

Diversity shapes Europe's future: An Islamic Perspective

By
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1. 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.) -

2. I am deeply humbled to be invited by Peter Schreiner President of **ICCS** – Intereuropean Commission on Church and School on behalf of other partners such as Evangelische Academy in Berlin and others. I am truly honoured to say these few words in the presence of so many distinguished and eminent scholars, educationists, fellow peace activists, politicians and religious leaders at this Conference on **"Diversity shapes Europe Future"** during the European religious dimension of inter-cultural dialogue year 2008.

3. From the very outset, I brought greetings from **Dr Abdul Bari** Secretary General of British Muslim's most representative umbrella body Muslim Council of Britain (**MCB**) and the former Secretary General of **MCB Sir Iqbal Sacranie OBE. As a Muslim I greet you with the greetings of the Holy Month of Ramadan – Ramadan Kareem to all.**

4. As the Chairman of the taskforce for the Inter-cultural Europe 2008 for Daligue year I have enjoyed my visit to various EU countries and see the progress of number of projects in the European cities. On my humble opinion EU resources are well spent and got its value. Member states also palued their positive role in supporting the Intercultural dialogue year. The real herors are those Non governmentantl organsations and Grass-root groups who took these seriously and put their energies to make this as a great success.

5. European societies are becoming more and more multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic. Cultural Diversity lies at the heart of Europe's Religious heritage and characterises the daily lives of most Europeans, who are rooted in the culture and traditions of their home regions. This heritage also becomes manifest in buildings and monuments for instance, which are very often the focal point of a region's cultural legacy. In this sense, Europe's diverse histories and cultures are reflected in the material remnants present in huge numbers all over the continent. Even though Europe is still richly covered with the legacies of its cultural heritage, the numerous economic, political and social changes of the last decades in all European regions often shift the conservation of cultural heritage to the background, while economic considerations are considered the main priorities. This often leads to the negligence of a region's cultural heritage and might became a danger to its very survival.As we are fully

aware of the importance of historical artefacts and national treasures for European cultural identity, it intends to contribute to their preservation.

6. Inter-Culture cooperation is sometimes taken as the icing on the cake, an additional flavour to spice up ordinary life or simply as entertainment. A political approach, however, broaches the question of the impact of culture on citizens and society. It is a valuable tool for the Regions to open up to innovative ways of thinking, responding to problems and approaching policy issues. European integration is an endless learning process and needs a strong cooperation scheme involving all sectors of society, including regional and local stakeholders. Only such a grass-roots approach to interregional cooperation, that transcends national borders and encourages improved mutual knowledge and understanding, will allow the citizens to fully experience and own Europe. Therefore, European Regions are encouraged all the Regions to ensure that specific priorities on Interregional Cooperation are included in their Convergence and/or Competitiveness programmes; participation relates to democracy and whether culture can foster active citizenship.

7. Dialogue between cultures, the oldest and most fundamental mode of democratic conversation, is an antidote to reject extremism and violence. Its objective is to enable us to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world, to develop a sense of community and belonging.

8. The challenge has been described as a "**clash of civilisations**", and some have responded with the concept of an "**alliance of civilisations**". Is it mainly an issue of values and beliefs, or is it primarily a question of economic or social inequality, the oil market or geopolitical strategy?

9. Why afford any importance at all to the religious dimension? Of course, we can and must recognise freedom of religion, as does the European Convention on Human Rights but we must also acknowledge the full contribution religion can make to society by strengthening moral values and giving hope and joy to people. Yet is it not sufficient to adhere to human rights values? There should never be any incompatibility between human rights and religion. That is a question we need to answer. And why, in this context, should we afford special protection to religions, over and above that granted to any individual against slander and incitement to hatred? That is another question to be looked at.

10. The impact of migration flows and diversities of any type bring about ongoing transformations socially, economically and culturally, and all of our societies, with no exception, are called to cope with such transformations adequately and appropriately. Accordingly, policymaking can in no way ignore those conditions that form the very basis of dialogue, that is to say: respect for human rights of individuals and among individuals, respect for democracy and the rule of law – pillars on which the action of the Council of Europe is centred.

11. In the context of globalization, where "boundaries" between different societies, and hence different cultures, have apparently faded out as opposed to a couple of decades ago, while

new, often unexpected issues come to the forefront and consolidated certainties fall to pieces, there is an urgent need for our societies to define new behavioural patterns, educate to new forms of relationship and avert close-mindedness and confrontation as impulsive reactions to change.

12. Civil institutions and society are both called to pay greater attention to and cope with the many issues that have arisen, and to courageously and critically rethink "outdated" social models, in order to devise appropriate policies in the light of a cultural environment greatly changed compared to the past. At the same time, they have to guarantee equal rights and equal opportunities for a balanced social and economic development, and promote tolerance and respect for diversities, because the new social fabric that is emerging is still uncertain and hard to predict in the long run. The global vision of a Europe should be aware of its diverse cultures and common heritage, where dialogue, tolerance, mutual knowledge and understanding are key instruments to consolidate the sense of belonging to the Old Continent. However, we believe that this process cannot occur separately from the moral and spiritual values which are at the very basis of our respective cultures.

13. Religion assumes particular importance also with regard to the development of intercultural dialogue and may contribute to the protection and promotion of the fundamental values in which our societies are rooted, in respect for their autonomy and prerogatives. Today, we are confronted with international tensions and threats against stability and peaceful coexistence of different cultural, political, ethnic and religious groups within the same people. These threats, sometimes accompanied by violent acts and destruction, are often justified by their authors on religious grounds to strengthening dialogue as a key factor to promote mutual knowledge, rapprochement and cooperation – as irreplaceable instruments to help us identify, in our respective areas of competence, the most effective policies to build peace and protect our peoples from the spreading of violence and abuse, hatred and discrimination.

14. This goes hand in hand with the duty to favour active participation by our peoples, in particular by the young, in the promotion of cultural and spiritual values and ideals in order to counter these threats. For this reason, I wish to underline, in particular, the importance of the Campaign "**All different, all equal**", launched by the Council of Europe in June 2006 to raise awareness among European young people on the common objective of fighting against any form of intolerance and discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, islamophobia, while promoting respect for diversities; as well as the constant support provided by the Commissioner for Human Rights to numerous initiatives involving various countries concerning strategies to consolidate interfaith dialogue.

15. What is Europe? Is it a geographical entity, mixture of Judo-Christian-Islamic culture or is it a product of a secular religion? What is Europe's Identity? The name Europe first appeared in a legend recounted by Greek and Roman authors. The Roman Poet Ovid regarded Europa as a beautiful part of the world where civilisation first flourished in the 1st century BCE in the south-eastern part of Mediterranean area. Today everybody associates the name "Europe" with a certain geographical area – though frontiers of Europe are not quite as obvious as they appear.

The terms Western Europe, Eastern Europe, European Union and others are used for various reasons.

