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# **Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations: a Means to Counter Racism**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

❖ Preface .....	7
❖ Alliance of civilizations: three basic rules .....	11
❖ Mutual understanding as a lever for dialogue .....	12
❖ Equality and interdependence .....	15
❖ Rapprochement of cultures .....	17
❖ A wide scope and deep significance .....	19
❖ Developing modes of action .....	20
❖ Empowering the alliance of civilizations .....	22
❖ A UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination .....	24
❖ The fight against Islamophobia: a shared responsibility .....	28
❖ Anti-peace groups sell fear of Islam .....	31
❖ Why target Muslims in the USA? .....	33
❖ The message of peace-loving thinkers .....	35

## PREFACE

The scope of cultural dialogue, rapprochement and the alliance of civilizations is broad and encompasses many issues of import to the resolution of major civilizational problems. The current raging conflicts further compound these problems which are gaining in complexity as tensions escalate, with repercussions that undermine the world's cultures and civilizations. Such a state has a profound impact on the followers of religions and rises as an stumbling block on their way to accessing the realm of lofty and effective human dialogue, a dialogue that weaves strong bonds between nations and peoples within a context of mutual respect and a common drive to build a human world order that is free of tension and crises.

One of these crises with a political component, an ethnic dimension and a cultural element, endured by the entire humanity in these times, is the unbridled growth and spread of racial discrimination trends and hate movements that are jeopardizing human relations, threatening the world's safety and security, and triggering conflicts that wreak havoc with stability and spark enmity. Once it has dug its claws in men's hearts, such enmity would awaken evil tendencies and fling the doors wide open before crises where lives are lost, resources are squandered, corruption prevails and disaster reigns, and where it becomes

impossible to reach consensus-based solutions that could pave the way for security and the rule of peace.

Since countering racist tendencies is a noble mission in the fulfilment of which the efforts of the entire international community must come together, the consolidation of the values of cultural dialogue through rapprochement and entrenching the alliance of civilizations are two actions that could lay bridges of mutual understanding between nations and peoples and spread the culture of tolerance, coexistence and harmony, spurred by the drive to edify world peace on bases of international law and eternal human values that represent a common denominator of all religions, cultures and civilizations.

Cognizant of the importance of this drive, I have dedicated a fair amount of my attention and interests to it. I have taken up my share of the responsibility of spreading the values of dialogue, rapprochement and alliance among the followers of religions, cultures and civilizations through my writings and theorizing, as well as through my participation in international conferences as a speaker, an interlocutor and as the carrier of the Islamic civilizational vision of these weighty human questions.

In 2008, I published a book titled *Towards the Alliance of Civilizations with the Cairo-based Dar al-Shorouq*. Four of my studies were also published in Arabic, English and French. The first one came out in 2006 on *Common Cultural Heritage and Alliance of Civilizations*. The second study was published in 2009 on *Dialogue and the Alliance of Civilizations*, and the

third one was titled *Civilizational Communication and its Role in Promotion of Understanding between Peoples*. The fourth study was published in 2015 on *The Alliance of Civilizations and Building a New World Order*. This publication represents my fifth study on this vital subject and is published under the title *Countering Racism through Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations*.

A common thread runs through all these studies and the book that I published eight years ago. Through these writings, I have contributed within the limits of my functional prerogatives and my academic interests to consecrating the Islamic vision of the alliance of civilizations and to emphasising that intercultural and religious dialogue and the alliance of civilizations are not mere intellectual luxuries but a means to fight nihilist ideas, destructive trends and evil tendencies that include racism and hate trends on which I focused my efforts in this study. There is no doubt that this study is coming out at a time when the need is at its greatest for cultural sensitization, intellectual enlightenment and human mobilization against the multiple dangers besieging the world as a whole, and not only countries of the South as some analysts may be inclined to think, betraying a lack of appreciation of the dangers lurking in the folds of these ethnic, religious, political and cultural racism trends.

Here is hoping that this study, which is published in French and Arabic as well, will prompt us to ponder this racism which stands out as one of the most dangerous phenomena in today's world, rethink our positions vis-à-vis this phenomenon and stimulate the

will to counter it with the necessary conscientiousness, strong determination and innovative thinking.

