



Annual Dialogue Report

The Grand Mufti
Shawky Allam Initiative



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on Religion and Values
2016**

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& Roland Schatz**

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Preface: Overcoming terrorism needs all on board

How do we speak of peace after the series of brutal attacks in Lebanon, Egypt, France, Turkey, Nigeria, Israel, and Palestine - not to mention the daily bloodshed in Syria? In the face of these atrocities, an immediate definition comes to mind: peace is more than the absence of war.

Peace is deeply personal. It is not easily defined, nor explained. For some, peace is the freedom of movement, to attend football matches, concerts, and moments of pleasure without fear. For others, it is access to quality education, decent work, and effective justice systems. Or, it can be committing to a sustainable and safe planet for future generations.

Peace comes in many forms, shapes, and meanings, all based on individual perceptions, backgrounds, and experiences. For this reason, building and maintaining peace is complex and multi-faceted, especially as we face new threats – such as terrorism, violent extremism, climate change, epidemics, hunger, prolonged conflict, or finding a response to the world's mounting refugee crisis.

I have close friends and colleagues in Paris and Lebanon. Clearly shaken by the events that transpired last year, they are nevertheless determined to not let violence interrupt their daily lives. Their reaction to the attacks has been a fierce defense of peace. The UN Climate Summit in Paris at the end of November and the 2030 Agreement on Sustainable Development Goals in New York last September showed what can be achieved if all understand the need for resilient solutions. I am optimistic that the Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, launched on Jan 15 in New York, and the Initiative by the Grandmufti of Egypt, announced on January 20 in Davos and reaffirmed at the United Nations in Geneva, are sending a clear message: we are all united in our efforts and desire to end violence. But for this to happen the willingness to open up and reinstall trust is a *sine qua non*.

Trust binds our world together, from the trust between family members and the trust between neighbors in a community to the trust between customers and enterprises and the trust between au-

thorities and citizens. But many have lost trust in their leaders, in political systems, in religious institutions and in the very notion that we are all in this world together and share a common future.

This is a problem, because trust is the essential element that allows us to build a world of agreed-upon rules, with a level playing field for all. We need trust in our religious establishments, governments, police and legal systems. As individuals, we need to trust our schools, our doctors our media and one another.

Our trust deficit is, to a large extent, the result of asymmetries in our world. The fact that so many are taking the trust bestowed on them for granted explains countless of these asymmetries. People in positions of authority abuse trust and break the rules, with no consequences. The deep sense of in-justice that many feel, the sentiment of being excluded and not having the same opportunities as others, drives mistrust. And mistrust is one of the underlying factors that lead to extremism, terror and other expressions of frustration.

If we do not honestly address the lack of trust as a basic driver of violence, we miss the point. We risk spiraling in the wrong direction when we respond to violence with more violence. By bombing those who have attacked us, we do not solve the problem but exacerbate it. This is what we need to correct now, because our future is at stake.

We need to rebuild trust through legitimate leadership, justice and accountability so we all have institutions, systems and processes we can trust. We need to re-build trust in individuals so that they feel they belong to our community, that they make a difference and that they matter. This is the fundamental step toward creating the necessary virtuous circle where trust leads to responsibility and response.

Creating trust is at the heart of what the United Nations does: from building trust between nations to building trust between people and their leaders, from building trust in public health and education programs to building trust in international treaties. Above all, the United Nations is the embodiment of the world's collective trust that we can all come together to address our biggest challenges.

Peace is a big word for all of us in Geneva. It is at the core of the work that we do and at the heart of the United Nations' mandate. We work every day around the globe to translate peace into, food, shelter, water, healthcare, education, decent work, as well as freedom, rights, and equality. In Geneva, organizations contribute to peace in all its different shapes and forms.

In light of the current events and given the initiatives by our Secretary-General and the Grandmufti, Dr. Shawky Allam, I am convinced that our work to promote peace is more relevant than ever. I feel hope knowing that there are far more people working for peace than the opposite.

Geneva, January 10, 2016 – Michael Møller

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1. Muslim Countries Should Lead by Example by Shawki Allam

Violent extremists, acting in the name of Islam, have struck many parts of the world and the recent Paris shooting and the tragic events of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington are only a few examples. Western and eastern officials as well wonder, “Where are the moderates?” Many world leaders, seeing only the extremism perpetrated by a radical few, despair of finding progressive and peaceful partners of standing in the Muslim world.

We therefore are extremely grateful to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and his team, who have initiated just last Friday the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism at the General Assembly in New York. This Plan of Action and our proposal can work hand in hand in order to underline the fact, that the majorities around the globe, within the Muslim world as well from all other religions are part of the solution once they stand up and make sure, their opinion and respect to principles, standards and law are heard well above the awareness threshold.

Islamic renewal and reform is a process dating back to the 19th century, when centuries-old dynamics began to address the challenges of Western colonialism as well as the promise and perils of industrialization, economic development, and the Western nation state as a new post-imperial model for the organization and governance of Muslim societies.

