

English Version

Mrs. Gerdi A. Verbeet
President, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal
Postbus 20018, 2500 EA Den Haag
The Netherlands

Geert Wilders' irresponsible and offensive statements show the need for increased dialogue initiatives

Dear Mrs Verbeet,

The boards of the Cairo based **Center for Arab-West Understanding** (www.cawu.org) and the Dutch **Arab-West Stichting** (www.arabwestfoundation.com), as well as the many people who have signed this letter of petition to you, condemn Geert Wilders' recent provocative statements about Muslims and Islam and ask you and your colleagues in the Dutch Parliament to do the same. In doing so, we also call on all Dutch MP's to actively and effectively promote intercultural tolerance, dialogue and harmonious co-existence.

We strongly believe that Wilders' comments were deliberately offensive and intended to promote a fear of Muslims, with the apparent aim of winning votes. This is highly irresponsible and will undoubtedly cause great damage to the many years of dialogue between peoples of different cultures and faiths, not only in the Netherlands but around the world. Wilder's film appears to have compounded and exacerbated the impact of his comments.

Much of the anger at Wilders comments in the Arab and Islamic world has been expressed through the Arab media. While this is understandable, the signatories of this petition encourage and indeed welcome rational and considered critique of Wilders and the ideas he represents. At the same time we unequivocally reject the use of similarly inflammatory comments, violence or threats of the use of violence as a response.

Being offensive and inflammatory, as Wilders has once again been on this occasion, can only serve to break lines of communication, sows seeds of mistrust in the community and incite emotional and damaging tensions in both Western and Muslim societies.

We are confident that you and the majority of your fellow MP's recognise and embrace the fact that we are living in a world in which people of different cultures and faiths live side by side and must cooperate together harmoniously and peacefully. Dialogue based on understanding and mutual respect is needed to live with one another in peace. We do not necessarily have to agree with aspects of different cultures and faiths, but we must all attempt to respond rationally and intelligently to the differences of opinion that exist.

Our two organisations – one in the Netherlands and the other in Egypt – represent a growing international community of not only Egyptians and Dutchmen but also people of many other nationalities, beliefs and cultures - who are committed to dialogue, tolerance and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims, the Arab world and the West. Our co-operative projects to develop an electronic journal and library related to inter-cultural dialogue (www.arabwestreport.info) and building a specialised portal that links academic and dialogue institutions in the Arab World and Europe (www.enawu.com) illustrate our commitment to inter-cultural understanding and we commend this work to the Tweede Kamer.

Eng. Sawsan Gabra Ayoub Khalil

Chairperson Center for Arab-West Understanding

90 Road 14B, Maadi, Cairo, Egypt

Dick Parlevliet

Chairperson Stichting Arab West Understanding / Arab West Foundation

Blaak 550, 3011 TA Rotterdam, The Netherlands.