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**Social Media, Religion and Political Violence Forum**

**The Open University, Camden, London**

 **Monday 15 June 2015**

**09:30-17:00hrs**

This forum will examine the role of social media in the online circulation and mobilisation of violent images, narratives and texts by religious groups. It will bring together researchers, policy-makers, religious leaders, activists, NGO workers media analysts and journalists to discuss the relationship between social media, religion, and political violence. We will address issues that are often deemed so highly sensitive that, in themselves, they provoke political and social conflict. We aim to expose common myths and assumptions about the causes of religious violence today. In so doing, we will stress the importance of drawing on historical and comparative perspectives in order to grasp a more accurate picture of contemporary realities.

This forum is timely. The cyclical reproduction and augmentation of insecurities, particularly around Islamist religious violence, and the narrow framing of public and media debate means that core problems are misunderstood or marginalised. The enduring spotlight on Muslim citizens is part of the problem. Our research suggests that there is a lack of understanding between policy-makers, researchers, journalists, religious and community organisations. Joined up thinking and inter-faith co-operation is required if we are to unlock the key to conflict resolution in contemporary multi-faith societies and glean a better understanding of the attractions and motivations underlying religious violence.

The forum will address these issues in a highly interactive way. Researchers and other interested parties will share the latest findings of their research, consider the state of knowledge in the field, identify gaps, exchange knowledge and make recommendations for political, policy and practical action. Researchers, specialists and practitioners of diverse religious or spiritual traditions, as well as those opposed to religion, are invited. A report on the day’s proceedings will be produced with your recommendations and will be circulated to relevant government departments, religious and academic organisations.

Topics for debate include: How can we explain why some people are attracted to religious extremism and violence? How are public and media debates about religion and violence framed? What role does gender play in these debates? Why are debates about religious violence prone to collapse? How are social media used to motivate or oppose extremist ideologies and religious violence? Do social media help sustain strong extremist political networks or are such affiliations more fragile than is often presumed? What role do sacred texts and images play in decisions to join and remain affiliated to extremist religious groups? How are sacred texts circulated and used in online debates to justify acts of religious violence? How do images of religious violence and of ‘modern martyrdom’ feed extreme forms of religion? In what ways do social media contribute to the branding of religious, political or extremist groups? How could social media and sacred text be used to encourage peace-building, interfaith dialogue or peaceful social change?

***This event is invitation only and will be conducted under the Chatham House Rule.***

***This event is organised by the Mediating Religion International Network***

***http://www.mediatingreligion.org***