May Allah guide our steps on the right path.

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## **ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS: THREE BASIC RULES**

This is a topic of great concern to the world we live in today considering the growing complexity of the threats to which world peace and security today are exposed, in the wake of the rising tides of racism that breed hatred among peoples and undermine the unity of the human family. Add to that the spread of false accusations and unfounded allegations about heavenly religions, Islam included, and about people in the world, especially Muslims, who are being labelled altogether as terrorists, extremists and a serious threat to human civilization.

Let me at this point examine the concept of the alliance of civilizations and discuss its cultural, political and practical dimensions. I will then discuss the principle of dialogue of cultures and rapprochement of civilizations before I move to explore the concept of racist currents, most notably Islamophobia.

The alliance of civilizations is a direct outgrowth of dialogue of cultures, both of which are grounded in the following three principles:

- Knowing each other;
- Mutual understanding; and
- Rapprochement.

First, by getting to know each other we mean, in this context, what God said in verse 13 of *Surat al-Hujurat* (The Chambers): *[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 (not that ye may despise (each other).]*  
Knowing one another is being interactive in the act of knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing between groups of people, peoples or cultures.

Second, mutual understanding could only result from people knowing one another, with as core elements interactive sharing and understanding between two sides, two peoples or two cultures.

## **MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AS A LEVER FOR DIALOGUE**

The objective is to understand one another and reach agreement. Dialogue will therefore be more fruitful and useful and would serve even more common interests. Dialogue is not an intellectual luxury and should not be kept behind closed doors, cut off from reality, because it would have no effect on defusing struggles and conflicts. Its effect would be just as bad on the dissemination of the culture of justice and peace and the establishment of security and peace on earth.

Mutual understanding, a prerequisite for dialogue, requires mutual respect. Thus, the parties to the dialogue must respect each other and respect each other's beliefs, their religions and religious symbols. Similarly they must keep away from blasphemous ridicule whatsoever even implicitly

Learning about one another, in such a deep and comprehensive sense, leads to rapprochement – the latter being a spur to dialogue in its broadest acceptance and as a concept that reinforces

objectives of building firm connections between individuals and communities, between peoples and nations. With so profound a sense of dialogue, among cultures, we could reach a state of alliance of civilizations (AoC), which is much bigger in scope and concept.

If the United Nations has adopted the idea of the alliance of civilizations proposed by former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero from the pulpit of the UN General Assembly, this concept is far from novel to us. Many thinkers and authors from the Muslim world have addressed it in the past, and I personally tackled it in different respects in some of my writings. Furthermore, anyone engaged with the dialogue of civilizations would not have ignored the idea of the alliance of civilizations since dialogue is not an end in itself, but a means to reach human coexistence, mutual understanding and cooperation. This formula, the alliance of civilizations, is what breathes life into dialogue and makes it constructive and effective.

In 2008, I wrote a book published in Dar al-Shuruq publishing house in Cairo under the title “*On the Way to the Alliance of Civilizations*”. I wrote three other works on the same topic, published each in a trilingual (Arabic, French and English) edition – one in 2006, titled “*Common Cultural Heritage and Alliance of Civilizations*”, the other in 2009, titled “*Dialogue and Alliance of Civilizations*”, the third one in 2010, titled “*Civilizational Communication and its Role in Promoting Understanding between Peoples*”, and the most recent book in 2015, titled “*The Alliance of Civilizations and Building a New World Order*”.

In all these works, I have examined methodically the origin of the concept of the alliance of civilizations. And I have come to the conclusion that any idea that serves human values and bolsters the efforts of the international community to achieve world peace and security and promote the values of justice and peace flows in the same direction as the alliance of civilizations. Any endeavor made by an individual or a group towards rapprochement, cooperation and coexistence between nations and peoples one another, only helps consolidate the alliance of civilizations because it fulfils one of the objectives set for this alliance.