At the Dar al Iftaa, Egypt's supreme body for Islamic legal edicts over which I preside, we wrestle constantly with the issue of Islam's critical engagement with modernity, much in the same way that the Roman Catholic Church underwent and is still immersed in this process. We issue thousands of fatwas or authoritative legal edicts – affirming women's rights to dignity, education and employment, holding political office, and condemning religiously motivated violence and terror. We have upheld the right of freedom of conscience and of freedom of expression within the bounds of human dignity. We have promoted the common history and beliefs that exists between Islam, Christianity, Judaism and other eastern

religions. We have underscored that governance must be based on justice and popular sovereignty. We are committed to human liberty and Islamic law. Nonetheless, we must make more tangible progress deepening understanding of Islam.

Since my appointment as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Islamic leaders have made it a point to reach out to the whole world to promote peaceful coexistence and to build bridges of understanding and cooperation. To all of us it was a real pleasure to see the world community coming together to meet the challenges of global climate change, most recently in Paris to reduce emissions and to work toward the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that the international community debated for years among leaders involving the representatives from all religions. Islam has and must continue to play a key role in advocating human flourishing, something that ought to be a source of hope within Muslim-majority societies as well as those societies in which Muslims are minorities invited to contribute their many gifts for the sake of the common good.

The Muslim world today in both the east and the west is at the center of international debate, and I believe the time is ripe for further practical steps in order to build on recent successes to continue to build a sustained relationship of mutual trust and respect among world religions.

My message in Davos on behalf of the Muslim world is that Muslims are important participants in the Davos-started C100 initiative that has established the C1 Foundation back in 2008 in London with the support and guidance by their founders Prince Ghazi of Jordan and Roland Schatz, founder of Media Tenor, both co-chairs, the Bishop of London and the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr. Ali Gomaa as well as all the thought leaders from academia such as Prof. John Esposito from Georgetown University, Prof. Miroslav Wolf from Yale and Prof. David Ford from Cambridge University, politicians such as Tony Blair and media leaders like the former Director of Al Arabia, Nakhle El Hage and the Editor in Chief of Europe's largest tabloid newspaper BILD, Kai Diekmann.

Muslim religious leaders, who have spent our lives in careful and intense study of our tradition, are charged with re-establishing the authority of our qualified religious leaders whose lives are dedicat-

ed to understanding, knowledge and expositing the truth of Islam as a way of life oriented toward peace and justice in the human family above all else. I have set out to publish an authoritative picture of Islam which, I hope, will give the world a better understanding of Islam and the Muslim world. That understanding will help us all to live together in peace, tranquility, and mutual cooperation.

As the American Muslim scholar and jurist Khaled Abou el-Fadl has pointed out, religious authority in Islam and other faith traditions is always threatened by authoritarian interpreters who have far less interest in preserving the integrity and vitality of traditional religious teaching than they do in using religion as a basis for their legitimizing and popularizing their claim to power. The most dangerous subset of these authoritarian interpreters is the violent extremists.

In both Islam and other religions we are witnessing a phenomenon in which extremists without a sound foundation in religious learning have asserted themselves as religious authorities, even though they lack scholarly qualifications for making valid interpretations of religious law and morality. It is this unfounded rebellious pretention towards religion that opens the way for extremist interpretations of Islam that have no basis in the Muslim faith.

Furthermore, and this is very important, extremists have, for the most part, not been educated in genuine centers of Islamic learning. Rather, the vast majority are young men and women who have been raised in troubled environments in which many of them have themselves been the victims of the violence of militarism, both domestic and foreign, and in which an even greater number have witnessed gross injustices perpetrated against relatively helpless and voiceless civilian populations. As a result, these young people fall to distorted and misguided interpretations of Islam that have no basis in traditional Islamic doctrine and are aimed at enlisting them in a crass political agenda wrapped in the thin veneer of so-called religious virtue. Such extremism creates havoc and chaos in the lives of these young people, in their societies, and in the lives of an increasing number of innocent people – first and foremost fellow Muslims, but increasingly encompassing non-Muslims living in the Muslim majority world and in Western societies.

Terrorist groups audaciously misinterpret Islam, citing from the Quran selectively to suit their own agendas and add a so-called “authoritative” dressing to their views. These deviant ideologies need to be fought by intellectual responses which debunk their erroneous ideologies. The international media as well as academic scholars are called to publish and broadcast the voices of authentic Muslim scholars who deconstruct the false claims and warped understanding of the Quranic exegesis.

We have to remember, however, that an ultimate defeat of violent extremists and terrorists cannot happen without revival and renewal, not only within Islam, but within the other major religious traditions of the world as they seek to be more faithful to their core teachings of peace and justice in a world suffering from the ills of materialism, militarism, poverty, and disease.

As a Muslim religious leader, my responsibility is to call for Muslim religious leaders to revisit with fidelity to traditional learning and openness to sound theories of modern critical analysis, the incredibly rich Islamic intellectual heritage. I also call for a renewed appreciation of the tremendous intellectual diversity in Islamic thought and recognition that the development and dissemination of Islamic thought has suffered a troubled history as a consequence of global political developments. This exchange of understanding Islam needs all of us to rededicate ourselves to creating a better world: in mosques, churches, synagogues, in politics, in schools, media, companies, sports and all walks of life. We will not reach this goal of understanding by excluding anyone.

It cannot be stated strongly enough that violent extremism, whether perpetrated by non-state actors, recognized nation states, or unrecognized “states” such as Da’esh, is opposed to everything Islamic law stands for. Islamic law is a sophisticated and humane system which mandates very precise rules that are designed to safeguard and advance core human dignity.

