

Islam & Humanitarianism: The Pillar and the Imperative

Doing Good in Ghana: The MWL Focuses First on Children, Environment and Culture

A Visionary Science & Spirit: The MWL Offers Breakthrough Technologies for Blindness in Africa

The Dakar Conference: Leading African Muslim Scholarship and the Ideals of Islam

Art & Civilization: Celebrating Centuries of African Islamic Painting & Sculpture

JULY 2019

VOL 47 | NO 7 | DUL QADAH

# AFRICA & the MWL

Hope in Action



*True Muslims  
seeks harmony with  
everyone, regardless of  
religion or nationality.*

— His Excellency Sheikh  
Dr. Mohammad bin  
Abdulkarim Al-Issa

#### **About the MWL**

The Muslim World League is a non-governmental international organization based in Mecca. Its goal is to clarify the true message of Islam.

In order to fulfill his dream for an Islamic Ummah, Crown Prince Faisal, the third son of King Abdulaziz ibn Muhammad Al Saud, founded the Muslim World League during the meeting of the general Islamic Conference on May 18, 1962. The establishment of the MWL continued the vision of the Crown Prince to enlighten and educate the international Muslim community, which began with the founding by the Crown Prince of the Islamic University of Madinah in 1961. The Muslim World League has grown into a worldwide charity to which the Saudi Royal Family remains an active donor. Ascending to the throne as King Faisal in November 1964, the Saudi leader remained steadfast in his faith, proclaiming “I beg of you, brothers, to look upon me as both brother and servant. ‘Majesty’ is reserved to God alone and ‘the throne’ is the throne of the Heavens and Earth.”

# Contents

**JULY 2019** | VOLUME 47 | ISSUE 7

<b>1. The Month in Review</b>	
The MWL in late June and July. Most significant news highlights of the month.....	4
<b>2. Editorial Leaders</b>	
Letter from the Editor: MWL & Africa: Giving Hope by Taking Action.....	8
Editorial Leader: Humanitarianism: An Islamic Imperative.....	10
Editorial Leader: The Dakar Conference: "Islamic Thought: Approaches and Methods".....	14
Editorial Leader: "Doing Good in Ghana".....	18
<b>3. Geopolitics</b>	
The Ghana Conference.....	20
<b>4. Editorial Leaders</b>	
Feature Essay – Visionaries: Latest MWL applications of successful work treating blindness in Africa.....	22
Feature Essay – Clean Environment, Clear Future: H.E. Dr. Al-Issa inaugurates a project in Ghana, the League Well Project, to produce clean, purified water for the population of that country.....	24
<b>5. Culture</b>	
Feature Essay: Morocco and the Culture of Tolerance.....	26
<b>6. Guest Essays</b>	
His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa.....	28
<b>7. Historical Essay</b>	
Celebrating Islamic Art in Africa: A World of Hidden Treasures, Global Reach.....	30



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# The Month **in Review**

Late June – July 2019



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa greeted by Vice President of Ghana Mahamudu Bawumia.

## **JUNE 25, ACCRA**

On International Orphans Day at the Rahmah Islamic Basic School, cheering students welcomed H.E. Dr. Al-Issa. The students were eager to hear his message of hope, future prosperity and the fundamental Islamic principles

that guide them. On this occasion, Dr. Al-Issa announced the continuation of the MWL's global care program to orphans around the world. In recent months, the program delivered financial assistance to 11,500 boys and girls across eleven regions.

Dr. Al-Issa also spent time touring throughout Ghana, where the MWL “supports programs specifically that provide opportunities for young people to share the true meaning of Islam through moderation.”

## **JUNE 26, ACCRA**

The first Muslim World League annual conference took place in Accra. During the conference, Dr. Al-Issa inaugurated the League Well Project. The project was facilitated by the MWL-administered International Organization for Relief, Welfare and Development, also based in Mecca. The goal is to provide clean drinking water to communities most in need.

## **JUNE 27, ACCRA, GHANA**

His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary of the Muslim World



League, joined the Islamic Centre for Education and Development of the Government of Ghana to co-host the “International Symposium on Religious and Ethnic Minorities: Rights & Duties.” The distinguished attendees included the Vice President of Ghana and other senior political officials, and attracted religious leaders from the Muslim and Christian communities, including the National Chief Imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu; the Chairman of the Hajj Board, Sheikh I.C. Quaye, who also chairs the Islamic Centre for Education Development; the Catholic Archbishop of Cape Coast, the Most Rev. Charles Palmer Buckle, and members of academia.

### **JUNE 27, ACCRA**

The Muslim World League signed historic agreements with the leadership in Ghana to provide support for Muslim and non-Muslim communities across the country. H.E. Dr. Al-Issa commended Ghanaian leaders for promoting religious tolerance and ensuring peaceful co-existence among followers of all faiths.

### **JULY 5, DAKAR, SENEGAL**

Senegalese President Macky Sall and H.E. Dr. Al-Issa convened an international conference in Dakar, where they gathered hundreds of Africa’s top intellectuals and scholars. At the event, Dr. Al-Issa received the highest state honor from President Macky Sall for his efforts “to spread the values of moderation and promote cooperation and harmony among followers of all cultures, religions and humanitarian initiatives.”

Hundreds of scientists, scholars and religious leaders gathered for the conference titled “Islamic Thought: Approach and Message.” The speakers and delegates “argued the importance of being guided by faith and the values of diverse civilization.” The MWL actively promotes rigorous intellectual enterprise and prestigious Muslim scholarship. For example, the Constituent Council is the MWL’s highest authority, consisting of 60 prominent Muslim scholars.”

🗨️ *All individuals must promote noble moral values and encourage responsible social practices. They should cooperate in fighting moral, environmental and familial challenges according to concepts shared by Islam and humanity.*

— The Charter of Makkah, concluded May 29 with the participation of 1,200 prominent Islamic figures from 139 countries to establish its key principles. The Charter was signed by His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, on May 31, 2019

### **JULY 5, DAKAR**

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa signed a cooperation agreement with the High Authority of Waqf, an Islamic endowment of property held in trust for charitable purposes throughout the country.



**JULY 5, DAKAR**

Expressing his unwavering support for youth education, H.E. Dr. Al-Issa participated in the opening ceremony at a new Muslim World League-sponsored school located outside Dakar.

**JULY 5, THIÈS, SENEGAL**

While in Senegal, H.E. Dr. Al-Issa laid the cornerstone for a wellness clinic and a center for Arab-Islamic Studies in Thiès, Senegal, the country's third largest city. Such efforts underscore how health and humanitarian efforts are two key components of the Muslim World League's mission around the world.



**JULY 7, RABAT, MOROCCO**

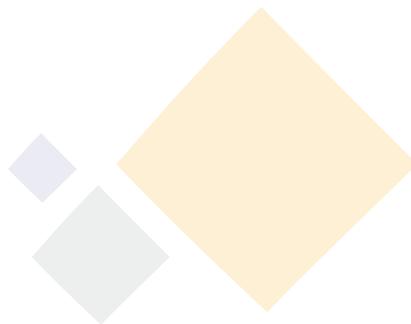
In Rabat, the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Muslim World League signed a cooperation and partnership agreement. Dr. Salim Mohammed Al-Malik, Director General of ISESCO and H.E. Dr. Al-Issa signed the agreement together.