The alliance of civilizations is the natural outcome and fruit of the dialogue of civilizations. It is the culmination of the well-intentioned efforts of the sage of this world over many decades, particularly the past fifteen years, and in particular since the UN General Assembly announced its decision to proclaim **2001 as the UN Year for the Dialogue of Civilizations.**

The international community, represented by a group elite of intellectuals and international and regional organizations sharing the same concern, has moved beyond the initial stage of dialogue which involved at first promoting the culture of dialogue and fostering trust in this culture through forums and gatherings to the phase of the alliance of civilizations. Such phase requires a civilizational coexistence based on mutual respect and common interests and on international laws that declare all states as equal, guarantee equal rights for nations and peoples and set the conditions for establishing peace and security in the world.

## EQUALITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Similar to international relations, the alliance is based on the rule of equality and mutual dependence, and on the premise of a shared aspiration. It does not necessarily presuppose the equality of the allied parties since an admission of equality contradicts the spirit itself of an alliance. Indeed, an alliance is a coalition of culturally diverse parties with different interests and capacities who are encouraged to create this alliance out of their shared awareness of the need to overcome the differences and obstacles that stand in the way of an understanding beneficial to their respective interests.

If alliance is the agreement by two parties to become each other's ally, this agreement gives rise to a coalition. The agreement of a group of individuals of different civilizations to forge a civilizational and cultural alliance does not presuppose unification because difference is the essence of nature and cultural and civilizational diversity is a way of the universe. This alliance provides people with a framework for collective action that serves noble human objectives, for the natural ambition they all share for stability and peace, for prosperity and harmony, and for a new human civilization that arises from the amalgamation and alliance of all civilizations and cultures.

Perhaps, the theory of an alliance of civilizations at this stage in the world's history has little chance of becoming a reality. But the vanguard reform ideas which changed peoples' lives and propelled them from weakness and backwardness to strength and progress, first emerged as idealistic ideas that no one expected to come to fruition. But they did, thanks to the strong will of the

people who believed with all their heart in progress and angled for it with all their might and natural disposition for progress, growth and continuous renewal.

If the international community shows signs of a willingness to see a decisive action carried out within the framework of international cooperation to give a new lease of life to the human civilizational edifice in ways that have not been elaborated yet, the alliance of civilizations may be a suitable and applicable formula. It is the thesis put forth in many forums and at various levels. This idea was the fruit of the dialogue of civilizations and cultures which reacted to changes and whose concepts translated into a mutual understanding that is today agreeable to most parties.

Judging from the above, we can safely argue that the alliance of civilizations is, in practical terms, the most effective tool for reforming conditions, and saving humanity from a mass of problems and escalating crises that international policy has so far failed to resolve in a fair and decisive manner through conventional diplomacy and other methods that lack transparency, seriousness and dedication.

Renewing the civilizational edifice of the world as one entity through the alliance of civilizations, not just dialogue, and through fruitful cooperation, enlightened by the teachings of divine religions and human principles as defined in the UN Charter, is the most important mission of the wise and the strongly determined. It is also the mission of noble-minded and enlightened people from all walks of life, and from different religions, cultures and civilizations, to confront the currents of racism, hatred and two-way enmity and build a safe, bright and prosperous future where

Man's dignity is not violated nor his rights abused, where the strong does not eat the weak, where all refer to the law and where the values of coexistence, tolerance and human kinship prevail.

While each alliance has aims to fulfill, these being the motives behind its creation, the noble objectives of the alliance of civilizations deserve the sacrifices of its loyal champions who toil for the general benefit of mankind. These include the restoration of peace and security, as well as fighting poverty, deadly diseases, organized crime and terrorism under all its forms, the exploitation of man, human rights abuses, the repression of free will and depriving people of their independence and freedom, drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, the promotion of racial discrimination and supremacy, stirring up religious enmity to and fear of Islam or what is called Islamophobia, the production of mass destruction weapons, and the unnatural and immoral uses of genetic engineering.