The purpose of Islamic Law is not to establish theocracies, to subjugate non-believers or to subject people to capital punishment. Rather, the Shari’ah, as God’s will for the flourishing of His human creation, aims to facilitate a believer’s attainment of God’s grace,

secure human wellbeing in this life and attain human salvation in the hereafter – ideals common to all Abrahamic faiths.

The sensationalism over so-called “Shari’ah law” that we see time and again, is uninformed fear mongering. Islamophobic extremists who spread hate are completely ignorant of the fact that U.S. American Muslims, for example, practice the core tenets of the Shari’ah every day when they operate soup kitchens, donate their time to community service, marry, practice professions, run businesses, have children, visit the sick, and respect human dignity.

Unfortunately, some media outlets report only the speech and actions of a small, but highly visible and disruptive minority of people within the Muslim world. They imply, by the disproportionate coverage of Muslim extremism, that this speech and these actions represent the belief and practice of the majority of Muslims. They also either imply or expressly state that Islam has been a violent religion from its beginning. This view is unfortunately reinforced through the presentation of Islam in the wider mass media.

The findings from the C1 World Dialogue Foundation, published in the Annual Dialogue Reports 2009, 2011 and 2015, demonstrate our efforts to overcome stereotypes that are predominant obstacles blocking acceptance of tolerance and respect for human dignity as we share this world together.

Allow me to be clear – authentic Islam is utterly against extremism. We must understand the underlying factors that provide a rationalization for terrorism and extremism in order to eradicate this scourge. It is imperative that we understand and address the underlying causes of extremism and terrorism in order to build a better future that can bring an end to this grave situation that is inflaming the world.

Finally, Muslim leaders need to present Islam in a deeper and more comprehensive manner. Islam needs to enlist supporters to correct the lack of understanding and return from bias to objectivity in both the media and in academia, especially in non-Muslim countries. And Muslim countries have to let the world see how the Islam is grounded in diversity and mutual respect.

On my recent visits to many countries across the globe, I called for the promotion of scholarly cooperation, building bridges of cooperation and understanding and supporting the existing and ongoing efforts of the Muslim community towards positive integration.

Although I believe that these recommendations were met with approval, I find it necessary to repeat them again today in the hope that you will assist me in making them a reality. There is no more powerful a weapon against extremism than truthful education.

I wish to tap the “Spirit of Davos” to create concrete steps towards a world in peace defined by respect for human dignity and wellbeing.

We are able to achieve peace in the beauty of God’s creation. We can ask our friends in the United Nations to take a leadership role to help build bridges. Here in Switzerland, in Geneva – an important UN locus genui – is the institutional base to prove that the desire for peace is more than only wishful thinking.

2. Who Can Adequately Represent Muslims? by Ibrahim Negm

One of the most important questions that has been raised repeatedly is what role religion and religious forces will play in the still emerging political scene in the MENA region. Because MENA remains a profoundly religious, the burning question is who can adequately represent the religious interests of the masses, and direct them towards peaceful and productive democratic ends? These are critical question. Both their number and significance underscore the very large challenges ahead in this important region.

The Muslim world has been particularly successful at creating institutions and bodies whose long-standing service to the community confer upon them legitimacy that cannot be had simply by someone with access to modern media. This is no time to abandon that example, for it is the only vehicle by which a humane understanding of Islam – opposed to terrorism, violence and discrimination – is possible. This understanding I speak of, and its attendant imperative to engage with the modern world, is not a new phenomenon. Rather it is part of the treasures of the cultural heritage of Arabs and Muslims.

This spirit of moderation, tolerance and flexibility is well reflected in the paradigm of al-Azhar university which has long served not only the Egyptian people but the Muslim world at large, by not only producing first-rate scholars, thinkers and intellectuals, but also by providing educational opportunities for men and women, instilling in them an ethic of integrity, leadership and service and devoting itself to spreading a balanced vision of Islam based on recognized and orthodox ideals infused with spiritual depth. We are confident in this great institution's ability to restore its status as a historical giant, and exert its influence on the articulation of Islam in Egypt and throughout the Muslim world. Now is the time to support institutions that seek to articulate an Islam suitable to the modern world, with impeccable scholarly credentials, and the worldwide prestige necessary to succeed in creating a better world.

In the modern context, the significance of the Azhar has been diffused into a variety of institutions. In addition to the University and the many informal teacher-student relationships that form amongst Azhari students and professors, the Azhari mission is supported by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, which administers more than 120,000 mosques throughout the country staffed by more than 80,000 Imams, all graduates of the Azhar. Equally crucial to the administering of the Azhari paradigm is the Dar al-Ifta, the authoritative voice of Islamic legal interpretation in Egypt and the larger Sunni Islamic world. It has served for over a century as the premier body in Egypt tasked with the responsibility of responding to the many and often complicated matters (about half a million edicts issued per year in 10 different languages) confronting contemporary Muslims in terms of their religious responsibilities.

What is the Azhari methodology? Whence did it originate, and what is it composed of? Through an extensive analysis of its output, we are able to articulate some conclusions about the essential features of the Azhari approach. These features are representative of the spirit that inheres in the scholarly activities of its 'ulama, their works and scholarly positions. Below, we summarize and explain these features so as to delineate what constitutes a specifically Azhari approach, in contradistinction especially to Islamism and Salafism, the two other religious currents noticeable in Egypt and the MENA regions.

