

The Trialogue of Cultures*

By

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Bismillah Hir Rahma Nir Rahim (I begin with name of God the Most Kind the Most Merciful). I greet you with the greetings of Islam (**Assalamu Alaykum wa Rahmatullah wa Barakathu** (May God's blessing and peace be with us all.)

I am honoured -- and deeply humbled -- to be invited to speak to you this afternoon on the very important and timely topic of the role of religion in the response to terrorism. From the very outset I wish to give you greetings from the British Muslim community and their representative body Muslim Council of Britain (**MCB**), congratulating you for organising this conference

Let me begin from the very outset to clarify Islam from Muslim. Most people treat Islam and Muslims as synonymous and mutually interchangeable terms, often saying Islam where they ought to say Muslims and vice versa. In my opinion the word "Islam" should be used exclusively for the "Way of Life" based upon divine sources: The Book known as Qur'an, "the word of God" and Sunnah, "the proven practices of the Prophet" (peace and blessing of God be upon him). "Muslims" as human beings are free to abide or deviate from Divine Guidance as they feel fit according to their own conscience. Islam has never claimed to be a new faith. It is the same faith that God ordained with the creation of the first man sent to earth. Islam confirms almost all Biblical and Hebrew Prophets as the Prophets of Islam and their messages as the messages of Islam as long it they are confirmed in the Qur'an, the Book of Islam. The moral and ethical code of Islam is similar to Judaism, Christianity and many other major world faiths. The only difference is in theology, concepts and practices in method of worship of the One and the Only One God and methodology of how morality and ethics should govern all spheres and aspects of our human life.

The general theory of Islam begins with a consideration of application of Islamic Shariah (Law) in daily life. Shariah is not a divine Law. It is a human interpretation of the sacred text. According to Islamic teachings, the Creator not only laid down laws governing the natural universe but rules for human conduct in all aspects of life. Unlike natural order, which follows its predetermined laws, mankind has the freedom to rebel and follow its own "man-made" laws, which is, however, a form of unbelief (**shirk**). Non-submission to the will of Allah is not only an act of ingratitude (**kufr**) for divine mercies, but also a choice for evil and misery in this world and punishment in the life hereafter. In Islam, all aspects of natural life have been God-willed, therefore, the ultimate purpose of all creation is the compliance of the created with the will of the creator. Islam is neither a purely otherworldly religion nor one that focuses too much on worldly affairs. Muslims seek the best of both worlds. Islam is simultaneously a creed, a set of ethical norms, a social order, and a way of life. Wherever they are, Muslims are expected to actively contribute to the common good and to show solidarity with their brothers and sisters in faith, worldwide.

Islamic Theory : 3 Ds: 1) Din ; 2) Dunya; 3) Dawla

Islamic way of life can be summarised in three words **1) Din** (religion), **2) Dunya** (Community), **3) Dawla** (State). Islamic Shariah covers all of these three aspects. From

Islamic point of view, life is a unity. It cannot be divided into watertight compartments. Islamic Shariah gives directions to all aspects of life in its entirety. Islamic Shariah is a complete scheme of life and an all-embracing social order where nothing is superfluous and nothing lacking. Therefore there is no separation between state and church. Islamic State is not a theocratic state. Secularism, in Muslims view, destroys the transcendence of all moral values. In Qur'anic words "those who forget God eventually forget themselves" (59:19) and their individual and corporate personalities disintegrate. Thus, Islam is considered the religion in which, through voluntary submission to God, human beings find peace with themselves and their environment. A Muslim seeks God's guidance in all matters all the time. There is no contradiction between the divine rights of the individual, anchored in the Qura'n, and the core rights as embodied in the Universal Human Rights declarations. Muslims support fundamental human rights, rule of law, division of power with accountability and checks and balances, universal suffrage and eligibility, and freedom of speech and conscience. Islamic Shariah commands its followers to observe the local legal order. Muslims can live anywhere in the world, provided they can fulfil their fundamental religious duties. Muslims must also respect and abide by all laws of the land.

Muslims are required to observe religious rules in the community and establish an Islamic State to achieve man's righteousness. It is the duty of every Muslim to cooperate with others for seeking the common good. It is the duty of Islamic state to establish a just social order based on principles of harmony, respect, freedom and dignity where all human beings are accepted with all of their differences. Diversity is not only recognised but also appreciated in Islamic Society. Muslims can discharge this responsibility collectively with establishing an Islamic State with power to command (**amr**) and prohibit (**nahy**). Thus Islamic State is an indispensable condition of Islamic life in the true sense of the word "Islam". However, Muslims living in minority situation has no duty to establish an Islamic State. Muslims are part of Global community (**Ummah**). Muslims living as majority has religious duty to establish an Islamic State to establish Peace and Justice with an authority to enjoin Good and prohibit evil "**Amar bil Maroof and Nahi a'nil Munkar**".

The necessity of mutual cooperation:

In my faith tradition the Holy Qur'an commands believers for interfaith co-operation "**to come to common grounds**" (3:64). As a Muslim I have been ordered to build good relations with all people of the world (49:13 & (16:40); work for peace everywhere and whenever possible with others (2:208) & 8:61); cooperate with others in furthering virtue and God-consciousness (5:2); seek and secure human welfare, promote justice and peace (4:114); do good to others (28:77) and not to break promises made to others (16:91). The Holy Qur'an tells believers that those who do good deeds and help others are the best creation (98:6). **The Holy Prophet of Islam made it clear that "Religion is man's treatment of other fellow-beings" (Bukhari & Muslim); and "the best among you is he who does good deeds in serving other people" (Ahmad & Tabrani).**

The Prophet of Islam (May the peace of God be upon him) practiced this ideal for interfaith dialogue himself while talking to Jews, Christians and other faith traditions, as well as people with no faith on issues concerning life, death and relevant matters. The Prophet of Islam confirmed this in writing explicitly in the Charter of Medina in 622 CE. The Holy Qur'an not only recognized religious pluralism as accepting other groups as

legitimate socio-religious communities but also accepting their spirituality. The preservation of the sanctity of the places of worship of other faiths is paramount in Islamic tradition (22:40). The Holy Qur'an is full of many examples but time does not permit me to dwell on this.

The Role of Religion:

Religion brings joy and hope to millions of people in the world. Religion is a social force that can be harnessed to build bridges or manipulated to erect walls. Living and working together in today's multicultural, multi-religious and multi faith society is not always easy. Faith communities have huge human and financial resources. Religion motivates its followers for doing good deeds such as raising funds for good causes, helping elderly and needy people in our communities and motivating their followers to tackle many social issues in our society.

Religion harnesses deep emotions, which can sometimes take destructive forms. Where this happens, we must draw on our faith to bring about reconciliation and understanding. The truest fruits of our faith are healing the wounds of the past and being positive to construct trust and fellowship between different people.

We have a great deal to learn from one another, which enriches us without undermining our own identities. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but build on shared hopes and values.

The need of Inter-community Dialogue:

The famous German theologian Prof Hans Kung once said, "No peace among nations without peace among religions, and no peace among religions without dialogue between the religions". In the document **the Caux 2002 Dialogue: An honest conversation among concerned Muslims and non-Muslims on Peace, Justice and Faith I added**, "No peace without justice and no justice without forgiveness and compassion". Among many prerequisites of meaningful dialogue are active listening, honest conversation, accepting the other's vision whether agreeing or disagreeing, and acknowledging the other's pain.

In today's world there is a dire need of inter-religious dialogue. There are common values that human beings share irrespective of religion, nationality or ethnicity. These values include the sanctity of life, freedom, equality, respect for human rights, international humanitarian law, commitment to cultural and religious diversity, human dignity, human development, democracy, the rule of law, and equitable access to the earth's resources and equitable distribution of power.