## **RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES**

By proclaiming 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, the United Nations introduced a new concept to foster two other corollary concepts; i.e., dialogue of cultures and alliance of civilizations. In her message to the international community on the occasion, UNESCO Director General Mrs Irina Bokova says, “We are living in a world that is increasingly marked by a growing interdependence in all areas of human activity. The resultant cross-fertilization of our societies offers new opportunities to strengthen the ties between peoples,

nations and cultures at the global level. At the same time, with globalization, incomprehension and mistrust have increased in the last few years. The economic, environmental and ethical crisis has further increased this sense of insecurity and mistrust. In the light of these developments, I have proposed a new universal vision, open to the entire human community, which I have called the “**new humanism**”. I am convinced that UNESCO has all the strengths needed to provide a humanist response to globalization and crisis. In response to the sense of vulnerability which permeates all levels, there is indeed a need to invent new forms of action to safeguard social cohesion and preserve peace.”

She added, “In view of this urgent necessity, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2010 as International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and designated UNESCO as lead agency in the celebration of this Year, having regard to its experience of more than 60 years in the work of advancing “**the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples.**”

She went on, “Cultures encompass not only art and literature, but also lifestyles, value systems, traditions and beliefs. In this globalizing world, marked by increasingly rapid exchanges and greater complexity, the protection and promotion of this rich diversity present numerous challenges. True, culture is not included among the Millennium Development Goals in its own right, which I regret. But the links between culture and development are so strong that development cannot dispense with culture. I firmly intend to show, through new initiatives, that these links cannot be separated.”

## **A WIDE SCOPE AND DEEP SIGNIFICANCE**

These objectives are indisputably a concern for the international community in these times. Placing these concerns at the heart of the civilizational alliance strategy as well as cultural dialogue and human rapprochement, and leaving governments and international organizations without civilizational support and backup are two different matters. Attempting to meet these objectives within an alliance of civilizations raises the chances of their success and provides a broader scope of action to respond to the currents of racism and its threats to world peace.

The founding of the United Nations Organization was a cherished dream of the leaders of WWII victorious nations. There was not a glimmer of hope of an agreement between countries torn apart by war to create a more developed and modern alternative to the League of Nations whose existence was ineffective in preventing this war.

Hence, the United Nations Organization was created on a basis that was unfair in terms of human justice. It was erected on the sovereignty of the five permanent members of the Security Council through their exclusive veto privilege. Many are the crises, tragedies and violations caused by the use of this unfair privilege granted by the UN Charter to the five permanent members of the Security Council.

That is why the world is moving towards a restructuring and reform of the United Nations, starting with the Security Council, and studies and debates have gained some ground in this regard, there is an ever more pressing need for what could be called the (Organization of Allied Civilizations) or something similar that

would equal the United Nations and support it, working side by side with it to fulfill the objectives laid out in the Charter, along with other objectives which were not given due attention when the United Nations was first established in 1945.

The critical phase the world is experiencing today dictates a proper understanding of the challenges that abound in it and wise awareness of the profound changes transforming this world. Such challenges impel the international community to pursue its drive to bring about intercultural dialogue and the alliance of civilizations as a way of consolidating world peace and security and building a new world order edified on bases of international law, the respect of international legitimacy and the protection of human rights.

In the midst of an international ambience fraught with tensions that imperil the stability of human societies, the need is even more crucial to act within a framework of international partnership and human cooperation to consolidate intercultural dialogue and the alliance of civilizations at all levels, whether that of governments and regional and international organizations, or of the civil society with its myriad institutions, bodies and associations to counter the action of those who advocate hatred, racism, discrimination and hostility towards peoples, and seek to deprive them of the right to determine their future and fully enjoy their legitimate rights.

## **DEVELOPING MODES OF ACTION**

The more severe the crises erupting in different parts of the world and the stronger the tensions straining international relations -as

is the case today-, the stronger becomes the need to develop working methods and better implementation mechanisms for the alliance of civilizations through life-changing initiatives of which the fruits can be tangibly reaped by individuals and communities.

These would also serve as an impetus to seek an enlightened cultural awareness about the importance of this alliance which goes beyond the theoretical and philosophical planes to take shape in real life as meaningful and realistic projects jointly implemented by various stakeholders, from intellectual, cultural and scientific elites, to political, religious and media leaders, stars of arts, literature and sports, the youth, and men and women, in an embodiment of human cooperation and in consecration of the unity of the human family against all racist tendencies and fear mongering currents.

