

The Muslim Brotherhood Operative on Facebook's Content Oversight Board (Part 1)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Tawakkol Karman

When it comes to Islam, Facebook seems unable to get things right. It has made life more difficult for sober islamocritics such as Robert Spencer, censoring their content, while favoring those who attempt to deflect such criticism with charges of “racism” and “Islamophobia.”

Recently Mark Zuckerberg decided it would be a good thing – Diversity! Inclusivity! – to appoint the Yemeni journalist and political activist Tawakkol Karman to the Content Oversight Board of Facebook, a position where she will be well-placed to protect Islam and Muslims from their critics. It is not only

those islamocritics who are up in arms at Karman's appointment, but a great many Muslims are horrified as well. For Tawakkol Karman is not only a Muslim, but a fervent admirer of the Muslim Brotherhood.

To many around the world, Tawakkol Abdel-Salam Khalid Karman is known as the first Arab woman – and the second Muslim woman – to win a Nobel Prize, for Peace, in 2011. She won the prize for several reasons. First, there is her record of “activism,” which some may find underwhelming. In Yemen, she campaigned against systemic repression by the government, and demanded inquiries into corruption and other forms of social and legal injustice. In 2005, she founded an organization, Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), to help train women in media skills, and to promote the work of female journalists in Yemen. WJWC also produces regular reports on human rights abuses in Yemen, so far documenting more than 50 cases of attacks and what it claims are unfair sentences against newspapers and writers. In 2007, Tawakkol began organizing weekly protests in Yemen's capitol, Sana'a, against government mismanagement. She also shows up regularly at Change Square, where she holds court inside a tent when not haranguing her followers outside.

Karman is not shy about proclaiming her own greatness. At the [“Official Website of Tawakkol Karman,”](#) you will find listed (I haven't corrected the English) some of her Outstanding Achievements:

- The lady of year 2011 according to the readers and subscribers of Yahoo website;
- One of the Top 100 Global Thinkers selected by the Foreign Policy Magazine;
- Among the most strongest 100 Arab women;
- Awarded the Courage Award by the Embassy of United States of America, Sana'a in 2008;
- One of the seven women who change the history for the year of 2009;

- Member of Transparency International's Advisory Council;
- Member of High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post 2015 Development;
- She granted the honorary degree of doctor of law from Alberta University-Canada

It has been suggested that the main reason she was chosen to share the 2011 Peace Prize with two other women, both from Liberia – the Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leybah Gbowee, a “peace-and-women’s-rights-activist” – is that the Nobel Peace Prize Committee was that year under pressure to find a Muslim female recipient and Tawakkol Karman fit the bill, checking all the right boxes as a fighter “against governmental suppression” of dissent and as a “promoter of women’s rights.”

What the Nobel Peace Prize committee did not know, or did not care about, was that Karman held a senior position in Yemen’s Al-Islah Party, an affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood known for its extremist and violent agenda. In 2013, she was a strong supporter of Mohamad Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood member who became, briefly, the President of Egypt. She wrote an article in Foreign Policy about Egypt; her title says it all: “Mohamed Morsi is the Arab World’s Nelson Mandela.”

Aside from being a senior member of the Al-Islah Party, which had strong ties to the MB, Karman also had ties to the Brotherhood’s Yemeni branch, an Islamist movement founded by Abdul Majeed Al-Zindani, a man who appears in Washington’s Specially Designated Global Terrorist list. She claims to have severed those ties to the MB in Yemen, but many wonder whether her move was merely a cosmetic exercise to deceive gullible Westerners.

The story of Tawakkol Karman’s appointment to the Content Advisory Board at Facebook is at [Arab News](#):

Unsurprisingly, Facebook’s choice has prompted outrage on

social media networks, with many worried that it will bring the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas right into the heart of the biggest social networking company in the world.

"She has not denounced the extremist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood," Ghanem Nuseibeh, founder of risk consultancy Cornerstone Global Associates, told Arab News.

