

**EX-MUSLIMS
OF NORTH AMERICA**



2021

End of Year Highlights

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This is why we at EXMNA continue to stand on the frontlines of freethought.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Walking away from Islam carries a heavy toll. The act of apostasy still warrants a death sentence in 12 Muslim-majority countries across the world, while speech deemed offensive to religion can be punished in as many as 33.

The stigma of disbelief follows freethinkers even in the West: abuse, isolation, and ostracism after leaving the faith are faced by too many apostates.

At Ex-Muslims of North America, we work every day to fight for their rights and dignities.

At Ex-Muslims of North America, we work every day to fight for their rights and dignities. But apostates are not alone in suffering at the hands of religious belief.

The horrific attack on the French school teacher Samuel Paty late last year was a grisly reminder that nowhere in the world are we truly free to offend Islam. In the last few months, Islamist terror has made the news again with the murder of a British MP.

Through acts of violence, fundamentalists can force deference from us all—both in and outside the Muslim world. It is through this promise of violence that blasphemy laws of the Muslim world become, in effect, the same laws that govern us all.

We believe empowering apostates is the first step to securing a freer, more just future for all. Without the challenge from disbelievers, religion would have no pressure to reform.

This is why we at EXMNA continue to stand on the frontlines of freethought. This year, we have made enormous progress on our overhaul of WikiIslam, massively expanded our Persecution Tracker, championed the freedom to offend religious sentiments on social media, and brought to light groundbreaking insights of research on North American ex-Muslims with our Apostate Report.

With this and other work, we hope to carry the torch of freethought forward: to bring us closer to a world where all are free to follow their conscience, irrespective of religious dogmatism and silencing tactics. The following pages provide more details on the year's accomplishments, as well as a brief look at what we're planning for the future.

We will continue in our mission to foster nuanced and compassionate dialogue, to be fearless when others are fearful, and to fight for the rights of all.

Thank you for your support,

Muhammad Syed
President | Ex-Muslims of North America

Since 2013, Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA), an IRS registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit, has stood for the rights and dignities of those who leave Islam, and championed reason and freethought everywhere.

VISION

We envision a world where every person is free to follow their conscience.

MISSION

Ex-Muslims of North America advocates for acceptance of religious dissent, promotes secular values, and aims to reduce discrimination faced by those who leave Islam.

APOSTATE REPORT

exmuslims.org/apostate-report

Ex-Muslims stand among the most marginalized groups in the world. Too often rejected by their communities and subject to discrimination, they are among the least visible and understood religious groups in North America.

We at EXMNA wanted to change that.

Undertaking one of the largest efforts of its kind, we reached out to members of our former support communities for participation in a quantitative survey to explore ex-Muslims' lives, beliefs, values, and experiences.

This year, we released the findings to the public in the form of the Apostate Report.

The Process

EXMNA contracted researchers at George Mason University to help us develop a thorough questionnaire. In the end, nearly 600 ex-Muslims participated in the survey. From this raw data, we assembled the Apostate Report, bringing a much-needed quantitative element to the study of the ex-Muslim experience in the West.

The Findings

The Apostate Report reveals a wide breadth of insights into who ex-Muslims are, what motivates them, and what they experience. In so doing, it helps shatter harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about apostates and furthers understanding of this growing secular demographic.

We found that ex-Muslims were not especially predisposed to "sinful" behavior before apostasy, nor were they natural outcasts from their faith community. Leaving this community behind, in fact, is frequently one of the most difficult parts of the transition to non-belief.

Unsurprisingly, we also found that ex-Muslims also experience a different sort of

alienation: hiding behind the screen of a double life. Many respondents, fearing retribution, found themselves unable to share their true beliefs with those closest to them. Through it all, however, runs a positive undercurrent: the intellectual and physical freedom that comes with renouncing dogma. Driven by a concern for human rights, science, and reason, respondents remained firm in their decision to leave Islam behind and chart their own courses through life.

This all only scratches the surface of the Apostate Report, whose scope and

focus are groundbreaking and—we hope—lay the foundation for fruitful future studies. This kind of work is one step of many toward fostering toleration of religious dissent, not only in Islam but in all religions.

The report is available to view on our website, along with a host of articles exploring and contextualizing the findings in greater depth.



Scan the code to read the report here.

PERSECUTION TRACKER

persecution.exmuslims.org

As many as 33 Muslim-majority countries criminalize blasphemy or apostasy in some form, and in the worst cases, conviction can mean a death sentence. This is, of course, if social reprisal does not reach the victim before the state does, something that can occur in Western countries too.

The number of those who have been murdered, assaulted, threatened, fined, arrested, jailed, imprisoned, sentenced to death, and executed for the crime of speaking their minds against Islamic dogma is impossible to quantify. The

goal of those who carry out these heinous acts is to bury the courageous people they target deep enough that history cannot find them.