The international community's interest in intercultural dialogue issues and the alliance of civilizations is on the increase, both internationally through the activities carried out by the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and UNESCO, regionally through the programmes implemented by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) which projects the civilizational vision of the Islamic world on these issues, or locally through the action of civil society organizations, bodies and NGOs that endeavour to spread values of cultural dialogue that enhance the alliance of civilizations. An alliance such as this embodies a human citizenship based on deeply-entrenched foundations of understanding, tolerance and coexistence, as well as the mutual respect of cultural pluralism and the spiritual, cultural and civilizational specificity of peoples and nations.

## **EMPOWERING THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS**

With today's spiralling waves of violence, hatred, racism, fear mongering of Islam and instigating the international public opinion against this religion, there is a greater need to join all worthy efforts in order to strengthen the spirit of intercultural dialogue and empower an alliance of civilizations that fosters trust among peoples and builds human understanding within a context of mutual respect seated on a broad base of values and principles common to all nations and peoples. These include the value of human citizenship and the principle of joint action in creating a better citizen who is useful for his nation, open-minded to the rest of the world, interactive with universal human values and harbouring a strong faith in his religious and national values and his cultural and civilizational identity.

I believe this to be one of the most effective tools to counter bigoted movements of which the danger has escalated to alarming proportions to become an imminent danger to international peace and security.

But what is racism exactly? What are its components and elements? What are its reasons and motives? What are its effects?

I will try to keep my answer as concise and focused as possible.

Racism (or racial discrimination) is the belief that there are inborn differences and qualities in people's disposition and ability which originate from them belonging to a particular group or race (regardless of the definition of the term race). As such, racism justifies the treatment meted out to a community, whether socially or legally. The term "racism" is also used to refer to the

practices in which a given human group is treated differently, which discrimination is justified by resorting to generalizations based on stereotypes or scientifically false premises. Racism stems from a feeling of superiority or a conduct or practice or policy based on exclusion, marginalization and discrimination between people on the basis of colour, nationality or race.

Though racial discrimination is often based on physical differences between communities, it is nevertheless practiced against any person based on racial or cultural differentiations without this person being physically different. Moreover, racism can take a more complicated form that is unvoiced and unconsciously internalized in people who claim to be committed to the values of tolerance and equality.

According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, there is no distinction between the terms "racial" and "ethnic" discrimination.

There is evidence that the term “racism” has changed over time, originating from the simple belief that the human population can be divided into distinct races. Today, most biologists, anthropologists, and sociologists reject a taxonomy of races in favour of more specific and/or empirically verifiable criteria.

Racism can be described as a cultural and political phenomenon with sometimes a pronouncedly religious connotation. This much is true, since religious discrimination is the most extreme expression of discrimination with dangerous consequences for human concord and world peace.

## **A UN DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

Going back to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1963, we will see that it provides a clear legal view of racial discrimination. The Declaration reads:

- Discrimination between human beings on the ground of race, colour or ethnic origin is an offence to human dignity and shall be condemned as a denial of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations among nations and as a fact capable of disturbing peace and security among peoples.
- No State, institution, group or individual shall make any discrimination whatsoever in matters of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the treatment of persons, groups of persons or institutions on the ground of race, colour or ethnic origin.
- No State shall encourage, advocate or lend its support, through police action or otherwise, to any discrimination based on race, colour or ethnic origin by any group, institution or individual.
- Special concrete measures shall be taken in appropriate circumstances in order to secure adequate development or protection of individuals belonging to certain racial groups with the object of ensuring the full enjoyment

by such individuals of human rights and fundamental freedoms. These measures shall in no circumstances have as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate rights for different racial groups.

