

Charter of Building Bridges between Islamic Sects

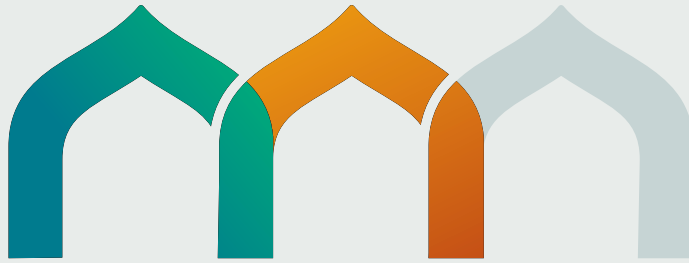
IFRC: MWL's support helps saving lives

Combating Islamophobia: MWL welcomes UN appointment of Special Envoy

Gaza: Growing malnutrition among children



CONFERENCE ON
BUILDING BRIDGES
BETWEEN ISLAMIC SECTS
CONVENED IN MAKKAH



المؤتمر الدولي
بناء الجسور بين
المذاهب الإسلامية

The Global Conference For Building Bridges
Between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects

THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE JOURNAL

"All of the people are the children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust."

Prophet Muhammad
Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3955



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"We are delighted at the Muslim World League to launch the first conference of this kind, in the sacred city of Makkah, during the blessed month of Ramadan, in an extension to the principles of the Charter of Makkah."

Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE

A Bridge Between Peoples

Dialogue on the Road

This issue of the MWL Journal comes to you in a new form with changes in style, presentation of topics and the way they are tackled, with the contributions of an international team of writers covering political, social, humanitarian, religious, health and cultural issues.

As we continue to walk the path of dialogue, under the guidance of His Excellency Dr. Mu-hammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, our journal is increasingly attentive to events taking place around us, and ever more supportive of the community of believers that inhabit all corners of the globe. We are certain that dialogue is essential for peaceful coexistence, and so is the adherence to God's commandments of mercy and justice.

The many trips undertaken by Dr. Al-Issa in the past few months, across Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the USA, have reinforced the bridge of dialogue, which most of the world's religious and political leaders see as the way forward.

The issue covers the Muslim World League's conference on Building Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects, which was held in Makkah during the blessed month of Ramadan, under the generous patronage of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz. The conference issued a charter that provides a roadmap to strengthen the bonds of Islamic brotherhood among various sects in a significant modern context.

The year 2023, unfortunately, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres puts it, "has been a year of enormous suffering, violence and climate chaos," which incites us to promote justice, dialogue and environmental awareness with all our might.

Dear reader, this is the Ramadan issue of the Journal. It is a special time for us to be close to the vulnerable and those in need in every part of our planet and it is also an opportunity for one to make changes toward a healthier lifestyle. ■



المؤتمر الدولي
بناء الجسور بين
المذاهب الإسلامية
The Global Conference For Building Bridges
Between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects

تحت رعاية كريمة من خادم الحرمين الشريفين الملك
سلمان بن عبدالعزيز آل سعود
حفظه الله ورعاؤه

مكة المكرمة | المملكة العربية السعودية
الأحد 7 - 8 رمضان 1445 هـ الموافق 17 - 18 مارس 2024 م



THE GLOBAL CONFERENCE on Building Bridges Between Islamic Schools of Thought Launched in Makkah

By
MWL
MAKKAH



The Global Conference on Building Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects commenced in Makkah on Sunday, March 17th, under the patronage of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz. Organized by the Muslim World League, with widespread participation from representatives of many Islamic sects and denomina-

tions, the event was inaugurated by His Excellency the Secretary General of the MWL and the Chairman of the Organization of Muslim Scholars, Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa. "We are delighted at the Muslim World League to launch the first conference of this kind, in the sacred city of Makkah and during the blessed month of Ramadan, in an extension to the



principles of the Charter of Makah,” said Dr. Al-Issa.

The conference issued the Charter for Building Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects, which outlines guiding principles and important references that aim to construct bridges of fraternity and cooperation among Islamic sects for the benefit of the Islamic Ummah.

His Eminence the Grand Muft of Saudi Arabia, President of the Council of Senior Scholars, and Chairman of the Supreme Council of the MWL, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al Al-Sheikh, gave the inaugural welcoming speech, in which he emphasized that Islam is a religion of unity that commands coali-

tion and unity of word and rank and warns against division and discord. He said that the Prophet’s Sunnah is replete with injunctions aimed at

bringing Muslims together, uniting different factions, and doing away with any elements that might lead to animosity and hatred among them.

The Grand Mufti addressed religious scholars: “When we emphasize this important Islamic principle, which calls for exerting every effort to achieve harmony among Muslims and avoid anything that may cause divisions, we are firstly addressing the scholars, who are considered by Muslims a source of religious guidance.” He added that when a scholar maintains decorum, professionalism and good intent, Muslims perceive a sense of brotherhood and empathy, and can consider these scholars as role models and examples to follow.

The MWL Secretary General, Dr. Al-Issa, said that the presence of highly respected scholars at the conference, representing the diversity of Islamic denominations, confirm the fact that the Islamic nation is in good standing and that its religious scholars set an authentic example of virtue for its followers.

“ When we emphasize this important Islamic principle, which calls for exerting every effort to achieve harmony among Muslims and avoid anything that may cause divisions, we are firstly addressing the scholars, who are considered by Muslims a source of religious guidance.

”

*His Eminence the Grand Mufti f Saudi Arabia
Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al Al-Sheikh*



He emphasized that diversity within religion must be accompanied by the acceptance of the fact that differences and diversity are part of the religious heritage; and that truth is sought by all, and every Muslim should strive to find it and live by it. He said all Islamic sects share the most obvious and unambiguous Islamic denominator, which is Islam's five pillars

He reiterated that Islam encompasses all Muslims in its fold, regardless of their sect, and that there is no place for any extraneous names or attributes that aim to find differences between Muslims. Any term or description should only be used if it clarifies a methodology and highlights its qualities, and does not substitute or compete with Islam, a name which Allah has gifted to us

He cautioned against sectarian and

partisan slogans, noting that their provocative nature fuels clashes and conflicts, and enables the exploitation of traditional and new media to escalate disputes and incite animosity within the Islamic world. He called for the inclusion of positive messaging in the media and to promote dialogue that creates harmony and brings people closer to each other, following the values of Islamic brotherhood.

Concluding his speech, Dr. Al-Issa expressed gratitude and appreciation for the significant Islamic efforts led by Saudi Arabia.

At the opening session, His Eminence, the distinguished scholar and Chairman of the UAE Fatwa Council, and member of the Islamic Fiqh Assembly, Abdullah bin Sheikh Al-Mahfouz bin Bayyah, affirm that the importance of Islamic unity

and its significance for Islamic societies is a consensus among scholars. He pointed out that unity is an im-





portant Islamic concept that applies to all relations, whether individual, collective, or international.



He further explained that the foundation of unity is universal and is symbolised by the testimony of faith (Shahadah), a concept that encompasses all Islamic sects and denominations.

Sheikh bin Bayyah concluded his speech by praising the efforts of the MWL and its Secretary General Dr. Al-Issa in bringing Muslims closer together, facilitating coexistence, and creating unity.

His Excellency the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Hussein Ibrahim Taha, stated that this conference is an extension of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's clear and steadfast positions on issues concerning the Islamic world and a manifestation of its spiritual leadership and continuous support for everything that unites and brings Muslims together.

He affirmed his belief that this conference will contribute significantly to promoting unity among Islamic sects, and its recommendations and outcome will lay the foundations and principles for this purpose. He praised the diligent efforts of the MWL and its active presence in serving Islam and Muslims in various parts of the world.

The opening session continued with speeches from eminent persons including Ayatollah Sheikh Ahmed Mablaghi, a member of the Leadership Experts Council in the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Mokhtar Gomaa, Minister of Awqaf and Chairman of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in the Arab Republic of Egypt, and the General President of the Nahdlatul Ulama Association in the Republic of Indonesia, His



Eminence Sheikh Mufti Abdul Ghani Al-Akhyar. Furthermore, the Amir of the Islamic Scholars Association in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Eminence Sheikh Fadlur Rahman bin Mufti Mahmoud, His Excellency Dr. Ali bin Abdulrahman Arbash, Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and the President of Dar Al-Ilm for Imam Khomei-

ni in Iraq, His Eminence Dr. Sayyed Jawad Al-Khoei, the President of the African Islamic Union, His Eminence Sheikh Mohamed Mahmoud El-Mahi bin Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass, and the President of the Malaysian Scholars Association, His Eminence Sheikh Wan Muhammad bin Abdulaziz, also spoke at the event.