To say that this is a specifically Azhari approach is merely to acknowledge the superior standing accorded to the Azhar in the field of religious education and interpretation by the 'ulama themselves. This does not detract, however, from the fact that this approach is spread throughout the Muslim world, forming a truly authentic and traditional worldview. Indeed, we discover that these very elements are common, widespread and current in the curricula of the great learning centres like the University of Zaytuna in Tunis; the Ottoman School in Tripoli (the Uthman Pasha Madrassa); the University of Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez; the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus; Fatih University in Istanbul; the great learning centres such as those in Hadramawt, Sana'a, India, Mauritania; as well as the secondary schools and institutions that have developed from these primary ones.

FIRST FEATURE

The first component is for one to have a continuous and unbroken sanad (chain) with respect to transmission, cognitive understanding, and spiritual purification.

Amongst the special features of the Azhari approach is that its sciences and knowledge disciplines are passed down and transmitted from generation to generation, and which constitute a continuous and unbroken chain of religious scholars and practitioners. Every generation receives from the generation preceding it with a continuous chain and uninterrupted understanding. None of the students who follow this approach will venture to take up leading positions except after receiving knowledge and keeping long company with scholars until they grant him permission or a formal license in transmitting (especially hadith narrations), teaching, writing, and imparting knowledge. Should you enquire from one of them as to his teachers, he will mention a number of them, and should you ask him how long he has spent in the company of his teacher or teachers, he will say that he has spent a long time in their company until he understood and comprehended from them the methodology of understanding and the entries to knowledge.

This is contrary to other approaches which are broken and interrupted and in which a student will take a leading position without keeping company with the scholars. And should you ask one of them how much time did he spend in the company of his teacher, he will tell you that he had only met him once, or that he has only spent a limited number of hours with him. How is it possible for him to have obtained knowledge, and how can his understanding be trusted?

This feature underscores the importance of authority to the Azhari approach. Western observers have repeatedly commented that among the difficulties in restoring a sense of stability to the Muslim world is the fractured nature of religious authority. They deem this to be integral to Islamic tradition itself, arguing that because Islam has no conception of a central authority akin to a pope, that authoritativeness is alien to Islam. This is a far cry from the long-

standing structure of Islamic tradition found throughout the Muslim world for centuries before it was penetrated by Salafi and Islamist thought. In this traditional approach, the leading 'ulama acted as something of a magisterium who measured the intellectual output of Muslims against the welfare and interests of the Muslim community at large. This approach makes way for a capacity to reform, controlled by the judgment of leading men of learning, and neither lesser lights nor any unaccredited autodidact.

SECOND FEATURE

The second component is giving due care and importance to obtaining a mastery of the auxiliary sciences.

Furthermore, it is an approach that is concerned with the education and training of its students on the basis of mastering and developing a firm grasp of the auxiliary sciences such as: nahw(syntax); sarf (morphology); ishtiqaq (etymology and derivation); balagha (rhetoric and eloquence) in its three parts; usul al-fiqh(principles of Islamic legal theory); 'ulum al-hadith (sciences of hadith); as well as other auxiliary sciences and disciplines that assist the learner, develop in him the relevant capacities, and enable him to engage in a nuanced, contextual and humane reading of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition, the Sunna, on the basis of knowledge, understanding and keen insight-while at the same time proceeding in the learning of all these sciences and disciplines on an approved methodology through which the student is able to rise from preliminaries to finer and subtle details.

It is as if the first feature – spending a lengthy portion of time in the company of religious scholars – is the one from which the second feature stems, since holding extended company with the 'ulama will enhance the learning of the sciences.

THIRD FEATURE

The third feature is having a thorough understanding of the higher objectives and purposes of the Shari'a

One of the outcomes of keeping prolonged company with the'ulama and obtaining knowledge of the auxiliary sciences, is the opening up, and development, of a keen insight into the understanding of the higher objectives and purposes of the Noble Shari'a, and the understanding that the religion (din) came to realize the following objectives: worshipping God; spiritual purification and growth; properhabitation of the earth; guiding nations to the good; inheriting knowledge from the Prophets; building the human being on godliness; spiritual insight; turning towards the Final Abode; obtaining honorable character traits; building civilization; producing spiritual revival until the Umma of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is itself a mercy Unto the worlds, just as the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is a mercy unto the worlds.

When a portion of the understanding of the Shari'a's higher objectives and purposes is made available to and placed within the reach of the student, his understanding of the religion is thereby broadened and enhanced and his insight into Islamic legal matters is thereby illuminated. Such training will enable him to avoid rigidity and harshness, teach those that lack knowledge or make mistakes with gentleness, and shape his character and personality according to the noble Prophetic model.

Other modern approaches often do not demonstrate any knowledge of and acquaintance with the higher objectives and purposes of the Shari'a. There is no mention of higher objectives and purposes in their discourse, nor is it manifest in their understanding and application.

FOURTH FEATURE

The fourth feature is the correct understanding of the Holy Qur'an, i.e. using Qur'anic verses in their appropriate and proper contexts.

