



**THE INITIATIVE OF THE CUSTODIAN OF THE  
TWO HOLY MOSQUES FOR DIALOGUE AMONG  
FOLLOWERS OF RELIGIONS AND CULTURES**

Achievements and Future Prospects

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## Preface:

The profound changes the world has undergone at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, coupled with the rapid mutations witnessed by humanity at the dawn of the third Millennium, have brought about a new generation of ideas to promote world peace and secure a safe future for mankind where harmony, coexistence and dialogue would prevail among the followers of religions, cultures and civilizations.

Amid this constantly changing trend of ideas aiming to redress international relations and reinforce rapprochement, understanding and acquaintanceship among peoples and nations, the United Nation General Assembly adopted, in 1998, a resolution proclaiming the year 2001 as the **(United Nation Year of Dialogue among Civilizations)**.

Four years later, these ideas having substantially matured and permeated world public opinion, the United Nations adopted the concept of the Alliance of Civilizations. It is in this context that former UN Secretary General Mr Kofi Annan established the United Nations Alliance of Civi-lizations, an organ tasked with setting this idea to motion.

Amid escalating hostility, racism, discrimination, religious disdain and affront to religious symbols, the need was ever more urgent for a strong, daring and balanced initiative to foster dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures, and promote the values of dialogue and peace culture the world over.

It is in this context that the initiative of the **Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures** has come, as an attempt to materialize the aspirations of people in the world for justice and peace. It is a significant contribution to the global effort being made to address the dangers threatening to undermine the stability of human societies, mainly because of escalating hostility, racism and enmity, coupled with ever-growing hot-spots of international tension, especially in the Muslim world.

As a matter of fact, this initiative has evolved through three main phases: the **first**, was the **International Islamic Conference for Dialogue**, held in June 2008 in Makkah Al Mukarramah; the **second** was the **World Conference on Dialogue**, held in July 2008 in Madrid; and the **third** was the **High-Level Meeting for Dialogue among Religions, Cultures and Civilizations**, held in November 2008 at the UN Headquarters in New York. The focus during these three phases was on how to find a practical way to set the initiative into motion. It is in this spirit that the **King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)** was established in Vienna, as part of the global engagement to best translate into action the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, in its being an invaluable conduit for genuine dialogue, at all levels, between the followers of human cultures and civilizations, within creative cultural diversity.

In a bid to push forth the initiative on a global scale and stimulate research in dialogue, and in recognition of the outstanding efforts in this area, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia established the **King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Prize for Dialogue of Civilizations**. This, along with **Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Programme for the Culture of Dialogue and Peace**, which was set up by UNESCO, will help enlarge the scope for this breakthrough initiative launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as part of contribution to the effort to promote peace, tolerance and harmony in the world.

Given the international acclaim the initiative has received, as a true embodiment of the Muslim world's view to the dialogue issues that are raised in international conferences; and with the view to promote this initiative in the Muslim world, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) presented to the 7<sup>th</sup> Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers, held in December 2011, in Algiers, a document pertaining to the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures. The document underlines the religious, cultural, civilizational and human scope of the initiative, situating it within a broader vision that is expressive of the principles underpinning the Islamic civilization's perception of dialogue as a means for greater cooperation between peoples and nations.

After discussion and adoption of the document, the Conference commissioned ISESCO to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations made in this context.

I am pleased to present to the readers the document on the “**Executive Plan for the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among Followers of Religions and Cultures: Achievements and Future Prospects**”. The 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Consultative Council in Charge of Implementing the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World adopted and praised this Plan. Similarly, the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Supreme Council of Education, Science and Culture for Muslims outside the Islamic World and the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Heads of Islamic Cultural Centers and Associations in Europe praised the Initiative together with its Executive Plan and put forward practical proposals to set them into motion outside the Muslim world.

In a bid to publicize the Initiative and its Executive Plan, ISESCO presented the two documents to the Fifth Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations (Vienna, 27-28 February 2013) and the Second World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue (Baku, 29 May-01 June 2013).

During the 10<sup>th</sup> Coordination Meeting of Heads of Delegation of ISESCO’s Member States which was held at UNESCO Headquarters, in Paris, on the sidelines of the 37<sup>th</sup> session of UNESCO General Conference, the Initiative and its Executive Plan were reviewed and discussed. In this regard, participants acclaimed the documents and stressed ISESCO’s role in pushing the Initiative forward in order to promote dialogue among cultures and civilizations and foster rapprochement among the followers of religions in the common humanitarian issues. It was also agreed to commission ISESCO to extend the reach of the **Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among Followers of Religions and Cultures** across the world.

The draft Executive Plan details the Initiative’s major trends and directions which have been meticulously developed through a comprehensive vision reflective of the Muslim world’s collective will. For though this document originally belongs to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, may Allah preserve him, it closely mirrors the Muslim

world's vision which, in turn, is indicative of the Islamic ever-renewing mission to the world.

Therefore, ISESCO has the pleasure to publish these two documents in a single edition. The objective is to contribute to widely circulating this historic, pioneering initiative to the large community of researchers, scholars, journalists, religious leaderships and intellectuals.

May Allah guide us to the right path and grant us success.

**Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri**

Director General of the Islamic  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization  
(ISESCO)

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THE TWO HOLY MOSQUES FOR DIALOGUE AMONG  
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Achievements and Future Prospects

Adopted by  
**the Seventh Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers**  
(Algiers, December 2011)



This document deals with the "**Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures**", both in terms of the steps that have been made for its implementation and with regard to the programmes and mechanisms to be put in place in order to ensure its continuity, its development and translate its contents into concrete reality.

As for the efforts to promote and popularize the Initiative, the document presents the key ideas of the "Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures" that have emerged in the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue held in Mecca in June 2008 as well as the main outcome of the international conferences, symposiums and intellectual and cultural forums which took place on this Initiative, especially the "**World Conference on Dialogue**" held in Madrid in July 2008 and the "**High-Level Meeting for the Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations**" held at the United Nations headquarters in New York in November 2008.

Regarding the ways and means of ensuring the sustainability and the implementation of the "Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques", the document put forward certain conditions which must be fulfilled in order to translate it into a concrete reality and a life culture. Indeed, the building of a world that believes in coexistence, based on solid foundations such as justice, rule of law, equality, security and peace goes necessarily through a meaningful dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures. This dialogue should keep in mind as an objective the human well-being, the world security and enhance what Humanity has in common. In order that all the meetings and conferences dedicated to the dialogue do not remain only an intellectual luxury debate where each party strives to care about its own religious, cultural or political image for public opinion, all the forces that are seeking to build world peace are called upon to put in place mechanisms that ensure the sustainability of this Initiative, its development, the realization of its objectives and the implementation of its contents until it becomes deeply rooted into people mentalities and behavior. That will help them to get rid of historical conflicts and of the shackles of clichés of prejudices and ready-made judgments, thanks to the opportunities put in by the dialogue among religions on the basis of "Come to a word common between you and us" to ensure that communication among cultures will serve as a bridge toward the consolidation of what human beings have in common and toward the realization of world peace.

Once we see this dialogue as mandatory and inevitable, its adoption should not be perceived as a submission to one way of life or to a given civilizational model, excluding others, but it requires taking into account the specificities of peoples and the respect for their cultures. In this regard, the dialogue can only be sought among parties who despite their differences are committed to achieve common goals and objectives. The success of the "Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures" requires the implementation of a practical programme. This programme is based on knowledge, recognition and mutual acknowledgement. Indeed, he who knows only his own culture, recognizes only his own values and does not adopt the right approach of seeking to know the others cannot be an eligible valued partner in the real dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures.

As dialogue should be among equal partners, the Muslim Ummah must take advantage of its means and potential to be able to bargain from strength with the other in order to promote a productive dialogue, a dialogue where the strong does not impose his conditions upon the weak. The present world of globalization does not acknowledge the peace that emanates from principles, but the peace established by might. The Roman adage that says "*who wants peace prepares for war*" continuously resonates strongly in the international relations which still are ruled by some major powers in accordance with their interests.

In this context, the initiative for dialogue with the other cannot succeed without a prior self-dialogue, for an inconsistent non-self-reliance is reflected in a negative bearing on the relations with the "other". This is why Muslim societies must consolidate their internal front through factors of strength such as the liberation of creative human potential, the encouragement of the regional organizations and work sharing among Islamic countries. This can only be done if these countries rely on their youth who are the builders of their future and their lifeblood to take up the civilizational challenges, by granting them their right to take part in the decision-making process which determines the future of their country in the educational, political, economic, social and cultural spheres. That will also contribute to create an appropriate climate which allows the youth to develop their abilities, their potential and their creativeness through upholding the values of truthfulness, justice and freedom, the implementation of political reforms, the establishment of social justice, the recognition of the right to assert distinctive identity and the consecration of the values of cultural diversity and pluralism. The fulfillment of such requirements demands the necessary willpower to reform the present in order to ensure the future. This will affect in a beneficial

manner the ability of the Muslim world to engage positively in the process of globalization in order to influence the balance of power and direct the compass of dialogue among followers of religions and cultures toward ways that serve the interests of humanity, wreck the navel-gazing complex, hegemonism and puts an end to the monopolization of will and world economic resources by the major powers. It is therefore necessary to build a multipolar world order, where the Islamic world will be stronger thanks to the high values of its religion, the necessary unity of its ranks and the effective complementarity of its forces so that it becomes one of these active poles able to stand out in the constructive dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures. Hence, conditions will be prepared to enable the success of the "Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures" and the fulfillment of the requirements for its durability and for the realization of the noble human goals it has defined and which were behind its proclamation to begin with, especially if the action aiming at its implementation is coupled with international efforts pointing at the promotion of dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures, communication, mutual understanding between peoples, mutual recognition and harmony among civilizations, including the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Initiative, the efforts by the State of Qatar to strengthen the dialogue among religions and the actions taken by UNESCO and ICESCO for the rapprochement of followers of religions, the enhancement of communication among peoples, the mutual enrichment of cultures and the dialogue among civilizations.

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the third millennium have witnessed major events that have changed the course of history, especially regarding the relations among peoples and nations. The end of the Cold War saw as well that of the international lining up between two blocks whose interests, goals and ideologies were conflicting. This has enabled the emergence of a new world order that some intellectuals and politicians have seen as a shattering victory of liberalism and the market economy. They started to praise the winners' speeches about the decisive victory of a model of civilization over the others, claiming that the course of history has stopped on the threshold of a unipolar world after the cold war. At the same time, others strived to theorize about the inevitable war between ideas and ideologies, looking upon cultural differences as a fuel for a future inescapable clash of civilizations.

As the cultural pluralism is a source of enrichment for the universal human civilization, and considering that its recognition reinforces the interaction between the cultures, guarantees the mutual respect among peoples, promotes their coexistence, preserves

their common interests, strengthens the common heritage of humanity and achieves world peace, experts and wise people, despite the difference of their cultures, their religions, their beliefs, their allegiances, and their faiths are now involved in the criticism of the theory of the clash of civilizations, showing its futility and presenting an alternative. It is not by chance that most of the initiatives taken in this direction have come from the Muslim world, a world steeped in the Islamic authentic culture which recommends dialogue, mutual understanding and recognition arising from the divine words: *[O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).]*<sup>(1)</sup> A world which believes too in diversity, pluralism and difference as universal rules in accordance with the verses: *[Had your Lord willed to make people a single nation and are still different only from the womb of your Lord, therefore he created them,]*<sup>(2)</sup> and with: *[To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah willed, He would have made you one nation, but that (He) may test you in what He has given you; so strive as in a race in good deeds. The return of you (all) is to Allah; then He will inform you about that in which you used to differ,]*<sup>(3)</sup> and with what the Almighty said *[And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors. Surely there are signs in this for the learned].*<sup>(4)</sup>

That is the way successive studies, books, symposiums and meetings that refute the Huntington vision and assertions regarding the threat that Islam would constitute to the western world. This position needed a political framework which can adopt it and present it to the international community as a practical response of the Islamic States to the theory of the clash of civilizations and the policies of demonization of Islam and as an effective contribution of the Muslim world and of the Islamic culture to laying solid foundations for dialogue among the religions and cultures in order to avoid for Mankind the scourges of wars and conflicts. It was in these circumstances that came the call to the international community by Dr. Muhammad Khatami, then President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to make the year 2001 the international year of dialogue among civilizations, as a first step for the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

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(1) (Surat Al Hujurat, verse 13).

(2) (Surat Hud, verses 18 and 19).

(3) (Surat Al Maidah, verse 48).

(4) (Surat Rum, verse 22)

in the hope that this dialogue would be a first milestone for the establishment of justice and freedom in the world. This call was approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations which had already proclaimed at its 35<sup>th</sup> session held on November 3, 1998 the year 2001 "International Year of Dialog among Civilizations".