Religion: Bridge building or Wall Erecting?

We should see religion as a total way of life anchored in faith in God and expressing itself in ethical conduct at the individual and social level. Justice, love and compassion - values that are highly cherished in any religion - rather than form, ritual and symbol, should propel this way of life. Since these values are universal, religion, which serves as a conduit for them, should also be preached and practised in a genuinely universal

manner. This is what one expects the practitioners of the religions to do in the coming century to counter the challenge of globalisation. They should discard the narrow, exclusive concept of religion, which often confines virtue and goodness to one's own kind. Justice and compassion in this exclusive approach seldom transcends one's own religious boundaries. We should eliminate forever such religious exclusivism. In a sense, certain aspects of globalisation may make it easier for us to put across the universal, all-embracing message of religion and its core values. Given the worldwide reach of the media we have today, for the first time in history the opportunity exists to convey to humankind as a whole the universal essence of each of our religions. Instead of allowing narrow-minded bigots to monopolise the airwaves, why shouldn't men and women with a universal outlook state their case through the global media infrastructure? Even more important, societies everywhere, as we have observed, are becoming less and less exclusive and more and more multi-religious.

It is as if social reality itself is forcing us to get rid of our exclusive attitudes and develop a universal orientation to our religion, which will be more accommodating of 'the other'. Indeed, one gets the feeling that each and every society is slowly, often painfully, beginning to realise what "humanity as a single family" means. Perhaps this is the path that nations must take for a universal community founded upon our common humanity to emerge. It is a community that globalisation will never be able to achieve. When such a universal community of different religions and peoples bound by their common humanity becomes a reality, we will understand what the illustrious mystic, **Jallaluddin Rumi**, meant when he wrote, "The lamps are different but the light is the same." In brief, religion motivates its followers to do good deeds such as charitable work and encourages doing common good for the betterment of all humanity.

In Search of a Common Ground

The question that preoccupies us as implied by the theme is this: Can we find a common ground on which all human beings stand comfortably in a democratic and pluralist society? My answer is a resounding yes. The Qur'an directs the Muslims to find a common ground with other communities. This common ground is expressed as a mutual respect of the freedom and autonomy of different religious communities. That none should appropriate to them the right to impose their way of life on other religious communities. The Qur'an is also clear that there can be no use of force in religious matters. The Qur'an urges Muslims to seek a political order based on peaceful cooperation and mutual respect, and warns them against placing religious solidarity over covenanted rights and the principles of justice

Religious conflict, particularly between Islam and Christianity in the past, or the more recent conflict between Israel and Palestine, more often than not rose out of human excesses and the desire to stir religious passion to support political goals. It is true that these Abrahamic religions (Islam / Judaism / Christianity) advance a slightly different conceptualisation of God and of humanity's relation to the divine, but doctrinal differences are not limited to inter-religious relationships. One can find more doctrinal diversity within each of these world religions than between them. Muslims, Jews and Christians, on the other hand, share similar core values of respect of human life and dignity, and profound commitment to charity and the common good.

Good deeds and Moral values:

As a Muslim I believe that faith in the broadest sense includes all that is good in life, and Islam emerged as a moral challenge for humanity to respond to the call of the faith with active submission to Divine Will, with a commitment to obey the Creator in providing welfare to all beings in the society without any consideration to race, gender, language, colour, culture, physical build or ethnic origin. The goal of Islam - of its concepts, worship and teachings relating to values, attitudes, morals and behaviour - is to create an Islamic personality of an individual Muslim preparing himself for a wider role in this life. Belief in Islam is not a simple assent to a dogma. All Islamic beliefs have a reference to an action. Good actions become a part of Islamic faith, which leads to a more virtuous life. Man is thus accountable for his own actions and behaviour. Humans have the responsibility to choose and implement a moral and righteous life in obedience to God's commandments for common good

The Qur'an and teachings of the Prophet of Islam strongly suggest that Faith without the backing of good deeds is meaningless. Faith based on **Aqida** (belief system) leads towards good deeds and good deeds prepare a man for a full Islamic personality. Islamic concepts of **Taqwa** (God Consciousness), **Falah** (well being) and **Hayat Tayyibiah** (good life) facilitate the realisation of an Islamic personality - when a Muslim seriously pursues the broader goals of the creation believing that **mankind is but one community and striving hard with others for freedom, justice, and peace**. It is upon an individual Muslim to build Islamic qualities, values and morals such as **brotherliness, sincerity, honesty, truthfulness, pursuit of knowledge, responsibility, integrity, fair dealing, keeping promises, discipline and self-control, humility, patience, courage, thankfulness, modesty, honour and self-respect, warmth and lovingness, generosity, hospitality, charitableness, kindness, helpfulness, respect, tolerance and mutual understanding, obeying the commandments and abstaining from the prohibitions**. These attributes transcend religious belief.

Collectively on a community level, a Muslim's obligation is to establish what is right and eradicating what is wrong; Strive for an Islamic identity supporting, promoting and protecting a Muslim way of family life; Dealing with health and educational issues and for the creation of a condition wherein perseverance of mutual compassion and well-being prevail for the benefit of the individual. On national and international levels a Muslim must work towards a better and peaceful world. With their own actions and deeds they can dispel myths and misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims. The Muslim community has a great responsibility in promoting the teaching of Islam and its values as a part of a global Muslim **Ummah** (World Community). Muslims must squarely confront the reality of British secular trends and adopt a different approach in their strategy in a minority setting of **Darul Ahad** (Domain of alliance and treaty agreement) from the majority setting of **Darul Islam** (Domain of Peace) where Muslims have power and authority over their own affairs.

Theological Foundations for Religions Pluralism:

Through my reading of the sacred text of the **Qur'an and Sunnah**, I have come to conclusions that are relevant to the application of the Qur'an to contemporary society, particularly with regard to democracy and pluralism. First, one of the core principles of Muslim belief is **shura**, which means consultation. This was how the Prophet consulted

with his companions on making decisions for his society. In the Qur'an, shura is mentioned twice, as a fundamental belief, just like prayer, and as a practice, according to the time in which one lives. In our times, genuine shura means genuine pluralism of points of view, and democracy. Second, this view of shura changes the concept of Jihad, which we hear so much about from the fundamentalists.

The foundations out of which an Islamic perspective on any topic should arise are nothing less than the authentic sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Both the Qur'an and the Hadith embrace and affirm **Ikhtilaf**, i.e. differences in belief, perspectives and viewpoints, as being natural and an essential part of the human condition. A denial of the right of others to hold beliefs and views, which are different and incompatible to one's own, is tantamount to a denial of Allah himself. In the Holy Qur'an, chapter 10, verse 99, Allah, the Sublime, declares:

“If your Lord had so desired, all the people on the earth would surely have come to believe, all of them; do you then think, that you could compel people to believe?”

And again in Qur'an, chapter 11, verse 118, Allah, the Sublime, declares:

“And had your Lord so willed, He could surely have made all human beings into one single community: but (He willed it otherwise, and so) they continue to hold divergent views.”

Both of these verses establish the principle of freedom of belief and thought in Islam. At the conclusion of the first verse, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is himself reproved for transgressing this principle by being over-enthusiastic in convincing others with regard to the truth of Islam. Thus the Qur'an stresses that the differences in beliefs, views and ideas of humankind is not incidental and negative but represents an Allah-willed, basic factor of human existence. The challenge which the principle of freedom of belief and thought in Islam holds for us is to develop clear ethics and find mechanisms to manage and deal with the differences of beliefs and theologies that exist. This is the challenge that religious pluralism holds for us.