**JULY 10**

In a powerful statement published by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), H.E. Dr. Al-Issa criticized attempts to politicize the Islamic ritual of Hajj, emphasizing instead the spiritual importance of pilgrimage and warning against any deviation from its intended purpose. The Muslim World League chief described the rise of political, sectarian, and partisan slogans as heresy, a week after Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei described the Hajj as "political work."

Leaders gather in Ghana to discuss the importance of co-existence and understanding among all religions.

Dr. Al-Issa receives greatest state honor from President of Senegal Macky Sall for his efforts to spread the values of moderation.



### JULY 17

The Muslim World League proudly announced His Majesty King Salman's invitation for families of victims from the Christchurch terror attack to perform Hajj. The Ambassador of New Zealand to the Kingdom, James Munro, stated, "This act of generosity is deeply appreciated by New Zealand and will be very meaningful for the families."

### JULY 17

In line with the United Nations' International Year of Moderation, the Muslim World League reiterated its commitment to combatting extremist thought and radicalism through the dissemination of messages of moderation, tolerance and peace.

### JULY 17, MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa received a warm welcome from the local community during his trip to Mozambique. During the trip, he underscored the Muslim World League's commitment to promoting cross-cultural understanding and unity at all levels.

### JULY 19, MECCA

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa opened the tower of the Organization for Relief, Welfare and Development in Mecca. Under construction for two years, the tower will be a hub for the Muslim World League's provision of critical humanitarian support and relief across the globe.

### JULY 21

One thousand pilgrims from Sudan were officially invited by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj this year as part of the program of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Hajj, Umrah and visit, which is implemented and supervised by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Call and Guidance. Out of the 1,000 pilgrims, 500 will be selected from the Sudanese army and family members of Sudanese who were killed while participating in the Arab Coalition's "Determination Storm and Restoring of Hope" operations.

trip through four great Russian cities, including Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan and Grozny. He promoted the cultural splendors and historical depths of Islam in Russia and celebrated traditions of religious tolerance in the country.

In April, the Secretary-General held a meeting with the Director of the Institute, Vitaly Naumkin, at which the two signed a cooperation agreement for the promotion of culture, science and education in Russia. The deal also promotes the concepts of moderation and national integration. ❖



### JULY 23

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa visited Russia to receive an honorary doctorate from the Russian Institute of Orientalism at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. In April, Dr. Al-Issa took a historic

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H.E. Dr. Al-Issa delivering critical humanitarian aid to vulnerable communities in Ghana.



# THE MWL & AFRICA: GIVING HOPE BY TAKING ACTION

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

## 🗨️ A Mega-Program for the African Continent.

— Al Riyadh Daily, July 3, 2019, describing the inauguration of orphan sponsorships and other developmental programs on the African continent by the Muslim World League.

In the Arabic language, *sadaqah* means, literally, “righteousness.” But in Islamic understanding, the word is defined as an act of “giving something to someone without expecting a substitute in return and with the intention of pleasing Allah.” The Muslim religion considers both humanitarian actions and the duty to help Muslims and non-Muslims alike as religious obligations to which all Muslims, rich and poor, are bound. And this sense of the term “humanitarian” is not limited to its general parameters of emergency or disaster relief, but encompasses social welfare in a broader sense. Muslims make donations to the disinherited with the aim of protecting themselves against misfortune. The texts and the Prophet’s prescriptions on this are many: “Charitable acts protect against a terrible death...” and “Charity shuts seventy doors of evil...” and again, “Charity extinguishes God’s anger and repels a terrible death...” It used to be traditional in Muslim societies to make a donation when someone was ill. While using the medical means available, the sick person or his family made a donation to the poor so as to benefit from God’s mercy.

This month we celebrate “hope in action” by chronicling the activities of H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa as he traveled to

the African continent from late June through late July on a multi-tiered mission fully dedicated to the highest ideals of *sadaqah*. First, his aim was to provide aid and charity to the staggering number of orphans in those countries as part of the MWL’s global program on children, one that has been a part of the organization’s mandate since its founding. Secondly, he sought to promote advances in health science and technology by providing African countries with cutting-edge solutions to crises ranging from unclean water and environmental pollution to cataract-induced blindness, both of which are tragically pervasive throughout Africa. Third, Dr. Al-Issa hosted international conferences in Dakar and Accra attracting the top Muslim scholars of the continent as part of the MWL Secretary General’s exhaustive worldwide efforts to promote tolerance and moderation. Fourth, he signed agreements for cooperation in those countries and in Rabat, Morocco, for the development of educational programs that will promote cultural and material advances in these richly historic yet economically challenged nations.

While engagement in Africa has long been the “right thing to do” on the part of international charitable and philanthropic organizations, the Islamic faith makes it clear that such activity is a basic moral duty and by no means a political expedient or social fashion. Quranic texts and hadiths make clear that charity and acts of humanitarianism are essential elements of religious practice for the Muslim. These Quranic and prophetic texts either oblige or strongly encourage charity and humanitarianism toward all people Muslim and non-Muslim alike. “For the

Muslim to undertake a humanitarian act is a way of receiving help from heaven, of erasing sins, and of meriting Paradise,” summarizes one scholar. Imperatives established by Islam (e.g. *zakat*, *waqf*, *kaffara*) historically have had a profound impact on people’s lives: the freeing of slaves, support for the most vulnerable, and the expansion of the educational and health-care system.

Today, faith-based Muslim NGOs, as exemplified by the Muslim World League, follow these texts to launch varied humanitarian programs in different domains. For most of us, life without family structure, proper nourishment or clean water is

unfathomable. Many vulnerable communities across Africa, however, are living with the harsh, everyday realities of poor health care, orphaned children, catastrophically polluted water-sources, and food insecurity. That is why the Muslim World League aims to always prioritize those most in need in more than a dozen countries across the Africa region. And it is why we honor the efforts this month of the indefatigable Dr. Al-Issa as he works—physically, intellectually and spiritually—to bring about a better future for the Continent. We call this “Hope in Action” and we observe it with both humility and pride. ❖



## Islamic Definitions of Charity:

**1.Zakat:** Obligatory payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property and used for charitable and religious purposes. Zakat is a fundamental pillar of Islam (the third) and of the same importance as the profession of faith, praying, fasting during Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca. It could be defined as a system which organizes the transfer of money from the well-off to the poor and needy and in money terms, for example, every Muslim should donate 2.5% of his annual means on condition that this money has been in his possession for more than one year.

**2.Waqf:** An endowment made by a Muslim to a religious educational or charitable cause. Waqf (continuous alms), according to Muslim tradition, consists of making an endowment of property for the benefit of a religious foundation or the common good and distributing the income amongst the needy. This must be real property or “quantifiable wealth” and this property should yield a continuous and a lasting profit. The majority of Muslim countries have ministers who work exclusively on the management of waqf.

**3.Fidyah & Kaffara:** Religious donations made in Islam when a fast (notably in Ramadan) is missed or broken. The donations can be of food or money and is used to feed those in need. They are mentioned in the Qu’ran which distinguishes the two but unifies them in one idea.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa meeting with the local community and delivering needed food aid.