16. The important contribution of Christianity to the culture of Europe is undeniable. Islam is also a reality of Europe for over 1000 years. All three monotheistic faith traditions Judaism, Christianity and Islam are foreign religions as far as Europe is concerned. All three faiths originated in the Middle East and yet had a profound influence on European culture. For many years and for a long time, Christianity with its strange mixture of Jewish tradition and universal pretension remained the religion of a marginalized minority. St Paul was convinced that non-Jews could become Christians without having first to become Jews by undergoing the rite of circumcision. At first, this conviction was not shared by every Christian leader of early times, but later it was adopted as a central tenet. This helped Christianity to develop as a world religion. The spread of Christianity was also helped by political and cultural situation of the time. [*For more details please read Karle Blei's "Freedom of Religion and Belief: Europe's Storey" published by Koninklijke Van Gorcum BV Postbus 43, 9400 AA Assen: The Netherlands, 2002*] The Roman Empire, with its Pax Romana, was a stable world where Greek language and its culture were dominated. The Christianity became the state religion of Roman Empire with its constitution of the Byzantine Empire. Despite its relationship to Judaism, Christianity developed independently within the Roman-Greek World. Christian sees Jews as different but related because they called by the same of God by whom they feel they called: the God and Father of Jesus Christ is, according to Christian faith, the same as the Jewish "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob".

European Cooperation since 1945:

17. Historically, Europe had done good and bad outside its boundaries. It could contribute to repair its bad influence, including the misdeeds under colonialism and the two world wars, only if it focused on core values, which included respect for human rights and spiritual aspiration. Religious groups had fought each other (Roman Catholics and Protestants most notably, but there are many more examples such as Crusades wars between Christian and Muslims) and people had fought to "put their stamp" on the continent; to unite it, but using violent means. In 1945, an exhausted Europe longed for an end to these conflicts. The inspiration to unite had been to ensure peace, but the external reality was that the past attempts to unite by violence had been replaced by economic agreements, starting with the European Coal and Steel Community and still the central factor in the European Union (affirmed later by the last speaker). But this was not enough to give it meaning. To create real peace in Europe, and thus help in the creation of world peace, one needed to have a fundamental and real respect for Human Dignity, Human Rights, True equality for all human beings – and a will with total determination to uphold them without fear and favour as God given right.

18. After WW2, everyone had said '**War no more**' and '**Never never again**', but the same had been said after WW1. In 1948, the European Movement held the first Pan European congress in The Hague The vision was of political, social, economic and cultural "One Europe", presided over by Winston Churchill who pleaded for a Pan European peace including the Soviet Union.

At that time there was no "iron curtain" and he was very optimistic and idealistic; but that did not last for long. The conference was attended by delegations from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but later that year they were invaded by the USSR. In 1957, the Treaties of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) – in which the signatory States 'determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe'. In this way, the member States specifically affirmed the political objective of a progressive political integration." <http://www.historiasiglo20.org/europe/traroma.htm>. The UK, Ireland and Denmark joined the EEC in 1973, then in 1981, Greece, Spain and Portugal. Between 1985 and 1992 the Internal Market was developed and in 1991 the Treaty of Maastricht affirmed the three pillars of future cooperation: **1.** Economic: the Internal Market, the Common Agricultural Policy (**CAP**) and the Euro. **2.** Foreign Affairs, though that was still undeveloped, and **3.** Justice and Home Affairs, to address the growing international problems of drugs, asylum seekers, and terrorism: and this cooperation has grown stronger and stronger.

European and Universal Values:

19. Universal values can also be considered European and originally European values could have become global. Individual human dignity is at the heart of all religions and it is the basis for human solidarity. Europe, as a collective, was designed to transcend national identities and it brings together nations with different cultural backgrounds. It is built upon the recognition that it is desirable to have a unity that respects diversity. The rights of the individual are thus brought together with the interests of the collective and the aim is to strike a balance: The value of hospitality and the importance of welcoming guests, other human beings, who, in a religious sense, have a 'divine image'. The well-being of our own community must be ensured while welcoming diversity. What unites Jews, Christians and Muslims is monotheism. Europe is a project and we all wish to find a 'meaning' in it. We all ask the question 'why?' and we all see our message as 'universal', while also teaching the respect of others. It is necessary to have a 'marriage' between Society, faith and intellect, ie to have faith as well as a critical mind. The great values the EU Constitution puts forward, such as equality, dignity, justice and human rights. But the challenge is the implementation of these values. I suggest an emphasis on civic education, Citizenship, promoting a multi-dimensional, inclusive identity, and building partnerships at local, regional, national European and International levels.

20. Presence of Muslims in Europe: A historical fact: The Muslim presence was a constant factor in European history from 7th Century of its advent soon after the origin of Islam. By trade Muslims were travellers and sailors through out the world. Within a few decades of the death of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (peace be upon him) (632 CE) his followers had burst out of Arabia and entered into Persian and Byzantium, the two empires that had divided the Middle-East between them, and took control of their vast territories from both. Initially Muslims came from the south via Spain (711CE / 94 AH) and Sicily (831 CE / 215 AH) and later through Balkan (11th Century onwards). [For further details See Professor Khurshid Ahmed's Interim Report on "Muslims in Europe" submitted to the Islamic Council of Europe on April 1976 published by the Islamic foundation Leicester United Kingdom] Muslim communities lived in

different parts of Europe ever since. There were long spells of Muslims rule in Spain (Andalusia), Sicily, and Balkan and autonomous Muslim pockets in France, Switzerland, Germany and South Italy. In spite of all political and geographical changes, there has always small communities existed over the centuries. In the European Middle Ages, Islam contributed tremendously in moulding the western, secular and modern rational thought. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe now has an prominent Muslim population. There have been many Muslims in Eastern Europe for some centuries; it's not the same in the West where large numbers of immigrants have arrived during the last forty years or so. According to the latest statistics, France has about 4 million Muslims, half of them French citizens. Those who don't become citizens of their host countries are mainly Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians. In Germany, there are 3.5 million Muslims, of whom 2 million are Turks. Belgium has about one Million and the Netherlands about the same number. Great Britain estimates its Muslim population to be about 2 million, almost all with British nationality. They come from Pakistan, India and the Near East. In 1987, Spain had 126,000 Moroccans plus many other foreigners. In 1999, the number had raised to about 250,000 the majority of whom came in through the back door. Italy's most recent statistics date from 1997 — a total of 422,000 immigrants. 130,000 come from Morocco, 59,000 from Albania, 48,000 from Tunisia, 33,000 from Senegal, 25,000 from Egypt. Available statistics concerning the number of Muslims present in Italy, don't take into account the illegal immigrants coming from North Africa, naturalised foreigners, and Italian nationals converted to Islam. Countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary and ex-Yugoslavia have had Muslim communities ever since their occupation by the Ottoman Empire.

21. Socio-economic and Political Context and shared memories: Major post-war Muslim settlements in Europe are made up of post-colonial groups. Most of them were once ruled by the countries they settled in. Germany is different. Turks make up most of its Muslim population but it was not a colonial power in Turkey. It did have close ties with the Ottoman Empire though. The shared memories have come down the centuries and indigenous Europeans are still finding it hard to behave as equals with nations they once thought of as lesser beings to dominate and control. More recent arrivals include Muslims fleeing countries in chaos under oppressive regimes or the wealthy international elite. Iranian, Iraqis, Indian Muslims, Somalis, Bosnian, Kosovan, Afghan and other Muslims have added to the diversity and mix. The central Mosque in London can have up to a hundred different nationalities, dozens of languages, black, brown and white, from Afghanistan to Argentina, praying together on Friday, all different, yet all equal before Allah. Islam is perceived as a threat to the west and not only since the 11th September 2001 attacks in the US. Since the Iranian Revolution in 1978-9 and the oil crisis precipitated by the Arab oil states, the faith and its followers have been viewed with suspicion and worse.