The world welcomed the year 2001 and with it a new century and a new millennium whose first year was intended to be the year of "dialogue among civilizations". However, the sectarian democracy has persisted in the international relations with its iniquity. The Israeli occupying authorities continued to massacre the Palestinians and none of the superpowers intervened to stop its aggression; the blockade on Iraq was imposed with its ensuing misfortunes of lack of food and medicines among others. The acceleration of globalization had swept to the bitter end boundaries and protections, leaving peoples of the Third World unprotected, accentuating problems and suffering. It is in this context that the attacks of September 11, 2001, took place, bringing back the theory of the "clash of civilization" to the agenda. Voices were raised then to hold the Islamic religion responsible for acts which have been attributed to some of its adherents. The "green danger" became one of the subjects that take up all the time and energies of circles amongst the right-wing extremists in the West as well as of some western media which launched campaigns against Islam and the Muslims nourishing the phenomenon of Islamic phobia. The controversy was then opened around the relationship between the Muslim world and the West in particular and, more generally, among the followers of religions and cultures.

To meet these challenges, the international community rushed in order to contain crises that threaten world peace. Hence, the initiative of dialogue among civilizations inspired the emergence of other initiatives including the initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations which was adopted by the United Nations and which has dedicated a special secretariat and developed a programme for its achievement. The Member States of the United Nations and the regional and international organizations were then mobilized to put in place mechanisms capable of ensuring the success of this initiative and the achievement of its objectives, with an effective participation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and its member states, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) which constitutes a fundamental partner of the General Secretariat for the Alliance of Civilizations.

At the same time, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan issued the "Amman Message". The State of Qatar also organized major annual conferences on dialogue among religions with the participation of distinguished Muslim, Christian and Jewish

scholars politicians and academics. These meetings were crowned with the creation of the Doha Center for Dialogue among Religions. Then came the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures in order to reinforce these efforts. The initiative constitutes a valuable contribution due to the fact that it emanates from the holy lands, the cradle of Islam, and in that it calls on all celestial religions, and all doctrines and schools of thought to start a dialogue on the basis of "Come to a word common between you and us" and of shared values that advocate coexistence and common life.

There is no doubt that the choice of dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures as the subject of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has demonstrated the latter's concern for finding ways and means of ensuring coexistence among men, world peace and dignity for human beings wherever they live without distinction of sex, culture or religion in order to enable humanity to build a civilization based on solidarity, brotherhood, justice, love and peace. This is why the initiative has attracted special attention and won wide support. Prominent intellectuals, political leaders, and key religious figures joined action to attend the meetings held to promote the Initiative and to mobilize support for it on an international scale and consider ways and means of its successful implementation. The presence at these meetings of representatives of various religions and doctrines and the favorable reception they reserved to the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques were remarkable.

Considering that this success of the initiative for dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures needs an internal dialogue among the followers of the same religion and of the same culture, an invitation was launched to Muslim scholars in order to discuss the issue of dialogue and the relationship between the followers of religions and cultures, both from the point of view of its sources in the Islamic culture and that of its contents, objectives, rules, methods, means and partners.

The International Islamic Conference for Dialogue, which was held in the Holy City of Mecca from 30 Jumada I to 2 Jumada II, 1429 (corresponding to 4-6 June 2008), was a scientific, intellectual and cultural forum for scholars and thinkers who discussed the challenges facing the Muslim Ummah in front of the waves of demonization of Islam and attacks against the Muslims that are taking place. These waves are fed by actions of extremists and intolerants whose behavior is in flagrant contradiction with the spirit of Islam, religion of tolerance, balance, coexistence, love and peace. The deliberations of this Conference culminated in the Makkah Appeal for Interfaith Dialogue which was considered a road map that defines the role of religions in man salvation from the dangers and crises that threaten him and lays the foundation

for a dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures which fosters their mutual understanding, solve their problems, secures their interests and qualifies them to assume their divine mission which is to be the builders of Civilization on Earth. One of the main conclusions of the Conference was the adoption of Dialogue as a Quranic genuine approach, and a practice adopted by all the prophets (peace and blessings be upon them) in communicating with their folks or exchanging with their critics. This is why following this path became a condition for the establishment of justice and peace in the world and for the formation of a world public opinion which consolidates what humanity has in common, adopts the just causes of peoples and supports their legitimate claims for freedom and independence and bars the path to those who call for the clash of cultures and civilizations and for war between the ideas and ideologies, standing in the way of those attempts of demonization of Islam and the subjection of its followers.

One of the other important results of the Conference was the insistence on the need to respect the rules and the approach of Islam in dialogue, in accordance with the Quranic sacred verse which says: [*And argue not with the People of the Book except by what is best, save such of them as act unjustly. But say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit. Do not talk with the people of the book that a polite way, at least that it is of those among them who are in bad faith. Tell them: 'We believe in what has been revealed to us as to what you were revealed; our God is the same as yours, and we are entirely submitted'.*]<sup>(5)</sup> The Conference has also insisted on the fact that "the revealed message", the doctrines and schools of thought possess in common a heritage that calls for respect for the virtues of ethics and rejects injustice, aggression, and moral decadence, family disintegration, serious damage to the ecological system". That was a strong signal sent by Muslim thinkers and scholars to the whole world to say that dialogue between the religions should not be a controversy around the beliefs, but rather a dialogue that fundamentally seeks to solve the problems of man and humanity and which must therefore move from the circle of theological considerations to that of human concerns, in a spirit of religious tolerance, human solidarity and awareness of a common destiny.

Islam, as the last revealed religion and as a religion of uprightness, universality and faith is capable of ensuring human salvation from the throes of materialism and from moral, social and ecological crises: [*O People of the Book, indeed Our Messenger has come to you, making clear to you much of that which you concealed of the*

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(5) (Surat Al-Ankaboot, verse 46).

*Book and passing over much. Indeed, there has come to you from Allah, a Light and a clear Book, whereby Allah guides such as follow His pleasure into the ways of peace, and brings them out of darkness into light by His will, and guides them to the right path.*]<sup>(6)</sup> To this end, the Muslim Ummah is called upon to enter into dialogue with the other communities to fructify the common cultural heritage in order to meet these challenges and ensure a better future for Mankind. However, in our dialogue with the other - as recommended by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in his keynote speech at the opening of the Conference - we must arm ourselves with the confidence that we draw from our faith in Allah and in the knowledge that we learn from the tolerance of our religion to dialogue with courtesy and decorum. In this way, we will keep hold with kindness on what we agree on and on what we disagree on we follow the teachings of the Almighty: [*To you be your religion, and to me my religion.*]<sup>(7)</sup>

The participants in the Conference were right to say that all cultures have visions and perceptions to face the challenges that threaten humanity and share the desire to provide appropriate solutions to crises confronting them, thanks to the human experience that they possess. That is why it is necessary to initiate a profound dialogue among the followers of these religious beliefs to invest in common values in order to develop joint programmes of action, to study the issues, resolve the problems of the moment and preserve humanity from their possible disastrous consequences. It is precisely here that lie the noble goals of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures which aims at strengthening communication between the peoples for the good of mankind as a whole, through the dissemination of the culture of mutual understanding, recognition, the right to difference, the acceptance of the opinions of others and the creation of a space of dialogue, not only at the international level, but also at national and regional levels. If the stated objective of the Initiative is to promote dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures, there are other benefits which may be gotten by all peoples on Earth through this initiative to the extent that it will bridge the gap between peoples, enhance communication on the regional level and help initiate projects for dialogue between the citizens of the same countries, both as regards the Arab countries which include Christian minorities or the European countries and the United States of America where minorities and significant Islamic communities are living. That will reinforce the respect for cultural diversity and the recognition of the

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(6) (Surat Al Maidah, verses 15 and 16).

(7) (Surat Al Kafirun, verse 6).

cultural rights of minorities, the guarantee of social peace and consequently the consolidation of world peace.

The scholars and wise men of the Muslim Ummah apprehended the significance of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques as well as the wisdom of the promoter and the nobility of the objectives. They took over the contents of the keynote address by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in the opening of their Conference and which, despite its brevity, has diagnosed the evil and prescribed the treatment likely to straighten up the misbehaves which were afflicting the relations between peoples and nations on the eve of the third millennium.

The source of evil lies in the introversion, the ignorance and the obscurantism. The remedy resides in the spirit of openness, dialogue and coexistence. As was so well said by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in his speech *“how great is this Ummah and how difficult are the challenges it faces in these times where the followers of extremism and intolerance among his sons are in league with its other enemies to tackle the rightness of its way. They targeted the tolerance and the noble values of Islam. It is for this reason that came the appeal from your brother to face the challenges of the introversion, ignorance and of narrowness of mind so that the world would assimilate the teachings of Islam and the generous prospects that it opens, without animosity or hostility.”*<sup>(8)</sup>

It is a clear condemnation by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques of the intolerant and extremist thought put about by some obscurantist Islamic movements in opposition to the spirit of openness, balance and tolerance of Islam. It is too, a clear condemnation of positions that some circles of the right in the West have adopted by striving to distort the image of Islam, going to war against it, thus violating the principles of coexistence between men, and of cultural and religious diversity; principles whose application has been clearly defined by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques when he said: *“The path to the other goes necessarily through the common values defined by the divine message that has been revealed by the Almighty for the benefit of Mankind, the preservation of its dignity, the enhancement of the values of righteousness, probity, equity, justice, the preservation of the family and its ethics which have been ill-treated in the time when men have strayed from their God and the teachings of His religion.”*<sup>(9)</sup>

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(8) (Statement of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques at opening of International Islamic Conference for Dialogue).

(9) (op.cit).

Such is the meaning of the message of the religions and these are the objectives of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. This means that the way is opened to the achievement of these goals if the followers of each religion are keeping to the teachings and principles of their faith. That is why the "Makkah Appeal for Interfaith Dialogue", adopted by the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue stressed that the essential objectives of the dialogue, proposed by the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques are:

- *“To contribute to meet the challenges and solve the problems facing Mankind because of its distance from the world of religion, its denial of its values and its precepts, which has led it to fall into the quagmire of vice, injustice, terrorism, violation of human rights, deterioration of the ecological system and natural environment that Allah the Almighty has offered in boon to humanity.”*
- *“To support the just human right causes and promote a world public opinion which defends these rights and contributes to the satisfaction of legitimate claims attached to it.”*
- *“To unmask the designs of the promoters of the clash of civilizations, and of the end of history and refute their claims to accredit the idea that Islam is the enemy of the modern civilization in order to demonize Islam, Muslims and maintain their own domination on the peoples and establish the hegemony of one unique culture over the world.”*
- *“To introduce Islam, its teachings, its humanistic principles and its valuable heritage which once empowered will contribute in an active manner to the normalization of human civilization.”*
- *“To replicate to the lies spread about Islam, Islamic states and institutions and correct the distorted image that has been accredited among religious communities, scientists and media.”*
- *“To have a better knowledge of non-Muslims, of their culture, and to establish common principles with them in order to achieve peaceful coexistence and social peace for the benefit of the human community, working together for the dissemination of moral values, the support of the right causes, justice and peace, the struggle against hegemony, exploitation, injustice, the dissolution of morals, family disintegration, and other evils that threaten the societies.”*
- *“To resolve disputes and differences which may arise between Muslims and non-Muslims who live with them in the same country and the same*

*societies, either as a minority or a majority, and create a favorable climate for a good social and national coexistence.”*

- *“To achieve mutual understanding with other cultures and human civilizations, by affirming the commitment of the Muslims in the context of the plurality of the civilizations of the human kind and to benefit from this mutual understanding and achieve and preserve world peace.”*
- *“To strengthen communication among the followers of Islam, with the view to consolidating the unity of the Ummah, itself a necessary prerequisite to mitigate the effects of fanaticism and quarrels.”*

As a matter of fact, we can say that the results of the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue constitutes a road map which confirms the founding character of dialogue in the Islamic culture, specifies the objectives of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures and defines the path for its implementation for the good of the Muslim Ummah and of mankind as a whole.

The initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has benefited from an unprecedented attention and has acquired, thanks to its dimension and to its noble humanistic objectives, a large international support that was obvious, given the weight of the eminent persons belonging to all regions of the world and all religions, all cultures, all races and nationalities who took part in the World Conference on Dialogue held in Madrid on 13-15 Rajab 1429 (July 16-18, 2008) under the auspices of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz who addressed the participants, saying that he *“came to this World Conference on Dialogue from the Holy Places to which all Muslim hearts and thoughts are devoted, bearing a message of the Muslim Ummah which tells that Islam is the religion of moderation, tolerance and balance, a message that calls for a constructive dialogue among the followers of different religions and appeals to humankind for a new era where concord takes over from disputes and stressing that differences must not be a source of quarrels and that religion is not behind the tragedies experienced by human-kind throughout history but extremism that soiled some followers of all divine religions and political doctrines. Therefore, the peoples of the world have no choice but to meet around what is common to them through the dialogue among religions and civilizations. Man may be able to destroy the earth, just as he is able to transform it into a haven of peace and harmony where the followers of different religions, faiths and philosophies, coexist peacefully and where people live and cooperate in respect and deal with*

*problems through dialogue and non-violence, overcoming hatred by love, fanaticism by tolerance, vice by morale, injustice by equity, war by peace and racism by human brotherhood.*"<sup>(10)</sup>

The speech of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques constituted a reference for the Conference and the debates that took place, which explains the strong presence of its contents in the "Madrid Declaration" that has crowned the work of this Conference, a document which said that all men are equal in respect for human dignity, without distinction of color, race, obedience, religion and culture, and that dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures is the right track to harmony, mutual understanding, cooperation in human relations and peaceful coexistence among nations. It stresses that the religions aim at achieving happiness, justice, security and peace for all humans who are working for the enhancement of understanding and mutual recognition, cooperation and coexistence among peoples and calls for the dissemination of moral values and virtues through wisdom and God word, which empowers them to compete for the development of human values, in their struggle against crime, mismanagement, narcotic drugs and terrorism in order to preserve the family and society from all deviations.