One very important effect that results from prolonged company with the 'ulama, knowledge of the auxiliary sciences, and understanding of the higher objectives and purposes of the Shari'a is that the proponent and practitioner of this approach becomes grounded in the reading of the Qur'an, and is able to use and apply Qur'anic verses in their proper and appropriate contexts. He does not go to a verse that was revealed in response to a specific circumstance and apply it indiscriminately as we see today. Likewise, he does not take a verse that has been revealed concerning a general issue and then apply it to a specific issue, nor a verse that has been revealed concerning a specific issue and then apply it to a general issue, and so on and so forth.

Rather, he ensures that he has sound understanding of the Holy Qur'an and is able to properly apply the Qur'an to particular contexts without ambiguity and confusion, unlike many other methodologies in current fashion which delve into Qur'an without the most basic of understandings and which often lead to distorted and warped interpretations. The intellectual honesty, rigor and consistency of the Azhari approach is surprisingly well-known to even the most average Egyptian, whose genuine religious sensibilities often lead him to understand the political opportunism with which Islamists and Salafists approach primary texts.

FIFTH FEATURE

The fifth feature is a genuine regard for the affairs of Muslim community.

One of the results of what has been explained above is that the student of knowledge realizes how serious his responsibility is to his co-religionist Muslims., and that the umma (Islamic nation) is in fact the repository of Islam itself, and that it is an umma of

knowledge, guidance, tolerance and mercy, and not one of destruction, violence and terrorism. He thus realizes that it is incumbent to participate and contribute to the production of the global culture and civilization in a way that is beneficial, effective and sophisticated. This is to be accomplished by way of human cultural output in all its forms: sciences, arts and crafts, and the promotion of the values of knowledge and learning in the various fields of the human, empirical and rational sciences.

SIXTH FEATURE

The sixth feature is carrying a concern for all creation.

When the student has thoroughly acquainted himself with the above, his attention will be turned to the fact that the Prophetic example was so deeply concerned with the entire creation (including all of humanity and nature). This is manifested by a complete eagerness, tenderness and compassion for all of God's creation. Of the most significant features of the Azhari approach is that it cultivates this sublime meaning in the hearts of its students, unlike other approaches which do not have in their discourse any reference to the rights that other nations and nature have over us.

SEVENTH FEATURE

The seventh feature concerns the holistic nature of knowledge.

Throughout centuries of educating its students, the Azhari approach has maintained that knowledge is composed of three elements: the first is sources and proofs in the form of the Qur'an, Sunnah (Prophetic Practice), scholarly consensus, and analogical reasoning; the second is the approved and rigorous method of understanding the religious texts, the manner of analyzing them and extrapolating their meaning and significance; and the third is qualifications, attributes, competencies, skills and intellectual endowments, which must be present in the person becoming knowledgeable, learned and grounded in the Islamic religious sciences. The

sources alone do not constitute knowledge nor guidance unless it is accompanied, approved, and endorsed by a method of interpretation carried out by a competent and qualified individual.

Other approaches tend to tear knowledge apart and reduce it to fragments. Proponents of these methodologies do not understand what knowledge is but for the simplistic term *dalil* (proof or evidence). They demonstrate no knowledge of '*wajh al-dalala*' (angle of signification), that is to say, the more refined question of how the *dalil* signifies what it signifies and how it makes the particular point that it makes; nor of the method of compiling the disparate proofs on each issue, and the method of integrating, interpreting and analyzing them. Nor does it account for the state or condition of the person engaged in the interpretive process and the necessity to ensure that his intellectual capacities, skills and competencies are all suited for the task at hand. This results in a reductionist reading of Islamic sources, which in turn gives rise to a myopic worldview unable to interact with the modern world

Also, among the fullness of the elements of knowledge is that its bearer must be conversant with, and combine within himself, both the transmitted religious sciences (i.e. sciences that are primarily based on revelation, transmission and narration) and rational sciences (i.e. sciences that are primarily based on reason), such that he is able to interact with, understand and comprehend epistemological models of which the current state of global knowledge is composed, and he is thereby in a position to convey the salient and characteristic features of our religion to the world at large.

EIGHTH FEATURE

The eighth feature is deriving benefit from the tradition of the Umma, opening oneself up to it, maintaining contact with it, and building on it

Among the most salient features of the Azhari way is that it is an approach that embraces the tradition of the umma (the Muslim world) with respect to the sciences and its fields, and interacts and engages with that tradition. It is an approach that acknowledges

this tradition's authentic nature and value and knows how to extrapolate and extract from it everything that is beneficial, meritorious and sublime. It also knows how to build on this tradition and how to add to it—contrary to other approaches that seek to abandon the tradition of the Muslim Umma and sever relations with it.

This is well-known to Muslims around the world, and is the reason why the tradition of the ‘ulama is thought to be the most authentic, and connects them with the past in a way that is respectful of the positions of previous scholarship, while willing to engage with it in an acknowledgement that this engagement itself is in the best traditions of the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Conclusion

The Azhar has been blessed throughout the centuries to have met with the acceptance of the masses of Muslims, the umma or the Global Muslim Community at large. In addition, its central location between the Muslim East and West, and North and South has meant that many delegations of the Muslim world have passed through it. This has resulted in a cosmopolitan outlook, open-minded and respectful of the various particularities of Muslim scholarship in its various geographical areas, and thereby the expansion of the circle of knowledge at the Azhar. In this way, the teaching methodologies at al-Azhar became more refined, and its horizons expanded. This resulted in a very important outcome: embracing and accommodating the other, since students from all over the Muslim world set out to the al-Azhar. This is well-known, but what is less well understood is that non-Muslim students journeyed to al-Azhar to study, and the scholars of al-Azhar embraced and accommodated them as their own.