22. I wish to reiterate my warmest thanks to all representatives, both civil and religious, for their participation in and contribution to the debate, reflections and proposals that will derive from this meeting, which, I am confident, will enable us to make progress in our respective areas of competence, both domestically and internationally.

23. When the Heads of State and Government met in Warsaw in 2005, they reiterated their commitment to the common values and principles enshrined in Europe's cultural, religious and humanistic heritage and pointed out, in their "Declaration", that it was a heritage that was "both shared and rich in its diversity".

24. Cultural diversity is indeed increasingly a feature of our societies. The cultural environment in which individuals find themselves in our continent is changing rapidly. Transfrontier migration, the demands by certain minorities for their own cultural identity, the cultural implications of globalisation, the growing interdependence of all the regions of the world and progress in information and communication technology are among the main factors responsible for this growing diversity. How should we react? How can we combine social cohesion and cultural diversity? How can we ensure access to economic and social rights for all in our multicultural societies? How can we establish and consolidate a democratic culture that guarantees respect for the cultural identity of each of its members without falling into the trap of relativism in terms of values?

25. In order to rise to this challenge, the Council of Europe has introduced numerous instruments in pursuit of a common and coherent policy in this field. Standard-setting work, training and information in the areas of education in diversity and respect for others, the promotion of social cohesion and the management of migration in the light of the Organisation's values are features of our policy for fostering intercultural dialogue, and existed well before the actual term "intercultural dialogue" came to be used. Since the Warsaw Summit, intercultural dialogue has been one of the Council of Europe's priorities.

26. Being keen to devise a coherent, long-term policy to promote intercultural dialogue in Europe, but also between Europe and neighbouring regions, the Council of Europe has prepared a "**White Paper on intercultural dialogue**" (launched by the Council of European Ministers of Foreign Affairs at their 118th Ministerial Session on 7 May 2008). The White Paper addresses all the aspects of intercultural dialogue. It sums up the Council of Europe's achievements in the form of standard-setting instruments and the results of our practical experience. The White Paper also provides examples of good practice and address recommendations to all those involved in intercultural dialogue.

27. As stated in the "consultation document", the White Paper has been prepared by means of an open and inclusive consultation process. Representatives of virtually all groups were involved in the exercise:

- governments of member states;
- members of the Parliamentary Assembly;
- local and regional authorities;
- non-governmental organisations representing civil society, in particular youth organisations and those representing immigrants' interests;
- women;
- the media;

- employers and trade unions;
- other international institutions involved in furthering intercultural dialogue, and many others.

28. Europe's religious communities have been particularly important partners in this process. Some religious aspects have been included in the programme of activities of the Council of Europe since its inception, particularly in connection with the protection of freedom of thought, conscience and religion and in the context of the contributions that religions have made to Europe's cultural heritage. A policy in favour of intercultural dialogue cannot, however, be developed without a broader approach that takes due account of religions and beliefs as social and historical realities.

29. European Religious Leaders of Religions for Peace (RfP-E) held a meeting in March 2008 and an Assembly in May 2008 in Rovereto-Italy was organised a European wide consultation in connection with the Council of Europe's White Paper with women from very different backgrounds. In the course of the discussion, one woman, a social worker in Turin with a completely secular approach, told us about the difficulties she encountered with certain groups of immigrants in her city over the practice of the genital mutilation of women in their communities. She eventually reached the conclusion that the only way of persuading the most hardline fathers not to allow their daughters to be mutilated was to bring in one of their religious leaders. Neither the law nor money, still less a call for respect for the rules of Italian society, were as convincing as the advice handed down by their religion.

30. Of course, this is just an isolated example. Yesterday's debate clearly showed the nature and range of the issues at stake. We are convinced that the religious dimension plays a considerable part in the understanding of cultural diversity, in the management of life in society on a day-to-day basis, and in ensuring that human rights and the dignity of each man and woman are firmly enshrined in our societies.

31. It is for that reason that it is essential to involve religious communities, so that the White Paper can be produced in consultation with all those concerned by intercultural dialogue. Numerous representatives of religious communities, who are among us today, and many others in Europe, recently received the "consultation document" and a special questionnaire comprising 14 questions, so that they could let us have their views on intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension.

32. I should like to take this opportunity to thank those among you who have already responded to the call of the Council of Europe in their replies. Overall, these provide a wealth of information essential to our European survey. I shall leave aside expectations of the Council of Europe, and the examples of good practice, and concentrate on **three fundamental aspects: the overall vision of our societies, concepts of cultural diversity and means of fostering intercultural dialogue. Cultural diversity in European societies is perceived by all as something that cannot be ignored and is welcome. While some draw attention to the great cultural diversity within the various religions themselves (in**

Judaism, Islam and Catholicism), other replies point out that religion is an important dimension of a national or regional culture (Orthodox religion).

33. Islam is not a culture and has always been flexible in adapting to different cultures, according to one Muslim reply. Relations between cultural diversity and religions are complex, religious diversity being one form of cultural diversity, and the religions themselves are confronted with the challenges resulting from the increasing cultural diversity of their members. The fact is that cultural diversity within a religion is not an obstacle to recognising a particular religious identity that transcends that diversity. **Moreover, several replies highlight the dynamic, complex and changing nature of cultures.**

34. As for the concepts of diversity and intercultural dialogue, the replies are favourable: several mention experiences of inter-religious dialogue and what it has achieved. As one Rabbi points out, religious communities play a crucial part in promoting intercultural dialogue, for they are people's conscience and have a guiding role in what are often troubled times and among populations who have largely lost their bearings. **The European Council of Religious Leaders –ECRL stresses that religion is a means of forging an identity and a potential force for social cohesion, adding that religions have unique features that can be used in pursuit of peace, reconciliation and intercultural understanding.**

35. Some, however, consider that it is not sufficient to talk of intercultural dialogue, and that it is necessary to assign an objective to such dialogue. The reply from the inter-faith group of NGOs contains a wealth of material, and states that one of the objectives of intercultural dialogue is to succeed in distinguishing what in the various cultures is universal and what is related to specific factors stemming from the historical, geographical, economic, linguistic and other conditions of their development.

36. How can cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue be promoted? In their replies to the questionnaire, the religious communities describe their experiences and achievements in the area of inter-denominational and inter-religious dialogue. As the reply from the International Movement for the Apostolate of Independent Social Environments points out, however, **dialogue, whether intercultural or inter-religious, is not something that can be imposed, or learned theoretically.** It is a question of experimenting with encounters involving people, establishing conditions that ensure that they are listened to, and sharing ideas, particularly – a point made by several replies – at local level. Frequent attention is drawn to the vital role of education, the responsibility of the media and the importance of acquiring intercultural skills.

