

## **FRANCE**

### **Between 5,000 and 10,000 Salafists in France**

**By Jean-Marie Guénois**

**Le Figaro (31.03.2012)/ Translation by HRWF (09.04.2012) - INTERVIEW - Interview with Dominique Thomas, an expert in Radical Islam and researcher at Ehess.**

#### **LE FIGARO.- Is there a Salafist risk in France?**

**Dominique THOMAS-** The type of Salafism which is practiced in France is not a danger to society. In actuality, very few Muslims who are radicalized to the point of violence have crossed paths with these Salafist preachers. As a movement, most of Salafism rejects political violence. Certainly, the al-Qaeda and jihadist movements claim support from a certain type of Salafism but this version is not the same type of Salafism as that of these preachers.

#### **What are the different types of Salafism?**

There are three types. The first and the most important is "quietist," or traditionalist. It advocates a return to the fundamental texts of Islam and accuses other Muslims of distorting Islam. In addition, it refuses to become politically engaged in any way. It even adheres to the principle that rebellion against Muslim political power is wrong. The second type is "reformist" Salafism. It is expanding rapidly in the Arab Spring world. Unlike "quietist" Salafism, this version encourages creating political parties-a recent development-in order to participate in elections. The third type, "activist" or jihadist Salafism, is the most narrow of the three. It promotes violence in order to threaten the legitimacy of states and to wage war against the West. These three movements are in competition with each other.

#### **How would the four Muslim preachers, who were denied entrance to France, not be dangerous ? They are explicitly antisemitic...**

They have a conservative vision of society which can prove difficult to reconcile with the values of French society. As for the anti-Semitism, we must understand that these preachers belong to an Arabic social construct dominated by a problematic Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. They ride this wave in order to mobilize public opinion. Out of duty, they show solidarity with the struggles of the Palestinian peoples. As long as this abscess is not punctured, this risk of overflowing will exist.

#### **Will the denial of entrance into France be effective?**

The entrance bans are largely symbolic. They will not affect Salafism in France. Between 5,000 and 10,000 people belong to this movement in our country and that number is growing. In the era of digital information, these telepreachers, well known throughout the entire world, are accessible on the internet or by satellite television. The entrance bans

cannot limit their influence because they are very popular. Abdallah Basfar, for example, one of the six preachers who were expected at the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), was a regular participant at this gathering. Without the drama of Toulouse, Basfar's presence would not have posed any problem. But we are currently in an election campaign.

**Will the entrance bans on the preachers produce consequences in the Arab world?**

The law against headscarves has already had a strong impact. But we must not overestimate the negative consequences of this incident. The greatest risk is for the new generation of leaders emerging in the Arab world. They claim, of course, to be politically Islamic, but many different possibilities exist. This action, therefore, risks being seen as a negative sign. The real question is the new political map of the Arab world. The Anglo-Saxons, more pragmatic than us, will seek to exploit the situation to their advantage. Accordingly, the Americans and the English have already made contact with many of these newly emerged political groups.