Interfaith Dialogue:

Interfaith Dialogue among people of different religious communities is more needed today than ever before. For many of us involved in this process, dialogue is an avenue to explain one's own faith to the other and to learn a little about the religion of one's dialogue partner. There are some who would like to see this dialogue go beyond **'knowing one another'**. They hope that through active intellectual interaction and engagement a shared universal spiritual-moral worldview will emerge which will serve as the basis of a new truly just and compassionate global civilisation.

What they are seeking is not just inter-religious understanding but the nurturing of a deep human bond of love and empathy transcending religious affiliation. Individuals who live in fear and lack of comprehension of other cultures are more likely to resort to acts of hatred, violence and destruction against a perceived “enemy”. Those who are exposed to the cultures of others and learn about them through communications across cultural divides are more likely to see diversity as strength and celebrate it as a gift. Today,

globalisation, migration and communication are bringing different races, cultures, ethnicities and religions into even closer contact with each other. People can and should take pride in their particular faith or heritage but share common human values.

People of faith always come together at the time of difficulty. They draw instructions from their own faith to bring reconciliation and understanding as truest fruits of religion is healing. People of faith do talk about: the danger of war and destruction by the powerful nations, lack of clean water to millions people on our planet, poverty, hunger, air pollution and our regard to environment, the increasing erosion of common human moral values and many other concerns such as peace, justice, tolerance and dialogue.

Regardless of any influence of religious teaching in their daily lives, such values generally accepted by all: love, respect, mercy, forgiveness, charity, brotherhood, dignity of human life and human rights etc. Most of these values are derived from religious beliefs. However, Interfaith movement has to involve itself in major moral issues which world is facing today. Interfaith dialogue is the only answer to religious exclusiveness. Sad is a nation whose young people have no dreams; sadder yet is a nation where the old try to kill the dreams of their young.

In 1981 Isaiah Berlin once wrote a note on “Prejudice” :

“For things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups that he or she or they are in the sole possession of the truth; especially about how to live, what to be and do, and that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken but wicked or mad, and need restraining or suppressing. It is a terrible and dangerous arrogance to believe that you alone are right; have a magical eye which sees the truth and that others cannot be right if they disagree”.

Rule of Law and Civil Society:

Some of the major ideas associated with democracy and human rights are in harmony with Islamic thought. The rule of law, a cardinal principle of democratic governance, is central to Islamic jurisprudence. Centuries ago, Islam recognised that all decisions, acts and procedures of public authorities at all levels cannot be valid or legally binding save to the extent they are consistent with the law'. This is, of course, linked to the concept of 'due process'. As in any society based upon democratic norms and procedures, Islamic law states that **“you cannot deprive a man of life, liberty or property except by due process of law”**. The emphasis given to virtuous, honest and upright Rulers themselves should not obscure us to the other side of Muslim history: The presence of countless Caliphs and Sultans who violated every moral code in their conduct of the affairs of state. They not only abused power and indulged in corrupt practices; many of them were utterly ruthless and incredibly cruel. **4Rs: Rights, Responsibilities, Relationships and Roles** in the Qur'an are closely intertwined. For instance, if one values one's role as a parent one would also become aware of the rights one enjoys, the responsibilities one bears, the relationships one sustains. As a parent one has certain rights over one's child; at the same time one has to fulfil certain responsibilities. In order to exercise one's rights and responsibilities, one has to actively maintain a loving relationship with one's child. It is this relationship, which, in turn, defines one's role, that endows one's role with meaning and purpose. The importance of maintaining this intimate, intricate link between right

and responsibility is underscored by the grim tragedies unfolding in yet another sphere of social and human relationships.

Identity, Community with European Islamic Culture

Like the concept of identity and community, the reference to an «Islamic culture» brings to mind an image of isolation and rejection of the European culture. Certain people would see the proof of this by saying that Muslims are not genuine in their desire to integrate, playing on the one hand the citizenship card whereas at the same time, looking to maintain their cultural particularities, such as their dress code, management of space when it comes to men and women, music and other issues. In their eyes, a real integration would affect every aspect of one's character. This is actually a very narrow vision of integration, almost resembling the notion of assimilation. One admits theoretically the rights of Muslims to practice their religion but then one refuses to do so when this expression becomes too visible.

In Actuality, the future of Muslim presence in Europe will come to a truly "European Islamic Culture" disengaged from the Arabic culture of North Africa, Turkey and Indo-Pakistan, although it is okay to refer to them for inspiration. This new culture is just in the process of being born and moulded. As is the case in Europe, through thoughts relating to dress code to artistic and creative expression, a whole new culture is being mobilised with a European energy while taking into account national customs and simultaneously respecting Islamic values and guidelines. Far from being an isolated undertaking, it is more a true acceptance of the realities of living in Europe together with the promise of cultural enrichment. The mixing of ideas and initiatives among young Muslims is a sign of an interesting phase about to be set in motion.

One cannot say enough about the importance of taking into account the aspect of time when evaluating the integration process of Muslims in Europe. Behind the veil of tension and violence in certain suburbs, a profound, new, unique energy is sweeping among the young generations of the Muslim communities. In less than ten years, a new conscience has arisen around the issues of the social, political and economic ventures, which are trying to find a place to manifest. The nineties in this respect was a period of transition and gestation, a challenge without a doubt but yet how rich and promising as well. More and more young Muslims of the second generation are acquiring confidence and a political maturity founded not only from the awareness of their own identity, but also from a thoughtful analysis on the legal, social, political and economic parameters. They achieved what their parents had not been able to and developed an attitude less and less frivolous and more and more participatory on the local and regional level.

Protecting one's Faith and remaining Muslim

Active young Muslims in certain associations for the longest time had been receiving the message that toleration of their presence comes at the price of their religious practice. This rhetoric, mainly from the political personas and the media appeared to confirm such a conclusion. So they conclude that it is better to be isolated. It is only very recently that through analysis, debates, external and internal discussions that it became apparent that nothing in the letter or the spirit of the European legislation was in opposition with a peaceful and complete practice of the Muslim religion. The laws do not say what some would like to say or interpret. Essentially, what the practicing Muslims wanted was to

protect their faith and to be assured about their right to practice their religion. This stimulated a break from the last ten years where the discussions had often been reactionary and aggressive. This achievement is of utmost importance even though these associations are always faced with bothersome administrative aspects due to suspicion, fear, and the widespread confusion that if someone is practicing, that means he is «already» a fundamentalist or extremist.

An increasing amount of Muslim associations are committed to transmitting a civic awareness to their members. Some citizen training programs are in the process of being internally structured or in collaboration with certain institutions that specialise in this area. Just until now, these initiatives remain an abstract discussion. However, whoever makes the effort to discover the initiatives and come into contact with the work of the Muslim associations will notice the consciousness, maturity and energy, which drives a great number of these Muslim associations. They have gone beyond any obstacles without compromising their religion to achieve a true citizenship, which commits them to becoming truly aware of their obligations and rights in the European setting. Relationships are strengthening with other social and political players on the local level and discussions are being organized. Such initiatives are new, growing and frequent, especially in France, Holland, England, Italy, Belgium and Germany.

Islamophobia and Social Exclusion

After 11th September 2001, the wave of anti-Muslim prejudice and attacks on European and American Muslims was more than doubled comparing from the statistics available during the Gulf War in 1991. Muslims from all backgrounds were threatened day and night, and suffered an acute sense of vulnerability in their homes and mosques, as well as on the streets. Several Muslims were killed in retaliation. A number of mosques endured arson attacks. To address the issue of Islamophobia, the American Congress passed laws providing further protection against anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hostility. As European Muslims have no protection under the present laws any recourse to criminal justice system would be appropriate. I think that European Governments must outlaw Religious Discrimination and enact laws against the incitement of religious hatred and vilification of religious sanctities. It is important to amend the present Public Order, Crime and Disorder, Human Right and Race Relation current legislations urgently to protect many innocent lives. This would be an act to address Extremism and fanaticism from our Multi-ethnic, Multi racial and Multi-faith British Society in 21st Century.

