



## PRESS RELEASE

*For immediate release*

### News Media Have a Duty to Publish Controversial Cartoons

Montreal, February 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, denounces the odious attacks which claimed the lives of two innocent people on February 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> in Copenhagen and which constitutes, like the Paris attacks in early January, a violation of the fundamental freedoms of every human being, in particular freedom of conscience, and was perpetrated in the name of Islamist extremism. The association simultaneously denounces the cowardice and lack of integrity of several news media – for example most English-language newspapers in Canada – which refused and continue to refuse to publish the cartoons which the murderers used, in both cases, as an excuse for their crimes.

Several journalists have written articles in which they unscrupulously repeat the false notion that these cartoons are all “offensive” and their articles have been published without the cartoons, thus depriving readers of information which is essential for a full understanding of events. The two *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons which are crucial for this controversy – a cover image published during the Danish cartoon crisis and the cover of the first issue to appear following the attack of January 7<sup>th</sup> – insult neither Muslims, nor Muhammad, nor Islam. (Both cartoons are available on the association's web site:

<http://www.atheologie.ca/images/charlie/953919.jpg>,

[http://www.atheologie.ca/images/charlie/ch\\_1178\\_couverture.jpg](http://www.atheologie.ca/images/charlie/ch_1178_couverture.jpg)) On the contrary, they display a sympathetic image of Muhammad who is shown criticizing the violent acts of fundamentalist extremists and feeling compassion for the victims.

If this is provocation, then it is the most salutary and constructive form of provocation possible. By failing to display these cartoons while conveying a false impression of their content, news media thus facilitate the manipulations of imams who dictate to the Muslim public that they have a religious obligation to feel offended.

The goal of the authors of these attacks is to suppress all criticism of their religion. But we have not only a right to criticize ideas and ideologies, including religions, indeed we have a duty to do so. That duty belongs especially to journalists. Wide distribution of the cartoons accompanied by objective discussion of their content would greatly reduce the risk for each publisher and would constitute a first small step in that direction, a task which nevertheless appears to be beyond the competence of some.

The Copenhagen events also remind us of the necessity of repealing article 296 of the Criminal Code of Canada which criminalizes “blasphemy.” It is also important to remove paragraph 319(3)(b) of the Code which grants impunity to religions with respect to hate propaganda because religions, despite their pretensions, are not the principal targets but rather the principal instigators of hatred – hatred of nonbelievers, of Jews, of members other religions, of homosexuals, of women, etc.

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