

Comments just plain offensive

By WAJHA AHMED*

AT the age of five, I migrated to Australia from Pakistan with my parents and sister. Our father had been invited here to teach commercial law. He was the son of a lawyer, making me a third-generation lawyer—and the first female one in our family.

And like millions of Australians, we will be celebrating Australia Day later this month with a barbie, lamingtons and cricket on TV.

As in this context I would like to publicly reject Sheikh Taj el-Dene Elhily's statements on who has a right to be in Australia. We all do.

Sheikh Hilaly's comments on overseas TV about Anglo-convict descendants and migrants are simply offensive and divisive.

But what is more offensive to me as an Australian is his attack on the prison sentences for the Skaf gang-rape trials, saying they were based in "racial prejudice".

This is completely incorrect and disgusting and offensive to the brave victims.

Let me be clear and say Islam does not excuse or condone sexual assault on women in any form.

The Koran is clear on how to—and in fact makes it obligatory for men to—protect women, particularly in areas like inheritance. The Koran—revealed 1400 years ago—was revolutionary when it gave women these rights.

In practical terms Sheikh Hilaly is an Imam of the Lakemba mosque, which is one of about 200 in Australia. He has no authority over other Muslim communities or Islamic associations.

Every Muslim and non-Muslim alike I know is outraged and offended by the comments made by the Sheikh. It is important for all Australians to be aware of this. I would request Australians not to judge all Muslims by the comments of one sheik in Lakemba.

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Convict list for heritage

PORT ARTHUR, Fremantle jail and Sydney's Hyde Park Barracks head a list of 11 convict sites nominated for World Heritage listing.

Heritage Minister Ian Campbell yesterday said the Federal Government was preparing the nominations in conjunction with the West Australian, Tasmanian and NSW governments.

Four of the sites are in NSW, including Sydney's Cockatoo Island.

Five are in Tasmania, including the Cascades Female Factory site in Hobart, and one each in Western Australia and Norfolk Island.

The 11 sites were chosen following extensive consultations with heritage experts in Australia and overseas.

Senator Campbell said Australians put great importance on their convict past and its physical legacy, which makes the sites worthy of listing.

Moderate Muslims and the Premier agree we've had enough of the Sheikh's lunacy

Stay there, Hilaly

By JOE HILDEBRAND and JUSTIN VALLEJO

THE leaders of NSW have delivered a simple message to Sheikh Taj el-Dene Elhily: If you don't like Australia, don't come back.

The Mufti of Australia may also find himself out of a job as soon as February when a new peak Muslim body is elected.

Premier Morris Iemma yesterday joined moderate Muslims in condemning the nation's top Muslim cleric for branding Australians racist liars who have less right to live here than he does.

The comments follow the mufti's explosive statements late last year likening women in revealing clothes to uncovered meat.

Community Relations Commissioner and secretary of the Pakistan Association of Australia Wajha Ahmed said Sheikh Hilaly's claim that gang rapist Bilal Skaf received a tougher sentence because he was a Muslim was an outrage.

"This is completely incorrect and disgusting and offensive to the brave victims," she said.

Ms Ahmed said the Sheikh should also immediately apologise for and withdraw his claim that Westerners are liars and Muslims have more right to be in Australia than Anglo Saxons.

"Every Muslim and non-Muslim alike I know is outraged and offended by the comments made by the sheik," she said.

Mr Iemma said the mufti's comments were deranged.

"What we've seen is that these statements again show his lack of credibility and just more ranting," he said.

"I mean you can say another day, another piece of evidence of how out of touch he is with his own community and with mainstream Australia. His comments are condemned utterly as are his previous ones."

"I note that he's overseas. Well if he doesn't like Australia and Australians so much, well he can stay where he is."

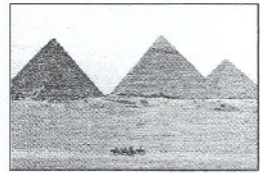
The Muslim Council of NSW expressed his shock and dismay at the Mufti's comments. Other progressive Muslims were also outraged.

"He is a lunatic, we don't listen to what he says because he doesn't represent us," said one Turkish Muslim, who did not want to be named.

The nation's peak Muslim body, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, was refusing to make any comment as it is under administration but fresh elections in February mean there could soon be a change of leadership less supportive of the mufti.

The Sheikh's confidant, Keyzar Trad said his comments were insensitive but said he was again taken out of context.

"He should have been a lot more careful," Mr Trad said. "There were



Ancient... Giza pyramids

Today in Cairo

- Population: 11.2 million plus one Australian mufti
- Founded: 641 AD
- Weather: Mostly fine but recently stormy
- Exports: Palm trees, souvenirs, messages of racial hatred

Five good reasons why the Sheikh should stay in Cairo:

1. Good friends with lots in common. At the same time as he was suggesting women were like uncovered meat there were hordes of young men attacking women in Cairo.
2. He was once in jail there. It could happen again.
3. Lack of temptation. You can't even see women's ankles.
4. Very small gay scene.
5. It's a long way away.



Sheikh Hilaly

too many generalisations that most of us just sit back and cringe at because we know they're going to offend."

But in Sheikh Hilaly's Lakemba heartland his supporters were backing him to the hilt.

One Lebanese Muslim said Muslims had more right to be in Australia than Prime Minister John Howard. "If anyone should be kicked out of here it should be him [Howard]," he said.

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Daily Telegraph
Should the Sheikh stay put? Tell us at NEWS.com.au/dailytelegraph



Disgusted... solicitor Wajha Ahmed, a Muslim immigrant. Picture: JOHN FEDER

Taken out of context: again

By JOE HILDEBRAND

SHEIKH Taj el-Dene Elhily says he is shocked his comments have caused an uproar in Australia, claiming he was only trying to prove how much he loved his adopted homeland.

Despite branding Westerners "liars" and claiming Muslims had more right to live in Australia than the descendants of convicts, the Sheikh told *The Daily Telegraph* he was trying to express how much Muslims were committed to their new home.

The Mufti's daughter Asma, whose husband is of Anglo-Saxon descent, also said those criticising her father should "get a life" and stop "media bashing" him.

Speaking through confidant Keyzar Trad, Sheikh Hilaly said he was surprised his words were seen as offensive and he hadn't intended them to be.

"I don't believe it," he said from Egypt, when told last night about the controversy he sparked in Australia.

"It's not my intention to offend anybody, my intention was to explain the previous controversy. Listen to the interview, listen to the whole thing... I was answering the questions."

However Sheikh Hilaly stood by his claims that Muslims and non-Muslims were treated differently by the media and, in the case of gang-rape rapist Bilal Skaf, the legal system.

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