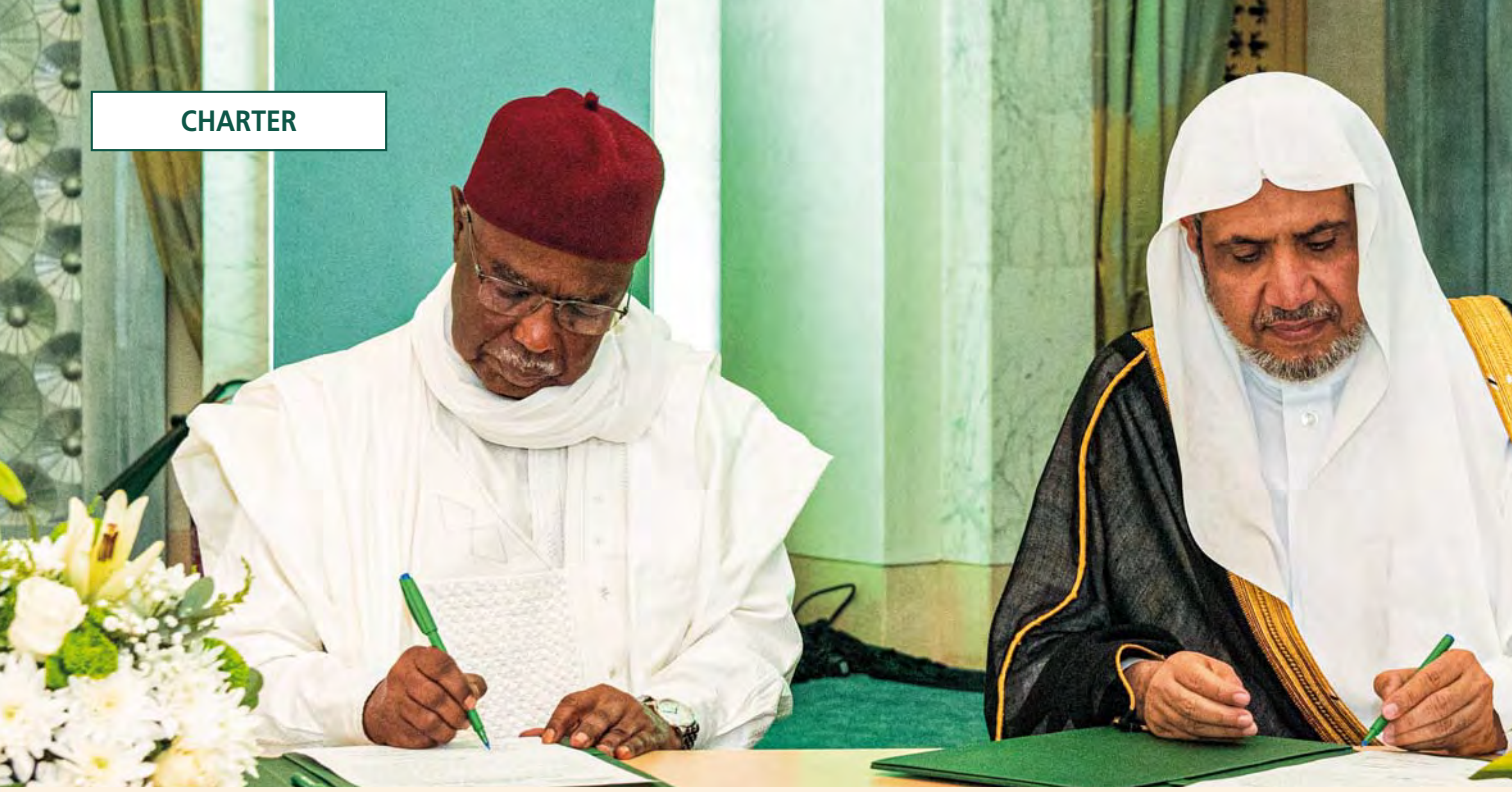


On the sidelines of the conference, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the MWL and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

This MoU establishes collaboration between the MWL and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in implementing the outcomes of the conference.

Furthermore, another MoU was signed between the MWL's Islamic Fiqh Assembly and the International Islamic Fiqh Academy affiliate with the OIC, with the aim of enhancing cooperation in scientific research, promoting a culture of tolerance and moderation, and strengthening Islamic unity.





MWL Secretary General Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa and OIC Secretary General Hissein Brahim Taha sign a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the outcomes of the Building Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects global conference. The MoU is to translate the charter issued by the conference into programs that benefit Muslims around the world.

Charter of Building Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects

By
MWL
MAKKAH



Based on the principle of Islam, which calls for the strengthening of Islamic brotherhood, and in line with the contents of the Makkah Charter endorsed by the Ummah's muftis and scholars on the twenty-fourth of the holy month of Ramadan in the year 1440 AH, corresponding to the twenty-ninth of May, 2019, distinguished scholars from various Islamic sects and components gathered at the conference of this charter. Meeting near the unifying Qibla and the Sacred House of Allah, under the banner of Islam—the message of mercy, justice, and peace, and the religion of tolerance, moderation, and balance—they expressed their pride in their religion as both

law and path. They affirmed their belief in Allah Almighty as their Lord and the only one worthy of worship, and in Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as the final prophet and messenger, adhering to the words of Allah Almighty: “Indeed, this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me.”

They gathered, heeding the call for harmony and unity, fully aware of the current duty to remind everyone of the concept of One Nation. They recognized that today, more than ever, there is an urgent need to consolidate their ranks, harmonize their efforts through their shared values that bridge their differences.



ences, unify their fragmented community, and reconcile their hearts. This gathering aimed to reconcile the differences among their schools of thought and sects by focusing on the fundamental principles and overarching values of Islam, along with its definitive rulings and legislation. Seeking to preserve their rights and dignity, the Ummah strives for unity by adhering to what Allah Almighty has commanded: ‘And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute, lest you lose courage and your strength depart.’ They are aware of the unfortunate repercussions reported by the Ummah, which can only be resolved, with God’s help, by achieving true Islamic brotherhood. This requires a full understanding of the ethics of disagreement and communication, which encompasses being cautious and addressing the risks associated with categorization and exclusion, understanding the harm caused by defamation and projection, and rejecting the dissemination of misinformation and the practice of labeling someone as a disbeliever. These issues have led to confusion, division, enmity, and significant cor-

ruption.

They gathered to address the stereotypes associated with inter-sectarian conflict that misrepresent the essence of their religion. Such stereotypes have persuaded narrow-minded individuals who fail to appreciate Allah’s way of creating diversity and multiplicity among people. This misunderstanding undermines the wisdom and ethical guidelines prescribed by Islam, detracting from a comprehensive understanding of Sharia, and the principles of brotherhood and compassion central to the faith. Acknowledging the potential damage to the unifying spirit of Islam, as well as the common objective of preserving its reputation and peaceful essence, the conferees shared experiences detailing the pain and tragedies that result from overstepping these boundaries. These actions not only hinder the Ummah from fulfilling its pivotal role but also detract from its contribution to civilization.

The conferees agreed to move beyond unproductive arguments that resulted in insulting rhetoric, which in turn caused fragmentation and division within the Ummah, particularly regarding the narrowed perceptions of Islam’s universality. They aim to bolster efforts towards unity, harmony, and cooperation. This charter outlines their commitment, explaining how their diverse sects can coexist, guided by the following principles:

1. Muslims form one nation; they worship one God, recite one book, follow one Prophet, and share one Direction (Qibla) regardless of their location. They are united under the name of Islam—by the grace of God. This name, chosen by Allah Almighty, cannot be replaced: “He has named you Muslims both before.” There is no place for extraneous names and descriptions that divide

rather than unite, diverge rather than bring closer, except those that explain the curriculum and catalyze Islamic Action, provided they neither replace nor compete with the name of Islam. This includes rejecting the alternatives chosen by extremists that harm the unity of the Ummah.

2. A Muslim is anyone who testifies to the oneness of Allah Almighty—there is no god but Him—in divinity, and to His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as the messenger and the seal of prophecy, adheres to the firm rope of Allah, believes in the Sharia’s rulings and the religion’s constants, acts according to them, and does not knowingly and intentionally commit or believe in what Muslims unanimously declare as disbelief.

3. The message of Islam is divine in its source, monotheistic in its belief, enlightened in its purposes, humane in its values, wise in its legislation, and beneficial for all; Allah Almighty said: “And we have sent you only as Mercy to the two worlds.” Thus, Muslims are called to reclaim their civilizational role, contributing to the building of a more inclusive and beneficial future that ensures sustainable security and peace.

4. The facts of Islam are derived from Revelation, as represented by the Holy Qur’an and what has been authentically transmitted from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) or unanimously agreed upon by the Ummah. Furthermore, the independent reasoning (Ijtihad) of scholars, stemming from their knowledge and faith, is held in respect, reverence, and considered beneficial. In the face of diversity and disagreement, Muslims are to adhere to known ethics and rules.

5. Islam represents the final message from Allah to His Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), and no one, regardless of their knowledge and righteousness, can alter anything within Islam. Allah Almighty stated: “Say: ‘It is not for me, on my own, to change it. I only follow what is revealed to me. If I were to disobey my Lord, I fear the penalty of a Great Day.’”

6. Achieving the objectives of the legislation involves preserving the five necessities: religion as the basis of Islamic identity, the protection of oneself (encompassing dignity, security, life), the care for the mind to maintain societal balance, the sacredness of honor to protect societal values, and the preservation of wealth from harm and corruption. Considering the modern era’s national states, a sixth necessity arises: safeguarding the homeland from any harm to its identity, security, achievements, or interests.

7. The formation of “the Muslim moderate character” is the responsibility of scholars, jurists, and their institutions, particularly those tasked with elucidating Islam’s truths and virtues, promoting its moderate and exemplary qualities, and correcting misconceptions.

8. The diversity of schools of thought, sects, and ideologies among Muslims is a manifestation of divine will, emphasizing the inevitability of diversity as a part of God’s laws. This diversity, rooted in methodological differences and varying conditions, requires thoughtful engagement and caution against divisiveness. The commonalities among Islamic schools of thought, particularly the Two Declarations of Faith, outweigh their differences, fostering Islamic brotherhood stronger than ideological diversities. Muslims should always seek and follow the truth.

9. Islamic schools of thought and sects emerged within the Muslim community through systematic foundations and scientific efforts, grounded in respect for core principles. The duty lies in maintaining these schools’ origins in Islam and their constructive contributions without disrupting their positive roles, deviating from correctness, mistrusting their proponents, or misusing their diversity.

10. The religious and cultural unity of Muslims is a profound duty, and striving to achieve it is a noble endeavor that necessitates reinforcing the Islamic commonalities that underpin this unity in its broadest terms and major issues.

11. Muslims from diverse backgrounds are partners in building their distinguished civilization, facing contemporary challenges, and collectively aspiring to a future enriched with brotherhood and harmony. In this future, commonalities override divisions and conflicts, elevating high values to foster understanding, coexistence, and cooperation.

12. The events and lessons of history should inspire future generations to replicate successes and avoid past mistakes. It is neither legally nor logically acceptable to dredge up historical debates or differences among schools of thought to undermine unity, brotherhood, and cooperation within the Ummah.

13. Islamic commonalities are well-established principles that unite the Ummah, reflecting unity, harmony, and shared responsibilities. Understanding these deeply enhances resilience against extremism and conflicts among different schools of thought.

14. The necessity of holding regular, effective, and productive

dialogue forums among Islamic sects to strengthen their brotherly bonds, goodwill, persistence, and to address challenges and obstacles effectively.

15. The main sources of tragedies have been the slogans of partisanship and extremism, leading to conflicts, historical tumults, and fostering animosities. These behaviors, fueled by marginalization, weaken the bonds of brotherhood and the noble objectives of Islam, much to the pleasure of Islam’s adversaries and other malevolent forces.

16. A Muslim is defined by the utterance and adherence to the Two Declarations of Faith, believing in Islam’s principles. It is impermissible to label anyone a disbeliever without incontrovertible evidence, as acknowledged by knowledgeable and faithful individuals.

17. The acts of declaring disbelief (Takfir), denouncing innovation (bid’ah), and spreading misinformation are governed by strict rules and require precise evidence. Such judgments are reserved for institutional bodies equipped with knowledge, moderation, and justice, and must be supported by Islamic jurisprudence as agreed upon by the knowledgeable and faithful.

18. Cooperation among diverse Muslim communities is crucial for achieving integration and enhancing the Ummah’s presence and influence both within national communities and internationally, within the framework of their national systems.