- Particular efforts shall be made to prevent discrimination based on race, colour or ethnic origin, especially in the fields of civil rights, access to citizenship, education, religion, employment, occupation and housing.
- Everyone shall have equal access to any place or facility intended for use by the general public, without distinction as to race, colour or ethnic origin.
- All States shall take effective measures to revise governmental and other public policies and to rescind laws and regulations which have the effect of creating and perpetuating racial discrimination wherever it still exists. They should pass legislation for prohibiting such discrimination and should take all appropriate measures to combat those prejudices which lead to racial discrimination.
- An end shall be put without delay to governmental and other public policies of racial segregation and especially policies of apartheid, as well as all forms of racial discrimination and separation resulting from such policies.
- No discrimination by reason of race, colour or ethnic origin shall be admitted in the enjoyment by any person of political and citizenship rights in his country, in particular the right to participate in elections through universal and equal suffrage and to take part in the

government. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

- Everyone has the right to equality before the law and to equal justice under the law. Everyone, without distinction as to race, colour or ethnic origin, has the right to security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by government officials or by any individual, group or institution.
- Everyone shall have the right to an effective remedy and protection against any discrimination he may suffer on the ground of race, colour or ethnic origin with respect to his fundamental rights and freedoms through independent national tribunals competent to deal with such matters.
- All effective steps shall be taken immediately in the fields of teaching, education and information, with a view to eliminating racial discrimination and prejudice and promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial groups, as well as to propagating the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.
- All propaganda and organizations based on ideas or theories of the superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin with a view to justifying or promoting racial discrimination in any form shall be severely condemned.
- All incitement to or acts of violence, whether by individuals or organizations against any race or group

of persons of another colour or ethnic origin shall be considered an offence against society and punishable under law.

- In order to put into effect the purposes and principles of the present Declaration, all States shall take immediate and positive measures, including legislative and other measures, to prosecute and/or outlaw organizations which promote or incite to racial discrimination, or incite to or use violence for purposes of discrimination based on race, colour or ethnic origin.
- The United Nations, the specialized agencies, States and non-governmental organizations shall do all in their power to promote energetic action which, by combining legal and other practical measures, will make possible the abolition of all forms of racial discrimination. They shall, in particular, study the causes of such discrimination with a view to recommending appropriate and effective measures to combat and eliminate it.
- Every State shall promote respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and shall fully and faithfully observe the provisions of the present Declaration, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

From this detailed and careful investigation of the underlying conceptions of racism, including religious discrimination, we may now ask this question and provide an answer to it:

- Why is Islam subjected to religious discrimination? Why are they afraid of Islam and using such scare tactics through many channels and in different ways? And does such religious discrimination not run counter to international law?

## **THE FIGHT AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY**

Fear of Islam and the suspicious and repressive treatment of Muslims in many places, and spreading falsehoods that distort this religion's image and are in fact the antithesis of its essence, find corroboration in the actions of some Muslims who have strayed far from the straight path. The despicable acts of terror being committed on the Islamic scene, the unacceptable radical ideas being promoted and the perverted concepts and forms of tyranny practiced in some countries by way of repressed freedoms and human right violations, all of this provides ample motive for a segment of the Western society to hate Islam, promote fear of this religion, and arbitrarily inflame the public opinion against all Muslims.

All these deviances are partly responsible for the distortion of Islam's image within Western societies, particularly within certain media channels, research centres and universities. We cannot absolve ourselves of the responsibility because a fatal disease is indeed gnawing at the body of Islam. Today's events have taken a course far from the right direction on many a level, and some Muslims are now living in full violation of Islam's tolerant ways and its Sharia, the principles of good governance, the lofty tenets governing the lives of individuals and communities, and values

of virtue, integrity and dedication to good actions for the greater good of humanity at large.

Now that we have established the source of this fear of Islam and the danger it represents, what is the significance of Islamophobia?

The answer requires that we delve deeper and expand our research and understanding. Islamophobia is no longer considered a mere ephemeral fad. It has evolved into a phenomenon with many ramifications, repercussions and dangers, posing a threat to international peace and security and not only to Muslim communities in and outside the borders of the Islamic world as it not only constitutes an act of aggression against Islam and an onslaught on its beliefs, but also aims to destabilize human societies in general, thus becoming a dangerous phenomenon by all standards. The term Islamophobia was first used in 1987 and migrated from English to the world's different languages. Its first definition dates back to 1997 and appeared in a report drafted by the British Runnymede Trust Corporation around 'Islamophobia: a challenge for us all' in which the phenomenon was explained as "*fear or dislike of all or most Muslims.*"

The first author to use this term in France was Emile Malet in his article "***Culture or Barbarism***" which he published in 1994 in the French newspaper Le Monde.

