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# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

The Religion and Peacemaking program conducts research, identifies best practices, and develops new peacebuilding tools for religious leaders and organizations. It also helps define and shape the field of religious peacebuilding.

USIP's Religion and Peacemaking program has produced a series of Special Reports on Islam, including "Applying Islamic Principles in the Twenty-first Century," "Ijtihad," "Islam and Democracy," "Islamic Perspectives on Peace and Violence," and "The Diversity of Muslims in the United States." This report is the most recent addition to that series. It is coauthored by David Smock, associate vice president for the Religion and Peacemaking program, and Qamar-ul Huda, senior program officer in that program. The research assistant for this project was Basma Yousef.

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## Islamic Peacemaking Since 9/11

### Summary

- Muslims in general and Muslim leaders particularly have often been severely criticized for not more energetically condemning the violent acts of Muslim extremists.
- Violent extremists are on one edge of the Muslim community. They are counterbalanced by a growing movement of Muslim peacemakers.
- Equally as notable as Islamic militancy but less noted are Muslims' 1) widespread condemnation of terrorism and other violent acts; 2) promotion of interfaith dialogue; 3) education of Muslim youth and reeducation of extremist Muslims; and 4) promotion of peaceful conflict resolution.

### Introduction

Muslims in general and Muslim leaders particularly have often been severely criticized for not more energetically condemning the violent acts of Muslim extremists. The uninformed often assume that extremists represent Islam's mainstream. Even those who recognize that extremists are on the margins of the worldwide Muslim community do not understand the degree of pluralism within Islam. Islam comes in many forms and interpretations. Violent extremists are on one edge of the Muslim community, but they are counterbalanced by a growing movement of Muslim peacemakers.

The purpose of this report is 1) to explore the extent to which Muslim leaders have spoken out publicly to condemn the violent acts committed by extremists; and 2) to identify growing efforts within Muslim communities to reach out peacefully to other communities and to reinforce the peaceful message of Islam. It is also hoped that reports of these efforts in one part of the world will be instructive for Muslims living elsewhere.

### Reactions of Muslim Leaders to Religiously Related Violence

Most key Muslim leaders have widely and repeatedly denounced the September 11, 2001, attacks and subsequent acts of violence committed in the name of Islam. The Council

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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

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on American-Islamic Relations issued a press statement on Sept. 11, condemning the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C.: "We condemn in the strongest terms possible what are apparently vicious and cowardly acts of terrorism against innocent civilians." The popular Internet site Beliefnet contains a compendium of statements by prominent American Muslims condemning the perpetrators of 9/11 and subsequent acts by extremists. Thirteen American Muslim organizations issued a statement on September 21, 2001, stating, "We support the President and Congress of the U.S. in the struggle against terrorism. Holding to the ideals of both our religion and our country, we condemn all forms of terrorism, and confirm the need for perpetrators of any such acts of violence to be brought to justice, including those who carried out attacks of Tuesday, September 11, 2001."

The highest judicial body for Islam in the United States, the Fiqh Council of North America, declared in 2005, "The Fiqh Council of North America wishes to reaffirm Islam's absolute condemnation of terrorism and religious extremism. . . . Targeting civilians' life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is haram, or forbidden, and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not 'martyrs.' The Quran, Islam's revealed text, states: 'Whoever kills a person [unjustly] . . . it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved all mankind.' (Quran, 5:32)" In 2007, the Fiqh Council of North America issued a fatwa, a legal edict, declaring:

. . . in the spirit of this season of Thanksgiving . . . the Fiqh Council of North America states its unequivocal and unqualified condemnation of the destruction and violence committed against innocent men and women . . . . All acts of terrorism are forbidden in Islam. It is forbidden for a Muslim to cooperate or associate with any individual or group that is involved in any act of terrorism or violence. It is the duty of Muslims to report to enforcement authorities any threat which is designed to place a human being in harm's way, bringing them before a competent court of law and in accordance with due process.