37. A Rabbi states that one of the key issues in inter-religious dialogue and dialogue between believers and agnostics is undoubtedly the status of women in present-day society.

ECRL Berlin Declaration on Religious Dialogue:

38. At the end of celebrations ECRL issues a declaration where Berlin is seen as the venue and some current challenges:

(For full text see: <http://www.rfp-europe.eu/index.cfm?id=185825>)

39. 2008 has been declared the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In a pluralistic Europe dialogue across dividing lines – be they cultural, linguistic or religious – is of the greatest importance. All over Europe issues related to identity are hotly debated, and often religion is at the centre of discussions. Europe and Europeans are also constantly interacting with the rest of the world, experiencing the joys and the challenges of communicating across cultural and religious divides.

40. Sometimes religion is seen as an obstacle to peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. At the same time we know that some of the most pressing challenges in our time – climate change, poverty, migration, marginalisation of women, discrimination and terrorism – can only be solved if we unite resources across traditional dividing lines.

- (1) Religion permeates Europe. Christianity, Islam and Judaism are part of European history. Today other great religious traditions have also found a place in the continent. In every town or village in Europe there is at least one house of worship: a Church, a Mosque or a Synagogue. To ensure a prosperous and harmonious future for Europe, people of different faiths must live peacefully together.*
- (2) Interreligious dialogue emphasises both our similarities and our differences. In interreligious dialogue we acknowledge that human beings of all faiths share certain experiences, needs and longings. We also acknowledge that we are different from each other in many respects and will remain different. Our religious traditions have formed different social rules and models which sometimes contradict each other. One aim of interreligious dialogue is to reduce false perceptions of difference and culture gaps, while we respect that something about our dialogue partner will necessarily remain other (or even alien) to us.*
- (3) Interreligious dialogue should promote respect for human rights. Interreligious dialogue should respect the shared values found within all great religious traditions and embodied within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Commitment to human rights does not preclude a variety of world views or ethical systems and interpretations.*
- (4) The invitation to the dialogue is open. The more we differ, the more we need dialogue. It is not a precondition for dialogue that we share a wide spectrum of values and ideas. Only clear breaches of respect for the most fundamental values, such as the right to life and the rule of law, should exclude people from being invited into dialogue. While the invitation is open, everyone must abide by the agreed rules of a particular dialoguing situation. Women and young people have important*

perspectives and contributions to offer and should have distinct voices in interreligious dialogue.

- (5) Interreligious dialogue is a mode of relating to other faiths and has a transforming potential. Interreligious dialogue is a particular way of interacting with others through which all who are involved can be transformed. Dialogue on issues of faith and identity is not negotiations, because we do not seek agreement, it is not debates, because we do not seek to win over the other, and it is more than a discussion because we contribute not only rational arguments but personal and emotive stories and experiences and thus engage existentially with each other.*
- (6) Interreligious dialogue affirms the integrity of religious beliefs. In dialogue we come closer to each other without necessarily becoming more similar. All who engage in interreligious dialogue should do so with full integrity in their own religious tradition and without compromise to what they hold dear. In interreligious dialogue we do not aim at creating a new or shared religion.*
- (7) Interreligious dialogue addresses asymmetric power relationships with honesty. The power relationship between different religious groups is sometimes asymmetric. This can be caused by for example poverty/wealth, language, gender or numbers (minority/majority). Interreligious dialogue must not be used to obscure this. In dialogue the facts and experiences of asymmetric power should be addressed, and mechanisms should be found to give voice to those who struggle to be heard.*
- (8) Interreligious dialogue furthers stakeholdership and participation in society. Interreligious dialogue should address a wide spectrum of issues. It is important to explore shared values and address common concerns, but one should not shy away from addressing issues on which there are disagreement, uncertainty or even fear of the other. Some current trends, such as rapid development of new technology in biology, medicine and communication and changing understandings of family are closely linked to questions of values and identities. Religions do not agree on the responses to these questions, but should discuss these matters with openness and courage. Dialogue is not a means to a predefined end, but it is intrinsic to genuine dialogue that it furthers mutual understanding, respect for differences, and the participation and stakeholdership of all in society and thus strengthens social cohesion.*
- (9) Interreligious dialogue leads to common action. A full understanding of interreligious dialogue includes common action – diapraxis. The dignity of human life, to which all religions are committed, is challenged for example through poverty, violence, abuse of women and children, discrimination of migrants and dramatic changes in the natural environment. Different religions can address these issues together, although our ethics may draw on different resources. Interreligious dialogue should aim at mustering the resources of varying religious traditions to take up the challenges*

which Europe faces today. Through common action we learn to understand better ourselves, each other, and the world in which we live.

(10) Structures for interreligious cooperation are assets in times of crisis. Repeatedly religion plays a role in situations of conflict. Established and trustful structures for interreligious dialogue are a tremendous strength when relationships between communities deteriorate. Religious leaders must address dangerous and violent perversions of religion within their own communities.

(11) Knowledge and confidence in a tradition further interreligious understanding. Open and trustful interreligious dialogue is furthered by a secure knowledge of one's own religious tradition as well as that of others. This knowledge should be taught in a spirit of peace and respect for the different traditions. Many religions make truth claims that are mutually exclusive. This is no more an impediment to dialogue and the full participation in society than the explicit or implicit truth claims of secular ideologies. Dialogue between religions, cultures and social groups is often dialogue across opposing truth claims and world views.

(12) Religion has a natural place also in the public sphere. Religion continues to have an important role to play in the public life of a Europe with many religions. This applies to minorities and majorities alike. The public display of religious symbols or celebration of religious festivals should neither be seen as offensive to other religions nor as a threat to social cohesion. Religious minorities in Europe generally do not feel offended by for example public Christmas or Easter celebrations in countries where this is a tradition as long as their own freedom of religion is respected.

(13) Religious leaders, religious people and the authorities share responsibility for interreligious dialogue. Convinced that interreligious dialogue is important for a peaceful and prosperous Europe we call on religious leaders of all religious traditions and in every corner of Europe to join in interreligious dialogue based on the principles outlined in this declaration. We call on all religious people in Europe to enter into the most important dialogue of all, "the dialogue of life", in the local community, in families and workplaces with confidence and courage. We call on the authorities on local, national and European level to engage constructively with religious communities in mutual respect for each other's different roles, and to create frameworks within which religious practices and interreligious dialogue based on the principles in this declaration may be further developed and prosper for the benefit of peaceful coexistence in Europe.

41. The religious communities consider that there are numerous obstacles to the development of inter-cultural dialogue: isolationism, as identities close in on themselves; a lack of social ties; ignorance and prejudice; fear, misunderstanding, social and economic problems and religious extremism; and a lack of knowledge about others, sometimes compounded by the fact that people may be taught to hate or reject people who are

different. This brief overview of the initial replies to the 14 questions in our questionnaire has already introduced the whole range of issues to be broached this morning and the wealth of aspects we must take into account.

42. I would invite you to take advantage of this morning's debate to share your views with us. Every effort will be made to ensure that the White Paper reflects the viewpoints of the various religious communities and the positions of non-believers and all other sections of society as faithfully as possible. The Council of Europe is convinced that intercultural dialogue can progress only if it is seen as a joint responsibility and a task shared by all, and if it is open to everyone.