One of the points which met general agreement among the participants was the absolute refusal of theories advocating the clash of civilizations and therefore the extreme attention to be given to the danger of the campaign aiming at creating and exacerbating differences between peoples which undermine the foundations of peace and stability in the world. The participants were also unanimous on the need to develop the cooperation among religious, cultural, educational and media institutions in order to anchor the moral values, encourage the constructive social practices, and promote the culture of respect and mutual recognition through the dialogue. They insisted on the need to establish universal rules for dialogue in order to ensure the perception and the deep taking root of human values and moral principles which constitute a common heritage of all followers of religions and cultures, with a view to strengthening stability in the world and prosperity of men. The Conference has called for the creation of a working group whose mission is to identify the obstacles to the dialogue and the difficulties which prevent the achievement of the expected goals, and to draw up a universal document which encourages the dissemination of the culture of respect for religions and their symbols, and prohibits undermining them.

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(10) (Statement of Custodian of Two Holy Mosques at opening of World Conference on Dialogue, Madrid).

It is natural that a statement which has gained the unanimity of the followers of the different religions and cultures receives a universal echo. The "Madrid Declaration" has found its way into the corridors of the United Nations to ensure that its content has to be submitted for discussion in meetings, conferences and international symposia. In this context, and as a positive reaction to the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the United Nations General Assembly has held the "High-Level Meeting for the Dialogue among Religions, Cultures and Civilizations" at the United Nations headquarter on 14 to 15 Zul-qi'dâ 1429 (corresponding to 12-13 November 2008) with the participation of several heads of State and decision makers. The General Assembly then took note of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the convening of the World Congress for Dialogue held in Madrid, under his auspices, and called for *"the dissemination of the culture of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect of human rights among the followers of different religions, cultures and civilizations."*<sup>(11)</sup>

This meeting was a qualitative leap in enhancing the international efforts to take advantage of the common religious and human values in order to bridge the gap between peoples and strengthen networking among them. The dialogue among religions is no longer an exclusivity of theologians, intellectuals and specialized researchers, but it is now rather, thanks to the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, at the centre of the concerns and debates of leaders and decision makers of the world. That will likely widen the space of dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures on a global level. This was obvious in the speeches of the Kings and Heads of State who took part in the Conference and who have all insisted on the importance of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and on its ability to ensure the mutual understanding among the followers of religions and cultures who believe in dialogue as a means for the solution of disputes and the rapprochement of cultures in order to allow all to live in peace, harmony and security. These are the objectives defined by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques when he addressed the entire world from the rostrum of the United Nations, saying: *"the religions which have been a godsend by Allah The Almighty to ensure happiness for Mankind must not be a cause of its misfortunes. Men are equal on this planet and by consent are condemned to live together in peace and harmony or to finish in the fire of misunderstanding and hatred."* Given the fact that dialogue does not mean abandonment of rights, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has been clear in

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(11) (New York Declaration of High-Level Meeting for Dialogue of Religions, Cultures and Civilizations).

his appeal for a commitment to the principles and for the need to establish justice among men in order to iron out the differences and establish the dialogue on solid foundations which will guarantee its success and the achievement of its objectives. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques added: “*all the tragedies that the world is facing today are due to the abandonment of the greatest principles which all religions and all cultures have called for, in particular the principle of justice.*”<sup>(12)</sup> He also added that “*the dialogue to which his Initiative appeals is a civilized dialogue likely to revive the moral values and to anchor in the minds of peoples and nations what constitutes a clear victory of the best over the worst in a man, and offers to humanity the hope of a future where justice, safety and dignity drive away injustice, fear and misery.*”<sup>(13)</sup>

The Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has demonstrated that the values of coexistence with those who are different, the recognition of their right to freedom of opinion and belief are deeply rooted in the Islamic culture, which in turn take its source in the Islamic religion that the rightly guided Muslim strives to follow in accordance with the teachings of his God: **[Say: We believe in Allah and (in) that which has been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Abraham, and Ismail and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him do we submit.]**<sup>(14)</sup> Once the revelation of the last Message, a message of purity, universality, and truthfulness, the Muslims who follow these teachings have recognized the other celestial religions. Thus, the faith in the prophets of these religions is an integral part of their own faith, and the faith in the divine emanation of their messages is part of their own belief. They have always extended a hand of coexistence, cooperation and solidarity to the followers of all religions and all faiths. It is on this basis that dialogue among the followers of religions must be rehabilitated and given the importance it deserves in order for it to constitute a bridge towards the mutual enrichment of cultures, communication and coexistence among the civilizations and the followers of religions to build a human common heritage. If the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques were to benefit from the attention it deserves, it would contribute to changing the reality of the relations between the civilizations in this age of globalization, and

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(12) (Statement of Custodian of Two Holy Mosques at opening of High-Level Meeting on Dialogue of Religions, Cultures and Civilizations).

(13) (op.cit).

(14) (*Surat Al-Baqarâ*, verse 136).

will motivate the entire world to cope with the attempts of stereotyping and exclusion in order to rise above the tendency of cultural centralism, and to recognize the diversity. This Initiative is also capable of building a successful dialogue between the followers of the religions in order to establish the desired alliance among civilizations which could meet the challenges facing the world nowadays.

The countries which took part in the High-Level Meeting for the Dialogue of Religions, Cultures and Civilizations proved that they have seized this dimension of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques when they stated in the New York Declaration their “*concern about the increasing expression of intolerance, discrimination, propagation of hatred and oppression of minorities regardless of their religion*”. The “Declaration” lays great stress upon the “*need to encourage dialogue, mutual understanding, tolerance, respect for religions, cultures and beliefs of all*”, and rejects “*any use of the religion to justify attacks on innocent lives, terrorist acts, violence and coercion that are contrary to the message of all religions which call, on the contrary, for peace, justice and equality.*”<sup>(15)</sup>

The participating countries have also “*affirmed their desire to strengthen existing institutions within the United Nations system in order to promote tolerance, respect for human rights, preservation of the family and the environment, generalization of education, poverty alleviation, drugs control, crime and terrorism containments*”, as well as their “*recognition of the positive contribution of religions, beliefs and human values in the battle to meet these challenges.*”<sup>(16)</sup>

This high-level meeting gave a great impetus to the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. Its adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which is the most authoritative institution and the most representative of the States and peoples of the world, created a considerable stir on the international level and was derived from the recognition by the international community of the importance of this Initiative, of its human dimensions and the aptitude of its proponent to present a universal project. A project which restitutes to Man his dignity, to civilization its humanism, to cultures their interaction, to peoples their mutual recognition, to nations their solidarity, to religions their status, to peace its lustrousness and to dialogue its role, values and virtues. The initiative was capable of mobilizing the international community at its highest political level in order to place the dialogue among the

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(15) (New York Declaration of High-Level Meeting for Dialogue of Religions, Cultures and Civilizations).

(16) (op.cit).

followers of religions and cultures amid its major objectives, which is a way to pay tribute to the role that the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques may play so that the religions, the cultures and the cultural identities will be a factor of stability in the international policy, instead of being exploited to fuel wars and conflicts. Thus, the international community has realized that the message brought by the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques is not a plea for Islam, or for the uni-fication of religions, but rather a call to go back to the religions in their purity, to the preservation of the original nature of mankind inclined to worship the Almighty God and committed to mercy, love and peace among men, as well as to mutual understanding amongst those who share the same country, the same planet and the same life. It is also a thoughtful attempt to spread love, tolerance, fraternity amid peoples and a call for the redefinition of the concepts of dialogue, human solidarity and the consolidation of the culture of coexistence among all peoples on Earth in their religious, doctrinal and cultural diversity.

This high-level international mobilization which culminated in the adoption of the "New York Declaration" by the United Nation under the Chapter 45 "Culture in the service of peace" has greatly and efficiently helped to promote the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures and has paved the way for the translation of its contents into essential pillars in international relations, if the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in concert with other Arab and Islamic countries endeavor to open a broad international debate that transcends cultures, languages and ethnicities around this Initiative to make it a world charter which bars the way to the calls for hatred, intolerance, racism and the clash of civilizations. The achievement of such goals requires on the part of the international community to stand up for the just causes and to impose on its members to respect the conventions and the international legality that prohibit injustice, aggression and occupation. It also requires the commitment of the international, regional and national intellectual, cultural, scientific and educational organizations, institutions and organs, chiefly UNESCO and ICAHO, to back up the efforts for the implementation of this initiative as well as to help putting it among the priorities of the agenda of the media and the civil society activities and of the youth interests and debates within universities, institutes, schools, cultural clubs, political and communities organizations.

The Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures has strengthened the frameworks for dialogue adopted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia following the orientation given by the

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and under his supervision, both in their demonstrative aspect, through the cultural dialogues within the framework of the National Festival of Heritage and Culture “Inadriyah” and its scientific and academic dimensions through the symposium organized by King Abdul Aziz Public Library or in its institutional form through the creation of the King Abdul Aziz Center For National Dialogue whose efforts are focused on the promotion of the values of the dialogue within the Saudi Society. The initiative for the dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures came to carry the efforts undertaken by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques from the dissemination of culture of dialogue among natives of the same country and followers of the same religion to the anchorage of these values on a global world scale so that peace and harmony take the place of disagreement and conflict.

The High-Level Meeting for the Dialogue of the Religions, Cultures and Civilizations, held by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 2008 at its headquarters in New York, was a turning point in the attitude of the international community on the issue of dialogue among the religions and cultures, so that was a resounding success for the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. We must make use of this success to ensure the widest dissemination of the principles of the Initiative after its adoption and its recognition by the international community, which in turn requires the development of a sound strategy and of an efficient plan of action to allow for the implementation of the contents of the Initiative and the achievement of the objectives set by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. This plan of action may be guided by the final resolutions adopted by the conferences which have been held following the launching of the Initiative and its dissemination and, in particular, the Makkah Appeal for Interfaith Dialogue adopted by the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue. The Makkah Appeal has issued a call for *“the constitution of a an international body for dialogue which should include the main parties involved in the dialogue within the Muslim Ummah, in order to develop a common strategy, follow up and activate the issues, and undertake cooperation and coordination with the other parties involved.”* This appeal was strengthened by the Madrid Declaration, adopted by the World Congress for the Dialogue, which recommended *“the establishment of a Working Group to study the problems hindering Dialogue and preventing the attainment of its expected objectives. The working Group should carry out a study putting forward a vision to solve these problems.”*

Among the practical resolutions emanating from the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue, is the call for *“the institution of 'King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz*

*World Prize for the Dialogue of Civilizations' and its allocation to the personalities and international institutions that contribute to the promotion of dialogue and the achievement of its objectives*", as well as the call for "the creation of the 'King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Center for the Communication between the Civilizations' with a view to disseminating the culture of dialogue, refining and developing its skills on highly scientific bases". This call was reiterated in the final communiqué from the Steering Committee for the dialogue of religions, in its meeting held in Vienna on 13 and 14 July, 2009, and devoted to examining the practical necessary steps for the implementation of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and during which the Committee has decided to set up an International Dialogue Center for the Followers of Religions, as well as a preparatory working group which includes the representatives of the Islamic, Christian and Jewish religions in addition to the President of the International Institute for Peace with the task of proposing a committee which will develop detailed proposals for the creation of an International Dialogue Center, the definition of its mission, its rules of operation and its organizational structure. The importance of this decision was reaffirmed by "the Congress of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and its benefits for the dissemination of human values", held in Geneva from 30 September through 1 October 2009 by stating "its support for the creation of an International Dialogue Center in charge of the historical initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and which will implement additional programmes aiming at the advent of a human society where mutual understanding and respect will prevail." The creation of this Center has also been hailed by the Congress of the Common Heritage of Mankind, held in Taipei (Taiwan) on 18 and 19 Rabi' I, 1432 (February 21-22, 2011), which has proclaimed its "support for its noble objectives and called on the parties concerned by the dialogue throughout the world to coordinate with it and to support its programmes and activities." Major steps forward have been taken in setting up this Center, including the agreement concluded with Austria to host the Center at the Vienna-based **(King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Dialogue among Followers of Religions and Cultures)**<sup>(17)</sup>, and which will endeavor to establish a comprehensive programme of action for dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures, so that the benefits that mankind can gain from this Initiative are not limited to meetings held here and there whose studies and researches remain without effect on the ground for the good of Mankind that the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques came to serve.

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(17) Agreement on establishment of this centre in Vienna was signed on 14 Oct. 2011.