As a result, the Azhar has long demonstrated a capacity and willingness to monitor developments taking place in the worlds of people, events, ideas and things. In this way, al-Azhar was more perceptive of reality and the real world, and more conversant with the change that occurs in the domain in which Islamic legal rulings apply and which results in the particular legal ruling changing in its wake. One important outcome that occurred from this is the appli-

cation of the doctrine of juristic choice, or discretion, through which the scholars of al-Azhar would highlight the detailed manner in which Islam expands to accommodate the states and conditions of all its adherents. It can hardly be lost on anyone conversant with the current state of the Muslim world that this is precisely the sorts of commitments that are necessary for Islamic authorities to engage the modern world – not as rejectionist reactionaries but as intelligent and involved participants.

The events of the past few years in the Middle East and North Africa, though they have presented their own challenges, are reasons for optimism and hope. And indeed every good believer not God must remain hopeful, and maintain an attitude of optimism towards both humanity and the Divine.

In order to achieve this, however, we must confront the problems that we encounter with a sense of purpose and determination. It is with this in mind that the institution of the Dar al-Ifta, the premiere institution for Islamic Legal Interpretation in the Sunni Muslim world, feels a responsibility towards articulating the place of religion in the face of the new challenges developments. This has become especially important as in the past few years we have witnessed flare-ups of sectarian sentiment and indeed violence – both of which are deeply regrettable and run counter to the very notion of religious cooperation that both the Muslim and Christian faith encourage, uphold and indeed mandate.

It has long been the policy of the Dar al-Ifta and the office of the Grand Mufti that Egypt contains within itself a specific approach to the role of Islam in the current events which draws upon a centuries old tradition indigenous to our lands, expressed most clearly in what we may call the Azhar paradigm.

In contrast to the political parties who seek to invoke religion in order to engage in party politics, the Azhar paradigm envisions a very different, moderate and reasonable view on this topic. There is no doubt that Egyptians are a deeply spiritual people, marked by a profound sense of religiosity. But far from being a problem, this is a characteristic in which they should take pride. In the face of the way Islamic social and political participation is often thought of in

today's world, the Egyptian experience with Islam has been one of great tolerance and inclusion.

Our understanding of the role Islam is to play in Egypt is that of a custodian and advocate of the religious and social welfare of all Egyptians, and a representative of the Muslim community at large by acting as the moral conscience of political decision makers.

I mentioned earlier that the constant engagement with the world is a characteristic of a true Islamic vision. Indeed, the process of issuing fatwas – the primary role of the Dar al-Ifra – has long been understood to be integral to this process of engagement with the modern world. Flexibility is an integral part of the Islamic legal tradition; in fact, you could say it is one of the defining characteristics of Islamic law. Many in the Western world have come to identify the fatwa with some unfortunate pronouncements of political or self-appointed religious leaders. But fatwa-giving is in fact one of the most important institutions in the endeavor to properly understand the relationship between Islam and the modern world. In an attempt to provide Muslims with authoritative guidance about their religion, muftis look not only to the vast legal tradition, but must also conduct a proper examination of the lived reality of Muslims, in order to provide them with relevant rulings. In effect, fatwas and Muftis represent the bridge between the long-standing intellectual-legal tradition of Islam and the contemporary world in which we live. They are the link between the past and the present, the absolute and the relative, the transcendent and the contingent, the theoretical and the practical.

It is only when this deep awareness is lacking that this link is severed, and we witness the sorts of extremism we are witnessing today. When each and every person's unqualified opinion is considered a fatwa we lose a crucial tool in our capacities to reign in extremism and preserve balanced understandings of Islam. We may point to any number of declarations posing as fatwas from extremists and terrorists as examples of how grave the consequences are of not following the historical Islamic example of differentiating between those with scholarly standing and authority and those without.

**Editors and Contributors to
the Annual Dialogue Report**

Editors

Ibrahim Negm is Senior advisor to Sheikh Shawky Allam, The Grand Mufti of Egypt. He was awarded a distinguished fellowship to conduct research at Harvard Law School in 1996. He was also a visiting Researcher at the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences. He was also a visiting Scholar and researcher at Oxford University, UK, 2002. He obtained his Ph.D. in Islamic Studies in 2005 from Graduate Theological Foundation, IN. After earning his graduate Degree, he was awarded an adjunct position as an Assistant Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at St. John's University in New York. He served as a full time Imam and Director at the Islamic Center of South Shore in New York. He then served as the first Director of the Islamic Learning Foundation in College Point NY. Sheikh Negm has been the Senior Advisor to Sheikh Ali Gomaa, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt.



Christian Kolmer is the Head of Political and Social Research at Media Tenor International. Born 1965 in Essen, he studied Medieval and Modern History, Journalism and Communication Science and Economics in Bochum and Mainz from 1985 to 1993. He conducted research on the media image of the German Treuhandanstalt, and completed his PhD in 1999, on theories of news selection.



Since 1994, he has worked as a research associate at Media Tenor in Bonn and Zurich, last responsible for political studies, knowledge transfer and social issues.