43. *The concept of intercultural dialogue* 24 April 2007, downloaded from:
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/default_en.asp

44. *Objectives and conditions and Definitions:* *Our cultural environment is changing quickly and becoming more and more diversified. Cultural diversity is an essential condition of human society, brought about by cross-border migration, the claim of national and other minorities to a distinct cultural identity, the cultural effects of globalisation, the growing interdependence between all world regions and the advances of information and communication media. More and more individuals are living in a "multicultural" normality and have to manage their own multiple cultural affiliations.*

45 *Cultural diversity is also an economic, social and political plus, which needs to be developed and adequately managed. On the other hand, increasing cultural diversity brings about new social and political challenges. Cultural diversity often triggers fear and rejection. Stereotyping, racism, xenophobia, intolerance, discrimination and violence can threaten peace and the very essence of local and national communities.*

46. *Dialogue between cultures, the oldest and most fundamental mode of democratic conversation, is an antidote to rejection and violence.* *Its objective is to enable us to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. In political parlance, the term "intercultural dialogue" is still only loosely defined.*

47. *Objectives and conditions.* *In a general sense, the objective of intercultural dialogue is to learn to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Intercultural dialogue can also be a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. More specifically, the following goals have been outlined:*

- *To share visions of the world, to understand and learn from those that do not see the world with the same perspective we do;*
- *To identify similarities and differences between different cultural traditions and perceptions;*
- *To achieve a consensus that disputes should not be resolved by violence;*

- To help manage cultural diversity in a democratic manner, by making the necessary adjustments to all types of existing social and political arrangements;
- To bridge the divide between those who perceive diversity as a threat and those who view it as an enrichment;
- To share best practices particularly in the areas of intercultural dialogue, the democratic management of social diversity and the promotion of social cohesion;
- To develop jointly new projects.

48. *Easier than a definition is a description of the conditions, the "enabling factors" that characterize a true, meaningful intercultural dialogue. Based on existing experience, one can propose at least six crucial conditions that must be fulfilled from the very outset, or achieved during the process:*

- Equal dignity of all participants;
- Voluntary engagement in dialogue;
- A mindset (on both sides) characterised by openness, curiosity and commitment, and the absence of a desire to "win" the dialogue;
- A readiness to look at both cultural similarities and differences;
- A minimum degree of knowledge about the distinguishing features of one's own and the "other" culture;
- The ability to find a common language for understanding and respecting cultural differences.

49. Definitions: *In the past, the Council of Europe has rarely offered suggestions for a definition of intercultural dialogue (the most notable exception is the "Opatija Declaration" of 2003). For the purposes of the consultation process for the "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue", the following preliminary formulation may serve as a reference:*

50. *Intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's global perception."*

51. *In this definition, "open and respectful" means "based on the equal value of the partners"; "exchange of views" stands for every type of interaction that reveals cultural characteristics; "groups" stands for every type of collective that can act through its representatives (family, community, associations, peoples); "culture" includes everything relating to ways of life, customs, beliefs and other things that have been passed on to us for generations, as well as the various forms of artistic creation; "world perception" stands for values and ways of thinking.*

52. Examples of best practice: *In order to make the White Paper as relevant as possible for practical initiatives promoting intercultural dialogue in the various contexts, the Council of Europe will collect examples of best practice and make them available to the*

public. The power of good examples is usually much stronger than the effects of abstract principles.

53. What is an example of best practice? For selecting examples of best practice, the Council of Europe will apply a number of loosely defined criteria. In order to qualify, projects or programmes must be able to show that they:

- promote intercultural dialogue;
- achieved their aims;
- can be managed within a given budget and framework;
- can be continued beyond the experimental period (which very often profits from an exceptional funding opportunity)
- allow repetition and adaptation by other organisers, in other countries and in other cultures

54. In the context of the White Paper, examples of best practice can relate to one or several of the main areas of intercultural dialogue. They can be proposed by everybody and every institution.

55. Database of examples of best practice

As the consultation process of the White Paper of the Council of Europe progresses, this site will present examples of good practice realised at all levels and everywhere in Europe in the area of intercultural dialogue.

56 Selected other sites presenting examples of best practice ▲

- In the area of the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance, the site of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe presents examples of best practice at the national level and more specifically through the media
- The Directorate of Education of the Council of Europe (DG IV) proposes examples of best practice in the area of citizenship education
- The "COMPENDIUM" site of the Council of Europe on cultural policies and trends in Europe offers a database of examples of best practice
- The European Commission (DG Education and Culture) of the European Union recently published two manuals of examples of best practice in preparation of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue

57. How to propose examples of best practice

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/proposal_EN.asp#TopOfPage

Selected other sites presenting examples of best practice

- In the area of the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance, the site of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of

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- **Five policy approaches**
 1. *A political culture valuing diversity*
 2. *Human rights and fundamental freedoms*
 3. *From equality of opportunity to equal enjoyment of rights*
 4. *Democratic citizenship and participation*
 5. *Learning and teaching intercultural competences*

For Further detailed information please see:

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue 7 May 2008

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/White%20Paper_final_revised_EN.pdf

58. The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue:

1. *The European Conference on **the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue**", which took place on 23 and 24 April 2007 under the auspices of the San Marino chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, was a milestone in the efforts made to promote, stimulate and develop intercultural dialogue in Europe, and in particular its religious dimension. Gathered in San Marino, the representatives of the main bodies of the Council of Europe, the governments of Council of Europe member states, religions traditionally present in Europe and civil society, assisted by experts, discussed the implications of cultural and religious diversity in Europe for the strengthening of European co-operation based on shared values.*
2. *Increasing cultural diversity, induced by both the broader geographical scope of European co-operation and its increased openness, has given rise to challenges and opportunities which have to be taken into account in order to foster a richer dialogue with and between cultures. The Republic of San Marino, currently chairing the Committee of Ministers, has made this subject its main priority. Since the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government (Warsaw, Poland, May 2005) and the Conference of European Ministers responsible for cultural affairs (Faro, Portugal, October 2005), the Council of Europe in its entirety has been actively promoting the democratic management of diversity. In this respect, the conference is a further contribution to the implementation of the Action Plan agreed on at the Summit.*

3. *The conference followed on from the activities and conclusions of the international conferences on "Dialogue, tolerance and education: the concerted action of the Council of Europe and the religious communities" (Kazan, 22-23 February 2006) and "Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-Faith Cooperation", (Nizhniy Novgorod, 7-8 September 2006). The "Volga Forum Declaration", adopted at the latter conference, has particularly inspired the discussions in San Marino. Numerous references were also made to the conferences organised since 2000 by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, to the initiatives taken by the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe over the past few years. Participants welcomed the European Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation - "All different- All equal".*

4. *The participants reaffirmed their commitment to the shared values, which constitute the very foundation of the Council of Europe, namely universal, inalienable and indivisible human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Many among them noted that these values were rooted in Europe's cultural, religious and humanist heritage. The participants also wished to underline their attachment to the development of more inclusive and cohesive societies in Europe.*