In 2007, the Muslim Council of Britain convened a meeting of more than two hundred Muslim leaders that issued this statement:

We hereby emphatically affirm, announce and declare that (1) We consider all terrorist acts that aim to murder and maim innocent human beings utterly reprehensible and abhorrent. There is no basis whatsoever for such acts in our faith. Islam, as a religion of peace, rejects terror and promotes peace and harmony. We urge Muslim organizations and institutions to exercise their Islamic duty to correct and dispel misinterpretations of our faith. (2) All Britons, Muslim and non-Muslim, should stand united against the threat of terrorism. We should not allow terrorists to divide us and polarize one community against another . . . . 3) Islam requires us to protect and safeguard the life of civilians. It is our collective duty to give the fullest support and cooperation to the police in helping to prevent acts of terror from taking place. Islam requires us to protect and safeguard the life of human beings.

These American and British statements were echoed in the Arab world. The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Asheikh, stated on September 15, 2001, "Hijacking planes, terrorizing innocent people and shedding blood constitute a form of injustice that can not be tolerated by Islam, which views them as gross crimes and sinful acts." Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a prominent Islamic scholar and chairman of the Sunna and Sira Council in Qatar, issued a fatwa with other prominent Arab scholars on

September 27, 2001, condemning terrorism. Qaradawi encouraged Muslims to donate blood to the victims of the attacks. Similar condemnations were issued by Sheikh Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi, Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University, the oldest seat of Islamic learning. In 2007, Chief Islamic Justice Sheikh Izz-Eddine al-Khatib al-Tamimi of Jordan issued a message urging Muslims worldwide to reject religious extremism and to adhere to Islam's message of tolerance. Some "who claim to belong to Islam, have done gruesome and criminal acts in its name. . . . According to the Islamic religion an end does not justify the means."

Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi condemned the "terrible" attacks, and former president of Iran Seyyed Mohammad Khatami expressed his "deep sorrow and sympathy for the American nation." Immediately after 9/11, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt condemned the attacks and terrorism in general. Similar condemnations came from high officials in Syria, Jordan, the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Indonesia. King Abdullah II of Jordan in his Amman Message issued in 2004 declared, "On religious and moral grounds, we denounce the contemporary concept of terrorism that is associated with wrongful practices, whatever their source and form may be. Such acts are represented by aggression against human life in an oppressive form that transgresses the rulings of God, frightening those who are secure, violating peaceful civilians, finishing off the wounded, and killing prisoners; and they employ unethical means, such as destroying buildings and ransacking cities: 'Do not kill the soul that God has made sacrosanct, save for justice.' (Quran 6:151)"

The fifty-seven member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which is the overarching organization of Muslim-majority countries, declared on September 12, 2001, "We condemn these savage and criminal acts which are anathema to all human conventions and values and the monotheist religions, led by Islam." Later, the OIC issued a Convention on Combating International Terrorism stating, "believing that terrorism constitutes a gross violation of human rights, in particular the right to freedom and security, as well as an obstacle to the free functioning of institutions and socio-economic development, as it aims at destabilizing states; Convinced that terrorism cannot be justified in any way and that it should therefore be unambiguously condemned in all its forms and manifestations, and all its actions, means and practices, whatever its origin, causes or purposes." Senior clerics from the Darul Uloom Deoband representing the conservative and influential Sunni Deobandi movement in India issued a fatwa declaring, "Islam rejects all kinds of unjust violence, breach of peace, bloodshed, murder and plunder, and does not allow it in any form."

## **Interfaith Dialogue to Promote Peace**

Well before 9/11, many efforts were made to organize interfaith dialogue, particularly between Muslims and Christians. The Vatican has been particularly resourceful in this regard. The Bishops-Ulama Forum in the Philippines dates from 1996 and played a role in promoting peace following the peace agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front. The Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum was established in Pakistan in 1998 to promote religious tolerance between Muslims and Christians so they could work to promote peace, human rights, and democracy.