We launched our Persecution Tracker last year so that this would never happen.

It catalogs incidents of violence, hate, and state punishment directed against blasphemers, atheists, freethinkers, and religious minorities in the Muslim world and beyond. This year, we expanded on it in a variety of ways.

A Record of Persecution

This year, we have increased the number of cases on the Tracker by more than threefold—capturing the stories of more victims than ever before.

We also added a new component to the Tracker, our country profiles, which provide country-specific information about blasphemy and apostasy laws in the Islamic world. This additional information helps contextualize the individual stories of victims, making the Tracker the most thorough resource on blasphemy persecution incidents available.



Dutch ex-Muslim novelist Lale Gül forced into hiding following death threats

Last Update: 20 Aug 2021

Date: Feb 10, 2021
By: Vigilante
Type: Death Threats
Accused of: Blasphemy
Occupation: Writer, student
Citizen: Netherlands
Country: Netherlands
Known For: authoring the autobiographical novel entitled *Ik ga leven* (I'm going to live) which flouted her traditional Islamic upbringing

“My mother is threatening suicide. My ten-year-old sister texts me to please come back. The last time I spoke to my father at home, he was shaking incessantly. After I left, he called me crying. That broke me because I've never seen him cry.”
- Lale Gül

We have also improved the Tracker's interface and navigability, making it easier to browse these stories and see the suffering wrought by blasphemy laws and religious intolerance.



You can view the Persecution Tracker and its hundreds of documented cases on our website at exmuslims.org/persecution.



“Organized religion can only divide people, not unite them. And this is the absolute, complete truth - unless you’re being blind. The holy books and holy wars and holy lands and holy sheikhs have together caused more destruction, murder, terror and misery than any epidemic or world war could manage.”

Yameen Rasheed, a Maldivian secularist blogger who was murdered for his views.

Read about his case:



“I didn’t think I would have to leave my home country because I love Bangladesh. I miss my country all the time. But I felt that if I stayed, I would be murdered.”

Shammi Haque, a Bangladeshi atheist and feminist blogger who fled the country after receiving death threats for her writing

Read about her case:



EX-MUSLIMS OF NORTH AMERICA HOME WHO WE ARE OUR WORK PERSECUTION TRACKER APOSTATE REPORT

BACK

COUNTRY PROFILES

View information about current blasphemy laws and their histories by country.

Name	Apostasy Punishments	Blasphemy Punishments	Separation of Mosque & State	Vigilante Incidents
Afghanistan	Death, Prison, Civil Death	Death, Prison	No	Rare
Algeria	Civil Death	Prison, Fines	No	Rare
Bahrain	N/A	Fines, Prison	No	Rare
Bangladesh	N/A	Prison, Fines	No	Pervasive
Egypt	Civil Death	Prison, Fines	No	Pervasive
Gambia	N/A	Prison, Fines	Yes	Rare
Indonesia	Civil Death	Prison	No	Rare
Iran	Death	Death, Prison	No	Rare
Iraq	N/A	Fines, Prison	No	Rare
Jordan	Civil Death	Prison, Fines	No	Rare
Kuwait	Civil Death	Prison, Fines	No	Rare
Lebanon	N/A	Prison	No	Rare
Libya	Civil Death	Prison, Fines, Death	No	Rare
Malaysia	Death, Civil Death, Fines, Prison	Fines, Prison	No	Rare
Maldives	Death, Civil Death	Death	No	Pervasive
Mauritania	Civil Death, Death	Death, Prison, Fines	No	Rare
Morocco	Civil Death	Prison	No	Rare
Nigeria	Death, Civil Death	Death, Prison	No	Pervasive
Oman	Civil Death	Fines, Prison	No	Rare
Pakistan	Civil Death, Death	Death, Fines, Prison	No	Pervasive
Qatar	Death	Prison	No	Rare
Saudi Arabia	Death, Prison	Death, Prison	No	Rare
Somalia	N/A	Fines, Prison	No	Pervasive
Sudan	N/A	Fines, Prison	No	Rare
Syria	N/A	Prison	No	Pervasive
Tunisia	N/A	Fines, Prison	No	Rare
Turkey	N/A	Prison	No	Rare
United Arab Emirates	Fines, Prison	Prison, Fines	No	Rare
Yemen	Death, Civil Death	Fines, Prison	No	Rare

WIKIISLAM

wikiislam.net

Scholarly resources on the doctrines and apocryphal texts of Islam suffer from systemic bias. Apologetics too often take precedence over objectivity—even (and perhaps especially) in academia. We believe that an unbiased, skeptical resource on Islam is needed.

