

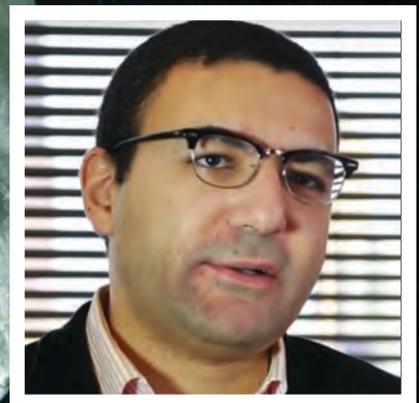


# Hizmet

is a true embodiment  
of the Islamic ideals of love  
and service to the other

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I have seen many un-Islamic cults play out in the world today: ISIS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, al-Shabab. Hizmet is not an un-Islamic cult. From my interaction with the volunteers, it is anything but.

Hizmet is a group of people that I have observed carry out the best of Islamic ideals: kindness, hospitality, love, selfless service. They are mainstream in their creed, as far as the Sunni Islamic school of thought goes. They read the Qur'an; they pray five times a day; they fast. They're very spiritual people. They don't push their beliefs, their Islamic beliefs, on non-Muslims. That's not what they're out to do. They're out to serve the world, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. So in terms of being an "un-Islamic cult," Hizmet is anything but. What they really are, in my opinion, is a true embodiment of the Islamic ideals of love and service to the other. And I've never seen anything to suggest otherwise.

I'm a civil rights activist, a human rights activist; I don't take my marching orders from demagogues whether they are domestic or foreign, whether they are elected or dictators. What I look at is the process, and what troubles me in today's Turkey is the process. Due process is the arbiter between those who accuse and those who defend. It's absent in contemporary Turkey. And there has to be independent judiciary; it has to be judges and a court that is not in anybody's corner. What we're seeing in Turkey, unfortunately, is a situation where government is essentially run by one party that acts as both the accuser/the prosecutor, the judge and the executioner. And those who are accused don't really have any leeway in the system to defend themselves.

Those who know Hizmet, who have interacted with Hizmet, know

Hizmet is the farthest thing from violence. They've never promoted violence; they've never accepted violence; they've been the first to condemn violence, including a violent overtake of a Republic, a coup. They've condemned this coup, and they've never promoted anything close to it. They've never been involved in anything that is violent in nature.

Now that the accusation is there, we have to ask for proof. And, even if there are individuals who may be associated with the Hizmet who were involved in one crime or another, including a coup, the question becomes: at what point do you incriminate an entire movement of millions of people, volunteers who want to serve humanity through their Islamic ideals? Can we condemn a teacher, a 24-year-old woman serving in some remote part of Turkey, Pakistan, or Kazakhstan, or anywhere in the world where they build schools in areas of underserved, underprivileged communities? How are these souls devoted to service affiliated or associated with that particular crime?

What you look at here is a witch hunt; it is "guilt by association." These are not in the tradition of liberal justice, liberal values that democracies espouse.

And it's exactly what is happening around the world when people in power want to shut out those who are not in their pockets, those they can't control, or those whom they don't like.

When a government is moving towards autocracy, when you're becoming a demagogue, when you become the "state" (*l'état, c'est moi*) and when you shut out opposition, shut down media, imprison journalists, and declare organizations, schools, mosques, or associations or universities or charities, as terrorist organizations just by a signature, then I have to say, that

is incorrect, and that is problematic, and that is unjust!

And I'll raise my voice, as a Muslim, as a human being, but also as a civil rights and human rights activist, because civil rights and human rights are not piecemeal. They cannot be divided; they cannot be allocated to one group and then denied to another. I believe that ideals are only good and are only meaningful if they apply to all human beings. It's a belief in blind due process, a blind independent judiciary, and having the procedures and the processes of justice apply everywhere, equally, to all people.

When I read the news that [Hizmet] schools were being shut down in Pakistan, it hurt, because Pakistan is in need of good schools, it's in need of education. We hear about radicalization, we hear about illiteracy, we hear about the lack of education in parts of the country – same in the United States, same in the world. And anyone who is putting themselves into service to build schools and educate young people is doing good in the world. As someone who built an organization, I understand how much effort this takes. I understand every wall that is painted, every nail that is hammered into that wall, every computer that is bought and connected, every chair and every table, and then all of the content that comes along with a good education. It takes so much to build a single classroom, let alone a whole organization. And here you have a school of many classrooms, and then you have a movement of many schools. One signature, for political pressure or for personal gain, shuts it all down.

It's so hard to build. It's so easy to destroy. And we, Muslim-Americans and people of conscience, have to raise our voices and say, "We don't stand for that!" ▲