In contribution to the efforts to achieve the objectives of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for the Dialogue among the Followers of the Religions and Cultures, and in a bid to strengthen its role in this respect, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) presents, in the second part of this document, its vision of the future prospects of this Initiative and the requirements for its success.

The Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has provided a valuable opportunity to review the question of Dialogue among the religions, cultures and civilizations so as to identify inadequacies in order to correct them and points of strength in order to reinforce them, especially that the principles of dialogue in the field of religion, its foundations, its ways, its methodologies and even some of its themes are of Islamic origin. In fact, the Holy Quran has laid down the foundations of this methodology by the many debates it opened with the followers of different faiths, as well as with the people of the Book correcting, criticizing or redressing as the need arises. This practice was reconfirmed by the Prophet's (PBUH) dealings with the various communities and people and then capitalized on since the beginning of Islam by the Muslim scholars when they engaged in different debates and controversies with the hierarchs of other religions and faiths, crowning all that with the foundation of the science of the comparative study of religions which set out the general principles of the methodological scientific study of the religions and helped to establish the spirit of coexistence among peoples of different religions and beliefs. There is no doubt that the fact that Islam was the first to develop the science of the comparative study of the religions is a proof of the spirit of tolerance that characterizes it and of the conscience of its scholars and dignitaries of their moral responsibility vis-à-vis humanity when Islam was in a prominent position among human civilizations. Consequently, Muslim scholars were keen on writing and editing books that deal with this subject in a scientific, reason-grounded and proven way, thus helping to make known the pre-Islamic religions. Their openness to other religions and beliefs has made their works real encyclopedias of religions which to nowadays offer researchers the opportunity to know the celestial religions, and other faiths and doctrines. Among these publications are articles and studies presented by Ibn Hazm Al Andalussi which he crowned with his Encyclopedia "*Al-Fasl fi'il-Milal wa'l-Ahwa' wa'l-Nihal'*" (lit. the Decisive Word on Sects, Hererodoxies and Denominations)<sup>(18)</sup> that has become a reference in the field of the comparative study of religions, the establishment of its rules and standards and has been translated into

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(18) Dar al-Jeel, Beirut.

Spanish by the Spanish orientalist Miguel Asín Palacios, who recognized Ibn Hazm as a precursor who developed a science that Europe will not be acquainted with until the 20th Century, corroborating what was said on this subject by the British orientalist Hamilton Gibb, namely that the West considers Ibn Hazm as the founder of the science of the comparative study of religions.

In this regard, Ibn Hazm was not an exception in Islam. Indeed, the history of Islam has known contribution which constituted an Islamic enrichment of the science of comparative study of religions, including that of the prominent author of “*Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*” (lit. The Book of Sects and Creeds)<sup>(19)</sup>, Abu al-Fath Muhammad ash-Shahrastani. Many other authors stood out such as Al Nowbakhti “*Al Araa' wa ad-Diyanat*” (lit. Opinions and Religions), Al Misbahi “*Dark al-Bughya fi Wasf al-Adyane w'al-Ibadat*” (lit. Reaching the Goal in Describing Religions and Acts of Worship), Abu Al Hassen Al Ach'Arii “*Jumal Al Maqalat*” (lit. Summary of Articles), Al-Mad'udi “*Al Maqalat fi Usul al-Diyanat*” (lit. Articles on the Fundamentals of Religions), Al-Baghdadi “*al-Farq bayna al-firaq*” (lit. The Difference between Factions),<sup>(20)</sup> Ibn Kemmounah “*Tenqih al-Abhath fil Milali Athalath: al-Yahudiya, al-Masihya wa'l Islam*” (lit. Authentication of Research on the Three Creeds: Judaism, Christianity and Islam),<sup>(21)</sup> Abu Al-Ma'ali Al-Juweini “*Al Irshad Ila Qawati' Al Adilla Fi Usul Al-I'tiqad*” (lit. Guidance in Decisive Evidences on the Fundamentals of Belief),<sup>(22)</sup> Abu Hamid al Ghazali, Al Vakhr Arrazi, Ibn Jarir Attabari, Al Qurtubi, Al Baquilani, Al Touvi, Al Bayruni, Al Maqrizi, Al ya'qubi, Abul Walid al Baji, Abul Hassen Al Amiri, Abu Issa Al Warraq, Rahmatu Allah al-Hindi, Sheikh Abu Zahra “*Adiyanat Al Qadimah*” (lit. Ancient Religions),<sup>(23)</sup> Abu Rabi' Mohamed Ibn Al Leith, author of the famous letter on the science of the comparative study of religions<sup>(24)</sup> which was addressed by the Caliph Harun Al Rashid to the Roman Emperor Constantine, and other names who have contributed throughout the History of the Islamic world, to enhance and develop this science in accordance with the intellectual pattern of the Nation based on the worldwide, universal and humanistic character of the message of Islam, which calls to unite around the principle of “Come to a common word”, through the call to give up details that divide the followers of the religions in favor of fundamentals that are common to these religions.

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(19) Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1980 (was published within Ibn Hazm's book cited above in four volumes).

(20) Al-Maktaba Al-Asriya, Beirut, 1995.

(21) Dar Al-Ansar, Cairo.

(22) Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiya, Beirut, 1995.

(23) Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, Cairo, 1998.

(24) Message of Abu Rabi' Muhammad Bin Layth (from Harun Ar-Rachid to Emperor Constantine of Rome), Maktabat Al-Nafida, Cairo, 2006.

This reminder of the rich contribution of Islam to the comparative study of the religions is not a result of a desire to sublimate a past that will remain anyhow etched in the history of science and ideas, but rather to point out the pioneering role which Muslims have played in reaching out to other cultures, following a scientific approach far from any complex either of inferiority or superiority. It is that approach that must be revived in today's world in order to open worldwide spaces of dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures in the framework of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue, provided that the latter is not confined to a controversy about the faiths, but rather is a dialogue which fundamentally aims to solve the problems facing Mankind.

The Dialogue must therefore move from the circle of the theological debates to that of the concerns of humanity in order to examine the ways and means of establishing real international cooperation, coexistence of civilizations and religions, human solidarity and world peace. In fact, the dialogue among the followers of religions is nowadays meaningless if it does not put on top of its priorities the humanitarian and social crises that afflict the world, the international economic crisis and the political deadlock that brings about the absence of democracy in international relations. This dialogue can succeed only if it puts an end to the contempt for religions and to the disregard for the sacred and if it tackles the problems related to poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, occupation and all forms of terrorism including state terrorism as it is practiced by the Israeli occupying authorities against the Palestinian people, the sacred Islamic and Christian shrines in the holy city of Jerusalem and in the whole occupied Palestinian territories, as well as their systematic and continuous crimes of war against the Holy Al Aqsa Mosque and its sanctuaries, in flagrant violation of international law, human values and teachings of all the celestial religions.

The scientific treatment by Islam of questions related to religions flows from a wise comprehension of the role of knowledge in acquaintanceship between the followers of religions and cultures. This has been a factor of strength for Muslims since they were the ones who took the initiative of reaching out to the other, communicating and dialoguing with him.

However, cultural, political and intellectual circumstances have prevented Muslims from continuing, as before, their contribution to civilization. It is therefore only normal that their backwardness affects their presence in the areas of interaction with others, on the cultural, religious and civilizational level. This presence has been suffering from atrophy, just like other factors of strength in the entity of the Ummah.

It is therefore necessary to promote a new vision for Dialogue among the followers of religions and cultures, both as regards its principles, its details and modalities so as the project of dialogue would regain its vitality, provide the opportunity to offer, even partially, advice and explanation to others, establish a basis of peace and security for human coexistence through the relevant founding Islamic values and concepts by capitalizing on all the common cultural factors and promoting them in the interest of the shared human heritage. Hence, the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques can reach its objectives, meet the challenges it faces and provide the civilizational alternative which will save and protect humanity. This is what ICGCO endeavors to elucidate and explain in the present document by putting on the table the major topics to which those in charge of promoting the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques should give the necessary attention and which can be summarized in five main issues:

The purpose here is to put forward definitions of an intellectual dimension which, while rooted in the specificity and identity of Islam, seeks at the same time to integrate the universally shared human values and to open channels of communication and dialogue between the followers of the religions and cultures; it being established that the commonly used concepts present numerous similarities reflecting the unity of kinds, preoccupations, interests and aspirations on the level, inter alia, of the social, political and civilizational values.

Needless to say that Islam both as a religion and as a culture, thanks to the universal, human and worldwide nature of its lofty message, has an enormous capacity for dialogue, assimilation, communication and acquaintanceship. This is attested by its success during the ages of Islamic prosperousness, in reaching out for the entire world, in opening spaces of scientific, religious, civilizational and cultural dialogue and in initiating debates with civilizational entities which believe in differing religions, embrace other cultural values and belong to different continents (Asia, Europe and Africa).

The issue of the intellectual structuring of the concepts is essential as far as dialogue and religious and cultural communication are concerned. Indeed, the Islamic library contains only a few, if any, scientific dictionaries which give the concepts their full meaning and all their capacities for self structuring and external communication. With the exception of language dictionaries, some non specialized encyclopedia or informal individual works, this side of the edifice still needs therefore efficient work.

This question takes even more importance when we realize that many foreign encyclopedias unfortunately present anti communication and anti-dialogue contents

thus deepening the disagreement rather than laying down the foundation for communication and coexistence; the reason being that most of them were drafted in political circumstances marked by a colonial context and expansionist and hegemonic aspirations. This is one of the reasons which have led ICECO to summon up all its human, material and financial resources in order to produce the Islamic Encyclopedia whose realization is considered one of the major scientific and civilizational projects which enjoy priority for the General Directorate of ICECO.

For concepts such as justice, freedom, equality, peace, security, dialogue, communication, solidarity, acquaintanceship, competition, culture, civilization, advancement, development, renaissance, enlightenment, renewal, monotheism, faith, cooperation and mutual assistance, we find almost exclusively elementary definitions that need further elaboration and more advanced research into the different dimensions and significations through a descriptive, structural, inclusive and transcendental method.

If, in our culture, dialogue is indeed a religious requirement before being a realistic, civilizational and human necessity, it necessarily needs knowledge and scientific qualification in order to insure equality and fair partnership and fully play its role in the give and take process, on the other hand. The intellectual structuring of the concepts is undoubtedly one of the most important introductions to self-promotion and dialogue with the other followers of the religions and the cultures; but there are also, in this context, other essential inlets wherein efforts should be intensified and complete each other, such as striving to unify the internal front to avert its further division and fragmentation which keep weakening the Ummah itself and its integrity. What is meant here is not merely geographical or political fragmentation of the countries of the Islamic world, but the splitting in thought and culture which does not express richness and structural diversity as much as it exacerbates conflict, polarization and negative parallelism between the movements and the rites, extending even to the concepts themselves which have been affected by partiality and censorship in favor of or against one side or the other.

Another factor that has a negative impact on this path is the burden of the western influence and its strong effect imposing the predominance of its model and its methodology in the dialogue and laying down the latter's agenda and outcome, by backing them through media, political, economic and, sometimes, military force.

Under such a pressure, one type of Islamic discourse is about to surrender to the stand that there is no viability to or benefit from dialogue, acquaintanceship or alliance as long as dominance, control and predetermined outcome are predominant. The fact

is that there is a misunderstanding and a confusion between the duty of explaining and transmitting the message values of communication and acquaintanceship whether the dissenter accepts them or not, which is close to if not religious call logic itself, on one hand, and uneven power balances, on the other.

Hence, if some western quarters have ill treated the concept of dialogue, exactly as they have done to other concepts such as freedom, justice, equality, security, peace, modernism, enlightenment among others, one has the duty to rebuild this concept on the basis of the Islamic reference and conception which, above anything else, confer on it the character of humanism and values. In a similar manner, one has the duty to reestablish the concept of freedom for instance in order to correct and repair the harm it too has endured, for the imperfection in the concepts' structure and representation should not be a justification for drawing back and leaving the arena, but on the contrary an incentive for occupying and orienting it.

As for the balance of power, since it is closely linked both positively and negatively to supporting the dialogue, it requires from the Ummah that it undertakes a renaissance on different fronts: educational, social, national, political, military, etc... If, on these fronts, the efficiency of its action has been affected, its reference can still reinforce and supply it with numerous factors of strength that others do not possess, pointing to weaknesses on their side. Unfortunately, we do not master capitalizing on and making proper use of these factors.

Against this backdrop, the proclamation of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of the Religions and Cultures is indeed well-timed according to both authoritative transmission of knowledge and sheer reason standards, as well as by civilizational and cultural necessity. This is the source of the Initiative's cogency and capacity to positively impact the cultural, religious and political circles.

Among the factors of the Ummah's strength and that of its Islamic discourse in matter of Dialogue are the proposal's forcefulness and effectiveness. The negative aspects and shortcomings of the western civilizational model are indeed too many as far as its social, cultural, civilizational, religious and natural environmental structure is concerned. Had the Islamic thought been able to come up with a discourse of proposals for alternatives and solutions up to the problem and the challenges it induces, it would have been in a position to win the argument, attract the opponent and bring in the dissenter to its side. But, unfortunately, when solutions and proposals beneath the desired level are put on the table or are not even formulated to begin with, the

space of proposal and competition is left to the hegemony of the other side which monopolizes it.