19. Muslims unite in supporting just causes at both Islamic and international levels, including the steadfastness of the Palestinian people against atrocities, their right to an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and

the preservation of Jerusalem's historical and Islamic identity.

20. Protecting the components of Islamic identity in non-Islamic countries is essential, especially in seeking recognition of their rights within civil constitutions. Scholars should emphasize the importance of optimal coexistence, caution against extremism, and advise against adhering to directives unsuitable for their circumstances, as decreed by Sharia.

21. The family, as society's nucleus, is vital for educating and guiding the young, safeguarding them from harm, and instilling Islamic values of brotherhood, understanding, harmony, and cooperation.

22. Educational efficiency plays a critical role in family building, shaping young minds, and guiding them towards a promising future under Allah's guidance. This includes the efficiency of teachers and the integrity of the curriculum at all educational levels, without gender discrimination, as Islam encourages learning for all.

23. Girls, within their legitimate roles, significantly contribute to realizing the Ummah's aspirations, particularly in nurturing well-educated families, underscoring the family's centrality in society and as a source of education.

24. Islamic media discourse aims to foster brotherhood and cooperation, raise awareness, correct misconceptions within Islam, and counter offensive campaigns, while urging Muslims, especially in non-Islamic countries, to accurately represent their faith and shoulder their responsibilities in depicting true Islam.

25. Misuse of traditional and new media escalates disputes and fosters enmity within Islamic societies.

Media messages should focus on constructive topics and dialogues that promote Islamic brotherhood and knowledge exchange without arrogance or defamation.

26. Warning against sedition, its causes, and instigators is crucial, as is condemning incitement that undermines Islamic brotherhood. The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) emphasized that believers are brothers.

27. Conflicts among Muslims, fueled by extremism or disrespect for their jurisprudence, serve no purpose and please only adversaries. Such actions are immoral, damaging individuals, sects, the reputation of the religion, and peace.

28. An annual conference to reaffirm the vision, mission, goals, and values of this meeting is proposed to enhance commitment to this charter. Next year, "The Second Conference for Building Bridges Between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects," will be held that aims to discuss recent developments in the Islamic arena, with God's help.

For the purpose of facilitating communication between Islamic sects, a joint coordinating committee will be established, named 'The Coordinating Committee between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects.' The General Secretariat of the Muslim World League will outline the committee's system, chairmanship, members, and secretariat in consultation with senior Islamic figures from various sects. These proposals are to be approved during the next conference.

The attendees of this conference pledge to uphold the contents of this charter and strive to embed its principles within their scientific academies and national communities, without prejudice to applicable regulations and international laws. Furthermore, they call on all scholarly bodies, community figures, and national institutions to support the charter.

They extend their gratitude to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, and to His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince — may Allah protect them — for the significant efforts exerted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in unifying the Ummah and promoting cooperation among them. This is in recognition of the Kingdom's pioneering Islamic role and the honor of being the focal point for Muslims worldwide, including the service of the Two Holy Mosques. ■

*Issued in Makkah, March 18, 2024
(corresponding to Ramadan 08, 1445H)*





The Path of Peace

By
Ziad
Itani



Four stops marked the Secretary General of the Muslim World League and the Chairman of the Muslim Scholars Association Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa's journey on the path of peace, including Sicily in Italy, Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, Albania, and Spain, where he met with King Felipe VI as an honored guest at the legislative dialogue, attended by prominent human rights activists, legislative leaders, ministers, heads of constitutional councils, and judges from Europe, Central America, and

South America. D-Issa carried the message of peace and reconciliation at all these stops, emphasizing four points: building bridges of understanding and mutual respect between nations and peoples; confronting hate speech that is motivated by civilizational-conflicts narratives; working towards creating a more cohesive global society where individuals work for the collective good, and the collective ensures the safety of the individual; and promoting peace by enhancing religious and cultural coexistence.



in confronting the narratives of civilizational conflict and hate speech, stressing the noble goal of promoting peace and security in a harmonious global society.

At a time when the world is contemplating how to move away from conflicts and destruction that displaced and caused the death of millions of people in recent years, Dr. Al-Issa's journey outlined the path of peace that can lead to safety and stability. Peace is not merely a literary term to adorn speeches and articles, but a term representing a humanitarian need for all peoples of the earth.

Conflicts have exhausted the home of humanity, the earth, and religions, in their diversity, call for love, tolerance, and peace. Working towards peace is a religious duty agreed upon by all. It is a path walked Al-Issa, with hope and anticipation that all humanity will follow suit. ■

Dr. Al-Issa embodied the strategy of action pursued by the Muslim World League, which is based on serving humanity as a whole, without discrimination based on ethnicity or creed. He stated in Albania, "Anyone who contemplates the texts of Sharia senses its universal spirit, as it includes everyone with its great wisdom, vast mercy, and exquisite legislative purposes that combined idealism and realism." In Spain, in the presence of His Majesty the King, Dr. Al-Issa emphasized the crucial contributions of various religions to peace efforts worldwide, affirming the shared responsibility





Highest Order of Albania Awarded to MWL Secretary General

By
Franz
Pagot



The Secretary-General of the Muslim World League Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa led a delegation to Tirana, Albania, where they were received by several Albanian ministers and prominent religious and official figures for round-table discussions, a solemn event that brought together influential figures for the first time in the country's history.

Albanian President Bajram Begaj awarded

Dr. Al-Issa with the highest medal in the country, 'The State Order for World-Renowned Spiritual Figures', at the Presidential Palace.

At the request of Albania's Islamic Sheikdom and Grand Mufti, Al-Issa delivered Friday sermon at a historic mosque, focusing on Islamic values and behavior, drawing lessons from the life of Prophet Mohammad as the epitome of Islamic principles: "In every



part of the biography of our Prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, we find an example that embodies the values of Islam, all comprised in an ethical code with which Islam reached the four corners of the world. This ethical code has become a milestone in human values." He continued: "Our religion has a precise criterion, and whoever adopts its values is a true Muslim and a member of the Muslim community, and whoever turns away from it, has nothing of the traits of the true Muslim." Al-Issa also added: "It is a fact that many Muslims have won the hearts of others by their good words, their good deeds, or their gracious forgiveness. Many people consider our behavior when judging our religion." He said: "Anyone who contemplates the texts of the Sharia senses its universal spirit, as its inclusion of everyone with its great wisdom, vast mercy, and exquisite legislative purposes that combine idealism and realism."

Subsequently, Dr. Al-Issa gave two separate lectures to academics and students in Tirana, delving into topics on Islamic thought, its origins and essence, with precious insights on Quranic texts and the Sunnah, catering to the different needs of academics and students, usefully translated into Albanian.

Dr. Al-Issa also visited the Islamic Sheikhdome headquarters, where he was welcomed by the President of the Sheikhdome, who commended the MWL's successful efforts in promoting peace in the Balkans, particularly acknowledging the positive response to the 'Sarajevo Declaration', praising the organization's commitment to fostering coexistence and combatting extremism hatred and Islamophobia. Led by His Excellency the Ambassador of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in Tirana, Mr. Faisal bin Ghazi Hefzi, as well as the Apostolic Nuncio of the Vatican, a dinner was given in Dr. Al-Issa's honour.

Dr. Al-Issa then met Her Excellency the Speaker of the Albanian Parliament Ms. Lindita Nikolla, who conveyed Albania's deep appreciation for the visit, recognizing the MWL's important role in promoting peace and

cultural coexistence.

Dr. Al-Issa expressed his delight in visiting Albania, praising it as a model of international excellence in embracing diversity, reiterating that Islam unequivocally opposes any ideologies that provoke conflict.

Dr. Al-Issa then met with Prime Minister Edi Rama to discuss shared interests on various topics, with Rama commending the MWL for its efforts in promoting harmony among diverse societies worldwide.

The Prime Minister extended an invitation to the MWL to organize an international conference in Tirana, aimed at enhancing understanding and cooperation among civilizations, drawing upon Albania's experiences in diversity.

After his official visit, the Secretary-General was presented with the 'Foundation Shield', symbolizing the preservation of Islamic identity in Albania and the Balkans.

Al-Issa also visited the Sharia school in Tirana, established a century ago, which has endured challenging periods in the region's history, encouraging the students and faculty to continue the school's legacy and equip themselves with knowledge to serve the ideals of Islam. ■





Parliament Receives Al-Issa in Sarajevo

By
**Rossella
Fabiani**

Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, was the scene of a ferocious war that lasted almost four years, from 1992 to 1995, and resulted in more than one hundred thousand deaths, two million refugees, and enormous destruction.

Today, the city stands as a symbol of how it is possible to rebuild coexistence from the rubble, representing a living testimony of reconciliation.

It is from this city that the Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL), Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa,

launched a new appeal for peace as he spoke at an international congress. With over 400 participants, the congress was co-organized by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the MWL, and was held on the 12th of February, with the participation of President Zeljko Komsic and the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives Denis Zvizdić.

At the center of Al-Issa's speech was an affirmation of the importance "of interreligious dialogue and the key role that religious leaders can play to rebuild trust between communities".

More traditional approaches on how to





achieve peace through negotiations, based solely on economic leverage or political bargaining, have repeatedly missed the mark, as they fail to touch on the deeper dimensions of conflicts. With 84% of the world's population identifying with a religious tradition, and with the recognition that religious narratives often underlie conflicts, the role of religious leaders in conflict resolution is of substantial importance.

Underestimating, or even ignoring, the symbolic and moral weight that religion has in long-standing conflicts, such as those in Afghanistan or the Middle East, is for Al-Issa a serious error in assessment, because a lasting and authentic peace can only be achieved by involving the deepest moral foundations of societies.

The role of moral leadership in promoting genuine and lasting reconciliation is indispensable. Political and economic negotiations, although necessary, neglect the hu-

man element par excellence: "peace can take root – Al-Issa explained – only by rebuilding the social fabric, and religious leaders, who exercise profound influence and moral authority, possess the unique ability to overcome divisions that seem insurmountable, creating a model of reconciliation that Sarajevo now embodies to the world.

This model, which showcases a city once marked by foreign aggression and is now a champion of interreligious dialogue and unity, offer invaluable lessons for global peace efforts. It demonstrates that peace goes beyond the cessation of conflict and is achieved by building mutual understanding, respect, and recognition between different communities.

In Sarajevo, in a quadrilateral within a few hundred meters, there are the Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque, the largest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Catholic cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Orthodox Church

of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel, and the largest Ashkenazi synagogue in the city. Among these communities, a climate of mutual respect has been established.

Recognizing the fundamental role of faith in peace-building is not optional, but essential to overcome the challenges of conflict resolution and lasting reconciliation, Sheikh Al-Issa said.