Moves to meet the growing demands of Islamic pressure groups to outlaw 'religious discrimination' and islamophobia in Europe are being debated which will have its far-reaching implications. (For details See Reports published by EUMC at www.eumc.eu.int and Open Society Institute's publications such as monitoring the EU Accession Process Reports 2002 see their website: www.eump.org) Pressure, particularly from Muslim groups who now make up 65% of all Britain's ethnic minorities, to be defined by religion rather than race, is mounting. European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia has produced a number of reports on Islamophobia especially 15 counties and five cities

A spokesperson of the Muslim Council of Britain said: 'when it comes to the needs of British Muslims like health and housing Muslims are excluded. The Asian umbrella is being addressed but the Muslim community, which constitutes the largest ethnic minority, is not, and our identity is first and foremost religious. This is cultural Racism.

There are various issues at stake being tackled in different ways: incitement to religious hatred.

European Union has issued a mandatory circular on 27 Nov 2000 to outlaw religious discrimination in Employment but not in services or goods. Each member state has to domestically incorporate this legislation into their legal system soon. It is important to define discrimination. 'If it means with respect to right to have a social housing and healthcare, right to access an employment then of course we are all against it. If it means discrimination that you make claims and counter claims with regards to truth one believes and practices as their religion then it destroys all possibility of inter-faith dialogue.'

Combating Terrorism and Fear

Terrorism is a plight that must be fought. No amount of anger and discontent can justify the targeting of non-combatant civilians with the brutality we all witnessed on September 11, 2001. The level of destruction inflicted on civilians, the brutality with which the terrorist attacks were executed, and the fact that the terrorist design is undertaken by extensive deliberation and determination sent shockwaves throughout the world, and brought condemnation from foes and friends alike. Targeting thousands of unarmed civilians, using civilian airliners carrying civilian passengers, and bringing down two of the most spectacular buildings in the whole planet, in a drama that was played on live TV in front of millions of viewers, made the attacks even more sinister and apocalyptic.

But terrorism cannot be fought by mystifying it or by ignoring its root causes. The first step for developing a sound strategy to effectively combat terrorism is to examine the conditions that give rise to the anger, frustration, and desperation that fuel all terrorist acts. To focus on individuals and organizations that employ terror, while ignoring the socio-political circumstances that give rise to acts of desperation, can potentially strengthen the arms of the terrorists. A devastating force unleashed against elusive groups can exacerbate the very conditions that gave rise to resentment, frustration, and anger. Terrorism is fuelled by the actions of exclusivist regimes that privilege some and deny basic rights to others. Rogue governments that use state security agencies and excessive force to silence critics and political opposition fuel it. To be effective in fighting terrorism we must dry the swamps of abuse and injustice that breed radicalism all over the world.

Terrorism and Islam:

There is no accepted definition of "Terrorism" by any international organisation. The present usage of the word "Terrorism" means the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property, to intimidate or coerce civilian population undermining the civil authority, excluding acts perpetrated by states or by coalitions of states. A definition of terrorism from an Islamic perspective might well be more wide-ranging than current usage.

The Islamic Scholars (IMAMS and Ulema) of Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in their meeting on Saturday the 29th September 2001 suggested that Terrorism include:

“Indiscriminate murder and the shedding of blood without due process of law, driving people out of their homes and lands, destruction of crops and livestock, the spreading of Fasad or Fitna (destruction, chaos, mischief and corruption which encompasses political, economic, social and moral corruption) on earth - are examples of criminal acts and evil behaviour condemned by Islam.”...to spread mischief and corruption on earth and destroy crops and cattle. God does not like mischief and corruption. (2: 25). (For full text see www.mcb.org.uk)

Islam and terrorism are contradictory terms opposed to each other. Islam condemns and rejects all forms of terror, killing without due process of law, injustice, corruption, tyranny and oppression. There is no justification for the usage of terms such as ‘Islamic terrorists’. As a Muslim we must take account of our deeds by other Muslims on the name of Islam. I feel ashamed when I hear that Muslims are breaking the Law of Islam. I sincerely apologize to those who have suffered due to any senseless actions of so-called Muslims. I seek forgiveness from Allah for any mistake done and ask forgiveness from my fellow beings. However, we must find the root cause of the problem.

Terrorism, in fact, is systematic, premeditated and calculated. It spans vast aspects covering the entire world, and manifests itself in various forms and shapes. Sometimes the religion of Islam is held responsible for the acts of a handful Muslims who are associated with acts of destruction and terror. Islam whose name means peace cannot encourage its adherents to work for death and destruction. It is an irony of our time that the light of Islamic learning, which brought an end to the dark ages of the West, is now being seen as responsible for the advent of an age of terror. Islam is peace not terror.

The efforts to blame Islam for terrorism are not only baseless and erroneous, but are unmistakably malicious and ill intended. Islam, like many religious traditions, stresses charity, mercy, and compassion. Historically, Islam is recognised for its tolerance toward other religions, even when bigotry and intolerance were widely accepted and practiced in medieval times. But like other religious traditions, Islam recognises the right of peoples to fight aggression, even though it puts higher premium on forgiveness. Reciprocity, or eye for an eye, is found not only in Islam, but in Christianity and Judaism as well. Further, like other religions, Islamic texts contain statements that emphasize forgiveness and peace, along with others that permit the use of force for fighting back against aggression and for achieving just peace.

In Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, Moses narrates to the Israelites a fiery message from God as they prepare to enter the Promised Land: "I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy." Likewise, the Gospels contain texts that call for the use of force to avenge the rights of people and to punish the unjust. In the Gospel of Matthew, a statement attributed to Jesus reads: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but the sword." (As quoted by Dr Louay M Safi in his article on Islam, World Peace and Terrorism Discourse. For further details see: [www.home.att.net /louaysafi/articles/2002](http://www.home.att.net/louaysafi/articles/2002))

A partial and out-of-context reading of religious texts, combined with a desire to reciprocate against real or perceived injustice, may lead misguided individuals and radical groups to commit atrocities in the name of religion and justice. Muslim scholars and leaders must speak against using Islam and Islamic doctrines to undertake acts rooted in political ambition or frustration. By the same token, media organizations have the duty to present a balanced picture of Muslim society and faith, rather than feeding on the frenzy of bigotry and stereotyping. The media more often than not focuses on the eccentric and extraordinary, and as such brings distorted pictures of Middle Eastern realities. Rather than showing that radical Islamic groups standing on the fringe outside mainstream society, the media reverse the picture by projecting radicalism and extremism as the norm in the Middle East. The sight of a handful Palestinian youths celebrating an American calamity is newsworthy, but a demonstration by thousands of sympathetic Arabs is not.