After 9/11, an urgent awareness arose about how critical interfaith tolerance is to world peace, so interfaith dialogue gained new prominence. In 2002, the annual Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue was inaugurated. In 2008, the two hundred participants from thirty countries issued a declaration stating, "Interfaith dialogue is a necessity at every level: international, regional, and local; working groups on different levels . . . should be established with emphasis on issues such as education, peacebuilding and the promotion of solidarity and understanding among different communities and cultures." In 2003, the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC)

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was established “with the aim of using research, dialogue, and practical initiatives to promote values of peaceful interfaith coexistence . . . . The attacks [of 9/11] and the subsequent U.S.-led war on terrorism have provoked numerous dialogues on the civilization tensions between Islam and Christianity and have fostered a global chasm of fear and intolerance between followers of the two faiths. JICRC will act as a mechanism to mediate the divide that is being perpetuated by mutual fears and misunderstandings. The JICRC will constitute initiatives for building and broadening interfaith coexistence and mutual respect between religions.” JICRC organizes an annual conference for leading Muslims and Christians from the Middle East under the chairmanship of King Abdullah II.

Former President Mohammad Khatami of Iran proposed to the United Nations a dialogue among civilizations, which heavily emphasized interfaith dialogue. The United Nations declared 2001 to be the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations, and in 2004, Khatami founded the International Institute for Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations, based in Iran. At the initiative of the Spanish and Turkish governments and under the auspices of the United Nations, the Alliance of Civilizations was created in 2005. The alliance is supported by eighty-five member countries and international organizations. Its mission statement declares, “The Alliance functions, both globally and within the UN system, in the following capacities: a bridge builder and convener, connecting people and organizations devoted to promoting trust and understanding between diverse communities, particularly—but not exclusively—between Muslim and Western societies.”

Since 2005, the presidents of the European Commission, European Council, and European Parliament bring together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders every year to discuss issues of mutual concern. The focus in 2008 was reconciliation through intercultural and interfaith dialogue, as well as shared religious perspectives on climate change. On Holocaust Memorial Day in 2008, the Supreme Muslim Council of Ireland issued this statement: “Today is a day of remembrance and contemplation of the horrific tragedy that befell the Jewish people in WWII which is a shameful event in the history of the human race and a failure of a society to protect a vulnerable section of its indigenous people . . . . If we were to exclude the current conflicts in the Middle East, then we will find that in the past the Muslim and Jewish peoples have lived side-by-side for centuries in relative peace, understanding and harmony.” In February 2008, leading European Muslim scholars including Tariq Ramadan and Mustafa Cerić, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, issued an open letter to the Jewish community stating, “As Muslims and Jews we share core doctrinal beliefs, the most important of which is strict monotheism.” The letter was issued “as a gesture of goodwill towards rabbinic leaders and the wider Jewish communities of the world.”

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Interfaith dialogue initiatives are probably more numerous in the United States than in any other part of the world, with initiatives undertaken by Muslim communities, as well as Christian and Jewish organizations. In 2008, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Union for Reform Judaism jointly produced a dialogue guide between Jews and Muslims for use by mosques and synagogues. ISNA President Ingrid Mattson stated in her introductory letter: “There are good reasons for the engagement of American Jews and Muslims at this point in our history. On the one hand, religion seems to have a particularly strong role in our society. On the other hand, perhaps there has never been a time in American history when religion has been so widely seen as a negative force.” In November 2007, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding in New York organized the first National Summit of Imams and Rabbis held at the New York Synagogue and the Islamic Cultural Center. In February 2008, the National Muslim-Christian Initiative in North America held its first meeting. ISNA was one of the cosponsors, and Sayyid Syeed of ISNA stated that “this initiative is part of ongoing Muslim efforts to engage other faith communities in North America and to bring about an understanding of common goals and reconciliation in our communities.”