Traditional models of peace negotiations, according to the Secretary General of MWL, must "evolve to incorporate the cultural, spiritual, and moral dimensions that underlie all human societies". The pursuit of peace – particularly in prolonged conflicts – requires a comprehensive approach that must include moral and spiritual leadership, alongside economic and political strategies. The speech of Bosnian president Zeljko Komsic echoed Al-Issa's, who has been thanked by the former for his commitment to the Balkan country. ■



By
MWL
MAKKAH



IFRC: MWL Support Helps Saving Lives

In an unprecedented event bring-ing together the heads of major international organizations active in humanitarian work, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL) Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, and the Secretary-General of the Inter-national Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Mr. Jagan Chapagain, met on board the world's most renowned humanitarian vessel, Ocean Viking, on the coast of Sicily, Italy, "which has witnessed the greatest human migration suffering" in the presence of the President of the Italian Republic, Mr. Rosario Valastro. The location was chosen due to the significant humanitarian challenges faced in the area, especially concerning the issue of migration. Dr. Al-Issa was briefed on the work progress on the ship. He praised the noble life-saving efforts made by the ship's crew, in cooperation with the IFRC, the MWL's strategic partners, to provide food, medicine, and health care to those stranded at sea. Mr. Chapagain expressed his appreciation for the MWL's great support and pivotal contribution to the IFRC's urgent mission and humanitarian work, considering it



an important strategic partner for his organization. "The MWL's rich contribution has had a significant impact on the lives of the displaced, and is a reflection of the generous support the organization provides within the framework of this humanitarian effort. It is truly appreciated by all," said Chapagain. He said that through the cooperation of humanitarian organizations, "we contribute to saving lives and preserving human dignity at sea," adding that this ship is a symbol of solidarity and humanity, as it aims to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to migrants and displaced people. The Ocean Viking

is a ship over 30 years old, utilized by the French NGO SOS Méditerranée, in collaboration with Doctors Without Borders, to assist distressed boats in the Mediterranean. Recently, Ocean Viking has been involved in several high-profile cases related to NGO rescue missions. The MWL announced the renewal of the Support for Migrants, Displaced Persons and Victim Conflict agreement, signed with the IFRC last year, which contributed to saving the lives of a total of 2,744 people, most of whom were stranded in the Mediterranean Sea, and providing them with health care and food until they reached safety. ■



MWL launches medical convoy through Asia and Africa

By
MWL
MAKKAH



The Muslim World League has launched a major medical program to perform surgeries and heart catheterizations in impoverished areas in Asia and Africa in collaboration with relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The MWL has assembled a medical convoy of consultants, specialists, and technicians from Saudi Arabia and abroad, in partnership with specialized agencies, traveling across underserved countries in Asia and Africa to perform surgeries, revive hearts, and restore hope for hundreds of patients. The high cost of heart surgeries and the lack of technical and medical resources in these

areas have made treatment inaccessible. The medical teams, after carefully screening hundreds of cases, have successfully performed complex surgeries on children with congenital heart defects and other severe conditions, ensuring they receive the care they need.

The MWL has established hospitals and health centers, launched vaccination programs, combated epidemics, and provided medical care to those in need. The MWL prioritizes advanced healthcare projects, offering comprehensive medical services to vulnerable and impoverished communities worldwide, particularly children and the elderly.

By
MWL
MAKKAH



Muslim World League Welcomes Appointment of UN Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia

The General Secretariat of the Muslim World League welcomed the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of a resolution on measures to combat Islamophobia, and the appointment of a special United Nations envoy to combat Islamophobia.

His Excellency Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the MWL and Chairman of the Organization of Muslim Scholars, affirmed that, under the current international circumstances, the world is witnessing a disturbing rise in hate speech, which threatens global peace and the harmony of its societies.

Dr. Al-Issa called for remedial measures, including the enactment of effective national and international legislations that criminalizes Islamophobia. He also warned against the phenomena of impunity, the absence of accountability, and the escalation of concepts of a clash of civilizations. Furthermore, he advocated for combating these issues by engaging in preventative measures at the levels of the family, education, and influential platforms.

He also confirmed: "Islam is the religion of mercy, kindness, justice, and peace, as supported by texts of jurisprudence and the biography of our Prophet, peace be upon him. This

path is the one that Islamic moderation has adopted throughout its rich and long history." Moreover, he added, "Islam is not represented by those who have deviated from its principles and values, nor by those who distort the meanings of its texts to justify their extremism and violence."

He reaffirmed the support of the MWL, including its global councils, bodies, and assemblies, for all international efforts aimed at combating extremist ideas and promoting the values of peace, coexistence, and mutual respect among followers of different religions and civilizations. ■

The Muslim World League

Made successful efforts in combating Islamophobia

Through:



The media

Launching international media campaigns to curb Islamophobic discourse



Legislation

Encouraging the enactment of laws that criminalize hate speech



Partnerships

Gaining international support to combat the dangers of hate speech

Islamophobia





وَثِيقَاتُ مَكْتَبِ الْمَكْتَبَةِ



Denmark bans burning of the Quran

By
**Alfredo
Maiorese**

The Danish Parliament has approved a law banning the burning of copies of the Quran in public places. Strong public protests erupted in Denmark and Sweden after anti-Islamic activists burned copies of the Holy Quran, causing tensions

with Muslims and prompting calls for governments in Northern Europe to ban this type of action. Many in Sweden and Denmark have argued that any restrictions on criticism of religion undermine the hard-won liberal freedoms in the two coun-



Denmark, the holy book of Islam was desecrated several times: in front of the Swedish Parliament, in the country's mosques, and in areas where large populations of Muslims live. Anti-Islamic demonstrations sparked the anger of Muslim countries during the last year.

The bill – approved after months of intense debate in Denmark – declared that it is illegal to burn, soil, trample on, or cut recognized religious scriptures including the Quran, the Bible, and the Torah, and passed with 94 votes in favor and 77 against. The Danish Justice Minister, the Social Democrat PETER HUMMELGAARD, said on TV that the burning of copies of the Quran “harmed Denmark’s interests and risked damaging the security of Danes abroad and here at home”.

Anyone who breaks the new law is punished with fines or, in particular cases, with a sentence of up to two years in prison.

However, the Swedish Justice Minister, Gunnar Strömmer, does not seem to want to follow the same path as Denmark. He believes that it may be necessary to change the law on public order, but that an absolute ban is not necessary. Denmark’s decision to pass a new law should therefore not change the Swedish government’s approach.

There are no official statistics on the Muslim community in Denmark, as the Danish government does not register individual religious beliefs. However, it is estimated that Muslims number around 280,000 people, making up nearly 5 percent of the total population. ■

tries. Denmark’s centrist coalition government has argued, however, that the new rules will only have a marginal impact on free speech and that contending with religion’s point of view in other ways will remain legal.

At this point, the question arises whether Sweden will follow Denmark in banning the burning of copies of the Quran. During the year 2023, both in Sweden and





Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism growing in US and Europe

By
**Franco
Minerbi**

Since October 7, 2023, the war in Gaza has been triggering an intertwined and opposing wave of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in different parts of the world, particularly in Europe and the United States.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), in early December 2023, lists “a staggering number” of 2,171 reports of incidents of violence and “a continuing wave of anti-Muslim hatred”.

Among the most serious episodes, in early January, was the shooting to death of Hassan Sharif, imam of a mosque in Newark, New Jersey, who was “very active in inter-religious dialogue in Newark” according to local media. In the wake of the conflict in the Middle East, from Burlington to Chicago, Washington and elsewhere, “innocent American citizens of the Muslim faith are suffering the consequences of this wave of violence,” CAIR director Nihad Awad said in December. In Burlington, Ver-



“ *The war in Gaza has been triggering an intertwined and opposing wave of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in different parts of the world* ”

mont, three Palestinian-American college students were shot and injured on November 25.

The protests and tensions related to the war in Gaza have divided university campuses. The new data includes 400 incidents that took place in the last two months of 2023, including on university campuses, compared to 33 in the same period last year. “For too long, Muslims in America have suffered a disproportionate number of hate attacks and other discriminatory acts,” said President Joe Biden’s spokeswoman, Karine Jean-Pierre, who assured that “the entire administration will continue to work to ensure that every American has the free-

dom to live safely and without fear for what they believe or how they pray.”

CAIR reported that Islamophobic actions in the USA soared by as much as 216 percent in the four weeks following October 7, 2023.

Cases of Islamophobia have also increased in Europe, particularly in England, France, and Germany, with attempted arson, verbal abuse, and acts of vandalism. There were over 700 reports of Islamophobic incidents in Britain in November – a seven-fold increase on the previous month.

In Germany, where Muslims are the second largest religious group with 5.5 million people, the majority of whom are Turkish, a sharp increase in Islamophobic attacks has been recorded.

In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders, the leader of the populist right who won the last elections, announced that he wants to ban mosques and Qur’anic schools, ban the Islamic headscarf in public buildings, and block immigration. Threats which, so far, he has not acted upon.

On the other side, according to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the number of anti-Semitic incidents rose by 388 percent during the first four weeks of the war in Gaza.

In Europe, incidents of anti-Semitism

have also increased significantly. Hate messages, verbal violence, and physical attacks are particularly worrying in Germany, France, and Belgium.

Felix Klein, the German federal government commissioner for combating anti-Semitism, said that 2,249 incidents of anti-Semitic crimes were recorded from October 7, 2023, to January 22, 2024, while throughout the whole year of 2022, there had been 2,300 anti-Semitic crimes. “This shows how dramatic the situation is,” Klein said. The president of the Central Council of Jews of Germany, Josef Schuster, declared that “anti-Semitism is widespread again in Germany.”

Violence is also on the rise in Belgium and France. Data from the Ministry of the Interior and the Jewish Community Protection Service show that 1,676 anti-Semitic acts were reported in 2023, compared to 436 in the previous year.

In neighboring Belgium, where around 30 thousand Jews live, many hateful messages were also posted online. Cases of desecration of dozens of tombs in the Jewish section of a cemetery occurred in Charleroi.

In Italy, incidents of anti-Semitism have reached unprecedented peaks, with 216 incidents reported in the last three months of 2023, compared to 241 in the entire previous year.



Migrant and asylum pact: New rules and regulations

**By
Joseph
Villeroy**

At the end of December, the European Union reached an agreement on the Pact on Asylum and Migration introducing new rules and regulations. The green light from MEPs and EU governments came at the end of the ‘trialogue,’ a procedure that gives the final shape to legislative texts. Negotiators from the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission have agreed on five separate EU regulations establishing how to share the management of

asylum and migration flows between Member States, and what to do in the event of a sudden migration crisis.