Religious Extremism:

Islam is religion of moderation. Holy Qur'an defines Muslims as the well -balanced middle nation model for others (2:143) and advised them not to follow extremism in religious interpretation (4:171, 5:77, 22:78). The Holy Prophet warned Muslims: "Beware of Extremism in your religion as people before you were destroyed themselves because of their extremism", "Do not be hard upon yourself in your opinion in the matter of faith", " Always choose easy way in your religious way on matters of faith. Certainly religion is easy" (Collection of sayings of the Holy Prophet by Ahmed, Nisai, Al-Hakim and Ibne Maja). In my humble opinion Islam believes in a civil Society based on rule of law, anyone who creates chaos (Fitna or Fasad) in the society through terror can be treated as harabi (waging war against the society) and should be brought to justice accordingly by legal process. Islam and terrorism are contradictory terms opposed to each other. Islam condemns and rejects all forms of terror, killing without due process of law, injustice, corruption, tyranny and oppression. There is no justification for the usage of terms such as 'Islamic terrorists'. The Holy prophet of Islam said, "By God, he is not a true believer, from whose mischief his neighbours do not feel secure."(Bukhari, Muslim)

Sanctity of life:

One of the distinctive features of the present world is the overwhelming presence of violence in our societies. The nature of indiscriminate and senseless violence is considered one of the prime threats to the world peace and security. I must make it clear that Islam upholds sanctity of human life, as the Holy Qur'an declares that killing one innocent human being is like killing the entire human race (5:32, 6:151, 17:33), like all other faith traditions. Islam considers all life forms as sacred. The first and foremost basic right of a human being given by God is the right to live in peace and security. However, taking a criminal's life by the state in order to administer justice is allowed in Islam as it upholds the rule of law, and helps maintains peace and security of the society. Only a proper and competent court can decide whether an individual has forfeited his right to life by disregarding the right to life and peace of other human beings. The accused must be given full facilities under the law 'the right of defence'. Extra judicial killings are strictly prohibited in Islam.

Suicide killing:

Killing one's own self (suicide) is prohibited in Islam (4:29), as it is an abuse of the Divine gift of Life. According to Islamic Law those who commit or try to commit suicide are committing a major sin and will be sent to the fire of hell. Even patients who are in severe pain are prohibited to wish death. Holy Prophet said: "Do not harm yourself or injure others". : The holy book of Islam does not call on young volunteers to strap explosives to their bodies and set them off in crowded public areas in Israel. That much is clear. Suicide bombers are waging a distinctly modern type of warfare not sanctioned in any faith. Many Muslim clerics and scholars have criticized the theology of suicide bombers, and the practice is very controversial within Islam. In the past year alone, the supreme religious leader and Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah al Sheikh, said he feared that using explosives in this manner is a form of suicide, and therefore condemned. And an influential Sheikh Al-Azhar Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, said bombers who detonate explosives among civilians are not fighting a true war and cannot be considered martyrs. These voices are not often heard because the Muslim community is united in the moral righteousness of the Palestinian cause. Let me remind ourselves the Islamic position:

"Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds." From the last sermon of Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).

"Hijacking Planes, terrorizing innocent people and shedding blood constitute a form of injustice that can not be tolerated by Islam, which views them as gross crimes and sinful acts."

Shaykh Abdul Aziz al-Al-shaikh, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and Chairman of the Senior Ulama, on September 15th, 2001

"The terrorists acts, from the perspective of Islamic law, constitute the crime of hirabah (waging war against society)."

September 27, 2001 - Fatwa, signed by Many scholars such as:

Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Grand Islamic Scholar and Chairman of the Sunnah and Sira Council, Qatar

Judge Tariq al-Bishri, First Deputy President of the Council of Preachers, Egypt

Dr. Muhammad s. al-Awa, Professor of Islamic Law and Shari'a, Egypt

Dr. Haytham al-Khayyat, Islamic scholar, Syria

Shaykh Fahmi Houaydi, Islamic scholar, Syria

Shaykh Taha Jabir al-Alwani, Chairman, North America High Council

"Neither the law of Islam nor its ethical system justify such a crime."

Dr Zaki Badawi, Principal of the Muslim College in London. Cited in *Arab News*, September 28, 2001.

"It is wrong to kill innocent people. It is also wrong to praise those who kill innocent people." Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, Pakistan. Cited in the *New York Times*, September 28, 2001.

(The above statements by high ranking international Muslim scholars and leaders appeared in an advertisement placed by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, in the *New York Times*, October 17th, 2001 and reproduced in MCB book on 11 September "In Quest of Sanity") See www.mcb.org.uk

Roots of Extremism and Fanaticism.

There are Muslims who claim to be religious but try to impose their views over others by force or violence. They forget that Islamic teaching advocates the fundamental principle to respect for individual freedom of conscience and belief. Islam believes that freedom of belief is a basic God given right to all human beings. Extremism and Fanaticism is alien to Islam. However there are a few verses of the Holy Qur'an, which have been interpreted in such a way that some Muslim may take a view to impose their views over others. For example The Holy Qur'an commands Muslim to live and rule their lives according to the revealed message of God. If any Muslim does not decide according to the Holy Qur'an then he is not only wrongdoer, a rebel, disobedient but a non-believer also (5:44- 47). These verses were interpreted by some that if a Muslim ruler has completely abandon the Islamic Law then it is legitimate to disobey him and change him by force. They also believe that, as Islam does not make any distinction between communities of believers and the Islamic State - because the State is simply a political arm to establish common good, it is important that Islamic Law must be established within Islamic societies. Due to their political ends they establish effective ways to promote their views by every means available to them.

In my opinion, fanaticism, terrorism and extremism are symptom of a problem, not the actual cause. In order to combat and eradicate these evils totally our long-term goal should be to eliminate the underlying social and political causes which breed them. We must continue fighting against Racism (colour or cultural), Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Xenophobia, and bigotry in words and deeds in all aspects of our society. Paralleling our actions against terrorism, we must have equally vigorous efforts to enhance freedom, human dignity, justice and humanitarian values. Some of the possible factors behind the violent terrorist's acts may include:

- 1) Hatred, hurt and prejudice**
- 2) Fear and powerlessness**
- 3) Occupation and domination**
- 4) Injustice and suffering**
- 5) Corruption and greed**
- 6) Oppression and Control**
- 7) Dictatorship and total authority**
- 8) Debt, poverty and hunger**
- 9) Frustration and helplessness**
- 10) Dislike of inclusive Society and above all**
- 11) Discrimination and Islamophobia**

There is a new type of terrorism, which has emerged recently in the forms of arson, bombing and sabotage in the name of saving the environment, ecology and animal and zoological kingdom. Racism (colour or cultural), anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Xenophobia, bigotry must be in words and deeds. I am glad to note that from the very beginning the British Prime Minister together with the American President made it clear that Islam and the Muslim Community are not to blame for the tragedy. We are dealing with fanatic individuals who have behaved in this most abhorrent and abominable manner. This is not a crusade or conflict between Islam and the West. Rt Hon Tony Blair said: "Blaming Islam is as ludicrous as blaming Christianity for loyalist attack on Catholics or nationalists attack on Protestants in Northern Ireland".

Peace and Justice:

Islam is a religion of peace. This fact is borne by both Islamic teachings and the very name of “**Islam.**” The term Islam essentially means to submit and surrender one’s will to a higher truth and a transcendental law, so that one can lead a meaningful life informed by the divine purpose of creation, and where the dignity and freedom of all human beings can be equally protected. Islamic teachings assert the basic freedom and equality of all peoples. Islam stresses the importance of mutual help and respect, and directs Muslims to extend friendship and good will to all, regardless of their religious, ethnic, gender, cultural, linguistic or racial background.

Islam, in fact, makes of peace at every greeting, which Muslims exchange whenever they meet by saying, "Peace be unto you" (**Assalamu 'Alaykum**). The Muslim also utters this statement at the end of every ritual prayer. From its inception, the Qur'an emphasized peace as an intrinsic Islamic value. In fact, the terms "**Islam**" and "**Peace**" have the same root, **salaam**. Furthermore, God has chosen the word peace (**salaam**) as the Muslim's greeting to remind believers as one of God attributes.

Islam commands Muslims to be just and fair in all circumstances even if it may go against oneself or their next of kin. The universe is constructed on what the Qur'an calls the *mizan*, or a balance. That balance is justice. The Glorious Qur'an says: “And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice), In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance, So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance” [*Al-Qur'an 55:9*] Justice is essential to maintain the balance of the human mind. Whenever any human being is deprived of justice, the mind is inclined to imbalance. The greater the injustice, the greater is the likelihood of imbalance. That is the reason the Glorious Qur'an warns against allowing hatred to cloud one’s judgment and sense of justice. The verses of Qur'an confirm the uncompromising stand on Justice: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve, and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do." (4:135).

