



Press Release

## Dutch MP to be prosecuted for 'hate speech' against Islam

*Arab Vision disagrees with prosecution*

Nicosia, Cyprus (January 21, 2009)

A Dutch court has ruled that a right-wing member of parliament should be prosecuted for his controversial statements and recent film against Islam. Geert Wilders, the leader of the Freedom Party, has responded by saying that the court's ruling is an 'attack on the freedom of expression'.

Last year, Wilders produced a film, *Fitna* (Arabic for strife), which suggested that the various terrorist attacks in the USA and Europe were triggered by Islam. 'Stop Islamization. Defend our freedom' was the concluding statement of the film, which was posted on the internet and drew protests across the Muslim World. The court in Amsterdam ruled that 'in a democratic system, hate speech is considered so serious that it is in the general interest to draw a clear line'.

Arab Vision, which has been producing Christian TV programs in the Arab World since 1997, does not agree with Wilders' broad-brush statements against Islam, nor his calls to ban the Koran as a 'fascist book'. However it also disagrees with the court's decision to prosecute. 'Our western societies should model freedom of speech, not quench it', Arab Vision's international director said today.

'The idea that Geert Wilders cannot say what he thinks about Islam mirrors the lack of freedom in the Muslim World. Irrespective of the content of his words, we strongly protest against this ruling and we think that the Dutch society is giving in to fear for what Muslims may do. In our work in the Arab World, we suffer from oppressive regimes and the lack of freedom. That makes us extra sensitive to not undermine our own values in the Western World.'

Last year, the public prosecutor's office decided that Wilders' comments did not constitute a criminal offence but rather contributed to the ongoing debate on Islam in Dutch society. This new court ruling reverses that decision and prompts the prosecutors to proceed with the case immediately. Wilders has been under police protection since Dutch director Theo Van Gogh was killed by a radical Islamist in 2004.

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Proclaiming the Gospel on TV in the Arab World