This intellectual structuring of the Islamic concepts of dialogue and communication looks as much as can be imagined like their intentional and philosophical definition. It is clear that the studies of intended meanings in semantics has added new dimensions to the jurisprudence and the law allowing them to take in charge new and specific cases and to follow the evolution of the society and life itself, although the resumption of the renewal and building of this science is still at its beginning in our recent and contemporary thought.

But knowledge, and in particular philosophy, since as jargon, notion and usage, it belongs to a differing western cultural domain, it conveys or has been made to convey principles, ideas and propositions which, totally or partially, go against the principles of the religion, its laws and established practices to the extent that some look at it as the exact objective antithesis of the religion itself, especially if we take into consideration the predominance of both old and new materialistic philosophical trends in the philosophical research and study in general. This explains the position of many jurisprudence doctors and scholars totally or partly refuting it.

This is a wrong stand to take vis-à-vis philosophy, knowledge as a whole and more particularly the philosophy of religion and the religious knowledge because it is based on reminiscing an experience belonging to a different historical, cultural and religious reality and context and applying it as it is to another one. Moreover, Muslim scholars and dignitaries like Al Ghazali, Ibn Hazm, Averroes and Ibn Taymia, among others, did deal with philosophy and logic as far as critical analysis, evaluation and exegesis are concerned.

Going beyond this form of analogy to look into the role philosophy or knowledge can play in transmitting the meanings of religion and in expressing its universal and human values, its relational system, its existence realities both in the unseen and real world, the common religious ethics, the human need for them and their capacity to prevent harm of whatever kind and in whatever field, all of this through the ability of theorizing, conceptualizing and explaining existence, creatures, life, relations, causal system, governing laws and other expressions and explanations that the objective philosophical research makes available without readymade analogies; going beyond this form of analogy, we will find concurrence and sometimes even identity between the function of philosophy and the aims of religion. Indeed, the latter has time and again and in different forms insisted on the necessity of contemplating,

pondering, cogitating, meditating, considering, learning and drawing lessons from the signs of the souls and the signs of the universe; all things which, in the final analysis, reflect the theorizing capacity which characterizes philosophy and singles out philosophers.

One can even affirm that, from this perspective, philosophy is one of the aims of religion and one way among others of explaining it; religion is a philosophical opinion about the universe, man and life. All forms of antagonism and all kinds of competition between the two are merely a historical human creation and the result of a wrong comprehension of religion or philosophy or both. For there is no contradiction between authentic transmission of knowledge and sound intellect as has been established by Sheikh al Islam Ibn Taymia, nor between wisdom and Islamic law as the jurisprudence scholar and philosopher Averroes has clearly stated in defining the relation between the two.

In this regard, another issue is frequently raised and has to do with the historical opposing dualities that separated more than united and divided more than unified, whereas there is no trace of this opposition between dualities in the religious texts or in the source of the scientific and intellectual interpretation thanks to many considerations, chief among them the unity of source and the regularity of the religious and universal laws. Indeed, if Revelation is the speech of God, the universe is His creation: ***[Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy.]***<sup>(25)</sup> In addition, the religious texts themselves confirm the role of reason in the comprehension making it a precondition for religious accountability and that of science in discovering the signs of the souls and of the universe, which is the path to the cognizance of creation and existence and hence of the Creator.

The origin of the sources of knowledge namely the Revelation, the intellect and the reality is to be found in complementarity not in antagonism. All the manifestations of antagonism that have surfaced go back to an erroneous comprehension and/or a false interpretation or to given biases which have created the contradiction between science and religion, tradition and reason, wisdom and Islamic law, authenticity and contemporaneity, Islam and modernism, Islam and the West, anything old and anything new ,etc...

If in the Council of Europe's "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" it is stated that respect for the universal values is "a precondition for dialogue between the cultures,"

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(25) Surat Al-Nisa', verse 82.

that dialogue is “*considered impossible in the absence of mutual equal respect for individuals, human rights, supremacy of law and democratic principles,*” and that it is those values “*especially the respect for freedom of speech and the other basic freedoms which guarantee a hegemony-free dialogue governed by the force of argument not the argument of force,*”<sup>(26)</sup> the book has also drawn attention to another more important matter which is in line with what is being argued in the present document about the necessity of a comprehensively communicational and intellectual structuring of many Islamic concepts, by its confirming that “in the consultation process, an idea frequently came up that the traditional approaches for managing the cultural diversity - and the religious diversity for that matter - are no longer suitable to the societies which are witnessing an unprecedented degree of diversity and a continuous development. The answers to the forms addressed to member states have in particular shown that the approach adopted until recently for public work in this domain - which in short is “cultural pluralism” - is no longer valid (...). The path to be followed is therefore that of dialogue between cultures.

Bill, the meaning of the expression “dialogue of cultures” has remained to a certain extent unclear. The reference document has therefore invited the concerned quarters to propose a definition. But they did not for dialogue between cultures is not a new established criterion, easily definable and applicable to all real situations without interference by other parties. This hesitation has revealed a genuine ambiguity in the usual meaning given to dialogue among cultures.

However, the parties that have filled out the forms and those which participated in the consultation concurred that the universal principles “*constitute a moral reference, offer the necessary framework for establishing a culture of forgiveness and clearly define its scope.*”<sup>(27)</sup>

Hence, there must be a new scientific endeavor to structure the religious, cultural, and civilizational concepts within the Ummah so as to qualify it to be in the vanguard of the dialogue programmes, on more than a level and a front; especially that the Islamic concepts are at the same time of a religious, cultural, civilizational, philosophical and scientific nature, with a tremendous framing capacity. In that, they differ from other concepts which belong exclusively to specific domains and which, if used elsewhere, lose their functional and practical meaning and may even switch to an opposite one.

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(26) White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living Together as Equals in Dignity”, p. 22 (published by ICFECCO, Rabat, 2002).

(27) Op cit. p.11.

We hardly find connections between the religious, philosophical, civilizational and scientific concepts because of historic controversies and operations of systematic exclusion and separation which have afflicted the western model.

The Muslim Ummah and the world at large need a new religious knowledge which enables the religions to play an important correcting role, commensurate with that of materialistic knowledge and philosophies in framing, influencing and orienting. In other words, to rebuild complementarity in the functions of knowledge sources through the production of a knowledge which reflects the common religious and human elements in values, judgments and society; and to take the religions out of a marginal secondary role to a main structuring one in science, knowledge and society. For religions are indeed the depositories of the value systems and do have the capacity to advise and orient in the face of the manifestations of continuous crises and bankruptcies of the narrow, egoistic and materialistic philosophical choices which frame knowledge, science and values; and in particular in the face of the challenges posed by globalization and postmodernist theories promoting exultation, exhilaration and consumption, sanctifying profit and production and violating the fixed absolute norms as well as the standard values in total nihilistic contravention to all limits, rights and specificities and heading to the destruction of the meaning, the aim and the philosophical quintessence of human existence and man's dimensions in life; all such things which the religions came to remind of, preserve and protect as indeed they are the justification of existence in the first place.

In the context of this reorientation in the religions' function towards its global and inclusive philosophical as well as knowledge-rooted structuring, it seems that the readings which, for a long time, have considered the religious phenomenon as of a pure historical or cultural nature have reached a dead end and begun to finally admit, both as individuals and schools of thought, that it is impossible to reduce that phenomenon to only one or two dimensions. Therefore, the religions' historian in particular is from now on asked not to deal only with history but also to bring out the framing philosophical and scientific dimension of religion, inter alia, in the social, political, cultural life and even as far as humanities and natural sciences are concerned. As long as he does not undertake this role, his action will remain incomplete for he cannot underline the referential framing role which is that of the religions as source of belief and behavior not merely as one of the elements of explanation.

We can find an explanation in one or another dimension of the religion for many human inventions in the cultural, literary, technical, social, political or even econo-

mical fields. This is evident for instance in a lot of Asian religions which were able to preserve their purity through the symbols, customs and habits which extend almost to each and every aspect of life, in spite of the materialistic and laic invasion which tries to totally disregard and devaluate them and to do the same with the three revealed religions, with a difference only in the stages of the historical action as regards the acquisition of legitimacy and power, etc.

The predominant characteristic of the Islamic dealing with the religions was, after the Quranic scientific methodological foundation of this domain, mainly more of a polemic and adjusting nature than of a structural, philosophical and intellectual one, having been affected in the same manner than scholastic theology itself; because of both internal and external conditions and challenges.

The studies of religions have been in the past, and are still for the most part nowadays, conceived in a conflictive framework governed by a logic of mutual exclusion between tendencies of the same structure as in the Christian experience or within various structures like in the case of Christianity with Judaism at given historical stages and the case of both with Islam. Hence the need now to free the religions from the conflictive character which was given them, hindering their structural and functional role in all areas of knowledge and walks of life as well as in communication and acquaintanceship as far as the relations between the followers of the religions and the cultures are concerned.

The Church looks to Islam as an adversary and to Muslims as enemies and it has used Christianity and Jesus (PBUH) in a crusade war which lasted centuries. Worse still, it has presented a distorted picture and a bad experience about religion by putting it in confrontation with science, thought and all forms of creation and logical reasoning. And so did many Jewish clergymen when they justified occupation and aggression in the name of religion, giving them a religious cover thus putting Judaism, too, in a confrontation which lasted decades and is still on with Islam and Muslims, in spite of the fact that Muslims and non-Zionist Jews are aware of the difference between Judaism as a revealed religion and Zionism as a racist political doctrine which puts on the coat of Judaism in order to achieve its mean objectives and expansionist designs.

If we go beyond this logic of confrontation which is guided by expansionist and colonial backgrounds to the scientific research area, we see that the West, which has taken the lead in the “dialogue” and the religious studies, is dominated by a recent way of interpreting religions that is in partial if not complete agreement with the

post renaissance era schools characterized by a philosophical, materialistic and laic orientation. Hence, if in their writings Durkheim, Young, Freud, Pitagora, Taylor, Bergson and others have studied the religious phenomenon from a social, psychological, historical and cultural perspective, they did not go farther. They did not see in it a source of belief and a definer of social, political and civilizational behavior, not merely one among other secondary explanatory factors. Some of them did however try to make up for that like Father Schmidt, Pinoza and others.

On the other hand, we notice that conferring the global framing explanatory dimension on religions came from inside the religious thought itself with its philosophical and reasoning characteristics, as did Al Ghazali and Averroes in Islam, Moussa Ibn Meymoun in Judaism and Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in Christianity.

The religious knowledge is indeed a scientific, social, reasoning and realistic knowledge; the more so as it is an orienting and advising message for man towards the most appropriate and straight path in life. Everything man has invented which goes in this direction, insures felicity for him in this world and hereafter and increases his knowledge of the creation and the Creator is religiously advisable and valuable. The flaw in many sciences and most knowledge nowadays is nothing else but the consequence of their disconnection from the religious advising and orienting values and their association with alternatives that make them deviate from serving man, universe and nature and transform them, most of the time, into elements of damage, ruin and destruction of man, universe and nature.

It remains to be stressed that the aims and goals of this new function of the religion namely framing, guiding, advising, counseling and coexisting, etc... can be translated into reality only if the emphasis is put on the consensual and common issues in all areas and the efforts are oriented towards building a thought of unity and complementarity in the human, scientific and universal fields for they are objectively amenable to such building and contribution.

We may consider the relations between the religions from two different approaches: the **conflictual approach** which looks for the areas of controversy and the **conciliatory approach** which concentrates on the common spheres in the faiths and the general and specific laws.

Considering that the present document endeavors to indicate the most efficient ways of effectively insuring the success of the “Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques among the Followers of Religions and Cultures”, it will concentrate

on the reconciliatory approach, not out of the need to, because the power unbalance or the pressure and the challenges of globalization compel us to highlight the common spheres in order to gather for the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques among the Followers of Religions and Cultures the evidence of its legitimacy or the justifications of its existence; but because the concept of dialogue goes back to the origins of the Islamic culture just like many other concepts which however were historically neglected and did not therefore receive enough attention and structuring to develop into a feeding pattern for the Ummah's culture and conduct, such as security and peace, equanimity and moderation, freedom, benevolence and martyrdom ..., concepts which are all badly needed to face the era of affliction and miseries; and, moreover, because it is a religious demand before being a request of life.

Dialogue with the other is an original principle of the founding sources of the Islamic culture and of the historical experience of the Muslim Ummah. The latter went however through conditions of divergence, division and decline that entrenched the factional and sectarian thought which dealt with the revealed texts as examples not corroborators of these choices in science, knowledge, etc...

The glorious Quran, although being indeed the message of closure, predominance, belief and global universal election, does not reject or exclude the "others" from its circle nor does it declare the end as globalization does today: "the end of history", "the end of man", "the end of the author", "the end of the method", "the end of utopia", "the end of ideology", "the end of philosophy", "the end of modernism", "the last man"...