Forgiveness: A different outlook and a new start:

In Islamic history one may find an outlook of a different nature. When the Romans conquered any country, the first thing they would do is massacre. When the Muslims entered any country, they would give guarantees of life, property and honour to all the non-belligerents. Even in war Muslims are not allowed to kill an old person, a woman, children, or those who are crippled or disabled. Not only that, even trees are not to be cut and crops are not to be burnt. The entirety of Islamic history does not know of the concept of mass killing or massacre of enemies. One cannot find one single example of any Inquisition or ethnic cleansing on the name of Islam

I draw your attention to look to the actions of the Holy Prophet of Islam when he entered Makkah as victor. **Everyone was offered amnesty and complete forgiveness.** When Caliph Umar entered Jerusalem he was not even prepared to pray in a Church for fear that those who came after him may treat the place as a mosque and take it away from the

Christians. But when the Crusaders took the city of Jerusalem there was a total massacre of the population. What happened in Spain? Not a single Muslim or Jew was left unexecuted or un-exiled. It was the same in Sicily where all the mosques were demolished. Even in the last century the same practice was adopted in Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya and many other parts of the world.

Islam condemns and rejects all forms of terror, killing without due process of law, injustice, corruption, tyranny and oppression. There is no justification for the usage of terms such as 'Islamic terrorists'. As a Muslim we must take account of our deeds by other Muslims on the name of Islam. **I feel ashamed when I hear that Muslims are breaking the Law of Islam. I sincerely apologise to those who have suffered due to any senseless actions of so-called Muslims. I seek forgiveness from Allah for any mistake done and ask forgiveness from my fellow beings.** However, we must find the root causes of the challenges of Terrorism, hatred and hurt.

Diversity recognised, appreciated and celebrated:

Islam presents the concept that all human beings are equal and we are equal because we are all creatures of God with no distinctions of colour, race or country, or tribe or clan or anything else. One would find that fanaticism is generated in the last analysis either from any of these false prejudices, when you try to group humanity into certain watertight compartments. One cannot change the colour of his skin; one cannot change his place of birth. If one believes in any of these standards, then rational fusion of the human race is not possible and you become intolerant towards others.

In Islam, the rational fusion is possible for whatever tribe, you come from, from whatever race you come, whatever colour you may have, whatever territory You might be born in, whatever language you speak, you are one, you can be one. You belong to one race the human race, the one family the human family. You belong to one brotherhood. Diversity among fellow human beings must be recognised, appreciated and valued in all aspects of life. The majority community is always judged by the way it treats its minority community

Ends cannot justify means:

Another point is that Islam is very unique and firm in asserting that the ends cannot justify the means. The source from where fanaticism and intolerance have most often come from is the mistaken belief that the ends justify the means. This means that to achieve even good ends you can resort to evil means. The principle that Islam has enunciated is that **"Good and bad are not equal. Replace evil by good". (The Qur'an 41:34)**

If you fight falsehood with falsehood it is falsehood that prevails. If you replace vice with vice, it is vice which triumphs. If you change evil by evil, it is evil which is victorious. Islam says that evil is to be eliminated by good. If you pursue this technique then you would only be able to fill the earth with goodness, justice, peace and feeling for humanity. Islam has struck at the roots of fanaticism. If you reflect upon the system that

Islam has given, you would find that fanaticism has no place in it and that idealism is the lifeblood of it. In the Qur'an it has been mentioned that the mission for which this Muslim nation has been created is that you call people to goodness. As far as the wrong (**munkar**) is concerned, you are permitted to eliminate it. But as far as the truth and virtue (**ma'ruf**) is concerned, it is not to be enforced by power.

One can very easily see that Islam has clearly discriminated between idealism and fanaticism. It has done everything to generate in us a real, noble, virtuous idealism, and to protect us from the evil influences of fanaticism. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has said that Islam is a religion of the middle path.

The Qur'an has called the Muslim nation '**Ummat al-Wusta**', the people of the middle and model nation, the people who maintain balance and equilibrium in all their affairs. Adhering to idealism, protecting and avoiding the extremes of fanaticism - this is the middle path and it is this path which Islam invites to all humanity. Through education, diplomacy, dialogue and firmness Muslims are urged to deal with extremism and fanaticism in the world.

We are dealing with here is a very serious problem of hatred, fear and prejudice. Those people who were responsible for killing thousands of people in America in what was clearly a carefully planned and expertly executed operation must be brought to justice. However, deep-rooted hatred can only be fought with dignity, education, understanding, dialogue and diplomacy. Unless the roots of hate are addressed there will be irrational people who will continue to commit such heinous evil crimes against humanity. Let all sensible people stand for peace, justice and make concerted efforts to fight terrorism by eliminating all injustices and exploitations in their part of world. I believe that being tough on the causes of this evil act is as important as identifying the terrorists themselves. I believe that without a revival of moral values, nurturing a shared sense of forgiveness and understanding may be we face an even greater challenge. We must pray to overcome hatred and violence in ourselves. Let us rededicate ourselves to peace, human dignity, and the eradication of the injustices that breed rage and vengeance. It requires multi-religious co-operation of all decent people from all shades and all sections of our communities from all over the globe.

Global Ethics and Interfaith Dialogue:

Let me remind ourselves of the words of Professor Hans Kung “**No peace among nations without peace among the religions and no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions**”. I add “**No peace without Justice and no Justice without forgiveness and compassion**”. Dialogue and agreement must be conscientiously applied and maintained, so to create bonds of love, care, trust and confidence. Its prerequisite is proper education and learning from one another. We must speak and act truthfully with compassion. We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. Every human being must be treated, fairly, humanly and with dignity without any fear or discrimination. A group of concerned Muslims and non-Muslims on the invitation of Prince Hassan Bin Talal, Professor Rajmohan Gandhi and Dr Cornelio Sommaruga met in Caux on 26-29 July 2002 at Mountain House, Caux (Switzerland). **Please see The Caux Dialogue: Peace, Justice and Faith: An honest conversation. See www.caux.ch**

I admire the work of **Prince Hassan El Talal** over the years for promoting better understanding between different faiths and advocating dialogue for resolving conflicts. His short book “**Continuity, innovation and Change**” is a *must* read. I not only share his vision but also say that he represents true Islamic scholarship in the current debate on the issue of World peace. The building of peace requires an attitude of sanctity and reverence of life, freedom and justice, the eradication of poverty, dissolution of all forms of discrimination and the protection of the environment for personal and future generations. The ideals of peace include fundamental and global directives such as:

- *Do not kill i.e. have respect for life;**
- *Do not steal i.e. deal honestly and fairly;**
- *Do not lie i.e. speak and act truthfully;**
- *Do not commit sexual immorality i.e. respect and love one another.**

I confirm that Islam is faith of moderation and girder of unity for all mankind and blessing for mankind because Muslim model communities where:

- *All of God’s creation – whether human, animal or the environment – is valued and respected;**
- *Where people want more to serve others than to get what they can for themselves;**
- *Where no one has too little or too much;**
- *Respecting the right of others to disagree with us;**
- *Being sensitive and courteous to all.**

I affirm that in Islam the belief in God or the Divine is the bedrock of one’s faith out of which flows ideas on the meaning and purpose of life, on the unity and dignity of mankind. Human dignity thus is an acknowledgement of the divine presence in each and every one of us and unites us into a single family. We believe in “**Thinking globally but acting locally.**” The world will not change for the better unless the conscience of individuals is changed first.