His work focuses on: Agenda setting, news selection, international comparative content analyses, media and war.

Roland Schatz is the Founder and CEO of Media Tenor International and InnoVatio Publishing. Schatz is a journalist in the 5th generation of his family and has devoted the past 30 years to implementing Perception Change by empowering media. In 2008, he launched, together with Prince Ghazi of Jordan, the C1 One World Dialogue foundation, to improve Inter-Faith-Dialogue. The InnoVatio network of academics, entrepreneurs and media leaders initiated the UN Global Sustainability Index. Schatz hosts masterclasses on ‘Unlearning Intolerance’ at the UN and teaches at the Institute for Future Management of the Sigmund Freud University in Vienna. In 2013 Schatz was appointed Senior Advisor to the General Director of the UN in Geneva.



Shawki Allam in the nineteenth and the current Grand Mufti of Egypt since March 4th, 2013.



Shawki Allam was born in the Nile Delta governorate of Beheira. He received his PhD in 1996 from the Al-azhar University in Jurisprudence and Sharia law. Prior to his appointment as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, he

served as the chairman of the Department of Jurisprudence at the School of Sharia at Al-Azhar University's Tanta branch.

In February 2013, he was elected by Al Azhar's council of senior scholars replacing outgoing grand Mufti, Ali Gomaa. This makes the first time that the Grand Mufti has been elected by Islamic scholars rather than appointed by the state

The position of Grand Mufti is seen as very influential in Egypt as well as throughout the Arab and Islamic world. The Grand Mufti is the first and primary source of religious authority, is seen as the symbolic religious representative of the whole state, and issues fatwas on religious matters. His office, the Dar al Ifta (literally, the house of fatwas), an agency charged with issuing religious legal opinions on any question to Muslims who ask for them, issues some half a million fatwas a year in ten different languages, including both the official ones that he himself crafts on important issues and the more routine ones handled via phone and Internet by a dozen or so subordinate muftis.

Dr Allam is a prolific writer. He wrote more than a dozen books on various issues of Islamic Law including women's political engagement, Criminal justice, codification of Islamic Law, religious minorities and Islamic thought.

Since his appointment as the Grand Mufti of Egypt, he made it a point to reach out to the whole world to promote an authoritative picture of Islam and spread peaceful coexistence and build bridges of understanding and cooperation. He was recently named the best promoter of interfaith understanding in 2014 by the interfaith alliance in South Korea.

He was recently selected the President of the world supreme council of Fatwa authorities. It is an initiative launched in Cairo of the senior leading Grand Muftis worldwide.

James D. Bindenagel is Henry Kissinger Professor for Governance and International Security at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-University Bonn, Germany.

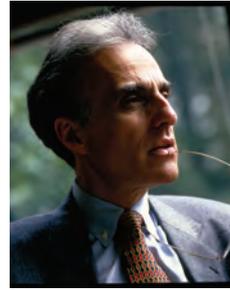
He is U.S. Ambassador (ret), whose professional speaking and writing includes teaching, articles and public lectures on international security in the 21st century, German security issues, Bundeswehr deployments, conflict prevention, post-conflict justice, and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the Kimberley Process for conflict diamonds, debates and other topics. Bindenagel is a former U.S. Ambassador, a career diplomat and an expert on Germany. He served as an American diplomat in East, West and united Germany during the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, unification of Germany, the Balkan Wars, debates on North Atlantic Treaty Organization security policy and expanded NATO membership, and German national security from 1972 to 2002. He introduced and promoted American Foreign Direct Investment in the Eastern states of Germany after unification in 1990 that made the United States the largest foreign investor in the five new German federal States. The Wall Street Journal profiled him on its front page as acting U.S. ambassador in Germany leading a business friendly U.S. Embassy.

He served as deputy and acting U.S. Ambassador in East Germany (1989-1990) and in United Germany (1994-1997). He was appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1999 as U.S. Ambassador and Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, was Special U.S. Negotiator for "Conflict Diamonds", and was Vice President of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and at DePaul University. Bindenagel also served as President of the Japan America Society of Chicago. Prior to his diplomatic career he was assigned to the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division in Germany.

He holds an MA in Public Administration and an AB in Political Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



John L. Esposito is Professor of Religion and International Affairs and of Islamic Studies and Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University.



Esposito specializes in Islam, political Islam from North Africa to Southeast Asia, and Religion and International Affairs. He is editor-in-chief of the four-volume *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, *The Oxford History of Islam*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, *The Islamic World: Past and Present*, the six-volume *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* and Oxford Islamic Studies Online. His more than thirty five books include *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (with Dalia Mogahed), *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, *Islam and Politics*, *Political Islam: Radicalism, Revolution or Reform?*, *Islam and Democracy* (with J. Voll) and *Women in Muslim Family Law*. His writings have been translated into more than 28 languages. A former president of the Middle East Studies Association of North America and the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies, he was a member of the World Economic Forum's Council of 100 Leaders, and is also on the High Level Group of the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations and President of the Executive Scientific Committee for *La Maison de la Mediterranee*'s 2005-2010 project, "The Mediterranean, Europe and Islam: Actors in Dialogue." Esposito is a recipient of the American Academy of Religion's 2005 Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion and of Pakistan's *Quaid-i-Azzam* Award for Outstanding Contributions in Islamic Studies. He has served as a consultant to the U.S. Department of State and to governments, corporations, universities, and the media. In 2003 he received the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University Award for Outstanding Teaching.