The Quran talks about the perfection of the religion and the completion of favor. It is an endeavour that started with Adam (PBUH): [This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.]<sup>(28)</sup> Completion and perfection infer and suppose a preexistence which acknowledges the efforts and favors of others. In the same vein, one can cite the brick tradition in Al Bukhari where the Prophet (PBUH) says: "*My status compared to that of the Prophets before me is like a man who has built the most wonderful house except that a brick was missing in a corner. People started to visit the house making laudatory comments about it, but saying: If only that brick was put in place! He said: I am that brick and I am the last of the prophets.*"<sup>(29)</sup>

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(28) (*Surat Al Maidah*, verse 3).

(29) (Narrated by Al-Bukhâri, according to Abu Hurayra).

The glorious Quran announces the closure (of the Message) in a context of openness and continuity both in space and time and strongly advises to take an active part in the happenings in order, if not to initiate them, at least to correct and orient them in the right direction instead of sitting idle on the sidelines and waiting for what might happen. The Prophet (PBUH) while in both Mecca and Medina used to give good news to his companions about the bright future of the religion, to send messengers all over the world, missing no opportunity to take the initiative in every dialogue, communication, cooperation or grant of rights.

In addition, the glorious Quran while, in order to highlight historical realities, it identifies the manifestations of distortion, alteration, disguise, concealment and mixing truth and falsehood on the part of the people of the Book, it requests at the same time that bridges of communication be extended to them: [*Say (O Muhammad): O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians): Come to a word that is just between us and you,*]<sup>(30)</sup> and orders to follow the best and most lenient ways to argue with them: [*And argue not with the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islamic Monotheism with His Verses).*]<sup>(31)</sup> It even goes further when it leaves no other choice for the people of the Book but to refer to the truth they find in their Books if they cannot follow the religion of the new Prophet: [*But how do they come to you for decision while they have the Taurât (Torah), in which is the (plain) Decision of Allah,*]<sup>(32)</sup> [*Let the people of the Injeel (Gospel) judge by what Allah has revealed therein;*]<sup>(33)</sup> all of this in a style made of argument and proof, attraction not fear, inclusion not exclusion unless there is clear denial and total rejection on the opposite side, then comes: [*Bear witness that we are Muslims,*]<sup>(34)</sup> and [*To you be your religion, and to me my religion.*]<sup>(35)</sup> We are not at that stage because we did not yet, in our present era, go through the experience and we hope that the sponsorship given by the scholars of the Ummah to the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques among the Followers of Religions and Cultures is a step in this direction.

For further elucidation, suffice it to meditate some of the Holy Quran verses and to deeply think about their meanings. Indeed, in the *surat Al Maidah* (The Table) for instance, we find a perfect talk which reflects, in a wonderful sequential context, the

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(30) (*Surat Al Imran*, verse 64).

(31) (*Surat Al Ankabut*, verse 46).

(32) (*Surat Al Maidah*, verse 43).

(33) (*Surat Al Maidah*, verse 47).

(34) (*Surat Al Imran*, verse 64).

(35) (*Surat Al Kafirun*, verse 6).

succession of the revelation's guidance and light in the revealed messages and their mutual confirmation with the particularities of each message depending on how its followers treat it and on the logic of exclusive or global universal election, without this meaning that they cancel each other.

Offering the choice to his Prophet and guiding him about the call of a group of Jews for his arbitration, The Almighty God says: *[So if they come to you (O Muhammad), either judge between them, or turn away from them. If you turn away from them, they cannot hurt you in the least. And if you judge, judge with justice between them. Verily, Allah loves those who act justly. But how do they come to you for decision while they have the Taurât (Torah), in which is the (plain) Decision of Allah; yet even after that, they turn away. For they are not (really) believers. Verily, We did send down the Taurât (Torah) [to Mûsâ (Moses)], therein was guidance and light, by which the Prophets, who submitted themselves to Allah's Will, judged for the Jews. And the rabbis and the priests [too judged for the Jews by the Taurât (Torah) after those Prophets], for to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's Book, and they were witnesses thereto.]*<sup>(36)</sup>

Then the Quran goes on about Jesus son of Mary and the Bible: *[And in their footsteps, We sent 'Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), confirming the Taurât (Torah) that had come before him, and We gave him the Injeel (Gospel), in which was guidance and light and confirmation of the Taurât (Torah) that had come before it, a guidance and an admonition for Al-Muttaqûn. Let the people of the Injeel (Gospel) judge by what Allah has revealed therein. And whosoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed (then) such (people) are the Fâsiqûn [the rebellious i.e. disobedient (of a lesser degree) to Allah.]*<sup>(37)</sup> Immediately thereafter, we find Allah's saying: *[And We have sent down to you (O Muhammad) the Book (this Qur'an) in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it and trustworthy in highness and a witness over it (old Scriptures). So judge among them by what Allah has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging away from the truth that has come to you. To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one nation, but that (He) may test you in what He has given you; so compete in good deeds. The return of you (all) is to Allah; then He will inform you about that in which you used to differ.]*<sup>(38)</sup>

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(36) (Surat Al Maidah, verses 42-44).

(37) (Surat Al Maidah, verses 46-47).

(38) (Surat Al Maidah, verse 48).

The verses talk about the complete, trustworthy and dominant Book designated by the definite article “the”, whereas the Torah and the Bible have previously been mentioned by name. They also talk of it as the Truth which has been revealed to him and must be followed; it is contained in the originals of the Books in their hands and is contained as well in the Quran by virtue of domination and belief, everything in it being true.

The verses also indicate that God the Almighty created people different and had He (may His name be glorified) wished; He would have made them a single nation (Ummah). Hence, nations and peoples will go on following their different religions and there is no other way but coexistence to insure peace and fairness in their gatherings, safety, security and concord in their urbanism, where faith leads to safety for mankind, values and ethics to rearing man on benevolence, inciting him to do good and dissuading him from wrongdoing.

The specialists of the fundamentals of the religion have a rule which states: “*the law of those who came before us is good for us as long as there is nothing in our law which contradicts it*”. Notwithstanding the controversy about it and, in particular, what could be inferred from Allah's saying: [***To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way,***]<sup>(39)</sup> and from the Holy Quranic verse: [***He (Allah) has ordained for you the same religion which He ordained for Nûh (Noah), and that which We have revealed to you (O Muhammad), and that which We ordained for Ibrâhîm (Abraham), Mûsâ (Moses) and 'Îsâa (Jesus) saying you should establish religion, and make no divisions in it,***]<sup>(40)</sup> this rule is related to the general precepts of the religion, its fundamentals and its origins as far as faith, prophecy, resurrection, final destiny and ethics are concerned; all things which were preached by the Prophets and the Messengers, and not to parts and parcels of the religions.

Still, the rule is an expression of the successive confirmations of the messages by each other, the prevalence of some over others, and the reiteration of the common elements between the religions and of the actual ongoing complementarity between them.

Once the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue is not addressed to Muslims only but to all the followers of the religions and the cultures, the efforts for convincing the adepts of other religions of the viability and the

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(39) (Surat Al Maidah, verse 48).

(40) (Surat Ash Shura, verse 13).

advantages to be derived from dialogue are the most important endeavor to undertake, especially since their religious Books stress the importance of dialogue and coexistence between the religions. In this regard, we can give some examples from texts in both the old and the new testaments pertaining to some laws which are common to all the revealed religions and which constitute the right shield against the grave social humanitarian and natural dangers and challenges produced by the rapid industrial and technical evolution which chases passionately the pleasures and the amenities that lead to illegal killing, lying, slander, calumny, deterioration of relations between religious leaders, lack of respect for the religions, the prophets and the messengers, and so on:

In the Exodus chapter, it is said in the ten Commandments<sup>(41)</sup>:

- *“And God spoke all these words, saying: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me” (...)* you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (...).”
- *“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” (...).”*
- *“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”<sup>(42)</sup>*

In the Exodus chapter also<sup>(43)</sup>:

- *“Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd (...) have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. Do not accept a*

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(41) (2/1-17).

(42) It must be noted that the tenth commandment does not belong to what is common to religions. It says: “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.”

(43) (23/1-9).

*bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.”*

And in Mathieu's Gospel:

- *“If you want<sup>(44)</sup> to enter life<sup>(45)</sup>, obey the commandments. Which ones? The man inquired. Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and 'love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>(46)</sup>*

In Mathieu's Gospel again<sup>(47)</sup>:

- *“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret.”*
- *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.”*
- *“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting.”*
- *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal (...) for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

In Mathieu's Gospel as well<sup>(48)</sup>:

- *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen; will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (...)”*

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(44) The talk is addressed to the young man who came to ask Jesus.

(45) He means the eternal life.

(46) (19/17-20).

(47) (6/3-23)

(48) (5/17-48)

- *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment (...)”*
- *“You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*
- *“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. But I tell you, do not swear at all (...)”*
- *“You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”*
- *“You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (...)”*

In Mathieu's Gospel finally<sup>(49)</sup>:

- *“Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*
- *Jesus answered him, “It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' The devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”*

All of this is contained in many Quranic verses such as Allah's saying: [**Say (O Muhammad): "Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited you from: Join**

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(49) (4/5-11).

*not anything in worship with Him; be good and dutiful to your parents; kill not your children because of poverty - We provide sustenance for you and for them; come not near to shameful sins whether committed openly or secretly; and kill not anyone whom Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause. This He has commanded you that you may understand,]<sup>(50)</sup> [Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet, and those slaves whom your right hands possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful,]<sup>(51)</sup> and: [And those who invoke not any other god along with Allah, nor kill such person as Allah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse - and whoever does this shall receive the punishment.]<sup>(52)</sup>*

Such examples which, if traced, can be abundantly found in all the religious texts attest, beyond any doubt, that the religions came out of the same alcove and that whatever difference or variation might appear between them is a product of History. In addition, religiosity, in the final analysis, remains a human inbred feature man is born with. Going any other way is equivalent to deflecting from that innate conduct towards the belief in some other alternative.

If religiosity is an inbred human quality and a universal code, acquaintanceship is a social, human and universal one as well, in virtue of the inborn dissimilarity between people and of the diversity of beings and creatures which suppose an awareness leading to acquaintanceship. This can be insured only through an absolute, dominant and all-inclusive reference such as religion in its most achieved and accomplished form, it being understood that each and every religion is capable of playing one of those roles if not all of them at the same time.

The efforts being undertaken in order to put into action the contents of the “Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures” and achieve its objectives need to benefit from earlier or parallel initiatives such as, in particular, Qatar's endeavors in the sphere of dialogue among the religions which culminated in the setting up of the international Doha center for dialogue among the religions and were marked by the annual holding of an international conference on dialogue among religions.<sup>(53)</sup> Its successive sessions

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(50) *Surat Al Anam*, verse 151.

(51) *Surat Al Nissa*, verse 36.

(52) *Surat Al Furqan*, verse 68.

(53) Ninth session was held in October 2011 (Doha Centre for Interfaith Dialogue was established in May 2007).

produced important results which should be benefited from and built on. One should also take advantage of the results of the work undertaken by the Secretariat of the alliance of civilizations affiliated to the United Nations both with regard to the conferences it held and to the international and regional strategies it has elaborated and which have been adopted, as amended, by the international community after discussions and consultations among member states of the United Nations and of competent organizations and institutions, first among them being IOECCO which is considered a special partner of the Alliance of civilizations Secretariat whether by its contribution in drafting strategies for the Alliance of civilizations or in their implementation and in making the voice of the Islamic world heard in the relevant international symposia and meetings. IOECCO's experience is indeed unique for it is an active international partner of the international organizations and institutions with an interest in the subject of dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations, chief among them UNESCO and the UN Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat. It has helped to set in motion many international initiatives relating to the subject and elaborated international strategies to deal with the dialogue topic because it realizes the importance of an influence carrying presence in the international arena for dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations, and because it firmly believes that dialogue is the best way to achieve acquaintanceship and eradicate the causes of misunderstanding between the peoples, to correct the image of their culture and their civilization and consolidate the human common values. IOECCO did play an efficient role in the elaboration of a comprehensive and balanced concept of dialogue with friendliness between the followers of the religions, the cultures and the civilizations as one of its essential bases and its noble objectives.

Dialogue in IOECCO's view is based on solid foundations, conducted through clearly defined rules and governed by three principles: mutual respect; fairness and justice; rejection of fanaticism, hatred and civilizational and religious centralization.

Considering IOECCO's view of a dialogue among the followers of the religions and the cultures, based on knowledge, recognition and conducive to acquaintanceship, communion then alliance; and taking into account its civilizational concept that IOECCO did help clearly define, the dialogue which will realize the general human objectives, serve the common interests, enhance the shared values and could be of interest to the Muslim world must meet the following requirements:

- 1- The Dialogue must be between equals. It must meet equality, fair partnership and common will conditions. It must be conducted on different levels and in various stages so as to be comprehensive, involving the different segments

and groups of the society on the level of the governmental, non-governmental, intellectual, scientific, educational and cultural institutions which are involved in the topics and domains assigned to the dialogue.