For many years, Wikislam has served as an important alternative to resources that affirm and repeat the narratives of theologians and religious authorities. However, it had also been plagued

by problems of its own, including inflammatory content and an uneven quality of writing and research.

EXMNA took ownership of Wikislam a few years ago and sought to change this over the long term, turning Wikislam into a truly authoritative resource on Islam from a skeptical and critical perspective.

This work entails an enormous effort: the review and overhaul of the wiki's

language, organization, and standards, applying these changes to every one of its articles.

This year has seen the most substantial progress in the wiki's renovation thus far.

Work on the overhaul now encompasses nearly 450 of the wiki's articles, with nearly 200 of those articles being reviewed since the beginning of 2021.

This review involves bringing articles into compliance with our new standards, emphasizing encyclopedic language, quality of sources, coherence of structure, and thorough documentation. The work is ongoing, and more than 150 articles are near-complete, including about a dozen finished, for the first time, this year. This means that, at last, our goals for the wiki's revamp are coming to fruition—an important milestone for a team as small as ours.

Our efforts with Wikislam do not stop at this content overhaul, monumental as it is. We have also begun the arduous task of translating the entire wiki into Arabic.

This year, we have accomplished the translation of more than 100 articles, bringing its badly-needed skeptical perspective on Islam to millions of readers in the heart of the Islamic world for the first time.

These important improvements have brought Wikislam significantly closer to its promise and potential: a proper encyclopedia worthy of its distinction as a comprehensive, authoritative resource on Islam.



Scan the code to visit the wiki

Page Discussion Read View source View history Search Wikislam

Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

From Wikislam, the online resource on Islam

This article or section is being renovated.				
Lead	Structure	Content	Language	References
4 / 4	4 / 4	4 / 4	4 / 4	4 / 4

Khadijah or **Khadija bint Khuwaylid** (Arabic: خديجة بنت خويلد) (555 - c.619) was Prophet Muhammad's first wife and she was his only wife as long as she lived.^[1] She is known to Muslims as *al-Kubra* ("the Great")^[2] and *al-Tahira* ("the Pure").^[3] Twelve of Muhammad's wives are credited with the title *Umm al-Muminin* ("Mother of the Faithful"),^[4] but Khadijah occupies a unique position as *the* Mother of Islam herself. Khadijah was the mother to all of Muhammad's children, including Fatimah, save one.

Khadijah is said to have come from a trading family and, before marrying Muhammad, had been a successful business woman and was said to be the richest woman in all of Mecca, and, on some accounts. It was as a result being her employee that Muhammad came to know Khadijah and ultimately marry her. It is also believed that she had two husbands, with whom she had multiple children, prior to Muhammad. Little else is known about her life prior to this final marriage.

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Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

Khadijah's "medal" in *Promptuarii iconum insigniorum* (1553). Lyon: Rouillé. This illustration made no pretense of being an accurate portrait but it has become a widely accepted symbolic representation of Khadijah.

Born 555
Mecca, Hijaz, Arabia (present-day Saudi Arabia)

Died c. 619 (aged 63-64)

Other names Khadijah al-Kubra
Khadijah al-Tahira

Occupation Merchant

Unbelief Brief

Freethought, religious dissent, and secularism are under attack everywhere, and particularly in Muslim-majority countries. Some exceptions notwithstanding, this problem in the last several years has been getting worse, not better.

As activists, reversing this trend is our utmost imperative. One way we seek to do that, in addition to our other work, is the simple act of refusing to look away from these assaults on freedom of conscience. This is the purpose of the Unbelief Brief, our bi-weekly round-up on current events related to Islam and freethought launched this year.

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You can read the Unbelief Brief every two weeks on our website (exmuslims.org). If you sign up for our e-mail newsletter, you can also receive it in your inbox.

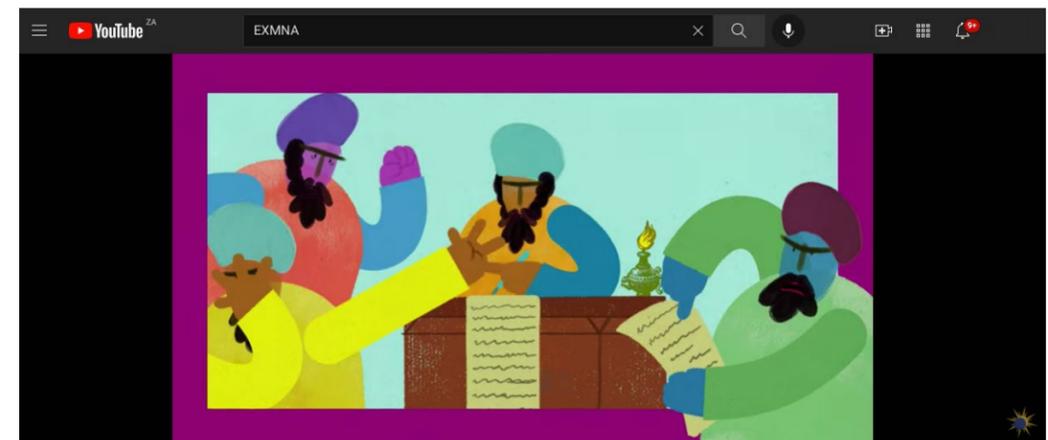


Freethinkers of Islamic History

The Muslim world was not always so closed to debate and dissent. The tide of religious authoritarianism rises and falls throughout history, and many periods—including the so-called “Islamic Golden Age”—have produced great minds of profound religious skepticism.