Proud Ghanaian child smiling upon the arrival of the Muslim World League.



# HUMANITARIANISM

## AN ISLAMIC IMPERATIVE

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

“*Quranic texts and hadiths do not exclude the non-Muslim from humanitarian aid. This principle was often given tangible form. In the early years of hijra (the Hegira era, or Muslim calendar), there was a famine in Modar (Saudi Arabia). The Prophet organized a humanitarian convoy to help the inhabitants there who, at that time, were not converted to Islam.*

— Abu Bakr ibn Husayn Al Baihaki *The Paths of the Faith* (994-1066); Hadith no. 3319, Vol 3 no. 199

**Islam as a humanitarian imperative** is the fundamental reason for the very existence of the Muslim World League and the driving spirit that makes the breadth and depth of its work in Africa a permanent calling, and not merely a seasonal or occasional interest. Furthermore, what distinguishes the work of the MWL in its emphasis on charitable works is the diversity within the scope of its worldwide duties and responsibilities. This, too, is in keeping with the instruction of the Qur’an itself, which gives precise guidelines for how the structure and character of charity must look in order to achieve the proper expression of this most fulfilling standard of human engagement. These timeless values and teachings of the Qur’an and the prophetic examples (*Sunnah*) comprise, most specifically:

- **Sincerity (Ikhlas)** — In responding to need and suffering, the MWL’s efforts are driven by sincerity to God and the need to fulfil obligations to humanity.
- **Excellence (Ihsan)** — Addressing poverty is marked by striving for excellence in organizational efficiency and the personal conduct of MWL leadership in establishing a model to the people it serves.
- **Compassion (Rahma)** — Belief in the well-being of every life is of importance and requires immediate response to suffering brought on by natural disasters, poverty and injustice.
- **Social Justice (Adl)** — The MWL’s work is intended to fulfill the rights of the most vulnerable, working to bring about God-given, individual human potential through the development of intellectual and social capabilities and available resources.
- **Custodianship (Amana)** — The organization upholds its sacred duty of the charitable mandate of humanitarianism in Islam and thereby maintains accountability for its works.

In administering these duties, H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa has put into action the following structure for his humanitarian work not only in Africa, but in all countries in which the organization is active:

**1. A Global approach:** Religious texts motivating humanitarian action are very diverse and relate to all areas of aid, including food aid and the fight against famine. A saying (*hadith*) of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) states: "The best of alms is to feed the hungry..." During the Feast of Sacrifice, when each Muslim family sacrifices a sheep, Prophetic tradition recommends that they eat one third, offer one third to friends and give one third to the needy. Likewise, if a Muslim is unable to fast during the month of Ramadan because of a lengthy illness, for example, he must feed a needy person every day. Thus the ritual of the Ramadan fast can be replaced by the rite of charity.

Islam declares that he who refuses to share his food is outside Islam: "He who sleeps with a full stomach knowing his neighbor is hungry is not a believer..." Furthermore, verses five to

nine of Surah seventy-six in the Qur'an describe the pleasures in Paradise awaiting those who "for the love of God offer food to the poor, the orphan and the prisoner..."

**2. Sponsorship of orphans:** Islam pays particular attention to the situation of orphans and as testimony to this, a number of verses in the Qur'an demand kindness on their behalf, promising the worst punishment for those who ill-treat them and equally promising the highest rewards for those who look after them. The Qur'an goes so far as to treat a person who oppresses an orphan as a non-believer in the same way as one who denies the existence of God: "See the one who denies the religion, then such is the man who repulses the orphan with harshness and does not help feed the poor..." and "Those who unjustly use the property of orphans eat up a fire into their own bodies; they will soon be enduring a blazing fire..." One more quotation of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) reads: "God, I firmly condemn him who abuses the rights of these two vulnerable groups: orphans and women..."



## The International Organization for Relief, Welfare and Development

During H.E. Dr. Al-Issa's visit to Ghana, the MWL brought greater awareness of Islam's true values. The MWL delivered food aid to the vulnerable communities through its charitable arm, the International Organization for Relief, Welfare and Development. This provided H.E. Dr. Al-Issa an opportunity to meet with leaders and community members to discuss how interreligious dialogue helps bridge the divide many communities face. These are elements of the MWL's mission to advance the causes of generosity and cooperation among all people, regardless of religion, faith and creed.



H.E. meets with local religious leaders to provide food aid to community.

👉👉 *If the famine [in Arabia] were to continue, I would put one hungry person in each Muslim household because people would not disappear if they share.*

—Caliph Omar (584, Mecca-644, Medina), one of the most powerful and influential Muslim Caliphs in history. A senior companion of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), he succeeded Abu Bakr as the second Caliph of the Rashidun caliphate.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa meets with more than one hundred of Africa's top intellectual and religious scholars at interreligious conference in Ghana.



**“Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord and for the garden whose width is that of the whole of the heavens and the earth, prepared for the righteous, those who spend freely whether in prosperity or adversity who restrain anger and pardon all men, God loves those who do good...”**

—Qu’ran, verses 133 and 134 of Sura, describing how God reserves his love for generous benefactors

Replying to one of his companions who complained of a spiritual uneasiness, the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) advised him to look after orphans: “If you wish to have a tender heart and be able to realize your goals, have pity on orphans, touch their heads with your hand and feed them from your own food....” This *hadith* shows that the care of an orphan should be comprehensive, i.e. both material and spiritual. He vigorously encouraged sponsorship of such orphans, stating, “God’s favorite residence is that in which an orphan is well-treated....”

**3. Assistance to refugees:** In the time of the founding of Islam, the word “refugee” was not used in the same sense as it is today. However, since its birth, Islam has had to deal with all manner of refugee situations. The first concerned those Muslims persecuted by the non-believers in Mecca. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) told them to take refuge in Abyssinia (Ethiopia). When the persecution reached an unbearable level, he and his companions decided to emigrate to Medina, where a number of Muslims and sympathizers welcomed them. A golden rule for the treatment of refugees was established, maintaining the principle of brotherhood between the “*ansar*” (“helpers”, inhabitants of Medina defending the Prophet’s cause) and the “*muhajirun*” (“emigrants”, refugees from Mecca). According to this pact, each “*ansar*” should take care of one “*muhajir*”, including food, clothing, shelter and any other assistance needed until the “*muhajir*” could look after himself.

The Muslim religion also encourages humanitarian acts that will bring about lasting change in people’s lives. There are numerous *hadiths* on this subject, in one of which the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) says: “The good work which God likes the best is the one which lasts, even if it is small...” In another *hadith*, he affirms the continuity of the reward even after death: “When a man dies, his works stop bringing him a reward with the exception of three actions: continuous charity, a useful science and a pious son who invokes God...” And again, “He who gives alms is rewarded for as long as it is lasting....” Thus the

length of the reward is connected to the durability of the charitable action. Long-term actions encouraged by the religion include, for instance, actions that provide water and food, and the gift of tools. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) also promised a lasting reward for the sinking of wells: "Whoever digs a well will be rewarded until the Day of Judgement every time a human, a genie or an animal drinks from that well...."