5. *The participants expressed their conviction that it was necessary to promote intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension with all interested parties and highlighted the importance of cooperating with religious communities, together with public authorities and other social actors, to create favourable conditions for communities living together in Europe. They nevertheless expressed their concerns over recent acts of violence marked by religious intolerance.*

6. *Beyond the wide range of national situations, particularly with regard to the social impact of religions or the emergence of new forms of religious belief, they noted that there was a trend in a number of member states towards more intensive interaction between the public authorities, religious institutions and/or communities and civil society. Although the main aim is to ensure effective safeguards in a democratic society for the right to freedom of religion or a particular worldview, including its dimensions of collective practice, this dialogue often also endeavours to improve the living together. The participants recommended that the examples of good practice presented in this respect during the conference should be widely disseminated, especially at local level.*

7. *The representatives of religions and civil society welcomed the interest shown by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with a view to establishing its own open and transparent dialogue with the religious communities and civil society based on the Organisation's values. They expressed their interest in taking part in this exercise and their willingness to contribute through their debates to its success. They also noted that, in so doing, the Council of Europe intended to maintain its neutral attitude towards the various religions and to take full account of the three following principles: (1) the need to respect freedom of thought, conscience and religion as guaranteed under Article 9 of the ECHR, (2) the equality of rights and duties of all citizens irrespective of their religious belonging, (3) the respective autonomy of state and religions. The Council of Europe will further take*

due account of the role and specific status of religious communities in each European country.

8. *The Conference examined the role of the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. Religions can indeed elevate or enhance the objectives of dialogue and help ensure that it is undertaken whilst respecting certain essential conditions, namely a shared ambition to protecting the dignity of every human being, by promoting human rights, including equality between women and men, strengthening social cohesion and fostering understanding and harmony between the different cultures present on our continent. In this perspective, the religious dimension of our cultures should be reflected in an appropriate manner in education systems and public debates, including in the media, in societies respecting freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention for Human Rights.*

9. *The discussions also highlighted the role of beliefs and convictions in affirming one's identity, and the place of religions in contemporary culture and the cultural heritage. The participants underlined the importance of promoting democratic citizenship, mutual knowledge of cultures and teaching about religions.*

10. *The participants noted the fact that the Council of Europe intends to publish a "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" by the end of 2007, which would set out the Organisation's main policy orientations in this field and provide policy-makers and practitioners at national, regional and local levels with guidelines and analytical and methodological tools for promoting intercultural dialogue. It would be drafted following an open and inclusive consultation of all stakeholders in intercultural dialogue, namely: the governments of Council of Europe member states, members of the Parliamentary Assembly, local and regional authorities, religious communities and civil society. The participants welcomed the opportunity provided by the conference to put forward their points of view on such an exercise and expressed their wish to be associated with the follow up given to the conclusions of this document, in which the religious dimension would be an important element.*

11. *At the end of their work, the participants agreed that in view of its achievements in standard setting and competence in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the Council of Europe provided a particularly appropriate framework for promoting intercultural dialogue and enhancing its religious dimension. They noted that the Council of Europe regards the participation of women in that process as very important.*

12. *The representatives of religions and civil society congratulated the Council of Europe for launching an in-depth discussion on the subject of dialogue with religious communities and civil society and for making a constructive proposal for holding annual exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. They wished that this open and transparent dialogue based on the values of the Council of Europe be set up, in a spirit of consultation, as from 2008. They also suggested that the NGOs active in the human rights and education groupings of the INGO Conference be fully associated to this process. In this regard, they considered that these meetings could in future, following an evaluation of their usefulness, serve as a platform for exchanges on the implementation of the*

recommendations of the White Paper, in particular those concerning the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue.

13. They warmly welcomed the forthcoming publication of a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and the broad consultation process. They saw it as an expression of the Council of Europe's willingness to develop a long-term policy in favour of such a dialogue. The White Paper would help highlight the constructive responses that democratic societies are required to give to the challenges posed by cultural diversity. The Conference allowed to collect a high number of proposals. The proposal was made that the Council of Europe elaborate a normative text on education in human rights and for democratic citizenship

14. The participants expressed their gratitude to the San Marino Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the initiative and for organising the conference, which has given a new and important impetus to the joint efforts to promote intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension on our continent.

59. British Muslims and Europe: The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is United Kingdom based, national representative Muslim umbrella body with over 500 affiliated national, regional and local organisations, education, charitable institutions, women and youth organisations and professional bodies including mosques. Most of the main national and regional Muslim bodies are now its members. The MCB was inaugurated - after several years of wide-ranging consultation and careful planning - on 23 November 1997 at the Brent Town Hall in Wembley by representatives of more than 250 Muslim organisations from all parts of Britain including Northern Ireland. The MCB through its active Europe and Internataional committee has links with many Eueopean organisations.

60. Muslims in Europe and their responsibilities: Some Muslim might agree with the assertion, made by Daniel Johnson in *The Daily Telegraph*, on 12 September 2001, that Muslims are required by the Holy Qur'an to believe that Jews and Christians will be "mustered into Gehennam." They forget that in the *Sahifat al-Madinah*, also known as the Constitution of Medina, the Prophet Muhammad legislated for a multi-religious society, based on tolerance, equality, and justice, many centuries before such an idea existed any where in the world. Indeed early Muslim society is more pluralistic in a religious. Under the terms of this document each religious group enjoyed cultural and legal autonomy. The Jews and Christians were equal before laws with Muslims. There was no clause demanding their subjection. They were bound by the same duties as the other parties to the contract; together they formed a single community, or **Ummah**, a word that is now used almost exclusively with reference to the Muslim community.

61. I must admit that Muslims have failed to publicise the pluralistic vision of Islam. As **Murad Hofmann** has said, "it is essential that the Western media and those who exert an influence on public opinion should be made aware of the true Islamic model of religious pluralism."

62. The Holy Qur'an not only conveys a message of **peace, respect, tolerance, justice, freedom and compassion; it provides mankind with a global framework for co-operation and a charter for inter-faith dialogue.** It repeatedly stresses that all peoples on earth have had their prophets and messengers, and that multiplicity of every kind — religious, cultural, or ethnic — is part of God's magnificent design: *"And among His wonders is...the diversity of your tongues and colours"* (The Holy Qur'an 30: 22); *"To each [community] among you have We appointed a law and a way of life. And if God had so willed, He could have made you one community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you...So compete with one another in doing good works, for to God you will all return, and He will inform you about that wherein you differ"* (The Holy Qur'an 5: 48).

63. This means that prophetic guidance is not limited to any one community, period, or civilisation. So Muslims — if they are true to their faith — do not claim a monopoly of the truth, or a monopoly of revelation: *"And indeed, within every community have We raised up an apostle [with this message]: 'Worship God and shun the powers of evil'"* (The Holy Qur'an 16: 36). Like Jesus, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and Blessing of God be upon them) did not come to establish a new religion, but to recapitulate the teachings of those prophets, or messengers, who had preceded him. He came to remind us of our status in the divine scheme of things as God's servants and deputies. As the **Prince of Wales** said, in "A Reflection on the Reith Lectures for the Year 2000," we have failed to live up to this "sacred trust between mankind and our Creator, under which we accept our duty of stewardship for the earth."