Islamophobia is linked to many factors where the remnants of historical grudges merge with the growing cultural, religious and political intolerances of the present. It is neither a by-product of the current juncture, nor a ramification of the 9/11 terrorist attacks as some people claim. It is instead a mix of negative influences and repercussions that make it a religious, cultural and

political movement threatening the universal human values that embody the essence of international law.

As historically documented, hatred of Islam and its use as a terror tool is not a novel tactic in Western culture. For example, the **Song of Roland** was instrumental in shaping the way Islam was perceived by the West, with Muslims depicted as infidels, pagans and back-stabbing traitors who attacked the rear of the French army and killed Roland, hero and nephew of King Charlemagne, and wiped out his army, and described how Charlemagne set out on a crusade to avenge his nephew and defeat the Muslims. This epic poem is still being taught at universities and colleges today, and thanks to its folk tales, the hatred of Muslims was fostered in the hearts and minds of the West. Additionally, strongly biased writings about Islam by a number of Christian ecclesiastic figures consecrated the perverse image of this religion and its Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Martin Luther, founder of the Protestant Church, explains how he gained certainty that nothing could be more detrimental to “**Mahmet**” or the Turks, or more damaging than all manner of weapons than the translation of their Quran and its dissemination among Christians as that would reveal what a repugnant, terrible and cursed book this Quran was and how replete it was with lies, myths and atrocities. Then came the Orientalist studies which, as you all know, were in their majority distortive, tendentious and ill-intentioned.

Islamophobia profoundly affects global international relations since it runs counter to the United Nations Charter, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related conventions, agreements and covenants, particularly paragraph 2 of Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

which reads: *“Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.” This confers on this phenomenon the attributes of a conflict in an era where the international community is joining hands to promote the culture of understanding, harmony and tolerance and the alliance of civilizations.*

With its spiralling dangers and escalating ramifications, this phenomenon has mutated into a threat to world peace and security in that it bypasses the specific sphere, and by that we mean Islam and Muslims in general, to reach the global sphere represented by the world at large. Denigrating Islam and waging an intellectual and religious war against it can only impact negatively on all religions and all their followers.

## **ANTI-PEACE GROUPS SELL FEAR OF ISLAM**

With this truth clear in our minds, we can safely say that those driving the phenomenon of Islamophobia and standing behind it are peace-loathing formations that violate human rights and advance in the opposite direction of international consensus on the universal values shared by all the nations and peoples. They stand in the way of the human drive that advocates intercultural dialogue and the alliance of civilizations and promotes values of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect among all mankind.

Yet, as we monitor and follow the events unfolding on the international scene, we need state that hostility towards Islam and ignorance of its essence and teachings are what fuels this battle against it and the determination to tarnish its image, disseminate

falsehoods, misconceptions and prejudices about it and make a target of it at all times. Standing witness to this is the abundant support extended to this thrust by multiple extremist groups whose interests converge with those of certain international powers that swim against the tide of peace in its broader and global sense.

We are in fact surprised that the Islamophobia-promoting industry is run by extremist groups whose only unifying factor is their hostility to Islam, plotting against it and fighting it in all possible ways. Wrong are those who believe that the strings of Islamophobia are pulled and its affairs managed by a specific group, a particular religious entity, or one of the existing fanatic and extremist movements. The opposite is in fact true because multiple forces with different leanings are at play here, hailing from different backgrounds but with immediate and future interests that converge through this fight against Islam and the conspiracy to break Muslims down and impede their progress. These groups, knowingly or unknowingly, are in reality acting against world peace and fighting against understanding, coexistence and dialogue among the followers of religions, cultures and civilizations.

As happened in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, hostilities against Muslim communities in the United States have escalated in an unprecedented way in the recent past and in more than one direction, unfolding at the rhythm of the war against Daesh, the obscure terrorist cell that claims to belong to Islam and apply its teachings but of whose deviances Islam is certainly innocent.