What does the Pact provide? The new regulation establishes how to treat people arriving at the EU’s external borders, the processing of asylum requests, and primary identification of those arriving. Among other things, they improved the identification procedures on arrival, “including facial recognition and finger



“ *The new regulation establishes how to treat people arriving at the EU’s external borders, the processing of asylum requests, and primary identification of those arriving* ”

prints, which also cover children from the age of six”.

The new regulation on the management of asylum and migration demands mandatory solidarity from EU countries recognized as under migratory pressure, allowing other member states to choose between relocating asylum seekers to their territory or paying financial contributions. It is what was once called “à la carte” solidarity, which Italy opposed for years, pushing instead for the mandatory relocations which, however, never passed the Council.

The text determines new criteria, according to which, a Member State is responsible for examining applications for protection. In response to the sudden increase in arrivals, the legislation establishes a mechanism aimed at ensuring solidarity and mea-

sures to support Member States facing an exceptional influx of non-EU migrants leading to the “collapse of the national asylum system”. The issue of the exploitation of migrants is also addressed.

Under the new screening regulation, anyone who does not meet the conditions to enter the EU will be subject to a pre-entry procedure, that includes: identification, collection of biometric data, health and safety checks; which might take up to seven days. The specific needs of children will be “taken into account” and each member state will have an independent monitoring mechanism to ensure that fundamental rights are respected.

The Asylum Procedures Regulation establishes a common method across the EU for granting or withdrawing international protection, replacing the different national procedures. The processing of asylum requests should be faster (up to six months for a first decision,) with shorter limits for manifestly unfounded or inadmissible requests. The provisional agreement must now be formally adopted by Parliament and the Council before it can become law and before the European elections in June 2024.

“December 20th, 2023, will go down in history” as the day in which “Europe has once again overcome its crisis. I am very proud that the Pact on Asylum and Migrations was true to its intentions and provided solutions,” reports the President of European

Parliament, Roberta Mestola.

“The Pact approval represents a great achievement for Europe and for Italy itself, which can now benefit from the new regulations to oversee the migration fluxes and counteract human traffickin ” states the Italian Interior Minister, Matteo Piantedosi, after the announcement.

German scholar Gerald Knaus, however, is arguing with the changes made during the “trialogue”. “I am afraid that it will neither put a stop to the illicit migration, nor it will influence the phenomenon of second migration, or even bring to a stop the Human Rights violations at the external borders”. Speaking about Italy, the country that endures the majority of the south Mediterranean migrations, his position is even more negative: “If the numbers remain on the average of 3,000 people per week, as they were last year, it is inconceivable to comply with these procedures only within the reception centers of Lampedusa and Sicily. They must be spread on the rest of the territory. And even then, the situation will be just as today”.

The German scholar claims that the issue lies in the fact that: “Spain, Italy, Greece, but even France and Germany, are not yet ready to repatriate or relocate to third countries those who reached Europe. The new regulations do not provide tools to make it happen. Therefore, all of those who risk the journey will be allowed to remain, and the vicious circle will not stop”. ■



UN reports: Gaza children's lives are threatened by growing malnutrition

By
Nizar
Ramadan

There is a sharp increase in malnutrition among children and pregnant and breastfeeding women in the Gaza Strip according to a joint statement by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Program (WFP), based on a new analysis published by the Global Nutrition Cluster. According to the study, food and clean water have become increasingly scarce, with a consequential spread of disease, which is seriously compromising the health of women and children, and

causing a widespread wave of acute malnutrition.

The report 'Nutritional Vulnerability and Situation Analysis_Gaza' shows the situation is particularly serious in the northern Gaza Strip which, for weeks, has been almost completely cut off from aid. Moreover, nutritional screenings conducted in shelters and health centers in the north showed that 15.6% – or one in six children under two years of age – are severely malnourished. Of these, nearly 3% suffer



“Food and clean water have become increasingly scarce, with a consequential spread of disease, which is seriously compromising the health of women and children

from severe wasting – the most life-threatening form of malnutrition – which puts young children at high risk of medical complications and death, unless they receive urgent care. The data was collected in January 2024, and the situation could be even more serious today.

Similar screenings carried out in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, where aid has been more available, found that in this area 5% of children under two are severely malnourished, which is clear evidence that the distribution of humanitarian aid is essential. The report also reinforces calls to protect Rafah from the threat of even more intense military operations. “The Gaza Strip is on the verge of seeing a foreseeable explosion of child deaths that would exacerbate the already serious level of child deaths in Gaza,” said UNICEF Deputy Ex-

ecutive Director for Humanitarian Action and Emergency Operations Procurement, Ted Chaiban. “We have been warning for weeks that the Gaza Strip is on the brink of a food crisis. If the conflict does not end now, child nutrition will continue to exacerbate, resulting in deaths or health problems that will affect children in Gaza for the rest of their lives, with potential inter-generational consequences,” Chaiban added.

Before the hostilities of recent months, the report continues, cases of child wasting in the Gaza Strip were rare, with only 0.8% of children under five years old severely malnourished.

The 15.6% rate of wasting among children under two in northern Gaza demonstrates a serious and rapid decline, and such a decline in the nutritional status of a population in the space of just three months is unprecedented on a global scale. “The sharp increase in malnutrition we are seeing in Gaza is dangerous and entirely preventable,” said Valerie Guarnieri, WFP Deputy Executive Director for World Food Program Operations. “Children and women, in particular, need continued access to healthy foods, clean water, and health and nutrition services. For this to happen, we need decisive

improvements in security and humanitarian access and additional entry points for aid to enter Gaza,” she added.

Inadequate supplies of safe drinking water, as well as insufficient water for cooking and hygiene purposes, are exacerbating poor nutrition. On average, the families interviewed have less than one liter of drinking water available per person per day. According to humanitarian standards, the minimum amount of safe water needed in an emergency situation is 3 liters per person per day, while the general standard is 15 liters per person, which includes sufficient quantities for drinking, washing, and cooking.

Hungry, thirsty, and weak, more and more Gazans are falling ill. The report finds that at least 90% of children under 5 are affected by one or more infectious diseases. 70% are affected by dysentery: a 23-fold increase compared to 2022. “Hunger and disease are a deadly combination,” said Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme. “Hungry, weakened and deeply traumatized children are more likely to get sick, and sick children, especially with diarrhea, cannot absorb nutrients well. What is happening before our eyes is dangerous and tragic.” ■

Ethiopia: war and drought caused food crisis in Tigray

By
**Sandro
Doria**

A severe food crisis is bringing northern Ethiopia to its knees. Most newborns suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

The government said that a total of 16 million people are facing severe food shortages, and many of them are starving. Doctors at the hospital in Mekelle, the capital of Ethiopia's Tigray region, report that the number of malnourished children hospitalized has doubled since 2020, when the

war between Tigray forces and the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies began. Although a ceasefire was agreed on in 2022, the impact of the conflict remains, with at least a million people still unable to return home.

James Landale, BBC correspondent, was able to travel with the British Minister for Africa, Andrew Mitchell, to Agulae, an hour drive north into the hills, where doctors were visiting children from outlying villages in a clinic. "It is clear that there

is a risk of real famine if action is not taken now,” said Mitchell, who promised that London will commit another 100 million pounds (125 million dollars) to help up to three million mothers and newborns in Ethiopia have access to healthcare. A new fund will also be created to provide medicines and vaccines.

The government is working with the United Nations to address the food crisis, although the economy is weak and budgets are being cut. The truth is that no one is able to understand the extent of the situation because detailed data is hard to come by. Access for the media is limited and many areas of the north are impossible to reach, even for humanitarian agencies, due to the continuous fighting, especially in Amhara.

Last year, USAid, the American

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*British Minister for Africa:
It is clear that there is a risk of real famine
if action is not taken now*

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development agency, and the United Nations World Food Program suspended humanitarian support for five months after it emerged that large quantities of food were being stolen, much of it diverted to feed the various armed forces. This made the situation worsen. Furthermore, conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine divert attention from what is happening in this area and less funding is allocated to Ethiopia. The head of

the UN mission, Ramiz Alakbarov, said it is “a forgotten crisis”. The problem is that some areas of the country are still occupied by militias and Eritrean forces. “In Ethiopia, there are several overlapping crises,” according to Alakbarov. “We have drought, people recovering from a two-year conflict, rising inflation, a resurgence of epidemic cases. If we fail to provide food assistance to people now, the situation will get worse.” ■





Muslim Women Basketball Players Hope FFBB Overturn Hijab Ban

By
**Eugenio
Santoprete**

N.C. State's Jannah Eissa and UC Irvine's Diaba Konate are bringing visibility and inspiration to some Muslim women by wearing hijabs while they play basketball in the wake of France's

decision to ban the hijab for all its female athletes participating in the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

"I love basketball, my family, and my faith," said Diaba Konate, a former member of the

youth French national team who now plays in the US. “It would break my heart to give up any one of those, and yet that is what the current French Federation of Basketball guidelines are forcing me to do.”

“My faith and my sport are both critical parts of who I am,” said, Layshia Clarendon, professional basketball player for the Los Angeles Sparks of the WNBA. “No one should have to choose between honoring their faith and playing the sport they love, and it’s heartbreaking and unacceptable that Muslim women in France are being forced to make that choice. I’m proud to be in solidarity with Diaba and with all athletes targeted by the French Federation of Basketball’s discriminatory policy.”

Terri Jackson, the executive director of the Women’s National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA) in the US has the same opinion: “Basketball has long been a powerful vehicle for inclusion and equality.” Jackson added: “All athletes should be able to both practice their faith and the sport they love, and we will continue to fight until they have the opportunity to do so.”

Konate admires Bilqis Abdul-Qadir, who made NCAA history by being the first to wear a hijab in college basketball when she played for Memphis a decade ago. Abdul-Qadir was instrumental in getting FIBA, the International Basketball Federation, to overturn its ban on headgear in 2017.

Former UConn player Batouly Camara, who was one of the first to wear a hijab in Spain’s LF1 league, has enjoyed seeing Eissa and Konate represent their religion.



“It’s truly inspiring to witness these two Muslim athletes competing at the highest level. This tournament serves as a significant moment, shining a spotlight on the best teams simultaneously with their faith,” said Camara, who founded the nonprofit organization Women And Kids Empowerment in 2017.

Konate started 31 of 32 games for UC Irvine, averaging 7.5 points and nearly four assists. She moved to the U.S. from France after receiving a scholarship from Idaho State. She transferred to UC Irvine as a junior.

She hopes to have the opportunity to play in a hijab at home in France, where she won two medals playing on their youth teams.