64. The actions of a few Muslim fanatics have been interpreted as vindicating the old idea that Islam promotes violence. All too often in the media the word "terrorism" is coupled with the adjective "Islamic." If Islam were really, as some suppose, a religion of fire and sword, why would *"the true servants of the Most Merciful"* be defined in the Holy Qur'an as *"those who walk gently on earth and who, when the ignorant address them, say 'Peace'"* (The Holy Qur'an 25: 63)? Why would Muslims be admonished to greet one another, on all occasions, with the words, "Peace be with you and God's mercy and blessings"? It is clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an: *"There shall be no compulsion in religion"* (The Holy Qur'an 2: 256). This disproves the fallacy that Islam imposes on the non-Muslim the choice between conversion and the sword. According to the Holy Qur'an, *"God does not love aggressors"* (The Holy Qur'an 2: 190), and war is only permitted in self-defence, or in defence of religion. If people did not have such a right, then, *"monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, in which God's name is much remembered, would surely have been destroyed by now"* (The Holy Qur'an 22: 40). This means that military action is justified against an enemy who destroys a place where God is worshipped. It is also said in the Holy Qur'an that those who are oppressed, or who have been unjustly driven from their homelands, have a duty to fight.

65. However, when the opportunity for peace arises, Muslims are encouraged to be forgiving and to seek reconciliation, for mercy and compassion are God's chief attributes: *"Whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with God."* (The Holy Qur'an 42: 40). This is why Muslims are taught to dedicate themselves constantly to God's service with the words, *"In*

the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate." Since the word *Islam* means "submission," from the same root as *salâm*, "peace," a Muslim is simply a person who attempts to find inner peace by submitting to God's will: *"He guides to Himself all those who turn to Him — those who believe, and whose hearts find their rest in the remembrance of God — for, truly, in the remembrance of God hearts do find their rest"* (The Holy Qur'an 13: 27-28). War in itself is never holy, and if the lesser *jihad* of war is not accompanied by what the Prophet Muhammad called "the greater *jihad*," the struggle to control the lower instincts and the whims of the ego, then war may be diabolical.

66. The following principles may be derived from the The Holy Qur'an:

First of all, Muslims should not ridicule the beliefs of others: *"But do not revile those whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance: for We have made the deeds of every people seem fair to them. In time, they must return to their Lord, and then He will make them understand what they have done"* (The Holy Qur'an 6: 108).

Secondly, Muslims should not associate with those who ridicule our faith: *"Do not take for your friends such as mock at your faith and make a jest of it...they are people who do not use their reason"* (The Holy Qur'an 5: 57-58).

Thirdly, when Muslims address those who do not share our beliefs, we should speak with courtesy: *"And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner"* (The Holy Qur'an 29: 46).

Fourthly, Muslims should invite people to use their reason, appealing to the intellect to interpret God's words, because there is no contradiction between faith and reason: *"O People of Scripture, why do you argue about Abraham, seeing that the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed till long after him? Will you not, then, use your reason?"* (The Holy Qur'an 3: 65).

67. Above all, within the bounds of propriety — no backbiting or blasphemy — there must be freedom of opinion and discussion both with those who hold other religious views and with those who share our faith — for if we cannot appreciate diversity within our own religious community, we will certainly not be able to value religious diversity. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "The differences of opinion among the learned within my community are [a sign of God's] grace." If Muslims were to follow these principles, they would become once again a *"community of the middle way"* (The Holy Qur'an, 2: 143), exercising moderation and avoiding all extremes.

68. It needs to be said, however, that before one can begin to apply these principles there has to be the willingness to listen and to engage in dialogue, and there has to be some degree of mutual respect and equality between the two parties. When there is a gross disparity of wealth, power and privilege, such as exists between Israel and Palestine, dialogue is very difficult. In fact the arrogance and selfishness of the rich nations, and the ever-widening gap between them and the rest of the world, generate feelings of resentment and discontent. In Islam a rich man does not merely have a duty to distribute some of his wealth to the poor, but

the poor have a *right* to a share in his wealth. The discrepancy between the rich nations and the poor is now so great that the wealth of the world's three richest families is said to be equal to that of 600 million people living in the world's poorest countries.

69. We now have to make a choice — individually and collectively — between confrontation and dialogue, between destruction and construction, between war and diplomacy. True global cooperation will not be possible until we recover an awareness of the ecumenical, ecological and ethical principles that are at the heart of every spiritual tradition. In most of the world's trouble spots — in Palestine, Kashmir, Gujarat, and Chechnya — Muslims have been massacred and tortured and denied their most basic rights – freedom, independence and dignity of life. In Iraq thousands of children have died of cancer as a result of international community's sanctions, or as a result of polluted drinking water and malnutrition, and thousands more may now be in danger of losing their lives due to occupation of foreign armies. In Afghanistan thousands of innocent people died as a result of US bombing. Not unnaturally Muslims feel that they have been treated unjustly by what is euphemistically called "the world community."

70. Those who see religious, cultural and ethnic diversity as a blessing, and who share the view of the **Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** that "no one creed has a monopoly of spiritual truth; no one civilisation encompasses all the spiritual, ethical, and artistic expressions of mankind," must find the middle way between religious fanaticism and fanatical secularism. It is essential, as **His Royal Highness Prince Hassan of Jordan** has said, that we promote a dialogue of civilisations, and that we should not allow extremists to hijack Islam or any other religion. It is vitally important, especially in the light of current events, to refute those shallow secularists who regard religion itself as inevitably divisive, and to rediscover the ethical principles upon which all the great spiritual traditions are based. It is not simply a matter of respecting religious differences; we have to recover the practical spiritual wisdom that unites us and makes us human. As **Martin Luther King** said, "our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies." This vision of a just and peaceful multi-religious society can never be achieved without the active cooperation of the mass media.

71. The necessity of mutual cooperation and respect: In my faith tradition the Holy Qur'an commands believers for interfaith co-operation "**to come to common grounds**" (The Holy Qur'an **3:64**). As a Muslim I have been ordered to build good relations with all people of the world (The Holy Qur'an **49:13 & (16:40)**); work for peace everywhere and whenever possible with others (The Holy Qur'an **2:208 & 8:61**); cooperate with others in furthering virtue and God-consciousness (The Holy Qur'an **5:2**); seek and secure human welfare, promote justice and peace (The Holy Qur'an **4:114**); do good to others (The Holy Qur'an **28:77**) and not to break promises made to others (The Holy Qur'an **16:91**). The Holy Qur'an tells believers that those who do good deeds and help others are the best creation (The Holy Qur'an **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).**

72. 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 (The Holy Qur'an **22:40**). The Holy Qur'an is full of many examples but time does not permit me to dwell on this.

73. In Search of a Common Ground: Much controversy arises or is made out of the question of values; what is meant by 'values'? Which values are good and which bad, if any? Which values are to be tolerated even if their rightness is controversial? Has one a right to express and teach values? Can any science or doctrine be neutral with regard to values? These are key issues of psychic and social development, not facts merely to observe and describe. The essential goodness of human nature is ultimately something for us to reach out to together, through discovering, experiencing and further developing it personally. Progress in this direction invokes many kinds of feedback from others in one's personal sphere of experience, which strengthen the conviction that, despite all, values are a human heritage, while anti-values are but the result of ignorance as to our this heritage and shortcomings in so far discovering and pursuing our true destiny, whether individually or collectively.