Earlier last October, John Bennett, Oklahoma Representative at the US Congress, stirred many criticisms after he wrote on his Facebook page that ‘the Quran clearly states that non Muslims should be killed’, adding that Christians should be wary of Muslim-Americans. In his dangerously racial statements, Republican candidate to the White House Donald Trump calls for banning all Muslims from entering the United States of America and for restrictions to be put on Muslims living in the US. Should he win the elections, this would signal the start of a political and religious crisis which would destabilize the US first and then the whole world, given the dangerous risks that would be posed by the US racist policy under his presidency.

Does freedom of speech mean jeopardizing another human principle which is freedom of faith? And does it justify going to the extent of blatant discrimination against a specific component of society?

The problem does not end with the display of a few posters and advertisements marketing fear of Islam and disseminating terror of this religion on the streets. The gravity lies in the force of impact such abusive propaganda has on the average American citizen to judge from the 143% increase in the rates of hate crimes against Muslims since last year, according to the New York Police Department’s Hate Crimes Unit.

## **WHY TARGET MUSLIMS IN THE USA?**

Muslims in the United States and other Western countries are not only suffering from a daily deluge of hate mail and acts, derogatory analyses and images streaming across television

screens and billboards on the road. Worse, they are the subject of security surveillance that tracks their movements on the streets, in mosques and at universities, monitors their gatherings, financial transactions and their charitable donations, even those innocent of funding any extremism. They are spied on, harassed and prosecuted.

This phenomenon has greatly gained in visibility after the 9/11 attacks when commentators, journalists, politicians and theoreticians explicitly adopted the Islamophobia discourse -fear of Islam- as an ideological justification for depriving tens of thousands of citizens of their civil liberties, compiling files about them, illegally detaining large numbers of legal residents, condoning the kidnapping and torture of suspects, and legalizing the spying, monitoring and entrapment of American citizens.

In Europe and the United States, whether after the September attacks or the start of the war on Daesh, Islamophobia has become a culturally acceptable justification to terrorize thinkers and researchers who speak out against discrimination and do not support terrorism or extremism...and they are many.

The ideology of Islamophobia in American society, as in other Western societies, is not a coincidence or the fruit of ignorance. It is resorted to out of a desire to preserve US political and economic hegemony over the world and to expand its reach.

It is also not restricted to marginal right-wing groups, the campuses of American universities or the political formations that try to demonize those who dare criticize Israel's policies against the Palestinians and those opposing US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a phenomenon of which the weave has

been skilfully in the making since the emergence of the concept of globalization.

There is no doubt that the American right wing and the neo-conservatives in particular are playing a pivotal role in maintaining the standards of Islamophobia, be it in Europe or in the United States, and provide anti-Islam theories and stories with a backdrop that is replete with deliberate fabrications and misconceptions. Needless to say, this stereotypical image will continue to prevail within American and other Western societies for decades to come, as long as the ideological premises that continuously promote it continue to exist, and as long as the successive international events that condition the American public opinion and the Western one in general to espouse such image continue to unfold. This will fuel racist movements, promote hatred, and jeopardize international peace and security.

## **THE MESSAGE OF PEACE-LOVING THINKERS**

The mission of free thinkers around the world is to face up to these movements of discrimination, denigration and distortion whatever their nature or sources are. They have the moral responsibility of cooperating in uncovering the truth, exposing and refuting falsehoods and allegations for the culture of justice and peace to prevail among mankind. The most fundamental mission of advocates of dialogue of cultures, rapprochement of cultures and alliance of civilizations is to save the world from the dangers posed to human societies, to counter racism, hatred and religious blasphemy by all means possible. The aim for them is to build peace in the world, make a safe future with prosperity for the entire human race, where the values of dialogue, the

alliance and rapprochement of cultures and civilizations prevail, and where peace, coexistence, tolerance and respect for God's creative diversity thrive.

From this standpoint, the challenge facing peace seekers and agents of coexistence, tolerance and rapprochement among human cultures and civilizations is to stand steadfast on these vital areas, rise up to difficulty, shoulder the grave responsibility that is theirs and honour their commitments on various planes.

Nothing should stop free-willed people across the world from continuing their mission to foster dialogue, alliance and rapprochement of cultures and civilizations, standing as a bulwark against racist ideologies inconsistent with the values of peace and coexistence among all human beings.