This fact is little-known both within and without the Islamic world. This is why we have been working on a series of animated and narrated informative videos focusing on many of these great skeptics.

This year, the first piece of that effort came to fruition. Our video on Abu Bakr al-Razi, “The Physician”—one of history’s greatest medical minds, and a passionate heretic to boot—was released just this past November. This profile of a deeply fascinating man and his blasphemies will, we hope, be the first chapter of several similar to come.



You can watch “Al-Razi: Islam’s Favorite Heretic” on our YouTube channel—and be sure to subscribe so as not to miss future installments in this series.



Scan the code to watch the video

ADVOCACY

Last year, we worked with various secular organizations including the American Humanist Association to advocate for the adoption of the Blasphemy Resolution — calling for the global end to blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws. The end of the year saw success — the Senate joined the House in adopting the Resolution.

This year, we have continued to meet with the offices of legislators in our efforts to repeal blasphemy and apostasy laws across the world.

In addition to ending blasphemy laws, we also advocate for a path to asylum for apostates or those accused of apostasy, and for more open speech and limitation of censorship on social media platforms.

Freedom to Dissent

The internet has become one of the most important tools available for

ex-religionists of all stripes to gather together, find support, and build resistance. However, well-intentioned but ill-conceived policies from social media companies have been curtailing our ability to utilize these tools.

Namely, concerns of amplifying “hate speech” has led to overly-broad content moderation on platforms such as Facebook, with ex-Muslims (and atheists everywhere) finding themselves banned or suspended for criticizing religion or religious figures.

To address these concerns, EXMNA has held several meetings with Facebook officials about their problematic content moderation policies and the harm they pose to ex-Muslims in particular.

We have continued in these meetings throughout 2021, most recently to voice our strong disapproval of a new community standard that would allow

content that criticizes “concepts and ideas” to be removed by moderators when religious sensibilities are offended.

This year EXMNA also participated in a historic meeting with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, along with other secular groups, organized by the Secular Coalition for America. It was, as we noted at the time, the first meeting of ex-Muslims with the White House, and it represents an important step toward the amplification of the concerns and issues that matter to ex-Muslims, as well as all people who share a commitment to secularism and religious pluralism.

Outreach

While we have kept busy on multiple projects this year, we have also continued to get the word out about them—and our organization at large—through several avenues.

Our social media presence continues to reach a very wide audience. Content

on our Facebook page has reached more than 4 million people, with nearly 300,000 unique page visits.

On Instagram, these numbers are around 250,000 and 200,000 respectively, and they represent significant increases in traffic from last year.

Our videos on YouTube have received about 400,000 views over the year, but our largest audience is on Twitter, where, in the past year, our content has garnered more than 21 million impressions.

There, our engagement rate—the ratio of impressions to interactions with our posts—has been very high, averaging between four and five percent throughout the year.

The job of spreading awareness is never done, and these outreach efforts are an integral component that we will continue as our work continues.

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WHAT'S NEXT

The battle for freedom of thought and conscience is never over. While 2021 has been a very productive year for us, there remains much more work to do. In the coming months and years, we are going to continue to update and maintain our Persecution Tracker, as well as our comprehensive overhaul of WikiIslam.

We will also continue regular publication of the Unbelief Brief. In addition, we hope to start work on more videos in our “Freethinkers of Early Islam” series to follow up on this year’s profile of al-Razi. All of these will be on our plate—plus some others that we will have more to say about in the future.

An enormous thank-you to all who have supported us this year—or any year. We hope you’ll join us on the front lines of freethought as we continue our endeavors for a long time to come.

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WAYS TO GIVE

We have one and only one way of sustaining these important efforts: financial contributions from people like you. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and your generosity maintains this mission, keeping us in operation so we can continue to be productive.

If you care about the causes we champion—about secularism, women’s rights, and above all freedom of conscience and belief—please consider donating today. You can do so on our website, either through PayPal, a credit/debit card payment, or a direct ACH transaction. We also accept check donations by mail, for which the address and form is also available on our website, or go to our website, exmuslims.org/donate

Scan the code if you would like to donate.



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