The world’s Religious view:

Plurality is a fact of today’s global village. People from many different faiths and belief or no faith live side by side. But society can only be built on mutual respect, openness and trust. This means living our lives with integrity, and allowing others to do so too. Our different religious traditions teach us the importance of good relationships characterized by honesty, truth, love, unselfishness, compassion and generosity of care for resolving conflicts by peaceful means.

Better understanding of others require us to share our desire for peace-building based on reverence of life, freedom, and justice, the eradication of poverty, dissolution of all forms of discrimination and protection of the environment for future generations.

We should show each other respect and courtesy. In dealing with people of other faiths and beliefs, or no convictions of any faith, this means:

- **Respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions;**
- **Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this on their own terms;**
- **Valuing and respecting the convictions of others about food, dress, and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence;**
- **Recognizing that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own ideals with other people's practices;**
- **Working together to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict;**
- **Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationship.**

Common Core Shared Human Values:

Honesty and sincerity, love and compassion, dignity and mutual respect, modesty and humility, moderation and restraint in our actions, sacrifice and unselfishness, kindness and courtesy, a sense of justice and a sense of fairness, a sense of balance and a sense of propriety, seeking forgiveness and asking for apology for past mistakes – these are values which all religions cherish.

When we talk about matters of faith and society with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means:

- **Recognising that listening carefully with respect, as well as speaking, is necessary for a genuine and honest conversation;**
- **Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances in bringing people together, not in confrontation but in trust to tackle urgent needs of the community;**
- **Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs and practices;**
- **Correcting misunderstandings or misrepresentations not only of our own but also of other faiths whenever we come across them;**
- **Being straightforward about our intentions in searching for solutions, focusing on *what* is right rather than *who* is right;**
- **Accepting and valuing the God-given diversity of our human family, honouring each person, appealing to the best qualities in everyone, and refusing to stereotype others;**
- **Ensuring that all religious commitments of all those who are present in any interfaith meetings will be respected;**
- **Recognising that energy for change requires a moral and spiritual transformation in each human spirit.**

All of us want others to understand and respect our personal views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith. In a multi faith society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterized by self-restraint and concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

- **Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone;**
- **Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations;**

- **Always being sensitive and courteous;**
- **Avoiding violent actions or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power;**
- **Respecting the right of others to disagree with us;**
- **Building lasting relationship outside our comfort zones.**

Together we will share our lives and resources that God has given us to make our earth a trusting community of hope, security and opportunity for all.

Taking into account the element of time, understanding the unavoidable tensions of co-existence with the added factor of the others visibility, the open and positive confirmation of the Muslim identity as we have discovered, is a concrete reality as is the integration of the citizen, de facto. Far from being a ghetto mentality, the majority of Muslims opt for a serene and open presence and some will go as far as proposing a “European Muslim Culture”.

We see the subsequent rumblings of an «intimate integration» into the European society, which should be an objective of any pluralist society that respects the concepts of identity and differences. Europe these days is a cosmopolitan society with people of many different races and religions. Because of this, some basic principles concerning how people live and work have to be drawn up. There must be a definite policy delineated by the European states. Also, there ought to be a better exchange of information and experiences among the countries concerned.

This policy should cover such headings as:

1. Equality of religions in the public sector — In many European countries, the juridical status of Islam, (and other «immigrant» religions), is not on the same footing as that of long-established religions. Islam ought to have an equivalent position and Muslims ought to be offered possibilities to carry out their religious duties protected by the country’s laws. On the other hand, it also means that the civil authorities can meet not all the Muslims’ demands. When there is a conflict of interests, appropriate structures would ensure that the authorities and the Muslim organisations can discuss the matter constructively.

2. Less dependence on foreign governments: inclusion into mainstream society — When it comes to financing their activities, Muslim communities should be less dependent on foreign financing, so as to reduce the influence of their country of origin, over what is said and done. One way would be to grant a Charitable Status to certain charitable works or training activities, as is done with organisations belonging to Christian Churches. Another method would be to grant tax relief to religious organisations. (In fact, a number of European countries already have this on their statute books).

3. Setting up ways and means for training leaders: Mutual Responsibilities for a positive coexistence — It should be made possible for the local Muslim community to establish training centres for their religious leaders (Imams, religious teachers) who are required for the organisation of the Muslim community and for religious teaching. The study programme should be adapted to European society.

4. Pay more attention to civic education, democracy, human rights and to the existence of a state built on the rule of law: Community cohesion — If you're going to talk about democracy and a state built on the rule of law, then all citizens (including naturalised citizens) must be formed in these principles. Education in these principles ought to be part of an assimilation process into local society, and of the study programme for religious leaders.

5. Importance of dialogue among religions: Peace, Justice and forgiveness — Dialogue between Christians and Muslims takes on an added importance from the point of view of today's society. People will thus get to know more about each other, understand each other and respect each other. Because in Europe there are now so many people coming from other religious traditions, it's important that on a European level, contacts between representatives of the various Christian Churches and Islam should be placed on a more official level, such as within the Council for Europe, the European Parliament and the European Union Commission.

6. Involvement of European Youth for peaceful co-existence

One should remain lucid, however. The obstacles are great and the explicit or subtle rejection and discrimination are everyday realities of many Muslims, who at times doubt the intentions and actions behind the political actors and co-citizens. The position is that in order to be European, one must be less Muslim. One should remember the meetings, debates and communal projects, which have brought to light the issues at the local level – a very important step that contribute to going beyond mere suspicions. Some Muslims have found hope when they were given the opportunity to meet with the concerned players, who were respectful, constructive, and ready to commit to an honest and adherent dialogue. These exchanges paint a picture to demonstrate true change is underway.

For many Muslims, this new phenomena will also give them the opportunity to see themselves in another light. Often seen as an enigma, some have unfortunately internalised the idea of assimilation by making oneself «very small», disappearing in the woodwork as an «invisible presence». The surrounding pressure has made them hide their religion as one hides an inferiority complex. Such an attitude will not bring promise of social peace and harmony but instead, possibility of an explosive situation. The present dynamics are such that they should transform the above mentioned feeling. In time, Muslims will understand that their presence is richness for the European society. As the debates unfold and awareness is created, this presence will allow this society to access a religious diversity and a new unique culture. This feeling culminates when increasing numbers of Muslims participate in debates, which concern the central foundation of their society: questions on meaning, values, education and ethics. This is what is required of them, obliging them as citizens to ask questions and to participate together with their social, political and economic partners. Their integration will be seen as a very positive contribution to the larger society while at the same time maintaining their spiritual integrity.

However, many European countries still see Islam as something not only foreign but dangerous to boot, and at all events a source of instability. They prefer to deal on the quiet with the dictatorships of the Muslim world, which may not observe the law but give them security and protect their interests. With a few exceptions, no European country

seems to talk directly to its Muslim citizens and residents other than – explicitly or otherwise – through these foreign states. Virtually all the European states want autonomy for their Muslims, and yet they pursue a policy based on affiliations and allegiances with the governments of origin (and on information gleaned from the various intelligence services).

In the years ahead, the states of Europe are going to have to rethink how they cope with their Muslims and with Islam in our midst. The associative movement proliferating all over Europe is producing full Muslim citizens of those countries, who are politically and financially independent and are already beginning to ask questions about the justification for the Europeans' link with the dictatorships of the Muslim world. Already, they are claiming the right to organise themselves on their own and decide for themselves the legitimacy of their religious representation. This is a fast-growing phenomenon. Whatever the countries of origin may want, they are losing ground, and second- and third-generation Muslims feel fewer and fewer ties with the countries their parents came from. If Europe is to succeed in the tricky venture of achieving cultural and religious pluralism in its societies, then there is an urgent need to move away from security-based thinking, in order to encourage dialogue, negotiation and confidence between states and their citizens: the only democratic way is one that respects both the law and its citizens.