74. The question that preoccupies us as implied by the theme is this: Can we find a common ground on which Muslims and non-Muslims stand comfortably in a democratic and pluralist society? My answer is a resounding yes. The Holy Qur'an directs the Muslims to find a common ground with other religious 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 Holy Qur'an is also clear that there can be no force in matter religious. The Holy 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

75. Religious conflict, particularly between Islam and Christianity in the past, or 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.

76. Muslims, Jews and Christian share similar core values of respect of human life and dignity and profound commitment to charity and the common good. There are five common values in all major religions and faiths of World. That **honesty and sincerity, compassion and love, sacrifice and selflessness, a sense of justice and a sense of fairness, patience and perseverance** are values which all religions cherish is to state the obvious. Likewise, there is no religion that does not regard human dignity and mutual respect, modesty and humility, moderation and restraint, a sense of balance, and a sense of propriety as vital aspects of a flourishing civilisation. Industry and diligence are important attributes. So are kindness and courtesy. The world has become a fairly stable multi-religious society as a result of political, economic and cultural policies and arrangements which have sought to accommodate the interests and aspirations of the different communities. But there are new challenges which demand new strategies for bridging the chasm that separates the communities. Harnessing the common values embodied in the religions of the nation is one such strategy that deserves our consideration.

78. Religious Foundations for Diversity and Pluralism: Through my reading of the sacred text of the Holy **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 Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him). Both the Holy 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 the Holy 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."

79. Both of these verses establish the principle of freedom of belief, thought and expression 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. All basic freedoms (freedom of Religions, Freedom of Speech, Freedom from fear (prejudice and hatred) and freedom from want (hunger/starvation) have been guaranteed by God Al-Mighty to all creations irrespective of their place of birth. Islam plays great importance to human dignity and civil society based on rule of law.

80. 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.

81. 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.

82. Golden Rule: "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself". It is noteworthy that most religions base their moral code on the highly effective Golden Rule:

Buddhism: Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful (Udana-Varga 5:18)

Judaism: What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary (Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Hinduism: This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you. (Mahabharata 5:1517)

Confucianism: Surely it is the maxim of loving kindness: Do not unto others what you would not have them do to you (Analects 15:23)

Zoroastrianism: That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not god for itself. Good thoughts, good words and good deed are the bases of good life.

The Christian faith actually uses two complimentary rules: The (ineffective) Biblical "Golden Rule" which proclaims: "All things whatsoever ye would that man should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt 7:12). However, the (effective) Ten Commandments are framed in the negative, as all moral codes must be in order to be effective.

Islam: "No one is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." (Sunnah) This moral code is also a version of the Golden Rule. It is very ineffective. It is obeyed

very selectively and ambiguously. Clearly, it is based on the unrealistic assumption that your brother has precisely the same needs and wants as you do.

If we wish to live in harmony with others and never give rise to a conflict with others, we must convert the "Golden Rule" into practice: "**Don't do to others what you don't want done to yourself**" ..

83. Global Ethics and Interfaith Dialogue: In 1993, the Parliament of World Religions adopted a declaration called *Towards A Global Ethic*, affirming that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the world's religions and that this core should form the basis of a global ethic. The principles of the global ethic include:

- **No new global order without a new global ethic,**
- **A fundamental demand: every human being must be treated humanely,**
- **Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life,**
- **Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order,**
- **Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women,**
- **Transformation of consciousness.**

The final principle is quite interesting and deserves some additional attention. The declaration describes this point as follows:

84. Historical experience demonstrates the following: Earth cannot be changed for the better unless we achieve a transformation in the consciousness of individuals in public life. The possibilities for transformation have already been glimpsed in areas such as war and peace, economy, and ecology, where in recent decades fundamental changes have taken place. This transformation must also be achieved in the area of ethics and values. Every individual has intrinsic dignity and inalienable rights, and each also has an inescapable responsibility for what she or he does or does not do. All our decisions and deeds, even our omissions and failures, have consequences."

85. 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

86. 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.

87. 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.

88. 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 for every Muslim. 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.**

89. 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.**

90. Human dignity 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." We live in an increasingly inter-netted world where it is now possible, thanks to the development of mass media, to communicate across language, cultural and religious barriers to the extent that has never previously even been imaginable.

91. Yet, the paradox of our time is that despite these remarkable developments in IT and communication, there are important gulfs that separate people and in so doing, as recent international developments have shown, threaten the stability and security of our world

92. It has been argued that from an Islamic viewpoint, there must be a common moral basis for mutual understanding both in general terms and in relation to the role of the media. For Muslims, there is an imperative to understand the reasons underpinning diversity, recognise that this diversity is inherent within the Divine plan, commit to searching for truth and upholding justice, respect for the rule of law, engage in dialogue and, finally, where differences cannot be resolved through these means, to respect differing viewpoints.

93. Such a framework is, I believe, in essence common to all refined moral codes. The world will not change for the better unless the conscience of individuals is changed first. It is imperative that these differences or tensions are not buried out of the fear of political correctness. There is a need for us all, to do more to understand the standpoints of those of other traditions and this is unfortunately very true of many Muslims today who simplistically and often unfairly reject the western world and its media as being immoral and decadent.

94. Visioning:

- Vision without action is merely a dream
- Action without vision just passes the time
- Vision with action can change the world

95. European shared Values and some responsibilities:

- **Peace and MUTUAL RESPECT**
- **Democracy and RULE OF LAW**
- **Tolerance and ACCEPTANCE**
- **Freedom and SECURITY and JUSTICE**
- **Solidarity and INCLUSIVENESS**
- **Equality and FAIRNESS to all**
- **Miscellaneous e.g: Rights and Responsibilities**
- **The extension of the Human Rights**
- **Inclusion or exclusion – Participatory Democracy**
- **The democratic participation in all spheres of the Society**
- **The emergence of an cohesive European identity**

96. Empowering the European Migrant Communities to contribute in achieving a cohesive, just, peaceful and successful European society

97. The issues of community cohesion, economic disparity, immigration and movement of population within Europe require each of us to look at our own responsibility. The Encounter will challenge the different representatives to offer their own perspective of their responsibility and contribution. An objective of the Encounter is to forge concrete assignments between individuals and institutions to enable them to commit themselves for

action. The second objective is to facilitate the establishment of inter-religious structures at local and National levels in yet more European countries.

98. I sincerely hope that the name of the City of Peace, Rovereto, will echo in our minds both as a pleasant memory, but also as a name that stirs our conscience and inspires us to continue our common actions based on our shared values - moving from dialogue to co-operative action, to recognise our shared values, identities and responsibilities and act upon them. We will together meet and acknowledge these shared values and responsibilities to bring them to the public space and commit individually and as civil society actors to actively co-operate, with a sense of shared identity, to shape our common European home.

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

100. 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 there be respect for the earth, peace for is people, love in our lives, and delight in the good, forgiveness for our past wrongs and from now on a new start.**

With Best Regards,

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