“Being French and hosting the Olympics, it hurts to not be able to be ourselves,” said Konate, who first started wearing the hijab in 2020. “Hopefully, it changes.”

Eissa, who turned 18 in February,

was a walk-on at N.C. State. She joined the team after trying out in September. She didn’t play much this season — appearing in 11 games and hitting one 3-pointer.

Earlier this season, a group of young Muslim girls came to her game. They also showed up a few more times to support her.

“Never thought I could be a role model for someone I didn’t know,” however, “I want to make it as far as I can for the image of women in hijabs,” said Eissa,

In an open letter published on March 8, 2024, over 80 athletes, including WNBA star Breanna Stewart and Olympic medalist Ibti-haj Muhammad, urge the French Federation of Basketball (FFBB) and the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) to immediately overturn the hijab ban from the French basketball rules and uphold international human rights laws and standards. ■



Islam's perspective on smoking: prohibited for harm

By
Sajed
Issa Shaban

The principles of Islamic law establish that everything that is not expressly prohibited as harmful to health or contrary to morality is permitted. Since there are no specific references to tobacco smoking in fundamental texts such as the Quran and the Sunnah, many jurists in the recent past have not expressed themselves explicitly on the topic of smoking.

However, in more recent years, the permissibility status of smoking has been further modified, to the extent that authoritative Islamic scholars have issued edicts (fatwas) declaring

smoking as prohibited (haram). It would be interesting to understand the reasons that have led to the different interpretations of Islamic law regarding smoking over time.

Islam represents both a spiritual and legal tradition, which has a strong impact on daily thoughts and behaviors. Expressing the concept in a few words, it can be said that the central element of this religion is to counteract, or at least minimize, the risk of harming the individual and society; while at the same time, maximize the possibilities of individual and collective well-being. The religious and



legal objectives are therefore to protect life, well-being, and property, and preserve the intellect, honor, and moral integrity.

The Quran is the direct word of God, the Sunna, a set of behaviors, actions, and attitudes instructed by Prophet Mohammad (PBUH.) The law of deductive logic, alongside the support of the aforementioned sources, allows scholars and competent authorities to express themselves on the news and needs of a world that constantly

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*The reclassification of smoking
as prohibited is based
on the general prohibition
of all the things that might cause harm*

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aims to align its parameters with the sources. This justifies the evolution and adaptability of Islamic law.

The reclassification of smoking as a prohibited action is based on the general prohibition of all the things that might cause harm.

For instance, things that harm religion and worship: The Prophet (PBUH) said: “Whoever eats garlic or onion, avoids us and our prayer and stays at home; angels are bothered by what bothers humans”. The smell emanating from a smoker’s mouth can certainly be annoying for those around him.

Harm to the body: “Do not kill yourselves... Do not lead yourselves to destruction... No harm should be inflicted on yourself or others”. As already mentioned, the scientific evidence that smoking causes organic damage could be sufficient to make it prohibited. Damage to the mind and willpower: the fact that nicotine addiction causes craving with smoking cessation and that, with tobacco, the individual suffers the exciting or falsely relaxing effects of nicotine, clearly goes against the indications of the word of God - which encourages maintaining the control on intellect, reason, and senses.

There is also the damage to property. A smoker squanders his wealth on things that cause harm and not well-being; “Do not squander your resources extravagantly: those who squander are brothers of the de-

mons”. These and other reasons are mentioned in the fatwas in support of the need to prohibit smoking. Moreover, it should be underlined that this does not only refer to cigarettes, but to everything that has similar effects including the use of water pipes (hookahs, shisha, etc.), typical of Arab culture countries. Furthermore, this interpretation extends not only to the consumption of tobacco, but also to offering it, being with those who smoke or sell their products.

The same reasons apply equally, with even greater force, to various types of drugs, such as marijuana and hashish, as tobacco is considered as a substance that causes a form of intoxication (inebriation). And the Quran is clear in this regard, condemning the state of intoxication and the individual who harms himself and society by consuming drugs.

In 1999, a WHO meeting on the theme “Tobacco and Religion” was held in Geneva, which assessed the influence of religion on public health as the new frontier in terms of cooperation. Furthermore, in Asia in 2023, the Indonesian Smoking Control Foundation was successful with its initiative aimed at educating middle school students about the harmful effects of smoking and tobacco advertising. This is a talk on “smoking or health” held in various schools during the fasting month. For a Muslim, this is a favorable period for quitting, as smoking is prohibited during daylight hours. ■



Soulatiyah:

First formal school in Makkah

By
Dr. Mohammed
Ali Al-Wafi

Most historians specializing in the history of India and the Arab world agree that this relationship is not a recent one; rather, its roots are believed to trace back to the time of Prophet Solomon, son of David (peace be upon them). This relationship extended beyond trade, embracing cultural and civilizational exchanges as well.

Arabs traveled to India, with some making it their second home. Similarly, Muslims from India visited the lands of the Two Holy Mosques, benefiting from its rich resources, particularly in religious and Islamic sciences. Many of them went on to become prominent scholars and imams in various Islamic disciplines.



One of the most remarkable stories in the history of Indian-Arab relations is that of the Al-Soulatiyah School, the first formal school in Makkah, established by Sheikh Rahmatullah bin Khalilur Rahman Al-Kairanawi, an Indian scholar, in 1875. This school was made possible by the generous donation of an Indian woman, Soulathunnisa Beegum.

At the time, the people of Makkah needed someone to take on this noble mission, as Islamic education was primarily limited to traditional kuttabs, or basic schools that taught reading, writing and memorization of the Qur'an, and a few lessons at the Grand Mosque.

The school played a crucial role in

“*Arabs traveled to India, with some making it their second home. Similarly, Muslims from India visited the lands of the Two Holy Mosques, benefiting from its rich resources, particularly in religious and Islamic sciences. Many of them went on to become prominent scholars and imams in various Islamic disciplines.*”

systematically educating the previous generation. Its graduates went on to become pioneers in education and teaching. Some, like Sheikh Hassan bin Ali Al-Masawi, who founded Dar Al-Uloom Al-Deeniyyah in Makkah, established schools modeled after it. Others founded religious schools and Quranic centers across the Islamic world.

It produced distinguished scholars and jurists who held judicial positions in courts throughout the history of the Hejaz and the Kingdom.

Among the most notable scholars associated with this school was the esteemed Sheikh Rahmatullah Al-Kairanawi. His influence extended far beyond founding an Islamic school within the Haram in Makkah; he was widely regarded as a leading intellectual and religious figure of his time. Sheikh Rahmatullah dedicated much of his life to refuting the false beliefs that had spread throughout India during that period.

He worked tirelessly to restore the faith and confidence of the Muslim community and elevate their pride in the virtues of their religion. One

of his most famous contributions was the well-known debate with the scholar Pfander.

Recognizing his expertise in defending the faith, the Ottoman Caliph, Sultan Abdul Aziz Khan, invited him to the Ottoman capital, Istanbul. Sheikh Rahmatullah was warmly welcomed at a grand official ceremony attended by ministers, scholars, and high-ranking officials. The Sultan honored him with an imperial robe and the second-class Order of Medjidie, in recognition of his service to Islam.

After spending some time in Istanbul, Sheikh Rahmatullah returned to the Haram in Makkah to continue his teaching and educational efforts.

Upon his return from Istanbul in 1863, Sheikh Al-Kairanawi focused on teaching at the Haram. Makkah was a hub for scholars, seekers of knowledge, and specialists in Islamic jurisprudence. These scholars conducted study circles in the Haram, sharing their knowledge of Islamic and Arabic sciences and other Sharia disciplines. However, no organized school was operating



with a clear methodology in a stimulating educational environment.

Recognizing the importance of establishing an Islamic school to provide structured education for Muslim children in both worldly and religious sciences, Sheikh Al-Kairanawi envisioned a central school with a unique character, offering lessons in both areas. His goal was to prepare students to face the challenges of life with a balanced education.

He opened his school in the house of an Indian prince, known as Dar Al-Saqifa, located at the foot of Jabal Hindi in the Al-Shamiyah neighborhood, in the year 1868. The school became known among the people of Makkah as the Indi-

an School or Sheikh Rahmatullah's School. It marked a significant turning point in the history of education in Makkah, serving as a cornerstone in the development of a well-educated Muslim generation that contributed to the betterment of both religion and society.

Soulathunnisa Beegum

During the Hajj season of 1872, a devout woman from the outskirts of Calcutta, in the state of West Bengal, traveled to perform the pilgrimage with her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. Nawazish Hasan. After completing the Hajj rituals, this generous family decided to build a charitable lodge (Ribat) near the Haram in Makkah or Madinah, as a lasting act of charity.

Mr. Nawazish Hasan attended Sheikh Al-Kairanawi's lessons at the Haram in Makkah every evening after the Maghrib prayer. To fulfill the family's wish, he consulted Sheikh Rahmatullah about building a charitable lodge. However, the Sheikh advised that there was no need for additional Ribats in Makkah and suggested instead purchasing land to build a religious school. Lady Soulathunnisa was thrilled with the idea and quickly purchased land near the Haram in Makkah to establish the school, which Sheikh Rahmatullah would oversee. In 1973, Sheikh Al-Kairanawi laid the foundation stone for what would become the first formal school in the Hejaz region. This charitable initiative



by the generous family from India reflected a deep spirit of kindness, religious solidarity, and charitable cooperation.