- 2- The dialogue must be governed by the authority of knowledge, the values of acquaintanceship and the principle of recognition. Knowledge is indeed the guarantee for rectifying mutual stereotyped images people have of each other and that are a result of ignorance about the “other”, in spite of the technological revolution and the tremendous evolution of the means of communication and contact which, supposedly, should have brought people closer to each other and reinforced acquaintance between them. They should also have facilitated the acceptance of plurality, diversity and the right of the “civilizational other” to differ, far from the complex of civilizational centralization and the attempts of exclusion and rejection. That indeed is the real guarantee for achieving the goals of the dialogue and the way leading to pacific coexistence and to the consolidation of the human common values.
- 3- The dialogue must aim at obtaining results benefiting all the parties and at guaranteeing the interests they deem vital for them and which relate to development in the cultural, scientific, economical and social fields of life. It must as well endeavor to combat injustice and aggression against peoples and nations and to eradicate the causes of conflicts which kill innocent people so that it can have an impact on all kinds of relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, establish cooperation between them and produce beneficial and gainful results in the interest of all.
- 4- The dialogue must be conducted in a civilized manner and lift itself above the issues which are known to have always been controversial and which would not be agreed upon without one of the parties conceding one of its faith fundamentals to the other. It should, therefore, keep away from such highly sensitive topics which, if raised, could lead to its interruption or, for the least, affect its positive conduct and outcome.
- 5- The dialogue must proceed simultaneously on parallel tracks and in conformity with already agreed upon programmes. It should not, for instance, be interrupted on a given track about a specific topic in order to wait for the outcome of the dialogue on another track. The rounds of the dialogue must, on the contrary, be interlinked and its tracks intertwined so as to reach complementarity in the desired objectives and acquaintanceship among civilizations.

Once these requirements are met and Dialogue proceeds in this direction, it would then be possible to get to a positive outcome which could enhance the common human values, reinforce the principles of coexistence between all people, establish acquaintanceship among them, consolidate and strengthen international relations and contribute to maintaining peace, security and stability worldwide.

Just as the implementation of the lofty purposes of the Initiative of the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures hinges upon these conditions, it depends also on taking practical measures and putting into place executive mechanisms which can guarantee the actual efficient implementation of the recommendations contained in the present document and the self sustaining vitality for the Initiative of the Custodian of the two holy Mosques as well as the realization of its humanitarian goals. In this framework, the following measures must be taken:

- Setting up of High Islamic Institution for Dialogue, made of scholars, thinkers, journalists and researchers and which play an advising role to the international center for dialogue among the followers of the religions and the cultures which is due to be created in Vienna and the formation of a council of wise men wherein the significant religions and cultures will be represented, with the Islamic high institution for dialogue as a member acting so to speak as the general assembly or the general conference of the center.
- Creating an international prize for dialogue: “the Mecca prize for dialogue” similar to the Nobel prize for peace and the earmarking of prizes of excellence and honorific grants in favor of institutions and individuals to embolden them to direct their interest towards presenting exceptional intellectual contribution or journalistic productions which are in favor of bringing people closer and consolidating the values of dialogue among the followers of the religions and the cultures and implementing the latter's goal.
- Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the technological revolution, the mass media and the communication means in order to promote the initiative on the widest possible level; creating a satellite channel devoted to dialogue and an interactive electronic site to explain the Initiative and promote its contents and objectives; endeavoring to open an international discussion about the ways of its implementation in particular among the youth, on the satellite channel for dialogue and the electronic site of the Initiative and through mass media, Facebook, all the media tribunes and available communication and contact means.

- Getting in contact with the media people who can make an impact on shaping the public opinion, in particular editorialists and columnists in the renowned western newspapers and presenters of highly rated news programmes; and fixing a calendar for an exchange of visits between them and their counter-parts in the Muslim world, while striving to convince them of the viability of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue and of its capacity to reinforce pacific coexistence and to secure international peace.
- Mobilizing the intellectuals, the journalists, the writers, the young bloggers, the artists, the film makers, the publishers, arts centers, the scout organizations, the official institutions, the private sector and the non-governmental and civil society organizations to join the efforts aiming at getting the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue better known and implementing its contents in coordination with their counterparts among the followers of the other religions and cultures, in the general interest of mankind as a whole.
- Fostering the intra cultural tourism and organizing caravans, expositions, cultural camps and opening common museums between the followers of the religions and cultures in order to establish cultural communication, explain cultural plurality, common human values and elucidate the contribution of all the cultures to the history of human civilization so as to change the mutual stereotyped images people have of each other and to reduce the gap between them and increasing the awareness of the importance of diversity, plurality and difference in building the foundations of the universal civilizational edifice and enriching the common cultural capital.
- Getting into partnership with the major international publishers to publish authoritative titles about dialogue among the followers of the religions and cultures and translating the most magnificent intellectual productions and reference publications in all the human cultures into the different living languages; getting intellectuals, journalists, film makers and researchers from different backgrounds to cooperate in view of producing media materials and broadcasting and television programs, documentaries, movies, publishing newspapers and electronic papers about the culture of the “other”, his history and civilization in order to rectify the false information about him and to explain the common human values and principles between the religions and cultures.

- Reinforcing programmes of association, exchange and cooperation between educational institutions, schools and summer schools; and organizing common cultural manifestations, entertainment camps, scientific and sportive competitions, technical festivals, discovery trips for the benefit of school pupils and university students among the followers of the various religions and cultures so as they could get to know each other and that the dialogue between the followers of the religions and cultures could be enhanced.
- Enhancing the role of the universities in reinforcing the dialogue among the followers of the religions and cultures through exchange of student missions, on site visits and scientific expertise between their professors and students; carrying out researches and studies, instituting chairs and scientific specialties which endeavor to study the culture of the “other” following a scientific method that is above the preconceived ideas, the negative historical backgrounds and the stereotyped images; making the rectification of the image of the “other's” culture one of the most important items and objectives of the partnership and twinning agreements to be concluded between these universities and, in this regard, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the terms of reference of the major unions of universities such as the International Association of Universities, the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World, the European Association of Universities, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the Association of Arab Universities and the Euromediterranean University (EMUNI).
- Backing the evenhanded international scientific research centers which undertake civilizational studies and deal with matters relating to connecting people and relations between the followers of the religions and cultures; and concluding agreements with these centers to carry out common researches and studies and to publish them; holding scientific conferences and symposia with the necessary advertisement in the media, making their outcomes known and publishing their proceedings.
- Promoting the cultural policies in the Islamic world so as to ensure the concrete and effective integration of its countries into the society of knowledge; conferring to culture the status it deserves and giving it the necessary financial resources, as a basic pillar of the process of durable development and of the civilizational renaissance project; sponsoring and giving the necessary attention to the talented, competent and energetically creative people, offering them the means to fulfill their ambitions and aspi-

rations and using their potential in presenting the bright image of the Islamic culture, guiding them to the path that will guarantee them to serve their nation and explain their religion, values and culture, by virtue of their aptitude to join the research and intellectual centers which influence the political decision making process or the media forums which have an influence on the international public opinion and the constitution of its collective perception of Islam and Muslims.

- Incorporating the contents of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue into the themes of the program of festivities of the capitals of the Islamic culture which is being supervised by ICECO and coordinating with the European Union and its specialized organs in order to incorporate them as well in the theme of the programme of festivities of the capitals of the European culture.
- Directing more attention to the role of culture and education in establishing evenhanded relations between the followers of religions and cultures on scientific, knowledge and mutual respect bases, through the production of educational materials for teachers and pupils, guiding manuals for authors of school books about the “other's” religion, values, culture, civilization and history; putting into effect the recommendations put forward in the present document by holding international conferences, scientific symposia, cultural seminars, study circles, national and regional training sessions and carrying out referential researches and studies for translating the contents of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue into a concrete reality by investing in the educational, scientific, cultural and communicational fields and endeavoring, in this framework, to benefit from the expertise of international and regional specialized organizations, institutions and organs, in the forefront of which is ICECO.

The achievement of the noble goals set out in the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures is conditioned by the international action and cooperation on the political, cultural, scientific, governmental, non-governmental and popular levels to reinforce mutual respect, develop the common cultural capital, enhance the shared human values and consolidate the common interests, as well as by the admission of the necessity to respect the particularities and acknowledge the values of pluralism and cultural diversity. It is equally conditioned by the dissemination of the spirit of friendliness and human solidarity, the endeavor to restructure the collective conceptions and

dismantle the stereotyped images the peoples have about each other, so as acquaintance between them would be founded on genuine cognizance and mutual comprehension could result from understanding and predisposition to understand. The only way to fulfill these conditions is to invest in culture and education by holding international intellectual and scientific conferences in order to work out mechanisms for implementing the Initiative of the Custodian of the two holy Mosques and evaluate the endeavors for its implementation; taking targeted initiatives aiming at consolidating the forums of dialogue among the followers of the religions, cultures and civilizations; directing the educational systems and the cultural policies to endorse diversity, pluralism, as well as respect for difference and establishing solid relations between the peoples on the basis of mutual trust with a view to liberating the minds from the bond of stereotyped images and misconceptions.

The Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures is a propitious occasion to present the ideal image of the medial Islamic thought as well as the real picture of the Islamic culture and to translate both into a concrete day-to-day life culture of the Muslims, a voice which speaks on their behalf and an active and interactive debating party acquainted with the other civilizational entities. The 16<sup>th</sup> Islamic Conference of the Ministers of Culture offers undoubtedly a fitting opportunity to gather the support of Members States for this Initiative and to set up a high institution composed of Muslim scholars, thinkers and media professionals which will be acting under the supervision of ISESCO in its capacity as the expertise house of the Islamic world in the fields of education, science, culture and communication, and operating as an experts council as well as an advisory body to the Center for Dialogue among the Followers of Religions and Cultures.<sup>(54)</sup> The main focus in the work of the high-level institution will be on examining the most efficient ways of implementing the recommendations put forward in the present document with a view to achieving the goals of the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, enhancing the shared human values, consolidating the foundations of peaceful relations between the peoples and creating the right conditions for the success of the project of dialogue among the followers of the religions and cultures. To this end, there must necessarily be a conscious opening to the different civilizational models and cultural systems with a view to populating the Earth, raising high the edifices of civilizations and consolidating the common human values in conformity with the Revelation's guidance and advice, thanks to a deductive methodology which reconciles the transmission, the

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(54) The Centre was established in Vienna (see note 17 above).

reason and the reality and in harmony between the Quranic verses and the signs of the Universe; all things which straighten the relation with oneself in the quest of a civilizational renaissance and with the other in matter of religious and cultural dialogue.

**EXECUTIVE PLAN FOR THE INITIATIVE OF THE  
CUSTODIAN OF THE TWO HOLY MOSQUES FOR DIALOGUE  
AMONG FOLLOWERS OF RELIGIONS AND CULTURES**  
Achievements and Future Prospects

Adopted by  
**the Eighth Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers**  
(Al Madinah Al Munawwarah, January 2014)



The Initiative for Dialogue among Followers of Religions and Cultures, launched by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, came in a context marked by three key features:

**First:** The wave of terrorism and extremism that have been associated with some militant groups that brandish religious slogans to promote hatred and hostility to one another in violation of Muslim religious creed.

**Second:** The widespread tendency of Islamophobia among large sections in Western societies, which is manifest in racial hostilities against Islam and Muslims, such as slanderous cartoons, movies and literary works.

**Third:** The growing role of the religious factor in regional and international conflicts, at a stage marked by many hotbeds of strife and tension in the areas of religious intersection, on top of which are some Balkan and Central Asian countries.

The particular focus of the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques is on the factors, challenges and prerequisites for peaceful coexistence and constructive cooperation, instead of dwelling on creed and doctrinal considerations which have proved a stumbling block for previous initiatives toward inter-faith dialogue

We seek to draw inspiration in this first part of the draft action plan from the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in presenting a strategic vision of dialogue among followers of religions through four axes:

**Axis One:** The place of religion in the current global context

It is clear that dialogue between Muslims and followers of other religions is laced with the variant status in which religion is regarded by the partners in dialogue. It is acknowledged that the core of the problem in the relationship between Muslims and other people is that religion is still the decisively

defining factor of the values of the major part of Muslim societies, both as individuals and as a community. In secular Jewish-Christian communities, religion has become individualized and confined to religious practice. This perception of religion, outside the scope of religious institutions, only robs religious dialogue of its true meaning and leads to the prevalence of theological thinking.

Several fundamental misconceptions underlie this perception, in the forefront of which is the relegation of religion to the confines of the West and Europe, without taking into account the rest of the world. Recent field studies confirm that Western Europe is an exception in the global religious landscape, at a time when the center of Christianity moved to South America, Africa and Eastern Europe, whereas religious practice was maintained at a high level in the United States.

Leaving aside Eastern religions (Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism) that are organically linked to the cultural values as well as the cultural and national identity of the countries in which they exist, the increasing spread of religions, particularly Islam and Protestantism, is a clearly established fact.

In fact, many serious social studies about the reality of religion in Western Europe have shown that religious affiliation has not declined in essence, despite the weak grip of the religious establishment on the awareness of individuals, the mixing and interference between religious beliefs and rituals of different sources and references and the presence of new religions and creeds in the traditional religious context.

