

International Consultation
"Transforming Communities: Christians and Muslims Building a Common Future"
Opening Address by the Representative of the World Islamic Call Society,
Dr. Ibrahim Rabu

Geneva, 1 November 2010

In The Name of God, The All-Merciful, The Compassionate

Your Royal Highness Prince Ghazi Ben Muhammad,
Mr Secretary General of the World Council of Churches,
Your Eminence,

I greet you with the greeting of Islam: May the peace, mercy and blessing of God be with you.

At the outset, I like to express my thanks and my gratitude to the leadership of the World Council of Churches and to its members, especially those who worked very hard over many months to prepare for this gathering of Muslims and Christians who have come from different parts of the world to discuss the methods and processes that promote coexistence and cooperation among adherents of the two largest religious traditions of the world. It is anticipated that through our deliberations, the future may bring with it hope for a world wherein religious values will prevail, and religion will play a vital role in shaping relationships among nations, countries, as well as individuals.

Ladies and gentlemen.... Based on Islamic principles and immutable convictions, the World Islamic Call Society strongly believes that inter-religious dialogue and cultural cooperation are the best route to take in dealing with global challenges, whether religious, educational or social. It is this conviction that compelled the World Islamic Call Society, in conjunction with the World Council of Churches, which shares the same conviction and shows the same enthusiasm, to cooperate with Aal Al-Beit Foundation for Islamic Thought and "A Common Word" Group due to their influential presence in the religious and cultural arenas, and due to their openness and

their care in building bridges with all cultures to provide better opportunities for future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen... This gathering that brings under one roof scores of leaders from Muslim and Christian communities is convened at a time when all of us are feeling a great deal of anxiety as a result of the growing phenomenon of violence which is coupled with extremism. Religions and religious symbols are constantly ridiculed, and there are spiteful attempts to associate terrorism with religious upbringing. It is unfortunate that one encounters examples of people from certain media outlets and even educators who are feeding this frenzy, and promoting hatred and sowing seeds of dissociation by distorting facts and infusing curricula and media productions with sensationalism and falsehood. This has resulted in a new phenomenon, known to all of us as Islamophobia.

It is incumbent on all faith communities to do their very best to combat such hate-filled attempts, through inter-religious meetings that should engage various sectors of the society. Our efforts should never cease in order to criminalize such trends. We need to capitalize on our common denominators to present people of other faith traditions for what they truly are. We should respect each other's unique practices and always invest in that which is common among us. This will end up providing the optimal environment to promote cooperation and understanding, and will spread the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among people. It will further contribute towards a global effort to eliminate extremism and fanaticism. Religious or nationalistic fervors should not be stirred under the false pretense of freedom of expression. Such a freedom should not infringe on the sacred zone or cultural labels of any community.

Ladies and gentlemen... Promoting serious and equitable dialogue among faith communities and cultures should take its appropriate position on our list of priorities, in order to promote common moral values, peaceful coexistence and human rights. We can never relinquish our common moral responsibility to establish well balanced human relationships that are based on the right of everyone to live with dignity, access development, and fight poverty, marginalization, oppression and assault.

If we are all concerned with the rise in terrorism, extremism and violence, as previously mentioned – phenomena that are not associated with a particular religion, culture, or race – the call of duty makes it incumbent upon us to honestly and impartially search for the causes of such phenomena and deal with it at the root level, instead of dealing with the visual symptoms. It does not require a rocket scientist to know that the root causes of the above-mentioned phenomena are political oppression, deprivation, marginalization and injustices due to occupation. Therefore, searching for just solutions for political hot-spots in the world, especially the Palestinian problem, should be our top priority.

Ladies and gentlemen... Attempts to remove religion from public life, interfering with the divine system of human creation, targeting religious moral values especially those with a social dimension, and the spread of materialism in shaping relations among nations and communities, all represent major challenges to all of us. We should face such challenges through cooperation and consolidation of our resources and strategies. We should be ultra diligent in finding solutions to the above problems, because their proponents conceal them under the premise that they are meant to promote individual freedoms, human rights, and democracy. Needless to say that such slogans are noble statements covering ill intentions.

As believers in God, His Angels, His Revealed Books and His Messengers, we feel the extent of the responsibility placed on our shoulders. There are others sharing this responsibility with us, whom we support and applaud for their efforts. We want to let them know that this gathering of ours is a humble effort, intended to compliment previous efforts, and those that will be made in the future by many communities of faith, Muslim, Christian or otherwise.

Ladies and gentlemen... Brothers and sisters... I welcome all of you and thank you for your attendance and your contributions. I further express my gratitude for that which you are doing, at different levels, to spread peace and security throughout the world. You are promoting a culture of reconciliation among communities and nations, declaring that the only criteria for excellence in the eyes of God are piety and righteousness.

I want to thank those whose work might have gone unnoticed in the background, whether they are members of the World Islamic Call Society, or the World Council of Churches, or the ad hoc committee that prepared for this gathering at meetings held in Istanbul, Geneva and Barcelona. Special thanks go to Aal Al-Beit Foundation for Islamic Thought and “A Common Word” Group, both of whom provided valuable advice and support. I cannot overlook thanking this country that hosted us and made it easy for many of us to participate in this gathering. However, it is our duty dictated by the moral need to be open towards each other, to express our deep anxiety, on behalf of Muslims and non-Muslims alike, especially Christians, as a result of the referendum that resulted in banning the building of mosque minarets. Such an outcome is contradictory with the image we all keep for this country. We cannot conceal our worries that the ban may negatively impact world relations at various levels. We believe that there is still a viable opportunity to use some wisdom to deal with such a delicate situation. We are certain that this country will continue protecting the rights of every one of its citizens to freely practice his/her religion.

Finally, all thanks are due to God, The All-Mighty, The One without partners, who did not beget nor was He begotten. It is He who gathered us here as Muslims and Christians in order to find ways that would bring happiness and goodness to His people, and discuss methods that ensure dignity for humans who represent God’s vicegerents on Earth.

We thank God for all His favours, and we thank all of you, and may peace, mercy and blessings of God be upon each and everyone of you.