The most important and far-reaching Muslim initiative to promote dialogue has been the issuance in November 2007 of “A Common Word Between Us and You,” addressed to

Christians around the world and signed by 138 Muslim scholars, clerics, and intellectuals. The introduction states that this is the first such initiative since the days of the Prophet to declare the common ground between Christianity and Islam. Those signing the statement represent every denomination and school of thought in Islam and every major Islamic country. King Abdullah II of Jordan was the patron of the gathering that produced the document. The introduction also notes: "Never before have Muslims delivered this kind of definitive consensus statement on Christianity. Rather than engage in polemic, the signatories have adopted the traditional and mainstream Islamic position of respecting the Christian scripture . . . . Indeed, the most fundamental common ground between Islam and Christianity, and the best basis for future dialogue and understanding, is the love of God and the love of the neighbor." More than three hundred Christian scholars issued a statement affirming the "Common Word" document. American Protestants responded by hosting a large gathering of Christian and Muslim leaders at Yale University in July 2008 to discuss the letter. The Vatican hosted a new World Muslim-Catholic Forum based on "A Common Word" later that year.

One of the most important interfaith conferences in recent years was initiated by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. It was sponsored by the Saudi-based World Muslim League and held in Madrid in July 2008. The conference brought together Sunni and Shiite Muslims and Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Shintoists. Most noteworthy and precedent-setting is the fact that the Saudi king and the World Muslim League—representatives of the world's most closed and conservative Muslim communities—sponsored the event. This is a very significant opening on their part toward dialogue with other religious communities, as well as an affirmation that non-Muslims deserve opportunities for international communication with Muslims.

The Centre for Religious Dialogue in Bosnia has been an important arena for Muslims and Christians to come together to address post-conflict trauma and to develop trusting relationships in the aftermath of the mid-1990s war there. Through international support, religious leaders have examined how the other is portrayed in their respective traditions and how to use practical approaches to counter negative stereotypes of each other.

## Islamic Interpretations

The fact that the Islamic intellectual tradition is extremely diverse helps explain how disparate behavior and acts, including those relating to violence and nonviolence, can all be justified in the name of Islam. The diversity of interpretations within Sunni Islam is demonstrated by the fact that four major schools of thought developed in the eighth and ninth centuries. Shiite interpretations differ from these Sunni legal schools; however, historically, there are common legal, philosophical, and theological interpretations shared by Sunnis and Shiites. Over the last fifty years, Muslim scholars from a variety of backgrounds have produced significant new interpretations. Some major concerns include rethinking the application of Islamic principles that deal with peace/war, governance, economics, social engagement, banking, human rights, education, and democracy.

Contrary to popular characterizations of Islam, there is a strong and continuing tradition of interpretation and reinterpretation of Islamic principles to address changing times. The science of *ijtihad*, or interpretation of Islamic principles, has been more active during some periods of history, but it is a continuing tradition, and current circumstances make the practice of *ijtihad* timelier than ever.\* As noted Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out, the tools to counter extremism lie within Islam, and particularly with pious Muslims: "Today, hope is manifested in Muslim intellectuals who

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***Today, hope is manifested in Muslim intellectuals who are intelligent, pious and who are in the process of rethinking Islam in the face of the challenges of modernity.***

\* See "*Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the Twenty-first Century*," USIP Special Report No. 125, August 2004.

***The core beliefs of Islam are timeless and changeless. What differs from age to age is articulation—the way the faith is lived in the light of new generations and new challenges.***

are intelligent, pious and who are in the process of rethinking Islam in the face of the challenges of modernity. They look at the question from the opposite direction than those Muslim intellectuals who are fascinated by secularism and who attempt to bring Western solutions to Muslim problems.” The Ankara School of Islamic interpretation is particularly active in the field of modern theological exegesis. Mehmet Pacaci of this school says the core beliefs of Islam are timeless and changeless. What differs from age to age is articulation—the way the faith is lived in the light of new generations and new challenges. That includes the way that sharia is understood. A team at the University of Ankara is working to research all the sayings and actions of the Prophet and to put them in their historical context. In explaining this project, Mehmet Gormez, another leading thinker and member of this school, stated that this is an effort to distinguish timeless truths from geographical, cultural, and religious values of their time and place.