**4. Micro-credit:** Micro-credits have proven effective in helping to eradicate poverty, and Islamic religious sources contain strong calls for action in this area. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) stated, "He who gives a dairy animal (a camel or cow) or who gives

a loan has the identical reward as one who frees a slave...." He added, "Every credit is alms...."

Other texts invite Muslims to be forgiving towards a borrower in difficulty, as in the following *hadith*: "He who wishes to be spared horrible tests on the Day of Judgement has only to make it easier for the borrower or erase his debts...." Another text states that "each overdue day is double charity...." In other citations, he promises "escape from the flames of hell" as a reward for the Muslim who cancels a debt or prolongs the time allowed for repayment. Finally, it should be noted that in the Muslim religion there is no interest payable on loans. ❖



## The International Islamic Relief Organization

**The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO)**—also known as the *International Organization for Relief, Welfare and Development*—is a charity based in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that was founded by the Muslim World League in 1978. It is a full member of the Conference of NGOs, where it serves on the board, and it has enjoyed consultative status at the United National Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) since 1995. It was the first Islamic NGO to gain observer status with the International Organization for Migration. The IIRO has worked in shared projects with the World Health Organization, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Program (WFP). Its seven main programs are social welfare, engineering, social development, emergency relief, health care, education and Qur'an teachings.



In Africa, the group is active in the following countries: Uganda, Chad, Tanzania, Comoros, South Africa, Lesotho, South Sudan, Mozambique, Niger, Benin, Djibouti, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Cameroon, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Togo, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Egypt, Mauritania and Nigeria.

*Please note: the organization is not to be confused with Islamic Relief, an NGO based in the United Kingdom.*



# THE DAKAR CONFERENCE: 'Islamic Thought: Approaches and Methods'

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

When the Muslim World League concluded its international conference on "Islamic Thought: Approach and Methods," which took place in the Senegalese capital of Dakar, the nature of the conference was quite different than those organized by the MWL in recent months. This time, the concentration was on the intellectual world of scholars and scientists as a critical influence in bringing about positive material change to the continent. Such distinguished individuals argued the importance of the human need to be guided by faith, and of the values of civilization, of proper human progress and the search to live an orderly and dignified life. They called for "building a mind capable of comprehending Islamic sciences and confronting extremism and violent ideas and their negative developments." The occasion was a far different approach to Africa than has generally been the case. Traditionally, such high-profile international conferences tend to be dominated by economic NGOs and political groups—approaches that often overlook the role of ideas and philosophical foundations in finding long-term solutions to present and ongoing issues.

Moustapha Niass, president of the National Assembly of Senegal, praised the MWL for launching programs designed to promote scientific and intellectual communication with different people and cultures. H.E. Sheikh Mbaye Niang, Minister

of Religious Affairs, noted that Islamic thought is defined by "open and flexible creations and properties guided by Islam," adding that the conference was being held at a time when its global context is marked by the escalation of violence in various religious and ethnic forms. "Many scientists and researchers have become more aware that this is the result of an intellectual crisis that has escalated and resulted in extremism and terrorism," he noted.

Madame Soham El-Wardini, Mayor of Dakar,

thanked the MWL for organizing the conference, hailing its pivotal role in promoting the values of moderation, especially in the face of extremist ideas. "Islamic thought extends bridges of communication with everyone confidently and capably," she said. A cooperation agreement was signed between the MWL and the High Authority of Waqf in Senegal covering the activation of endowments to promote and develop charity activities and the culture of philanthropy in Senegal.



*The first to enter Paradise are those who do charitable works.*

— Muhammed Al Bukhari (810-870 AD), Al-adabon al Moufrad, Hadith no. 1020. This famous work is a topical book of 1322 hadith addressing "the question of perfecting Muslim manners," inspired by the "immaculate character of the Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him)."

The honored speaker of the occasion, the MWL's own Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa, underlined the league's keenness to promote the true principles of Islam, which call for moderation and confronting hatred and extremism.

As Arab News reported on July 6, Dr. Al-Issa pointed out that Islamic thought "has enlightened the world with its mercy, humanity, justice, openness and



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa greets local children with the Ghanaian Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Cynthia Mamle Morrison.

tolerance,” stressing that modernity and authenticity are the main pillars of Islamic thought. The Secretary-General emphasized the importance of Islamic moderation “to fight ideological extremism.”

His Excellency also called for raising awareness about the importance of understanding religious texts and their significance, saying that “Shariah rules and fatwas change with the times and circumstances.” He further invited scholars to support “the formation of a good Muslim personality, especially for Muslim youths.”

The President of the Republic of Senegal, Macky Sall, decorated the Secretary General with the State Greatness Medal for his international efforts in “disseminating religious values of moderation, boosting cooperation between followers of cultures and religions, and his initiatives and humanitarian programs around the world.”

This honored occasion took place during President Sall’s meeting with Dr. Al-Issa at the Palace of Government in Dakar. The President further praised the outstanding efforts made by the Mecca-based MWL for putting together the international conference in Senegal, with its emphasis on sharing intellectual values and the excellence of otherwise little-known African-Muslim scholarship with the world at large.

His Excellency thanked the Senegalese president, confirming that the services of the Muslim World League around the world and particularly on the African continent represent “an Islamic and humanitarian duty ordained by the values of the Islamic religion, especially in the promotion of harmony among followers of religions, cultures and ethnicities.” ❖



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa greets His Excellency Moustapha Niasse, President of the National Assembly of Senegal before international religion conference.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa posing with President Macky Sall after receiving the greatest state honor.



## Senegal

- Senegal has long been held up as a model of Islamic democracy. It has remained free of Islamic extremism.
- Accusations of human rights violations and corruption are low, and ethnic tensions have rarely escalated. President Sall has proposed standardizing the curriculum in Islamic schools to ensure that radical teachings are eliminated.
- Islam is the predominant religion in Senegal, and 92% of the population is estimated to be Muslim, following the Sunni tradition with Sufi cultural themes.
- The population of this West African, Franco-phone nation may be mostly Muslim, but people of different faiths intermingle freely, and their religious traditions have become intertwined as well. Religious celebrations like the Christian observance of Lent have been influenced by Muslim traditions. A local professor of Islamic Civilization, Abdoul Aziz Kébé, writes about how Christian priests “explicitly give the Muslim example of strict discipline” to their congregations. Senegalese religion scholars maintain that this is one important way that traditions are transmitted across cultures.
- Islam has had a presence in Senegal since the 11th century, beginning with the conversion of the popular King War Jabi of Takur in 1040. Islam grew to become the religion of the wealthy and merchant classes, and the country began to attract exploring and colonizing powers in the 15th century, including the Portuguese, the British and the French.

“Many scientists and researchers have become more aware that intolerance is the result of an intellectual crisis that has escalated and resulted in extremism and terrorism.”

— H.E. Sheikh Mbaye Niang, Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Senegal, the Dakar conference, July 2019

It is an Islamic and humanitarian duty ordained by the values of the Islamic religion to promote harmony among followers of religions, cultures and ethnicities.

— H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, the Dakar Conference, July 2019 Muslim World League and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, April 29, 2019.