From what has gone before, religion has as the primary function of satisfying the fundamental human need for belonging. It is still the decisive element that influences the core beliefs of human beings about existence, nature and values. Hence, we realize the decline of positive historicist perceptions that bet on the disappearance and decline of religion as simply a passing stage in the evolution of human mind. Sound anthropologic and social studies today stress that human culture is based on symbolic absolutism, that the pattern of human interaction is based on the unseen, and that there is no way to overlook religion regardless of its pattern or original background.

Such is the importance of religious dialogue and its significance in addressing complex religious challenges in the world.

The Executive Plan will focus in this axis on **preparing studies and researches, holding seminars and forums on the place of religion within human societies and its role in the promotion of peace, security and stability and rapprochement between peoples. The focus will also be on involving regional and international bodies specialized in religious affairs, already established or proposed for establishment, in order to set up effective mechanisms to improve the image of religious diversity. Equal emphasis will be on the necessity to come together onto a common moral and ethical platform and approach to address major issues and challenges facing today's human community. There is no doubt that the resolution adopted by the Fourth Extraordinary Islamic Summit, which was held in Mecca, concerning the proposal by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to establish a center for dialogue among Islamic schools of thought to reach a common understanding, is instrumental to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' initiative. It further strengthens the internal dimension of dialogue and promotes rapprochement of Muslim schools of thought, thus preparing to best interact with the followers of other religions.**

## **Axis Two:** Religion and the State

It is commonly held that dialogue between Islam and the West cannot be religious, because Western societies are secular in terms of governance, whereas in most Muslim societies religion is the basis for the value-system, the judiciary and education.

How then establish dialogue between an absolute and sacred culture and a free pluralistic culture?

This view overlooks certain basic facts which need to be clarified:

- a) Western countries, though mostly guided by the principle of political pluralism and intellectual freedom, differ in handling the relationship

between religion and politics. There is the secular republican model which is based on the radical separation between religion and the State. This model, proper to France, is an incarnation of the organic affiliation to the community (i.e. the nation) which manifests itself in the universal laws underlying the collective values that regulate the various affairs of the community (this explains the hostile manner with which religion is challenged and its replacement by republicanism). There is also the Anglo-Saxon/German model, associated with the movement of religious reform, linked in turn to the enlightenment project in societies marked since the Middle Ages by religious pluralism. Secular systems in this second model are characterized by two main features: entrenching the individual and collective rights to religiosity, within the modern liberal values, and maintaining a pattern of religious legitimacy as a general framework for identity and a reference point, as is evident in the German, American and Danish constitutions, as well as the British “unwritten constitution”. The term “Secularism” takes differentiated and sometimes contradictory forms within the religion-politics relationship, and cannot accordingly be reduced to French “laicism” which entirely excludes religion from public affairs.

- b)** Social studies show that religion, though its role is diminishing in public affairs, is still the social frame of reference for all components of the political symbolism, albeit indirectly. These facts are reflected in the main arguments of the civil state, such as the words “sovereignty” and “representation”, which are associated with Christian theologian context. Similarly, these events are marked in ceremonial rituals of the political act, borrowed from religious practice. Hence the need to consider as relative the expression “radical separation”, the state and religion in Western societies.
- c)** The Islamic tradition was the first to cancel the notion of the religious State and priesthood in the history of religions. In this regard, it has introduced three safeguards for transition from the religious

State to the civil one namely: regarding the political power as being a sphere managed by human beings but does not reflect a sacred character; and the separation between the areas of the State and the civil society, which is the area of freedom and independence of the individual. Islam does not conceive of the State as the embodiment of religion. It is rather the Ummah, with the State at its head, which is the custodian of religion in terms of protection and interpretation.

Against this backdrop, it is clear that the different approaches by constitutional and legal systems in determining the relationship between religion and the state do not hinder an earnest and efficient religious dialogue both between Muslims and with others, as long as there is no divergence over the distinctive characteristics of the civil state which assert freedom of conscience, will and belief, reject coercion in religion and guarantee public freedoms and equal citizenship.

While Islam maintains the religious frame of reference in the public sphere, it ensures consistency with the principle of inseparability of Man's individual and collective convictions instead of their arbitrary separation which was adopted by modern secular systems. However, many leading thinkers in the West call for abandoning this perception considering that religious values and beliefs should not be excluded from public debate by imposing other beliefs and values under the pretense of rationalism while they are in fact carrying some religious remnants.

### **Axis Three:** The issue of values

There are obvious links between religion and values. All intellectual and social studies have proven the organic relationship between ethics in their individual and collective aspects and religion which is the mainstay of individuals' public perceptions of good and evil. Pure human rationalism cannot on its own produce standards for behaviour, i.e. values of duty; the farthest point it can reach is the generalization of conduct, i.e. to accept for the other what you accept for yourself.

If western modernity has tried to design a value pattern independently of religion, either by replacing it by knowledge (positivist ethics) or by ideologies, these attempts were doomed to failure. Eventually, the standard reference of ethics remained an unresolved issue.

It is evident that the Human Rights Code, which is the gist of the values of the modern era, has not provided for individual ethics; they therefore need a regulatory spiritual framework. Many western non-religious thinkers have found out this fact and accordingly adopted what they called human spirituality which reflects the need to return to religion in building values.

All religions share major human values. Monotheistic religions in particular share three common criteria: the doctrine of creation, and the revealed book, and the doctrine of resurrection and the afterlife. The doctrine of creation along with its associated idea of monotheism substantially contributes to raising the status of human beings, promoting their freedom and asserting their identity and rationality (as it can be reasonably inferred from the Islamic perspective of lieutenancy on earth and the trust).

Similarly, the revealed books facilitate transition from the idea of reading and interpretation, leaving the meaning open to free meditation and understanding of faith as a trust in the revealed text which presents proven evidence of its veracity. Therefore, belief in the unknown does not mean renunciation of the use of the mind and conclusive evidence.

The idea of resurrection paves the way to the future-looking course and the movement of history, liberates Man from fear of nature and instills in the self a basic spiritual rule of absolute justice.

Therefore, it is clear that monotheistic religions are today capable of using their deep spiritual mainstay in the global dialogue on values amid three major universal challenges:

- The challenge of positive naturalism that moved from the attempt to gain control of nature, transforming Man into an alienable and

disposable material. This can be clearly seen in the repercussions of the consequent unprecedented patterns of human servitude.

- The challenge of financial globalization where the real economy has separated from the financial liquidity with its unbridled tendency. This poses the problem of protecting intangible human assets from risks of stereotyping and utilitarian conduct.
- The challenge of protecting the civilizational and cultural diversity from the impact of the current communication revolution and its attendant tendencies towards the cultural and intellectual stereotyping that expose the cultural identity to dissolution through a non-communicative IT infrastructure.

It is worth noting that monotheistic religions which initiated the idea of universality ought to contribute through their fundamentals to drawing the map of new universal values which must reflect the rights of cultural diversity and evolve from free dialogue, while averting all tendencies towards cultural hegemony.

As the future of any society depends on its prevailing values, and given the profound impact of the value system on the historical evolution of cultures and civilizations, the issue of values must be given a privileged position in the Initiative's Implementation Plan. Accordingly, educational institutions, irrespective of their level and category, will be the mainstay of action in this area. This should not suggest that the role of the family, the school and the university must be limited to the inculcation dimension, but will go beyond that perimeter to build an identity deriving its strength from its intrinsic characteristics and components, opens up to and interacts with other identities, derives benefit from exposure to them, and contributes with them to building a common universal civilization.

On the other hand, the media will be a strategic partner of educational institutions, given the growing overlap between the roles of the two sectors (Education and Information), though often at the expense of the sought integration between them, as a result of the rising influence of the media on

society and on the public opinion, locally and internationally. **The development of reference materials for religious dialogue and their integration into curricula, together with the design of training programmes for teachers and journalists, and the development of multilingual websites using international languages, are vivid examples of the programmes to be included in the plan, which together will serve for consolidating the role of values and common ethical standards in promoting dialogue among followers of religions.**

#### **Axis Four:** Requirements of Coexistence

Coexistence has two dimensions, one of which relates to the coexistence of followers of religions themselves, while the other concerns their coexistence with non-religious groups.

With regard to the first dimension, many points of convergence between Muslims and followers of other religions must be pointed, mainly the existence of Christian and Jewish minorities in Muslim countries, and the presence of Muslim minorities in predominantly Christian countries.

Despite the loud buzz around some unfortunate events endured, in exceptional circumstances, by Christians in some Islamic countries, the situation of Christian minorities is generally normal. This goes in line with the Islamic teachings and values which enjoin kindness and justice to People of the Book, and with the concept of equal citizenship adopted by all Muslim world countries in their constitutional and legal systems. By the same token, we must also point to the persecution and humiliation of Muslim minorities in some predominantly Christian countries, as well as to the massacres and genocides perpetrated against Muslims in some Balkan countries within the context of civil wars that swept through the region in the 90s, and whose wounds are still festering. Another instance is the persecution the Muslim Rohingya minority in Burma face from Buddhist zealots

As to the second issue, it is worthy of mention that Islam has become a key component of the religious landscape in Europe and North America where it occupies the second place after Christianity. This should normally give

results in terms of the rights of religious practice, ritual performance, and representation within in the religious sphere and civil society. But this is still limited by real barriers in many countries.

These examples point to aspects of the problematic issue of peaceful coexistence and effective cooperation between followers of religions at a stage where all opinion polls show a growing trend of Islamophobia in the West.

By definition, Islamophobia means fear and demonization of Islam as a religion whose doctrinal maxims, scriptural constants and binding provisions entail an aggressive, violent and intolerant tendency at odds with the values of modern civilization.

Islamophobia does not mean criticism of Islam, as it has been familiar to Muslims since the Middle Ages and has never posed a problem as long as it is carried out within the confines of epistemology. In fact, the history of Islam abounds with instances of constructive dialogue between Muslims and their opponents some of whom held senior State positions, despite their writings which were very critical to Islam. Muslims have maintained the same open attitude towards the classical Orientalist studies notwithstanding their critical and sometimes biased attitude to Islam.

Islamophobia has nothing to do with the freedom of expression and thought vis-à-vis religions which is guaranteed in Western countries, but often falls under the legally penalized cultural racism.

Islamophobists do not see religion as a text and practice entailing a diversity of approaches and methodologies which vary according to the contexts of interpretation and application, as it is the case of all other religions. On the contrary, they consider Muslims as a homogenous group, freezing them in a stereotypical image of their religion considered as its essence, and eventually leading to the stigmatization of their religious identity.

Plain and effective interfaith dialogue requires that rules of an “ethical debate” be observed when dealing with the various issues and challenges of coexistence between followers of religions, especially with regard to the

intellectual and research which require a certain degree of fairness, impartiality and objectivity. Hence the need to counter cultural racism, a concept often confused with the freedom of expressing views on religious matters.

In its broadest sense, coexistence between followers of religions is one of the main objectives of the Initiative, as it serves to measure the efficiency of dialogue's mechanisms and precepts. This is the reason why the three previous axes are presented essentially as "theoretical tools", as compared with the present axis which we consider as the basis for a materialization of the Initiative on the ground to ensure an effective social impact. In this sense, the Executive Plan will give **special attention to analytical observatories, statistical studies and social mapping, in a bid to formulate the so-called "system of coexistence indicators", which consists in the record of information, data, practices and events reflecting the potential of coexistence of religious groups.** These indicators will be used for overhauling policies and methodologies adopted so far in the promotion of dialogue among followers of religions and for redressing its tracks to achieve a better outcome. The implementation programmes of the Initiative should not be restricted to theoretical matters and intellectual controversies, but must remain closely related to reality, and sensitive to present-time and future social trends. Only then could we develop proactive methods to turn dialogue into an "antidote" to all forms of tension, extremism and fanaticism, instead of being a mere series of reactions to situations produced without our participation and whose contexts we often fail to grasp.

There is no doubt that the Islamic cultural centers in the West can and must play a leading role in promoting coexistence provided they be supported, empowered and focused on the strategic priorities of the communities where they are based, in light of the efforts led by Arab and Islamic institutions which have set solid foundations for cooperation with these centers and coordination of their action.

Considering its extensive field expertise in coordinating the action of Islamic cultural centres and associations outside the Islamic world, ISESCO is invited to play a major role in steering the action of its Supreme Council

for Education, Science and Culture for Muslims outside the Islamic World with regard to the implementation of the Strategy for Islamic Cultural Action outside the Islamic World, through the regular meetings of the heads of Islamic Cultural centres and associations outside the Islamic world in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and Southeastern Africa and Western Indian Ocean Islands, and the Forum of the Heads of Islamic Cultural Centres and Associations outside the Islamic World, towards scheduling activities dedicated to the promotion of the culture of coexistence. Actually, ISESCO, within the framework of its action plan for the year 2013 and as part of the celebration of al-Madinah al-Munawarah as the Islamic Culture Capital for the year 1434 A.H./2013, scheduled the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Heads of Islamic Cultural Centres and Associations in Europe which was held in London, on 29 June 2013. The meeting theme focused on the means to activate the Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Dialogue among Followers of Religions and Cultures.