Innumerable scholarly treatises, including those published by the Institute of Islamic Information and Education and by Islam21, have been written on the meaning of jihad, concluding that jihad does not exclude violent responses to attacks on Muslim communities, but that the central thrust of jihad is nonviolent. The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr. Ali Gomaa, has made such a declaration and interpretation. More broadly, Dr. Gomaa stated that “the flexibility and adaptability of Islamic law is perhaps its greatest asset. To provide people with practical and relevant guidance while at the same time staying true to its foundational principles, Islam allows the wisdom and moral strength to be applied in modern times.”

Many imams across the world are making vigorous efforts to educate the younger members of their mosques that extremist interpretations of Islam are inaccurate. Imam Mohamed Magid, who heads a mosque in Virginia, says that he convenes classes with his younger congregants to talk “about using democratic means—not violence—to convey their frustrations and disagreements with U.S. foreign policy.” He preaches nonviolence as being faithful to Islamic principles.

Mohammed Dajani founded the Wasati Movement for young Palestinians to counter the prevailing beliefs that the only way to resolve conflict or differences is through a win-loss formula and that Muslims, Christians, and Jews are not meant to coexist. He asserts that Islam calls on Muslims to be moderate and peace-loving. He is trying to meet the challenge of religious radicalism through a homegrown contest for the hearts and minds of young Palestinians.

The young Muslim televangelist Moez Masoud, who has millions of viewers in North Africa, exemplifies a new movement to appeal to younger Muslims by promoting an upbeat and tolerant brand of Islam. Abdallah Schleifer, a specialist on Islam and electronic media at the American University in Cairo, says that Masoud and others promote a “sweet orthodoxy, which stresses the humane and compassionate.” Amr Khaled is another preacher with a mass following among educated middle-class and upper-class Egyptians, who are attracted to his message of personal piety and spiritual realization rather than militant ideology. In Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, a new TV channel is largely devoted to promoting the same kinds of religious teachings.

In 2006, the Second International Conference of the Assembly for Moderate Islamic Thought and Culture sponsored by the Royal Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan issued a twenty-five point plan to give practical support to moderates in reforming and reviving all aspects of Islamic heritage, values, and ethics in the global Muslim community. The assembly called for an international moderate assembly to generate a moderate movement and to coordinate activities with “all institutions and Islamic agencies, which adhere to the moderation program.”

The Muslims of Europe Conference held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2006, addressed the issues of Muslim minorities in Europe, the rise of Islamophobia, and racism. Participants committed to collectively fight terrorism and promote diversity and inclusivity. The twelve-point declaration, known as the Topkapi Declaration, reasserted its support of

the European Council for Fatwa and Research to continue working on engagement with society and positive integration. One section stated, "This right is in accordance with the democratic processes of Europe and in accordance with their faith. Islam calls upon all Muslims to promote the common good and welfare of society as a whole and prevent what is wrong."

Since 2002, the annual Doha Debates in Qatar have attracted more than five hundred leading scholars, practitioners, activists, politicians, lawyers, media specialists, economists, and other professionals to a widely publicized debate on contemporary issues such as terrorism, war, refugees, trade, education, conflict prevention, discrimination, labor rights, interfaith dialogue, and other peacemaking subjects. The impressive Doha Debates event attempts to address serious problems in the region while finding practical solutions to support civil society activities in peacebuilding.

## **Educational Efforts**

In Indonesia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, USIP's Religion and Peacemaking Program has discovered a hunger on the part of many administrators and teachers at madrassas for alternative teaching materials. The popular press frequently characterizes madrassas as hotbeds of Islamic radicalism, and some madrassas have been the source for particular religious, social, political, and militant exploitation. But USIP's Religion program has found hundreds of madrassas that want materials they can use to teach interfaith tolerance, pluralism, and peacemaking.