- Islam expanded substantially during the concentrated period of French rule, starting in the late 19th century when the Senegalese “turned to religious authority rather than colonial administration.” The country became independent in 1960.
- *The Great Mosque of Touba*, the second largest city in Senegal after Dakar, was founded in 1887 and completed in 1963. It is the largest building in the city and one of the largest mosques in Africa, with five minarets, three large domes and a capacity of 7000. Its founder was Amadou Bamba, a highly influential Muslim spiritual leader of the 19th century.
- *The Grand Mosque of Dakar* was opened in 1964 by Hasan II, King of Morocco, and Senegalese President Leopold Senghor. Richly decorated on the interior, the exterior is stylistically similar to the famous tomb of Mohammed V in Casablanca.
- *The Institute Islamique de Dakar* is situated within the Grand Mosque and is administered by the Senegalese Minister of Education.

H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa opened the tower of the Organization for Relief, Welfare & Development in Mecca on July 17-18, after two years of construction. The tower is a hub for the MWL’s provision of critical humanitarian support & relief across the globe.



Celebrating with youth in Accra after international conference.

Dr. Al-Issa receives a warm welcome from youth and local community in Ghana.

Senegalese schoolchildren excitedly greet H.E. Dr. Al-Issa as he arrives at ceremony for the new school sponsored by the Muslim World League.



# DOING GOOD IN GHANA

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

Ghana has the reputation of being one of the most historically rich and cultured of the sub-Saharan countries. However, the country still suffers from a 28% poverty rate and a high rate of HIV infection. HIV affects more than a quarter million individuals in a population of 25 million, and children are hit the hardest. Nearly forty percent of the country's population is under the age of 14, and 1.1 million children in Ghana have lost either one or both of their parents. According to SOS Children's Villages, a Vienna-based international organization of 118 national associations, currently some 27,000 Ghanaian children are living with HIV and about 160,000 have been orphaned due to the AIDS disease and face a life without their biological parents.

Children in Ghanaian orphanages often still have both parents or some other extended family, but live in orphanages because of their families'

extreme poverty. Sadly, corruption has infested this most tragic of situations: In the Ashanti region of the country, there are an estimated 25 orphanages, but only four have been accredited, according to the latest statistics available (2013). Such conditions give rise to so-called "illegal homes" into which children are placed even though their parents are still alive.

In Ghana, H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa launched development and pastoral projects in the country with the support of government and religious figures. He participated in the organization's International Festival of Orphans, attended by thousands of orphans at El Wak Stadium, alongside the Ghanaian Minister of Gender, Child and Social Protection. It was then that Dr. Al-Issa announced his organization's sponsorship of thousands of orphans and the establishment of vocational and technical centers dedicated to them.

"This comes as part of the huge program implemented by the MWL in Africa to support the continent's affected, poor and victims of crises and disasters without any religious, ethnic or political discrimination," a spokesperson for the organization said. "It covers projects to provide fresh water, food baskets, medical services, orphan care and mosques that benefit the continent's Muslims." The Muslim World League has always given special importance to orphans, considered one of the most vulnerable categories and subject to various problems due to the absence of one or both parents, particularly in poor societies. It is why H.E. Dr. Al-Issa launched MWL's international humanitarian



The Most Reverend Charles Gabriel Palmer-Buckle, an Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church, delivers remarks on promoting citizenship and co-existence.

project, through which it provides thousands of orphans from numerous countries with support and financial, health, social and educational care.

The MWL has also become one of the most prominent international actors concerned with water, having dug thousands of wells, set up water networks, provided purification plants and organized programs to raise awareness about the importance of water resources. In this framework, Dr. Al-Issa inaugurated a project to supply a large number of deprived people with fresh water, where they previously had to travel long distances to find drinkable sources. He also inaugurated one of the largest mosques built under his organization's custodianship to serve thousands of Muslims in Ghana before launching the medical campaign to combat eye diseases, which aims at treating hundreds of beneficiaries in the framework of a project to combat blindness in Africa. The projects are a continuation of the Muslim World League's series of programs and initiatives in Africa, generated from a belief in its global humanitarian role and the need to strengthen its alliances and agreements with official bodies, civil society and humanitarian organizations. You may read more about the boreholes water supply program and advances in eye care elsewhere in this issue.

The orphan program, for its part, is worldwide. For example, this past May, Dr. Al-Issa celebrated a World Orphan Day in Islamabad as part of the organization's international humanitarian efforts. One of the many partnerships serving orphanages is Pakistan Sweet Home, which operates the Al Furqan School for Orphans in Karachi, serving more than 1,000 orphans. The International Islamic Relief Organization, one of the sub-charities of the Muslim World League, provided assistance to the victims of the 2005 earthquake in the affected areas and regions of Pakistan, which were virtually isolated and inaccessible.

In fact, so extensive has been the organization's work on children and orphans that just over ten years ago the prestigious UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Interna-

tional Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), one of the charitable sub-organizations of the MWL described in an earlier section of this issue, to strengthen cooperation and support for children's rights, health, equality and protection across all countries. "Building partnerships with leading organizations like the International Islamic Relief Organization is the result of our trust in their continuous and effective efforts to protect and secure a better future for children," said Dr. Ayman Abu Laban, then the UNICEF representative for Gulf and other Arab countries and now based in Turkey for the organization.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa presents gift to Vice President of Ghana Mahamudu Bawumia.

H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa also met with Ghanaian Ashanti King Asantheme Tutu II, who received the Secretary General in Kumaji or Kumasi, the Ashanti capital. The King welcomed the visit of that delegation and praised the League's humanitarian efforts in Africa, citing its care for people from different religions and backgrounds without discrimination. Dr. Al-Issa visited several educational facilities in Kumasi and established a food-aid campaign to help residents there.



# THE GHANA CONFERENCE

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

A highly energized international symposium aimed at fostering unity among Muslims and adherents of other religious faiths was held in Accra on June 27 with the theme, "Religious minorities – Rights and Obligations." Organized by the Muslim World League in collaboration with the Islamic Centre for Education and Development, the symposium attracted religious leaders from the Muslim and Christian communities, including the National Chief Imam, Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu; the Chairman of the Hajj Board and the Islamic Centre for Education Development, Sheikh I.C. Quaye; the Catholic Archbishop of Ghana, the Most Rev. Charles Palmer Buckle; and a number of scholars. The event was spearheaded by the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Muhammad Bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, who called Ghana a "model of tolerance and moderation."

Ghana's Vice-President, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, told the gathering that the fundamental principle underpinning the policies of the government was to ensure that no group of people, particularly the minority in society, was left out of the development process. Dr. Bawumia described faith as "the cohesive vehicle through which morals that guided humanity were shaped, given form and identity, while religion, in its broad sense, was the communal architecture that societies had developed to organize and capture our faith." "If we rightly identify religion as the bedrock of a moral and positive society that has come to us from God, then societies must ensure that the rights of religious minorities are respected," he said.

The Vice-President paid tribute to Dr. Al-Issa, whom he commended for his special interest in orphans and his role in offering practical solutions to challenges of the youth.

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa noted that the recent visit of the National Chief Imam to the Christ the King Catholic Church in Accra symbolised a nation ready and willing to give peace a thriving environment to flourish. "If, indeed, this is the chemistry and social architecture of Ghana as a country, then we must at all times commit to exhibit harmonious traits towards one another. We must at all times respect one another's faith, whether majority or minority," he stressed. He also said that while the state had a role in ensuring that the rights of religious minorities were protected, it was equally the responsibility of minorities to conduct themselves in accordance with the law for the greater good of society.