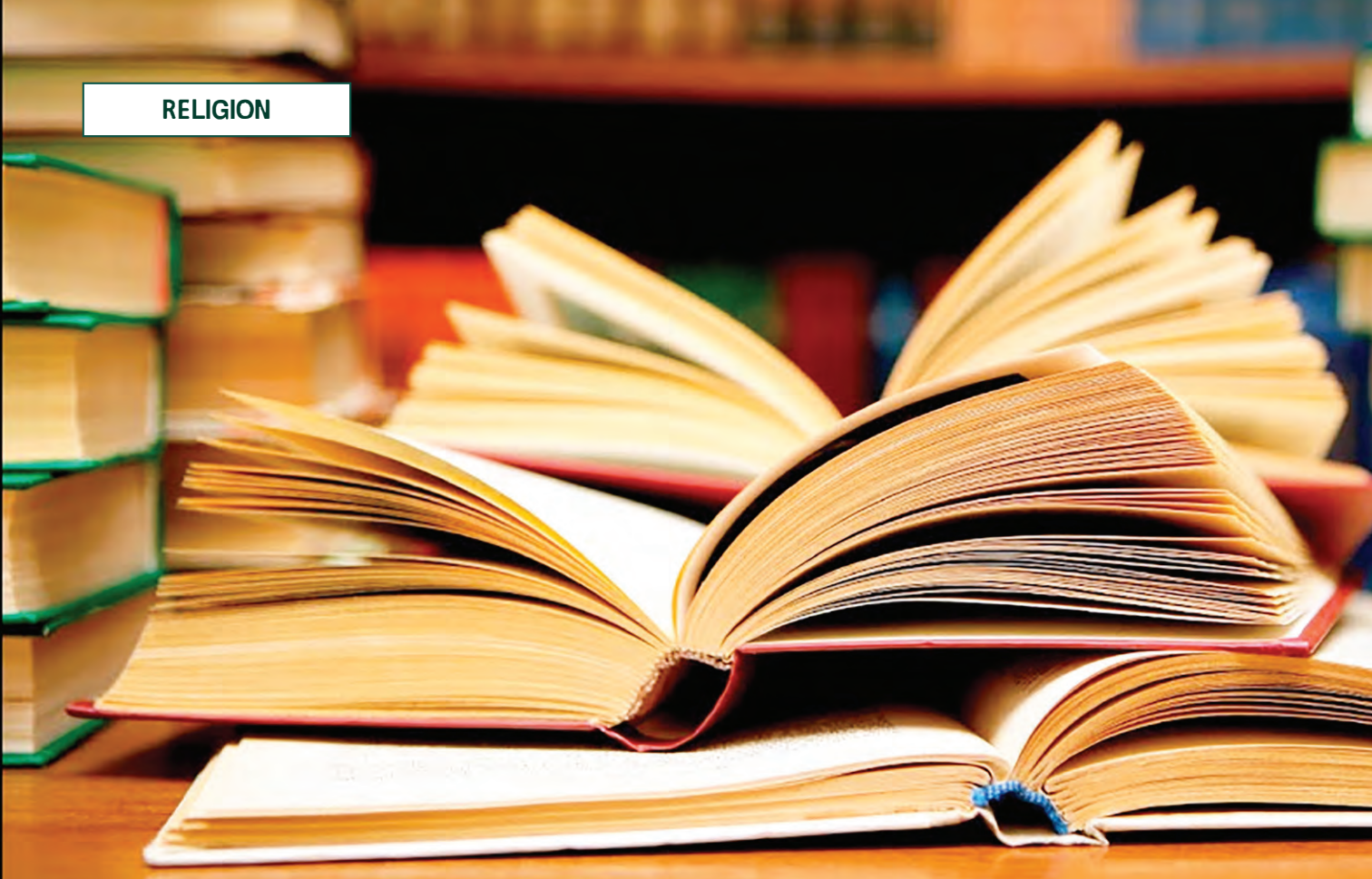
To honor the memory of the noble woman who made it possible, Sheikh Rahmatullah named the school “Al-Soulatiyah.”

Anyone who reads about the life of Lady Soulathunnisa will understand the deep religious values that influenced her character. History tells us that she was born into a devout family in Calcutta, with her lineage tracing back to the pious Sheikh Wasilullah, known for his asceticism and devotion in Bengal. Lady Soulathunnisa learned the Quran and religious sciences from an early age.

As she grew older, she married Sheikh Munshi Lutf Hasan, one of the wealthiest men in the region. A year before his death, Sheikh Lutf Hasan transferred all his property to his devoted wife. Raised in a deeply religious environment, Lady Soulathunnisa used most of her wealth for charitable causes, distributing it among the poor and needy. She also contributed to the construction of mosques and the development of roads in memory of her late husband, Lutf Hasan. Her life remains a remarkable example of faith-driven generosity in the Islamic community.

For over 250 years, Al-Soulatiyah School has played a vital role in educating scholars, jurists, judges,

and preachers throughout the Islamic world. It has produced a distinguished group of students who have significantly influenced the religious and intellectual landscape of the Muslim world. Many of these graduates have held important positions in Islamic communities, including roles in religious and legal fields, such as judges, muftis, and educators in Saudi universities and various educational institutions. The impact of the School has endured through the ages, despite changing times and evolving social circumstances. Its intellectual and scholarly legacy continues to be a subject of interest and study among scholars and researchers in the Islamic world. ■



Misrepresentation of Jurisprudential Differences in Extremist Rhetoric

By
**Zubair
Al-Ansari**

Jurisprudential differences among scholars are seen as one of the principles of flexibility in Islamic law. They ease hardship and provide leeway in people's daily lives. For this reason, most legal evidence used to derive rulings is considered speculative rather than definitive, as Al-Zarkashi notes, "so that people are not confined to a single school of thought, even when there is evidence supporting it."

There are several reasons for these dif-

ferences in jurisprudence, summarized as follows:

1. The absence of a clear religious text on the matter at hand. This requires scholars to engage in independent reasoning and consider the principles and objectives of Islamic law to determine what best serves the community's interests.
2. The presence of a religious text that is not definitive due to ambiguity in the meaning of the text, which can occur in both the Quran and the Sunnah, or from the text's authen-



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Jurisprudential opinions of extremist groups often come from unknown figures or individuals who lack proper scholarly and methodological training. These individuals are typically caught up in conflict-driven circumstances that prevent them from considering the broader context of the issues at hand and the potential consequences of their interpretations.

”

ticity, which can only occur in the Sunnah.

3. Historical and social changes that require scholars of each era to revisit jurisprudential issues, particularly those with differing opinions, to select the most suitable approaches for their communities and the historical context in which they live.

This brief overview of the causes and reasons for jurisprudential differences shows that such differences are fundamentally rooted in flexibility and choice, which are essential for enriching legal thought and adapting it to the needs of each era. The approach of scholars in establishing and acknowledging the necessity of these differences highlights their importance in Islam.

Whether by upholding the general principle that “every mujtahid (independent jurist) is correct” as long as their reasoning is within the framework of the guiding principles for understanding religious texts and their objectives, or by recognizing that consensus (ijma) applies only to a limited number of issues, as opposed to the many matters that have been subject to debate and differing opinions among various schools and jurisprudential trends.

However, with extremist groups, the principle of differences has been turned into a source of division and conflict. What was once a means of mercy and facilitation has been weaponized to fragment the Muslim community into sects and factions, and to sever its relationship with those who differ culturally and religiously. These groups have deliberately distorted the true nature of jurisprudential differences through their fatwas and opinions, creating a new form of division that deviates from the practices that have been established for centuries in Islamic tradition.

Extremist groups handle jurispru-

dential differences in the following ways:

1. Elevating jurisprudential differences to the level of doctrinal disputes, which often leads to widespread accusations of heresy and disbelief among Muslims. This approach also drives Muslim communities into open conflict with others. When examining many of the issues these groups use to create division and distinguish Muslims from others, we often find that they are based on secondary matters subject to various interpretations. They have taken some issues out of the realm of jurisprudential debate and placed them within the domain of creed, distorting concepts like loyalty and disavowal, which directly contradicts the clear teachings of Sharia and its objectives, as well as the divine wisdom in allowing religious differences to exist and the necessity of coexistence, for differences not to lead to bloodshed and corruption on earth.

2. Rejecting differing opinions, which naturally follows from the first point. When jurisprudential differences are elevated to the level of doctrinal issues, it inevitably

leads extremist groups, based on their flawed principles, to label others as heretics or unbelievers, and often to justify violence against them. This corrupt approach to dealing with differing opinions is in stark contrast to the established practices of Muslim scholars and jurists, who have traditionally respected each other's differences. It is well known that Islamic scholars have been willing to change their opinions in favor of others when they find the alternative opinion to be stronger and better supported by clear evidence or sound reasoning.

3. Claiming that their understanding of religious texts perfectly aligns with the intent of the lawgiver, which goes against the consensus among scholars that such understanding is speculative. Interpreting religious texts involves considering the historical and social context. While Sharia texts are divinely revealed, understanding and applying them—especially the speculative aspects of the Quran and Sunnah—require human effort, which is subject to error. Imam Al-Shawkani warned against those who use this claim to dismiss other juristic opinions and accuse other scholars of heresy or disbelief. He said: “Beware of those who claim that their opinion is what the Quran and Sunnah say, for this is a false claim based on a weak argument.”

4. Favoring strict opinions under the guise of caution, even though the principle is to choose the opinion supported by evidence and aligned with the public interest. Moreover, ease is a fundamental principle of Sharia that should be taken into account when consider-

“*The diversity of Islamic schools of thought is part of the divine wisdom in the natural order, and differing perspectives among Muslims arise from methodological factors tied to the foundations of these schools, as well as from changes related to geographical, temporal, and cultural circumstances.*”

ing different opinions

Jurisprudential opinions of extremist groups often come from unknown figures or individuals who lack proper scholarly and methodological training. These individuals are typically caught up in conflict-driven circumstances that prevent them from considering the broader context of the issues at hand and the potential consequences of their interpretations.

Those seeking religious guidance, especially online, should be cautious about the sources of fatwas and verify them with recognized scholars and officially endorsed institutions.

True scholars, deeply rooted in knowledge, have always placed jurisprudential differences in their proper context. This is reflected in the “Building Bridges Between Islamic Schools of Thought” document issued by the International Conference on Building Bridges Between Islamic Schools of Thought, organized by the Muslim World League in Ramadan of 2024 in Makkah. The document emphasizes that “the diversity of Islamic schools of thought is part of the divine wisdom in the natural order, and differing perspectives among

Muslims arise from methodological factors tied to the foundations of these schools, as well as from changes related to geographical, temporal, and cultural circumstances.”

The document also highlights that “it is essential to understand and address these differences with awareness and wisdom, while vigilant against the causes of division and discord. What unites the followers of Islamic schools of thought far outweighs what divides them, especially their shared belief in the Shahada and commitment to its implications. The bonds of Islamic brotherhood are stronger than any differences, and Muslims must always seek and follow the path of truth.”

This inclusive understanding of differences, which acknowledges their inevitability while emphasizing common ground, is exactly what extremist groups try to undermine. They attempt to impose their distorted views, narrow the broad-mindedness of Islamic thought, and turn what was originally a blessing and a source of ease into a tool for dividing the Ummah, creating factions, and weakening its unity and cohesion in the face of shared challenges. ■



THE CHARTER OF BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT AND SECTS

Endorsed by Muslim scholars from diverse
Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects

One Ummah

They worship one Lord,
recite one book, and follow
one Prophet, and share one
Direction (Qibla) regardless
of their location.

They are honored by Allah, the Most High,

By being given the name
'Al-Islam' as the name of
the religion, chosen by
Allah: "It is He (Allah) who
has named you Muslims."

From Makkah, their united Qibla, they confirmed that:

There is no place for
extraneous names and
descriptions that divide rather
than unite and diverge rather
than bring closer.