"On the contrary, there is everything [sic] to believe that she continues to espouse the hate speech that has been a mark of the Brotherhood in general."

Given her prominent role in the revolution that toppled Yemen's former leader Ali Abdullah Saleh, Karman's Nobel Prize is not without merit, say political analysts. But they add that her advocacy of extremist causes can hardly be glossed over.

"Karman was considered a symbol of the Yemeni revolution against the rule of Saleh, but over time she has become associated with intolerance, discrimination and lack of neutrality," Hani Nasira, a terrorism and extremism expert, told Arab News.

Soon after Karman was awarded the Nobel Prize, she was invited to Doha and [was] personally congratulated by Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader and preacher of hate, whose fatwas call for suicide bomb attacks and who praises Hitler for "punishing" the Jews.

After conveying to her his message of "support" for the Yemeni people, Al-Qaradawi gave Karman a copy of his book, "Fiqh Al-Jihad," as a gift.

Such easy rapport with a personality as controversial as Al-Qaradawi calls into question Karman's political beliefs, despite her ostensible split with the Brotherhood's Yemeni branch.

It also rings the alarm about the judgement of Facebook, a social networking behemoth that claims to be an unbiased arbiter of international political discourse.

Facebook has never been an “unbiased arbiter” when it comes to Islam. It has consistently privileged defenders of the faith, and made life difficult – by taking down posts or making them impossible to find – for islamocritics. It is not surprising that a Muslim Brotherhood admirer such as Tawakkol Karman would be appointed to Facebook’s Content Oversight Board; Facebook either does not know, or more likely does not care, about Karman’s dangerous liaisons.

“We understand that people will identify with some of our members and disagree passionately with others,” a Facebook Oversight Board spokesperson told Arab News.

“Board members were chosen to represent diverse perspectives and backgrounds that can help with addressing the most significant content decisions facing a global community.”

Would Facebook place a strong supporter of President Trump on the Content Oversight Board, to increase its diversity and inclusivity? Or a supporter of Matteo Salvini in Italy, or of Marine Le Pen in France, or of Victor Orban in Hungary? What about a supporter of Prime Minister Netanyahu? No, I didn’t think so either. They’re all, you see, “extremists.” Unlike Tawakkol Karman.

Facebook declined to respond to specific questions regarding Karman’s links to extremist groups. But clearly the platform has put its credibility on the line by bringing her on board.

Facebook “risks becoming the platform of choice for extremist Islamist ideology,” Nuseibeh, who is also chair of UK-based nonprofit Muslims Against Anti-Semitism, told Arab News.

“With Karman’s appointment, Facebook’s argument that it is an

impartial platform is severely weakened. There is no guarantee that Karman will not have a direct editorial influence on what Facebook allows to be published.

“Would Facebook, for example, appoint Aung San Suu Kyi, another Nobel laureate, to arbitrate in disputes over posts related to the Rohingya atrocities in Myanmar?”

Nuseibeh added: “Karman, to much of the world, is what Aung San Suu Kyi is to the Rohingyas.”

Karman’s abrasive personality became evident during the Arab Spring protests, which began with Tunisia’s “Jasmine Revolution” in 2011 before spreading out to other Arab countries including Yemen.

Previous Yemeni protest leaders who had aligned with her called her “dictatorial,” someone who went against the consensus of peaceful movements by urging young protesters to march on in the face of imminent danger.

“She called for that march, the police brutally attacked it and 13 people died,” one protest organizer who declined to be named told Reuters in 2011.

“She didn’t apologize for it and it really upset a lot of people.”

She was willing to sacrifice her young followers – sending them on a march that previous protest leaders opposed because of the “imminent danger” posed to the marchers by the police – for no other reason than to promote herself as a protest leader. Tawakkol Karman, of course, never marched in these protests; that would have been too dangerous.

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