**"If we rightly identify religion as the bedrock of a moral and positive society that has come to us from God, then societies must ensure that the rights of religious minorities are respected."**

—Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, Vice President of Ghana, at the MWL-organized Ghana conference, June-July 2019

The President of the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Most Rev. Philip Naameh, commended efforts by Ghana to involve all religions in national activities. He explained that the participation and inclusion of students of other faiths in the activities of Catholic schools was not for conversion but for discipline. In view of this structured balance between the Muslim and Catholic-Christian populations of the country, H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa described Ghana as “a country of harmony where people coexisted peacefully,” noting that it was “an inspiration to the rest of the world.”

“ You are a country of harmony where people have coexisted peacefully, and you are an inspiration to the rest of the world on religious tolerance and integration.”

— H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and Sheikh Dr. Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu, Chief Imam of Ghana, meet at interreligious conference in Ghana.

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa delivering speech at International religious cooperation event.

# VISIONARIES:

## THE MWL COMBATS BLINDNESS IN AFRICA

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

More than 40% of the population in Dakar, Senegal, lives below the poverty line, making access to healthcare a significant obstacle. The Muslim World League supports the Senegalese people by providing hundreds of life-changing cataract operations free of charge. The mission is not a new one: In October 2017, Senegalese Foreign Minister Siddiq Kaba sent a letter of appreciation to the MWL for conducting an eye medical camp, praising in particular its Dakar office.

In fact, the Muslim World League's self-appointed mission to combat blindness is particularly dedicated. In January 2019, during the course of his earlier African tour, the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa, inaugurated one of the MWL projects to combat blindness in Africa in

the Burundian capital Bujumbura, where a charitable hospital project had opened. The project was in cooperation with the Ministry of Health of Burundi and the Burundian Health Minister, Dr. Nkomana Tadi. H.E. Mr. Edouard Nduwimana of the governmental oversight committee of Burundi and a number of ophthalmologists at the hospital were present for the inauguration. Dr. Al-Issa was briefed on the first operation to remove cataracts in that program. This strategy, too, is a part of a grand-scale initiative of the MWL to combat blindness on the African continent, carried out by its subsidiary, the International Organization for Relief, Welfare & Development (IIRO).

While in Bujumbura, H.E. Dr. Al-Issa visited the main Senior Citizens' Home, the Children's Protection Center and the International Women's Union in a spirit



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa meets with local surgeons about the cataract's operation performed at the hospital.

of solidarity and encouragement. He emphasized the Muslim World League's pledge to communicate with everyone in order to provide support and help and to serve humanity without religious or ethnic discrimination. This meaning is at the heart of Islam's human values, in which every kind action to a human soul is rewarded, the highest gift of which is the dignity of fraternal human relations.

The Muslim World League has performed substantial humanitarian work in Africa for some time. The MWL, represented by one of its charity wings, the Interna-

tional Association for Relief, Care and Development (IARCD), launched last November (2018) a series of civil, humanitarian and health projects in Africa as part of its growing program for the continent. It carried out a heart surgery program for the elderly, distributed aid and subsistence to 14,000 orphans and implemented a program to fight disease in Sudan's eastern state of Kassala. The Sudanese government honored the Mecca-based organization for its efforts in providing assistance and, in particular, its work in helping to combat widespread "chikungunya," a devastating fever spread through an airborne virus.



## Stories from real life: MWL in the field

As reported by Voice of America, there are 18 million people worldwide who can't see the shadow of a hand move across their face because they are blind from cataracts. In places where the margins for survival are thin, the blind are often plunged into greater poverty and even early death. Poor families cannot afford to lose a worker, or to feed and care for someone who is helpless. "They call it a 'mouth without hands,'" says one field doctor who has worked extensively in the region. Modern surgery with artificial lens implantation could be done quickly, outside hospitals, at a cost of only about \$25 per patient. This technique has been refined by Western medicine and also by great advances in Saudi technology. The process allows cataracts to be removed in one motion, through a sutureless incision. Almost all who undergo the procedure have normal vision the next day.

The MWL leads "eye camps," sponsoring visiting eye surgeons, many from Saudi Arabia, to perform hundreds of surgeries over a period of weeks in remote areas far from hospitals. Doctors note that the techniques involved are almost the same as in advanced Western hospitals, but the pace is much faster. Observers note that there is a kind of assembly-line production, where a doctor is just moving from patient to patient. Over the course of two weeks in February-March 2019 in Burundi, for example, MWL teams performed several dozen such surgeries.



Dr. Al-Issa meets with members of the community that have been treated for cataracts.

# CLEAN ENVIRONMENT FOR A CLEAR FUTURE:

## THE BOREHOLES PROJECT

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

It is well known that far too many people lack access to clean water in parts of Africa. People, often children, are forced to walk miles each day to reach the nearest water source. According to various water-research NGOs, 70% of diseases in Ghana are caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation, while 22% of the population rely on surface water to meet their daily water needs, leaving them vulnerable to water-related illness and disease. The Muslim World League launched the League Boreholes Project to provide clean water to the community. Government has activated a procurement process with funding from the World Bank for the award of contracts towards drilling 250 boreholes to improve water and sanitation situation in the Upper West Region.

Water-supply and sanitation technology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are well positioned to tackle this immense challenge. One of the main challenges is water scarcity. In order to overcome water scarcity, substantial investments have been undertaken in seawater desalination, water distribution, sewerage and wastewater treatment. (For example, today about 50% of drinking water in Saudi Arabia comes from desalination, 40% from the mining of non-renewable groundwater and only 10% from surface water in the mountainous southwest of the country. The capital, Riyadh, located in the heart of the country, is supplied with desalinated water pumped from the Persian Gulf over a distance of 467 km, or approximately 290 miles.

Water is provided at nominal cost to residential users, and since 2000, the government has increasingly relied on the private sector to operate water and sanitation infrastructure, beginning with desalination and wastewater treatment plants. Since the creation of the National Water Company (NWC) in 2008, the operation of urban water distribution systems in the four largest cities has gradually been delegated to private companies as well.

Such Saudi know-how is what has allowed the Mecca-based Muslim World League the ability to call upon the top specialists and to gather the most efficient resources to address the crisis in Ghana. Dr. Hafiz Bin-Salih, Ghana's Upper West Regional Minister, made this known during the first ordinary meeting of the Upper West Regional said Coordi-



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and local schoolchildren flip-on water after launching the watering well project.

nating Council (RCC) for year 2019. He said that the elaborate borehole project had been rolled out to provide potable water to vast majority of the people (particularly those in rural communities lacking water) and that the MWL would be part of the brain trust to make it happen. In meeting H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa, the Ghanaian minister learned that although the MWL works in the capacity of a humanitarian organization founded on Islamic principles of charity and grace, the organization is able to call upon the right people with the right experience to put into effect a successful boreholes plan.

This spring, Dr. Bin Saleh announced that under the Ministry of Special Development Initiative, sixty-nine solar-powered, limited mechanized boreholes and sixty-nine ten-seater water-closet institutional toilets were under construction in various communities across the country's eleven provincial districts. The MWL will provide logistics and support for all these projects, and each borehole will serve 300 residents.



