
ANTI-ISLAM DUTCH POLITICIAN GEERT WILDERS CANCELS MUHAMMAD CARTOON CONTEST

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31.08.2018

Deutsche Welle (31 August 2018)

Far-right politician Geert Wilders has canceled a Prophet Muhammad cartoon contest to avoid 'Islamist violence.' The provocative stunt drew criticism at home and abroad.

Anti-Islam Dutch politician Geert Wilders on Thursday canceled a planned Prophet Muhammad cartoon competition, which had angered Muslims and prompted criticism at home over the provocative idea.

Wilders said he decided to cancel the contest to avoid Islamist violence after he received death threats.

"I have decided to cancel the competition to avoid the risk of making people victims of Islamist violence," Wilders said in a statement. "I don't want Muslims to use the cartoon competition as an excuse for Islamist violence."

"It's not just about me," Wilders said, adding that those against the cartoon event "see not only me, but the entire Netherlands as a target."

Images of Prophet Muhammad are traditionally forbidden in Islam as idolatrous and caricatures are regarded by many Muslims as highly offensive.

On Thursday, a 26-year-old man reportedly from Pakistan appeared in a Dutch court on suspicion of committing a terrorist act and plot to murder. He was arrested on Tuesday after posting a Facebook video threatening to kill Wilders or attack the Dutch parliament.

Islamist groups in Pakistan organized protests on Wednesday that drew thousands of protesters condemning Wilders.

In response, the Dutch foreign ministry issued a warning to its citizens in Pakistan to exercise caution and avoid demonstrations. A planned trade mission to Pakistan for November was also postponed "until a later date," the government-run Netherlands Enterprise Agency said.

The Dutch government has sought to distance itself from Wilders' contest, with Prime Minister Mark Rutte calling it provocative, but saying that there were protections of freedom of speech in the Netherlands.

"The aim is to provoke rather than to force a debate about Islam," Rutte said this week. "Wilders is a politician who provokes and he is free to do that."

Wilders heads the far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), the second largest party in the Dutch parliament.

He has for years lived under around-the-clock police protection due to his inflammatory anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Topping the list of his 10 point party plan is to "De-Islamize the Netherlands," including by closing mosques and banning the Quran.

The cartoon contest was planned for November and to be held at his party's secure offices in the Dutch parliament.

cw/rc (AFP, AP, dpa)

Kaynak/Source: