpetrators left their motives daubed on the walls of the charred building - "Rest in peace Theo van Gogh" said graffiti next to symbols of "white power".

Now the children are back at school - albeit in a temporary building. Jeanne says the older pupils are still grappling with emotional damage.

Across the Netherlands, the last month has been difficult. After Mr Van Gogh's murder on 2 November, uneasy questions about the country's reputation for multiculturalism are being asked.

The school fire is evidence of a terrible backlash against the country's million-strong Muslim community.



Even otherwise liberal Dutch believe there is a serious problem with Islamic extremism in the country that the government has so far ignored.

"Sometimes there's suffocating political correctness in Holland," says Hans Teeuwen, a comedian and colleague of Mr Van Gogh.

"We're so eager to be tolerant that we're sometimes unable to deal with questions that are so controversial, so difficult."

Certainly Muslims in Holland now feel under pressure.

At the El Mouahhidine mosque in east Amsterdam, the men gather for evening prayers.

Their mosque has been a role model for building relationships with the local community. But even they felt the change in atmosphere after the Van Gogh murder.

Said, a student teacher taking part in prayers, says the police were on guard at the mosque during the holy month of Ramadan.

He didn't feel any personal danger, but thinks the action of one extremist in murdering Mr Van Gogh has damaged the whole Muslim community in Holland. But, he adds, it has opened up a necessary debate about how Holland treats its different ethnic and religious groups.

More important is whether different ethnic and religious groups give respect to the Dutch society.

Said says the government is not doing enough to make life easier for Muslims.

If your life in Europe is so hard why do you live there? The Spain-Morocco border is flooded with money suckers like Said.

"Integration has to come from both sides. It's not one way. There are two ways and they have to be open to each other," urged Said. "By tightening up rules, you won't get the effect you want."

Intergration from both sides??? Netherlands is homeland of Dutch people. Why do Dutch people have to "integrate" into a foreign culture of human right abusers? This is called: Barefaced Impudence.

'Crisis of confidence'

The Netherlands government is now considering how to tackle this crisis of confidence in society. Ministers feel the need to show a



worried population that acts like Mr Van Gogh's murder will not happen again.

What guarantees do the Dutch ministers give that there will not be another victims of islamo-fascists? Can the Dutch government control 100,000 Muslim extremists?

As Justice Minister Piet Hein Donner has overseen a series of raids on suspected Islamic radicals in Holland since the Van Gogh murder. He wants more power for police and prosecutors to act against suspected extremists.

If police will have more power it will be a disaster. Government must not go against people's will otherwise there will be revolution.

He admits there is a general feeling of insecurity, and blames his predecessors for the threat of extremism.

"Maybe it's partly due to a policy in the past being too relaxed on immigration, but also too relaxed on the social effects of immigration," he said.

While there is no plan for an immigration clampdown yet, talking tough is clearly the order of the day.

At a specially organised pop concert in Amsterdam, performers call on the audience to fight extremism in all forms. The words of one song sum it up: "I am not black, I am not white, I'm singing the colour of my heart."

Similar "cultural" events occurred recently in Britain: Muslim rapper sings a song in which he calls for jihad.

But such idealism may not be enough to remove the trauma inflicted on Dutch society in the last few weeks.

Comments by Vortex

BBC
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4057645.stm>