## The Story of a Gold Coast Village: Water as Life

Nsuo Ase is a small village of about 105 people, located in the Akuapem Mountains of the Eastern Region. The main occupation of the people of Nsuo Ase is farming, growing crops such as maize, yam, palm, plantain, banana and vegetables. About 90% of the people in the village are uneducated. A few years ago, the people of the village were provided with a basic school to improve the educational opportunities of children. Residents strongly understand the concept of respect to one's religion. Religions practiced are Christian, Muslim and traditionalist. A yearly festival is observed called Odwira, a celebration of national identity by the Akan, Ashanti or Asante people of Ghana, in an area once known as the Gold Coast. For many years, the people of Nsuo Ase have been struggling to gain access to clean drinking water, and have had to rely on an unsafe stagnant water source contaminated by the heavy use of synthetic agricultural chemicals. In addition, free-range livestock share the source, which results in widespread gastrointestinal illness. The aim of this project is to build a water system to serve the needs of the community. Pipes will be run to Nsuo Ase from a village located about 950 meters away, and a 2,000-litre plastic water tank will be installed for water



The Muslim World League successfully launches watering well for local community in Ghana.

storage, mounted on a 5 square foot platform. A 2HP (horse power) electric pump will be used to elevate the water to the tank. Organized by the firm H2O Africa Care, the program will be part of the ambitious new Ghanaian project to build an extensive borehole network, which includes agreements concluded by H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana during the visit of the Secretary General to that country in late June and early July. *Additional information from Water Charity, an NGO focused on water development on the African continent*

The stunning Gold Coast of Ghana.  
Photo credit: All Africa Facts ([allafricafacts.com](http://allafricafacts.com))



# MOROCCO AND THE CULTURE OF TOLERANCE

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

**On July 7 at its headquarters in Rabat**, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Muslim World League signed a cooperation and partnership agreement at the opening session of ISESCO's Joint Commission meeting. The agreement was signed by ISESCO Director General Dr. Salim Mohammed Al-Malik and the Mecca-based organization's Secretary General, Dr. Al-Issa.

In a nutshell, the agreement provides for cooperation between the two organizations in holding conferences, seminars, forums, meetings, workshops, training sessions and joint programs. These events will revolve around an ambitious strategic plan that

includes: (1) "disseminating the correct understanding of Islam and its noble values; (2) combating extremism and hate speech; (3) promoting dialogue among followers of civilizations, religions and cultures; (4) celebrating the pioneers of Islamic civilization and their contributions in building human civilization; (5) fostering volunteer humanitarian action, especially for women, children, and youth; (6) teaching Arabic to non-Arabic speakers and highlighting the values of middle stance and moderation in such curricula; (7) promoting information and communication as means of spreading peace, moderation and tolerance; (8) intensifying the presence of Islamic culture on the international cultural scene; and (9) bolstering the cultural and educational action of Muslims outside the Islamic world."

As reported by Arab News, by virtue of this agreement, the two parties will set up a Joint Commission that will meet regularly for follow-up, planning, implementation and evaluation. The two organizations will also prepare a detailed annual cooperation programme including specific projects and activities, implementation mechanisms and each party's commitments. Moreover, the two parties have agreed to exchange their publications, studies, periodicals and other materials in areas of common interest and invite each other to take part in programs and activities of common interest to both ISESCO and the Muslim World League.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa signs partnership agreement with Dr. Salim Mohammed Al-Malik, Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), focused on cooperation to disseminate the true values of moderate Islam.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa meets with senior leadership in Morocco.



## King Mohammed VI Puts Morocco at Forefront of Religious Tolerance Efforts

As reported in *The North Africa Post* on July 20, the leadership of King Mohammed VI and his steadfast commitment to promote the values of tolerance, inter-religious dialogue and coexistence at home and abroad “stand as a distinctive feature of Morocco in the last two decades.” The King’s Muslim authority as Commander of the Faithful and his lineal descent from the Prophet Mohammed gives him an edge in promoting the lofty values of Islam and taking action against extremism.

“As Commander of the Faithful and defender of the faith, I am committed to protecting the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims alike,” said the Sovereign in a speech affirming that Moroccan Jews enjoy the same constitutional and political rights as their Muslim fellow citizens and play a key role in the country’s economy.

In 2010, King Mohammed VI initiated a program to refurbish hundreds of ancient synagogues and Jewish cemeteries scattered throughout Morocco. Since then, the kingdom has spent millions of dollars to repair nearly 200 of these sites. Christian residents in Morocco and temporary visitors have always practiced their faith freely in churches.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa discuss the necessity for peace and moderation in Islam.



# GUEST ESSAY

## HIS EXCELLENCY SHEIKH DR. MOHAMMAD BIN ABDULKARIM AL-ISSA

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019



**“As head of the Muslim World League, I see Islamic leaders calling for tolerance more than ever.”**

— Newsweek, July 10, 2019

As tensions mount in the Middle East, it might be easy from the West to imagine the Islamic world locked in an internecine political struggle, with each side wielding threats of open conflict and the violent rhetoric of exclusion.

Beyond the testy politics, however, Islamic religious leaders are speaking in greater unison than ever before. The message we are advancing is one of moderate Islam, and the promotion of peace, tolerance and love.

In May, I gathered with more than 1,200 Muslim leaders, scholars, academics and religious teachers in Mecca for the Muslim World League’s Conference on Moderation. We represented more than 139 countries and 27 different Islamic sects. Our four days of discussions focused on combating the global rise in hate speech and political intolerance plaguing so many of our communities.

We did not obsess over Shiite vs. Sunni or the questions of theological interpretation that have proved so divisive over time. Certainly, no one in our congregation recited “Death to America,” “A curse on the Jews” or any of the other political slogans so often deployed by the extremists, and so regularly replayed in television hits, newspaper quotes and rapid-fire retweets.

Instead, our mission centered on advancing harmony among Muslims, and coexistence between Muslims and everyone else. After the horrifying terrorist attacks on the Islamic community in Christchurch, New Zealand, and similar atrocities against synagogues in the United States and churches in Sri Lanka, we know we have a global problem.

Our solution is the Charter of Mecca, a document of groundbreaking frankness that received the endorsement of the entirety of the Islamic scholars who participated. It received political backing as well through its first signatory, Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with school children in Senegal.

The charter's 30 points send a clear message not just to the Muslim world but to the entire global community and worshippers of all faiths: We must put aside our differences and embrace our religious and cultural diversity. For isolated and independent of one another, we will never overpower the voices of hate.

We have a great challenge before us. Everywhere we look, we see old divides and outdated superstitions calcifying. We see the forces of intolerance and fanaticism finding new followers, spurred by social media and a culture that magnifies our disagreements and ignores our commonalities.

How do we win this battle? From the Muslim world, it starts with commitments the likes of which we have never formally adopted or connected to tolerance.

Our charter demands that we safeguard natural resources and manage industrial development; support climate treaties, fight hunger and poverty; eliminate disease and discrimination, and preserve the human rights of all people, including women and minorities. It includes a special obligation to empower women through social equality and economic opportunity, and to reject any effort that is disrespectful or marginalizing toward women.