To reduce sectarian Sunni-Shiite violence in Pakistan, USIP is working with eminent Pakistani scholars to find common ground and contribute toward peace education. The scholars collaborated to write a peace education textbook that will be used in religious schools to teach principles of peacebuilding based on Islamic tradition. This joint Sunni-Shiite project to diversify religious education builds upon the scholars' vast knowledge of Islamic concepts of peace and conflict while supporting the next generation of religious leaders to become peacemakers.

USIP has had similar training programs in Afghanistan's madrassas to impart to teachers, and in turn to their students, critical skills and knowledge relating to peace education and conflict resolution. Newly trained teachers are developing peace education resource centers in their religious schools to support local peacemaking efforts. These resource centers will have materials on Islamic sources relating to pluralism, democracy, tolerance, and human rights. At the national level, USIP is supporting the National Reconciliation Committee in Afghanistan to hold a summit on reconciliation and the practical steps needed to achieve it.

Governments in several Muslim countries are organizing reeducation programs to promote Islamic pluralism and tolerance. During Ramadan in 2008, the Moroccan government sent scores of clerics to Europe to reeducate Moroccan immigrants in Europe about Islamic teachings on peace and to be aware of signs of misguided teachings of intolerance and hatred. The Moroccan Ministry of Religious Affairs stated that these clerics will "answer the religious needs of the Moroccan community abroad, to protect it from any speeches of extremism or irregular nature, and to shelter it from extremism and fanaticism."

The government of Yemen has introduced a reeducation program in Yemeni jails for prisoners who are considered jihadists. Leading clerics, psychologists, and social health counselors meet with prisoners to engage them in religious instruction. The organizer of the program explained the origins of the program this way: "It came from the idea that terror depends on ideology and that thought should be confronted with thought." Saudi Arabia has adopted a similar program, which also involves the prisoner's family members being part of the healing and reconciliation process. Saudi Arabia's top cleric, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Asheikh, has adamantly instructed Saudi youth not to join jihadist activities since they contradict Islamic teachings.

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The International Centre for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP) was established in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2003 to promote pluralism within Muslim communities there and in Malaysia, Bangladesh, Thailand, and the Philippines. Among other activities, ICIP has developed texts on tolerant Islam for use in religious schools in Southeast Asia. Former president of Indonesia K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid has established the Wahid Institute “for the development of moderate Islamic thought to promote democratic reform, religious pluralism, multiculturalism and tolerance among Muslims both in Indonesia and around the world.” One of the institute’s programs provides six months of basic textual skill in Islamic studies for young Indonesians, “learning from a curriculum of progressive Muslim thinking devised by the Institute.” Wahid is committed to countering those who “seek to enforce—through intimidation and violence—a colorless, monolithic uniformity that does not and has never existed in the long history of Islam.”

Various Turkish organizations, including the Rumi Forum, are promoting the teachings of tolerance and pluralism advocated by famous Turkish scholar Fethullah Gulen. These Turkish organizations have established hundreds of schools in Muslim countries to promote Gulen’s nonviolent and peaceful interpretation of Islam. With its many publications on tolerance and Islamic peacemaking, the Gulen movement is a leading Muslim organization on religious and cultural dialogues.

Pendidikan Damai (PPD), a nonprofit educational NGO in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, promotes peace education for religious and nonreligious schools. Banda Aceh has had to deal with violence from separatists, as well as violence from the national army, which was sent to restrain uprisings. One critical PPD project focused on supporting the Acehese Ulama Council through workshops on Islamic peacemaking and writing a two-volume peace education textbook that is being used in all of the local schools. The peace education textbook is a valuable contribution to Banda Aceh schools because it provides educational models of peacemaking practices based on local culture, history, and religious traditions.