We Muslims should pledge to increase our awareness by positive thinking in understanding one another. We must pledge to be courageous defenders of peaceful teachings and interpretations of Islam, and to be exemplary peacemakers in our personal, family and social conduct of our lives in order to socially beneficial, peace fostering, bridge-builder and nature-friendly way of life.

Remember, Remember, Remember. Evil is not in the body. Evil is in the mind, therefore harm nobody. Just change the mind.

Lord You said and your word is true! Love is stronger than hate. O God Almighty You are peace and from You peace comes. Bestow upon all of us your peace and make our final destiny in your eternal abode of peace.

Let us pray, **“Let there be respect for the earth, peace for its people, love in our lives, delight in the good, forgiveness for our past wrongs and from now on a new start”.**
Amen

**A contribution at 8th Conference on Trialogue of Cultures at Bad Homberg (Germany)
28/29 September 2003**

Appendix One: European Religious Population

Country	Population	Catholic	Protestant/ Anglicans	Orthodox	Muslim	Hindu	Jewish	Buddhist	Other	None or Atheist
Albania	3,401,126	340,113		680,225	2,380,788					
Andorra	67,673	66,996							677	
Belarus	10,390,697	1,870,325		8,312,558					207,814	
Belgium	10,185,894	8,250,574	1,935,320							
Bosnia Herzegovina	3,591,618	538,743	143,665	1,113,402	1,436,647				359,162	
Bulgaria	8,155,828			6,932,454	1,060,258				163,117	
Croatia	4,681,015	3,580,976	18,724	519,593	56,172				505,550	
Czech Republic	10,283,762	4,010,667	473,053	308,513					1,378,024	4,113,505
Denmark	5,374,554		4,729,608	53,746					591,201	
Estonia	1,398,140						2,000			
Finland	5,164,825		4,596,694	51,648						464,834
France	59,128,187	47,893,831	1,182,564		2,956,409		591,282			6,504,101
Germany	82,081,365	27,907,664	28,728,478		1,641,627				23,803,596	
Greece	10,750,705			10,535,691	139,759				75,255	
Hungary	10,167,182	6,405,325	508,359						1,220,062	
Iceland	274,142	5,483	268,659							
Ireland	3,647,348	3,392,034	109,420,44						145,894	
Italy	56,678,568	55,544,997							1,133,571	
Latvia	2,326,689									
Liechtenstein	32,410	28,521	2,593						648	648
Lithuania	3,571,552						11,000			
Luxembourg	432,577	419,600							12,977	
Malta	383,285	356,455							26,830	
Moldova	4,466,758			4,399,757			67,001			
Monaco	32,231	30,619							1,612	
Netherlands	15,878,304	5,398,623	3,969,576		476,349				317,566	5,716,189
Norway	4,455,707	89,114	3,831,908						445,571	
Poland	38,644,184	36,711,975		1,159,326					772,884	
Portugal	9,902,147	9,308,018	297,064						297,064	
Rumania	22,291,200	1,114,560	1,337,472	19,393,344					445,824	
Russia	145,904,542			118,182,679	16,049,500		440,000			
San Marino	25,215	24,963							252	
Slovak Rep	5,401,134	3,256,884	453,695	221,446					945,198	523,910
Slovenia	1,970,056	1,635,146			19,701				315,209	
Spain	39,208,236	38,031,989							1,176,247	
Sweden	8,938,559	134,078	8,402,245						402,235	
Switzerland	7,288,715	3,352,809	2,915,486						1,020,420	
Turkey	66,620,120				65,953,919				666,201	
Ukraine	49,506,779						300,000			
UK & N Ireland	59,247,439	9,479,590	27,846,296.33		1,184,949		200,000		2,369,898	18,366,706
Vatican	850									
Yugoslavia	11,206,039	448,242	112,060	6,947,744	1,905,027				1,792,966	
TOTAL number	783,157,357	269,628,915	91,862,940	178,812,124	95,261,105	1,800,000	1,609,283	1,563,000	40,593,524	35,689,893
Percent of total Population		34.43%	11.73%	23%	12.16%	0.23%	0.21%	0.20%	5.18%	4.56%
Other world religions in Europe										
Baha'i	126000	NOTES:	Information collect from various sources including the faith communities.							
Jain	16000		Sources include							
Sikh	236000		World Almanac and Book of Facts 2000. Mahwah, NJ: PRIMEDIA Reference Inc. 1999 Encyc. Britannica Book of the Year							
Zoroastrian	12000		Hutchinson Encyclopaedia Encyclopaedia Britannica							

For British Religious official Census please see www.statistics.gov.uk

Appendix Two

The Summit for Muslim World Leaders
Islam and a Future World of Peace
 Jakarta, Indonesia — December 21 - 23, 2001

In the name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

Jakarta Declaration 1422 H/2001

Preamble

We begin by invoking the blessings of Allah on this effort and with salutations on the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him)

We, the participants and guests of the Summit of World Muslim Leaders gathered to reaffirm the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), under the theme Islam and a Future World of Peace, on 6 - 8 Shawwal, 1422 (20 - 23 December, 2001) in Jakarta, Indonesia.

We affirm that:

Islam is a religion of peace and justice. From its core values emanate respect for life and human dignity, affecting all ideals and actions that guide the day to day life of the Muslim.

Our understanding of religion and spirituality grows from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These resources provide the basis for resolving all challenges of this and every age, as well as all social circumstances.

The universality of the teachings of Islam affirms the sanctity of humankind, and thus enjoins on us an enduring dialogue of faiths and civilizations.

Deliberations proceeded along three lines of inquiry: Religion and Spirituality, Civic Responsibility in Political Society, and Interfaith, Intercultural, and International Relations.

1. Religion and Spirituality

We affirm that:

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent as mercy for all humankind. The message he delivered aims to produce peace and prosperity, promote love, compassion and forgiveness, and create a humane society. It is an important source of guidance in a changing and shrinking world and must be recognized as such.

To fulfill the ideals of the Prophet (PBUH) Muslims must recognize these teachings and his example as a guiding principle of their moral and spiritual development.

Islam rejects violence in any form against the innocent. In fact, it promotes justice and exhorts Muslims to be just even if be against their own selves, their parents, or kinfolk. Thus implementation of justice for and by the Muslims will be the single most important factor in the elimination of violence and terrorism.

To be just is the spiritual obligation of all faiths and nations.

Muslim leaders and scholars are responsible for, and have a moral obligation to teach and promote knowledge about the fundamental ethics of Islam, thus providing the foundation for peace and peaceful coexistence and harmony in the world.

2. Civic Responsibility in Political Society

We affirm that:

Muslim nations must devote their energies toward education of their masses, and improvement of economic opportunities for their people. They must enhance their interaction with other Muslim countries in joint projects for the welfare of their populations.

All nations of the world must apply their energies to conflict resolution globally, and be consistent at both home and abroad in their concern for justice, freedom and human rights.

In any system of government, the protection of the freedoms and rights of the citizens is paramount.

3. Interfaith, Intercultural, and International Relations

We affirm that:

Dialogue toward harmony and understanding is a Muslim religious responsibility. As a consequence, Muslims encourage people of all faiths to acknowledge, accept, promote, respect and appreciate the diversity among their different faiths and cultures.

Interfaith dialogue for the purposes of removing fear of the unknown, generating good will, and establishing mutual trust, should occur at all levels including at the level of individuals, faith groups, larger communities, and globally.

Intellectual and spiritual leaders are obliged to establish enduring structures of dialogue to prevent conflict among people of differing religious commitments and opinions. These leaders of all faith must convince their constituencies to work harmoniously with other groups and influence their elected or appointed leaders to promote peace and justice as the cornerstone of their agenda, policies, and practice.

May Allah bless this effort and forgive our shortcomings.

Jakarta
23 December 2001