We will take each of these commitments home with us, and exhort our community members to adhere to them. We must.

It is impossible not to feel that we have reached an inflection point in history. We can climb the roughhewn ladder toward greater unity and cooperation, or slide down the convenient chute of conflict and divisiveness.

For me, the choice is obvious. It is the only viable choice. As the Charter of Mecca instructs us, we must build cultural and religious ties among each other, deepen understanding between different communities, construct civilized partnerships, stand arm-in-arm against hatred and declare now and forevermore that every culture is a reflection of God's will, with an inviolable right to exist. We must view every conflict in the world as an opportunity for dialogue.

Islam can play a leading role. The charter provides a blueprint for how the Muslim world should interact with other faith traditions, including precise guidance on how we ought to welcome differences and affirm our common ethical, social and environmental values. It demands that we go beyond mere theory and empty slogans by taking concrete actions to reconcile, not radicalize, our future generations

In short, it compels us to we choose the ladder over the chute, no matter how difficult the climb. This is the objective at the heart of the Charter of Mecca, which we would ask everyone to embrace. We must all be leaders in building the world we want to live in.

*The views expressed in this article are the author's own.*



# HISTORICAL ESSAY

## CELEBRATING ISLAMIC ART IN AFRICA: A WORLD OF HIDDEN TREASURES, GLOBAL REACH

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | July 2019

**The ambitious exhibition** “Caravans of Gold” debuted in January 2019 and enjoyed a highly successful six-month run. It showcases the splendor and power of the lost kingdoms and commercial centers of Islamic Africa, using centuries-old artifacts from sites around the Sahara Desert and artwork from West and North Africa, Europe and the Middle East that reveal the reach of Saharan networks.

It was a first-of-its-kind show that opened at the Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University and, having closed there on July 21, will move next to Toronto and Washington, D.C. The works highlight new archaeological studies, and emerging knowledge in recent years have greatly enhanced scholars’ understanding of the central importance of West Africa in the 8th to 16th centuries. Hundreds of fragments — evidence of global trade systems — have been unearthed from sites such as Tadmekka and Gao in Mali and Sijilmasa in Morocco.



*The richness of [these] collections has made us a very important resource for telling the story of Africa’s significant contribution toward civilization.*

— Yusuf Usman, former director general of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria and a contributor to the “Caravans of Gold” publication.

“These ‘fragments in time’ are key to conjuring a new vision of the past,” said one curator of the exhibit. “We had a unique opportunity to use art history to contextualize these fragments and to use the special context of the museum to make visible the story of the thriving African cities and empires that were foundational to the global medieval world.”

“This exhibition is an act of retrieval,” said Lisa Corrin, Director of the Block Museum, “bringing together far-flung links to the past in order to correct and enlarge previous scholarly interpretations of medieval Africa. We are inviting visitors to read fragments, as archaeologists do, to imagine the past.”

By exploring the global impact of Saharan trade routes on a medieval economy fueled by gold, the exhibition upended historical misconceptions and demonstrates Africa’s influence on medieval Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and beyond. “Caravans of Gold” will next travel to the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto in September and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa presents gift to the Ghanaian Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Cynthia Mamle Morrison, at international conference in Accra.

in Washington in April 2020. A total of 250 artworks and fragments spanning five centuries and a vast geographic expanse will be showcased, and the exhibition features loans from partner museums and institutions in Mali, Morocco and Nigeria, including many items which have never been presented in North America.

The exhibit was a fresh journey into celebrating Africa's historic and poorly recognized global significance. Supported in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Buffett Institute at Northwestern University, among many other funding organizations, "Caravans of Gold" was the result of many years of effort, especially by Northwestern University, to leverage by global partnerships to produce greater impact. The Block Museum spent years building strong relationships with curators, scholars, staff and public officials at partner institutions in Mali, Morocco, and Nigeria. The museum secured loans for iconic artworks and objects that have never traveled outside their home countries, including a near life-sized copper seated figure from Tada and a rope-entwined vessel from Igbo Ukwu in Nigeria. American literary scholar and cultural critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the host of the PBS series *Africa's Great Civilizations*, said the exhibition is significant and timely."

The legacy of medieval trans-Saharan exchange has largely been omitted from Western historical narratives and art histories, and certainly from the way that Africa is presented in art museums. According to its curators, the exhibit was conceived "to shine a light on Africa's pivotal role in world history through the tangible materials that remain."

In a story of the collection on the website of Northwestern University, Yusuf Usman, former director general of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria and a contributor to the "Caravans of Gold" publication, believes this collaboration is an essential opportunity for museum goers and exhibition partners. "The richness of our collections has made us a very important resource for telling the story of Africa's significant contribution toward civilization," Usman said.

The exhibition includes an "unprecedented" number of loans from the national collections of Mali, Morocco and Nigeria, never before seen in the United States, including from Mali "irreplaceable terracotta sculptures, manuscripts and the delicate remains of woven indigo-dyed cloth from the medieval period that are among Africa's oldest surviving textiles." From Nigeria come sculptures

in bronze and terracotta, some dating to the 9th century. And from Morocco there are gold coins, glazed ceramics and carved stucco architectural embellishments.

Works that highlight the cultural blur of borders and territories have pride of place in the exhibition. The terracotta figures from the Bankoni Region of Mali, on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago, are

self-representations of people who participated in trans-Saharan trade. A deeply hued 14th-century Italian painting of the crucifixion covered with gold leaf, on loan from the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, is one example of the treasures on view from the Western canon. In the context of the exhibition, that work — ornamented with gold that likely was transported along Saharan caravan routes — takes on entirely new dimension.



## **The Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA): Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, Northwestern University**

ISITA is the first research center in North America specifically devoted to the study of Islam in Africa. Its founders, John O. Hunwick and Rex Sèan O’Fahey, built upon their career-long efforts to document and study the Islamic intellectual tradition in Africa, and also on Northwestern University’s longstanding tradition of excellence in this area.

A history of distinguished faculty, combined with the Herskovits Library of African Studies’ unique collection of Arabic manuscripts from West Africa, has established Northwestern as the undisputed hub for research and graduate training in the field of Islam in Africa.

### **The Arts of Islam in Africa Initiative (AIA)**

ISITA is launching a new, multidisciplinary initiative that will examine and increase awareness of artistic traditions that are among the most profound yet remarkably accessible aspects of Africa’s Islamic heritage. From calligraphy to clothing, music to mosque architecture, poetry and the psalmody of the Qur’an to pottery, painting, weaving, and digital media, these

arts embody and bring together African Islamic cosmologies, talismanic sciences, metaphysics, mythology, material cultures, ethics, histories, and much more. They point to a deeper understanding of the history, politics, socio-economics, values, world-views, personal experiences, and philosophies of the artists and their communities and traditions. While these artistic traditions are vital and popular on the continent and abroad, they are relatively understudied and under-appreciated in the academy.

In April 2019, ISITA hosted a brainstorming and planning session at Northwestern to formalize the initiative, assess the current state of the field, and chart an agenda of research and activities. More information about AIA will be available on the University website in coming months.

For more information, please see the institutional website of the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought at the Buffet Center at: <https://isita.buffett.northwestern.edu/>



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