H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal

Founder C-1 World Dialogue Foundation

Date of Birth: 15th October 1966.

Education:

- Cambridge University (Trinity College): (1988-1989; 1990-1993)
Ph.D. (Cantab.) in Modern and Medieval Languages and Literatures (July 1993)
- Princeton University: (1984-1988)
B.A., Comparative Literature (June 1988).
(Graduated with Highest Honours, *Summa cum laude.*)
- Harrow School: (1979-1984)
'O' and 'A' Levels.



Official Work:

- *Personal Envoy of H.M. King Abdullah II and Special Advisor to H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan.*
(October 6th 2003 to present.)
- *Advisor for Tribal Affairs and Cultural Secretary to H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan.*
(From February 7th 1999, until October 6th 2003.)
- *Advisor to His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan for Tribal Affairs.*
(July 2nd 1998 to February 7th 1999.)
(in addition to the post of *Cultural Secretary*).
- *Cultural Secretary to His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan.*
(October 4th 1994 to February 7th 1999.)
- *Officer* in the Royal Jordanian Desert Police Force (June 1989-December 1992):
Promoted to *First Lieutenant* (November 14, 1992).
Commissioned as a *Second Lieutenant* (November 1989).

Regent of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan:

- Has served Jordan as *Regent* in the absence of H.M. King Abdullah II from the country.

Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein has been the director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute (formerly the Elijah School for the Study of Wisdom in World Religions) since 1997. Alon is acknowledged as one of the world's leading figures in interreligious dialogue, specializing in bridging the theological and academic dimension with a variety of practical initiatives, especially involving world religious leadership. He is both a theoretician and activist, setting trends and precedents in the global interfaith arena. He is the founder and director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute (formerly the Elijah School for the Study of Wisdom in World Religions), and its rich website is testimony to his many and varied activities. A noted scholar of Jewish studies, he has held academic posts at Tel Aviv University and has served as director of the Center for the Study of Rabbinic Thought, Beit Morasha College, Jerusalem. Ordained a rabbi in 1977, he received his Ph.D. from Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1986 in the area of Rabbinic thought. From 1989 to 1999, he was a member of the Shalom Hartman Institute for Advanced Studies, Jerusalem, where he also served as director for interreligious affairs. Stanford University Press published his *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach* in 2000, and the Littman Library published his co-edited volume *Jewish Theology and World Religions*. His *Beyond Idolatry – The Jewish Encounter with Hinduism* is to appear shortly. Several other collective research projects and edited volumes complement more than fifty articles, published in such scholarly journals as *Harvard Theological Review*, *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, *Journal of Literature and Theology*, *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, *Ecumenism*, and *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*.



Jovan Kurbalija is the Founding Director of DiploFoundation and the Head of the Geneva Internet Platform. A former diplomat, Dr Kurbalija has a professional and academic background in international law, diplomacy, and information technology. He has been a pioneer in the field of e-diplomacy since 1992 when he established the Unit for Information Technology and Diplomacy at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies in Malta.



Dr Kurbalija is a leading expert in the field of e-diplomacy and the impact of the Internet on international relations. His book, *An Introduction to Internet Governance*, has been translated into 14 languages and is used as a textbook on academic courses worldwide. Dr Kurbalija lectures on e-diplomacy and Internet governance in academic and training institutions in many countries, including Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He is currently based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Prince Michael of Liechtenstein is Founder and Chairman of the Geopolitical Information Service AG and President of Finanzkontor in Vaduz, an international advisory and fiduciary trust company. He is also President of the think tank, ECAEF based in Vaduz. He studied Commerce at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, and consolidated his studies by assignments in the banking and industrial sector in Belgium, Canada and the U.S. From 1978 to 1987, he worked for Nestlé SA in the fields of controlling, management and marketing in various markets in Europe and Africa.



Ferdinand Mirbach is a project manager within the Cultural Orientations program at the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Gütersloh (Germany). After completing studies (2000 – 2005) in political science and religious studies in Munich, Göttingen and Bologna, he wrote a dissertation on the political integration of Muslims in Germany. Since 2008 he has been managing several projects at the Bertelsmann Stiftung, including the Religion Monitor. His research interests include issues regarding inter-religious dialogue and the integration of minorities in heterogeneous societies.



Michael Møller is Acting Head, United Nations Office at Geneva. Møller brings to the position a wealth of experience, having served for more than 30 years as an international civil servant in the United Nations. Most recently he was Executive Director of the Kofi Annan Foundation from 2008 to 2011. Prior to this, he served as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cyprus (2006-2008) and Director for Political, Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Affairs in the Office of the Secretary-General (2001-2006), also serving concurrently as Deputy Chief of Staff for the last two years of that period.



Martin Rieger is director of the Cultural Orientations program at the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Gütersloh (Germany). Following his studies in philosophy and theology (1988-1993), he completed his Ph.D. in liturgy and objective theology. From 1994 to 2004 he worked as a press relations officer with Lutheran church services in Germany. He then taught at the Berlin University of the Arts until 2006. Martin Rieger oversees several projects at the Bertelsmann Stiftung, including the Religion Monitor.