Arabic Language

one of six official UN languages

By
**Patrizia
Grandi**

The celebration of World Arabic Language Day last December coincided with the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of Arabic as one of the six official languages of the United Nations.

Arabic is spoken by over 450 million people around the world and, on December 18th, 2023, UNESCO brought together researchers, academics, young people and

heads of international institutions to pay homage to the language's poetic and artistic beauty. The event served as a solid platform to deepen the discussion on the influence of the Arabic language on knowledge, its transformation of society through poetry, and its remarkable impact on the arts.

Organized by the United Nations, pro-



moting the Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud Programme for the Arabic language, the initiative started at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, with a conference on the theme “Arabic: The Language of Poetry and the Arts”. Similar events took place simultaneously all over the world: from Azerbaijan to the Maldives, from Senegal to Singapore.

The Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL), Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa,

“*UNESCO brought together researchers and academics to pay homage to the poetic and artistic beauty of this language*”

was received during his visit to Egypt by the president of the Arabic Language Academy in Cairo, Abdel Wahab Abdel Hafez. The two addressed a range of academic topics and potential collaborations. The MWL plays an active role in promoting Arabic language education among non-native speakers, especially within Islamic countries.

In Baku, the vice-rector of academic affairs of ADA University, Fariz Ismailzade, announced that Arabic courses have begun at the university this year, underlining how “Arab-Azerbaijani relations are strengthening”.

Furthermore, on the occasion of the Arabic Language Day, the Saudi embassy in Hanoi presented the first Arabic-Vietnamese dictionary in the world. In addition, the King Salman Global Academy for the Arabic Language launched the standardized “Hamza” test for non-native Arabic speakers. The test evaluates reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills.

Also, in December, the first international conference on the cultural heritage of Arabic manuscripts

was held in Cairo, themed: “The author’s copy, challenges and problems”. The event was organized by the Institute of Arabic Manuscripts in Cairo, which is part of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

Academics from Brunei and Thailand cooperated to improve Arabic language teaching. A congregation of academics from the two countries gathered at the Language Center of the Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (Unissa).

The participants shared their experiences and knowledge of effective strategies for teaching Arabic during the seminar, which brought together academics from various educational institutions, including Thailand’s Princess of Naradhiwas University, to exchange expertise and discuss teaching methodologies. The collective effort underlies a mutual interest between educational institutions in Brunei and Thailand to promote and improve the teaching of Arabic. Among the topics discussed was also the upcoming fourth Conference on the Arabic language in South-East Asia. ■

Is There an Opportunity for Dietary Behavior Modification in Ramadan?

By
**Abdullah Amer
Al-Shehri**

The Arabic adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” underscores the paramount importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, an objective that individuals strive for throughout their existence to ensure their ability to undertake life’s required tasks and responsibilities. The field of health care has significantly benefited from the immense scientific advancements across various domains, experiencing a transformative shift in service delivery and the evolution of medical

research, which contributed to enhancing public health standards. However, this substantial advancement has been paralleled by rising statistics indicating an increase in the prevalence of certain diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. Medical studies and research have found a direct correlation between these ailments and dietary habits and lifestyle choices, indicating that modifying dietary behavior and lifestyle can prevent the onset of these diseases and reduce their complications.



The prevalence of fast-food culture among the youth worldwide is noteworthy. These meals, characterized by their low nutritional value but high content of fats, sugars, and salts, are universally favored among adolescents of various social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. The term “junk food” was initially coined in 1972 by Michael Jacobson, the director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, highlighting foods that, despite

their appealing taste, color, and appearance due to added enhancers, may deter young individuals and teenagers from consuming healthful diets rich in vegetables, fruits, and dairy.

Modern Dietary Practices and Misconceptions

The month of Ramadan offers a prime opportunity for general behavioral reform, with an enhanced prospect for rectifying improper dietary habits. It is crucial during

Ramadan to appreciate the value of nourishment and to recognize that its availability has not always been as it is in contemporary times. Historically, securing food involved considerable effort, necessitating hunting or foraging for sustenance, and individuals in many global regions a century ago would have been fortunate to secure enough daily sustenance. In ancient times, enduring hunger for a day or two was commonplace. This scenario extended over long durations when food was not readily accessible and, even when available, acquiring it required substantial effort. People lacked the capability to preserve food for extended periods, as not all foodstuffs were amenable to storage and had a limited shelf life before becoming spoiled and unfit for consumption.

The difficulty associated with sourcing food has transformed,



making acquisition remarkably easy, facilitating access to multiple meals daily, with an array of food varieties. This ease birthed a consumerist pattern concerning numerous food products, a majority potentially being unhealthy and non-beneficial. Corporate influences have augmented this trend through promotional campaigns and advertisements for food products, rendering them easily accessible and focusing particularly on young people and adolescents.

Such conduct has created incorrect nutritional habits where fast food and sugary beverages have become the widespread dietary norm, laden with high caloric content. Coupled with excessive con-

sumption and an inactive lifestyle, these dietary choices have led to an increase in obesity, subsequently heightening the risk for associated health issues such as type 2 diabetes and hypertension.

Fasting as Shield Against Unhealthy Nutrition

The Hadith, universally recognized, articulates that “fasting is a shield; thus, one should neither engage in obscene language nor act foolishly.” The term ‘shield’ herein symbolizes protection, allowing the observer of the fast to utilize their fasting as a defense against detrimental dietary habits during Ramadan. By adhering to simple guidelines, individuals can man-

age to reduce their cholesterol and blood pressure levels, and facilitate weight loss. Following these elementary suggestions enables weight management by avoiding overindulgence, particularly in foods rich in sugars and carbohydrates. The month designated for fasting serves as an appropriate time for dietary discipline and proper nutrition.

Influence of Nutritional Quality on General Health:

It is indisputable that the quality of dietary intake directly influences an individual’s overall health, particularly when integrated with lifestyle alterations concerning sufficient sleep and consistent engagement in physical activities.

Given that long-term poor dietary habits are the principal contributors to various human health conditions, Ramadan offers a sufficient period to concentrate on the quality of nutrition and to distance oneself from high-calorie, unhealthy dietary patterns.

Health Awareness

Health consciousness is essential, and the dissemination of knowledge regarding the enhancement of food quality, both during Ramadan and beyond, holds significant importance. Some educational institutions have strictly prohibited the entrance of fast food, recognizing that enriching the general cultural understanding of nutrition directly influences the community’s overall health status, not to mention the enhancement in healthcare quality in the long term: the workload of physicians would be reduced as the number of patients with medical complications attributable to

dietary habits is lowered.

Promoting a Health-Conscious Dietary Culture

Economically speaking, the healthcare budget in some nations encompasses large sums allocated for the construction of hospitals and providing healthcare and medications. Minimal investment in promoting awareness can substantially decrease this daunting economic bill. Reflecting on the tobacco companies, which accumulated huge profits over decades by marketing their tobacco products to teenagers through extensive advertising campaigns, we observe that some nations with costly healthcare systems have recognized the grave health consequences and proceeded to curb these corporations from exploiting advertising spaces to promote their products, subsequently mandating the inclusion of explicit warnings and informational brochures indicating that smoking is a leading cause of premature mortality and is associated with various cardiovascular diseases and pulmonary issues. The same applies to numerous other unhealthy consumer products, such as energy drinks and carbonated beverages, where legislation has been enacted to define the consumer age group, prohibiting sales to individuals younger than eighteen years of age. ■



By
Dania
Ramadan

The ocean floor is still a pristine heritage to be protected

International waters and the ocean floor are the largest and still uncontaminated ecosystems in the world, and therefore the primary object of “sea predator” appetites.

Extractive industries are searching, in deep waters, for copper, cobalt, nickel, and manganese. All of these constitute precious materials for the development of key technologies for energy transition, such as batteries, wind turbines, and solar energy.

The ocean floor also represents a source of hope, since at the bottom of the sea there is a heritage to be protected. Experts remind us that we still do not know enough about the ecosystem of the great seabed, and we should therefore avoid its exploitation before being certain that we would not irremediably destroy a large part of nature.

New technologies are now allowing the exploitation of the seabed, with no one to enforce the few laws in place for its protection. In 2020, only a fifth of the seabed was declared as previously mapped. Giada Balloch, a brilliant science communicator, wrote in the Italian newspaper “l’Identità”, that this is incredible, considering that the oceans cover 71% of the entire Earth’s surface. Although sonars and other devices have made considerable progress, much of the ocean floor still remains unexplored.

In recent years, the prospect of mapping the entire ocean floor by 2030 has attracted significant interest. New instruments and advanced systems, including sophisticated under-



water drones and robots, have been designed to finalize this ambitious project. Balloch believes that: “climate change and pollution have a significant impact on our seas and the completion of the map could provide us with fundamental data to understand the effects of these changes and develop more effective mitigation strategies.”

The goal of exploring the ocean’s last secrets could become a reality within the next decade. And the hidden treasure of the seas could fuel a new ecological marketing combining profit and environmental responsibility, with the benefit and safeguarding of flora, fauna and natural resources.

The significance of this underwater world for our planet cannot be underestimated. It provides oxygen, regulates the climate, is a vital food source, and provides opportunities for tourism. New Zealand, Belize, and South Africa, for example, have demonstrated how a country can gain benefit from the creation of protected areas.

A further way to exploit it, while at the same time promoting its conservation, is through the cosmetics and nutraceuticals sector: interest in natural ingredients from the sea, such as algae and marine microorganisms,

is growing. Many companies are investing in the development of these products, creating new market opportunities and products defined as ‘sustainable’. However, Balloch concludes: “it is essential that they act authentically, actively participating in the protection of the oceans rather than exploiting them for profit only.”

The shadows of the “sea predators” stand out, ready to stretch their claws. The danger is imminent. The countdown has already begun. The only stop could come from the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the international authority established to protect the seabed as a common heritage of humanity. Deep ocean ecosystems can breathe a sigh of relief. At the moment the feared green light for deep sea mining has in fact been put on hold: we will talk again about it in 2025.

This is what the Council of the International Seabed Authority decided last July during a long meeting in Kingston, Jamaica. This is good news for the movement of scientists and activists fighting against this potentially devastating new form of extractivism. But it is not yet a victory, since the call for a total moratorium on deep sea mining has not been taken into consideration so far. ■

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
قُلْ يٰعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ
لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا
إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

In the Name of Allah the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful

Say, 'O Prophet, **that Allah says,**

"O My servants who have exceeded the limits against their souls!

Do not lose hope in Allah's mercy, for Allah certainly forgives all sins.

He is indeed the All-Forgiving, **Most Merciful.**

Surah Az-Zumar - vers. 53

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