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## **Practical Peacebuilding Activities**

The fundamental Islamic principles of nonviolence and peacebuilding include the pursuit of justice; doing good; the universality and dignity of humanity; the sacredness of human life; equality; the quest for peace (individual, interpersonal, communal, regional, and international); peacemaking via reason, knowledge, and understanding; creativity; forgiveness; proper deeds and actions; responsibility; patience; collaborative actions and solidarity; inclusivity; diversity; pluralism; and tolerance. These principles are integral to the faith tradition of many Muslims and are crucial to Muslim peacebuilding initiatives developed by major figures like Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, Khalid Kishtainy, Hakim Mohammed Said, and Sakina Yakoobi. Satha-Anand is a distinguished Thai scholar and peace activist who published a groundbreaking essay, “The Nonviolent Crescent: Eight Theses on Muslim Nonviolent Action,” in which he asserts that violence is completely unacceptable in Islam, and that Muslims must use nonviolent action to fight for justice and reconciliation. He states, “Islam itself is fertile soil for nonviolence because of its potential for obedience, strong discipline, sharing and social responsibility, perseverance, and self-sacrifice, and the belief in the unity of the Muslim community and the oneness of mankind.” The voices of nonviolent Muslim leaders are rarely heard because they are diminished by radical rhetoric.

Based on theological themes of peacemaking, Sunni and Shiite scholars agree that the function of any society is to maintain healthy peaceful relationships, both human-to-human and human-to-divine. However, when conflicts erupt and destroy these relationships, it is mandated that their restoration is essential for justice to prevail. Theologians, jurists, philosophers, and others have historically promoted Islamic teach-

ings of ethics to prevent, mediate, and resolve conflicts. Ultimately, any level of disharmony is understood as a disruption to being peaceful.

An example of a Muslim non-governmental, nonprofit organization working for peacemaking is the Wajir Peace and Development Committee in Kenya, which focuses on community infrastructure and educational development. Amid the constant cycle of violence, arms smuggling, displacement, kidnappings, and general mistrust among the clans, a local woman, Dekha Ibrahim, initiated a dialogue with other women and elders to find solutions to these problems. They formed rapid response teams to tackle unrest, and eventually Dekha established the Women for Peace Nonviolent Movement, an interfaith and interethnic group that works for peace.

Since 1995, the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Nigeria has focused on improving Muslim and Christian relations through workshops on dialogue, conflict prevention, conflict transformation, and mediation. Confronting ethnic tensions and appalling violence in the 1990s, Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa, who were formally religious warriors, created the center to resolve conflicts. Building on their religious traditions, the centre fosters mutual respect and collaborative peacebuilding projects.

The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (RIIFS), based in Jordan, has fostered serious interdisciplinary research in the Arab world on religion, religious issues, interfaith studies, and cultural and civilizational studies for fifteen years. Aside from scholarly conferences and outstanding publications in these areas, RIIFS has held important peacebuilding workshops for Muslim and Christian religious leaders to increase cooperation and lessen tensions in the region.

The Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) comprises Muslim scholars and peacemakers in Asian countries. AMAN focuses on human rights, ethnic and religious intolerance, peace education, globalization, and youth leadership training. Based in Thailand, AMAN directs a one-month intensive School of Peace Studies and Conflict Transformation for young social workers, intellectuals, community leaders, and NGO workers. The course trains students in alternative paradigms for peace, peacemaking, conflict assessment and prevention, conflict transformation, and research methodologies in peacebuilding studies. AMAN supports research fellowships and publishes reports and books on dialogue, human rights, and Islamic peacemaking, as well as training manuals.

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) focuses on education, health, and rural and economic development in the poorest communities in twenty-five countries. Since 1957, Imam Aga Khan has served as the spiritual leader of the global Ismaili community, a Shiite sect that has emphasized the importance of social service, economic self-sufficiency, educational opportunities, and community development. AKDN supports research, microfinance, first-class hospitals, rural planning and housing projects, and the preservation of historical cultural institutions. The network has made enormous contributions to Islamic and non-Islamic communities to further civil society activities and interreligious and cross-civilizational dialogue.

The late eminent scholar As-Sayyid Mahdi al-Hakim Mohammad Mahdi Shamsuddin, perhaps Lebanon's most distinguished religious figure known for interreligious dialogue, advocated for greater religious cooperation (*adadiyya*) between Christians and Muslims in his country. His students formed the Imam M.M. Shamsuddin Foundation for Dialogue, which sponsors national dialogues on post-conflict healing, trains young religious leaders in dialogue, and supports interreligious collaboration.

Sisters in Islam (SIL) is a young Malaysia-based organization that advocates against discrimination and educates women about their legal rights. Through campaigns, legal clinical training, grassroots projects, and workshops, SIL informs women of their rights and ways in which the law is abused or misinterpreted against them. Emphasizing the equality of rights granted through the Islamic tradition, SIL has resisted conservative forces that want to limit women's participation in the public sphere and their ability to express their voices in public debates.

In a survey in 2005, commissioned by the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands, the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice identified fifty Muslim peacebuilding organizations in the Balkans and Africa. The programs of these organizations include 1) contributing to more effective dissemination of ideas such as democracy, human rights, justice, development, and peacemaking; 2) challenging traditional structures, such as the role of women in society; 3) mediating between conflicting parties; and 4) encouraging reconciliation, interfaith dialogue, disarmament, and demilitarization.

Some of the organizations described in the survey include the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism, mentioned above, which facilitated peace talks relating to conflicts in several parts of Indonesia; the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Nigeria, whose leaders have successfully mediated the end of religiously based violence in several parts of the country; the Interfaith Mediation Committee in Liberia, whose leaders were key facilitators in the peace process there; and the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, whose Muslim and Christian leaders have constituted an important force for peace in northern Uganda. Many similar organizations are found in other Muslim countries.

This list of Muslim NGOs illustrates different types of peacebuilding activities that are occurring on the ground with little recognition. It is hoped that their work will be replicated throughout the Muslim world. Their peacebuilding strategies and conflict resolution practices are constructed within an Islamic framework, usually based on the Quran, other texts and narratives, jurisprudence, philosophy, theology, foundational doctrines, creeds, beliefs, and practices of Islam. These efforts reaffirm basic principles in Islam: 1) All humanity comes from a common origin, and human dignity must be recognized and respected; 2) the diversity among people encapsulates the richness of traditions; 3) in striving to improve the world, Muslims must cooperate and dialogue with others to foster peace; 4) to be actively engaged with one's tradition means not to lead isolated lives but rather to engage with others in a respectful manner; and 5) practicing good deeds and striving toward justice must be present in everyday dealings with all human beings, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or tribe.

## Conclusion

It is common knowledge that some Muslims espouse extremist interpretations of Islam, and some of these extremists engage in religiously motivated violence. But what is much less widely recognized is the extent of peacebuilding within the worldwide Muslim community. A large majority of Muslims denounce religiously motivated violence and are disgusted by the abuse of their religion. Evidence of this can be seen in Muslim leaders' widespread condemnation of terrorism and religiously motivated violence around the world after 9/11, as well as after recent events in India. In addition, this report has described the efforts of many Muslim organizations and leaders to promote more frequent and effective dialogue with Christians and Jews to enhance mutual understanding and create practical steps to improve relations. Efforts are also under way in many places to vigorously educate Muslim youth about the core Islamic teachings of tolerance, peace, and pluralism. In addition, governments and institutions in Muslim countries are working to reeducate Muslim extremists about the falsity of the doctrines they advocate and to find alternative nonviolent methods to express their discontent. Finally, there are growing indications of Muslim individuals and organizations promoting peaceful conflict resolution.

***While the number of Muslim peacebuilding organizations is rising, many are small and struggling financially.***

While the number of Muslim peacebuilding organizations is rising, many are small and struggling financially. International donors could make an important contribution to world peace by aiding these organizations and strengthening their programs. Several American Muslim organizations have recognized the important roles they can play in reinforcing pluralism within Islam worldwide, and they should be encouraged and supported. Muslim leaders who promote nonviolence, pluralism, and tolerance should be

recognized and their efforts publicized. Key Muslim organizations around the world are mobilizing to counter extremism within Islam, and they should be applauded.

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