

**Comprehensive Report of the Proceedings of the First Annual Muslim  
Peacebuilding, Justice, and Interfaith Dialogue Conference**

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**First Annual Conference of Muslim Peacebuilding, Justice, and Interfaith Dialogue**

American University, Washington D.C.

April 28-29, 2006

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## Welcome

Dr. Muhammad Abu-Nimer- Salam Institute

This is not an academic conference, rather it is meant to build connections and to network between people that care about the subject of Islamic peacebuilding. There is a need to speak of issues such as pluralism in Islam and the aftermath of September 11, 2001, internally. Many are working on Islamic peacebuilding, for example, the Islamic Society of North America, Najeeba Syeed-Miller, Karim Crow and this conference is a contribution to what is already happening in the American Islamic community. This is a process and responsibility for all involved to systematically think about the Islamic perspectives of peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and interfaith, in an attempt to bring it to the American public context. In addition, we are also trying to encourage young Muslim academics interested in peacebuilding. Salam Institute for Peace and Justice is used as a framework for this purpose. In particular, its role includes encouraging the younger generations to think about peacebuilding, followed by training, and finally disseminating the information.

**Dr. Louay Safi- Islamic Society of North America**

Conflict is an important aspect of our life and is a part of the human condition, arising from three factors, the first of which is free will, second individual experiences, and thirdly separate interests. The United States Constitution recognizes the good aspects of conflict which is why we have checks and balances. The Qur'an also talks about the importance of conflict and God checks one group of people by means of another. Conflict can be positive and stimulating.

Salam Institute and the ISNA Leadership Development Center (ILDC) are hoping to have these conferences on Islamic peacebuilding annually, this is the first. The ISNA Center works in the Islamic community mainly to establish leadership and integrate the Muslim community into the larger American society.

**Panel 1: Peace through Development- Experiences from Muslim Communities and the Muslim World**

**Presenter 1: Kathleen Meilahn: "Legitimate Authority in Iraq-Islam, Tribes, and Conflict Management Operation Iraqi Freedom Conflict Management Opportunities."**

**Abstract:**

I am currently working on a research paper which I would like to present at the MPJID conference. I think it would fit in with one of these conference themes: Islamic Approaches to Mediation and Conflict Resolution, or Islamic Approaches to Peace and Interfaith Dialogue, or possibly Intra-Muslim Dialogue and Peacebuilding. The following issues will be addressed:

- Legitimate Authority in Iraq: This will address and identify tribal and religious leadership positions, etc. the U.S. should be engaging to create more effective civil society communication and public diplomacy, for general cooperation and conflict management (or conflict resolution) purposes.
- Islamic sources of conflict management: Qur'an, Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet), Suna (the deeds of the Prophet), Shari'a and associated scholarly schools of thought. This section will be fairly brief.
- Cultural context conflict management/resolution: This will reach outside of traditional "Western" CR tradition and theory, to include Islamic and regional, cultural, and/or traditional methods of managing conflict that already exist. I will evaluate how/whether the U.S. can mediate ongoing civil conflicts in Iraq, or otherwise, identify leaders who may be able to do so. I will address whether the U.S. can help ameliorate Islamic-Western relationships or reduce anti-American/anti-West sentiment in the region via exercising culturally appropriate conflict management techniques and developing empathy for, and understanding of, the Iraqi people (as well as others in the region).
- Examples: I intend to find examples of U.S. military officers who have used sulha successfully to demonstrate how Islamic sources of conflict management CAN work if westerners work in accordance with culturally appropriate traditions.

Intent: I hope to provide information the U.S. government can utilize to enhance inter- and intra-faith dialogue, allow for a more stable situation in Iraq which will lead to effective post-conflict development, bring about peace, and uphold justice.

## **Presentation**

The Department of Defense recognizes cultural awareness training is an 'Achilles heel'. So much of my paper is well-known to this audience. The Iraqis are trying to put together a government while at the same time building a state. They suffer a problem of legitimacy. The population is allowing other actors to challenge the institution of the state: men dominating other men by violence.

For Shi'a especially, charismatic authority can dominate. Prophet Mohammed's (peace be upon him) authority transformed into shari'a law.

Tribal authority, the sheikh, gained from superior violent raids and counter-raids. War lords were military leaders who became political and economic authority. The British colonialist encouraged this tribal leadership.

The paper then goes on to discuss the shallabee, the merchant class. Their purpose was to give basic information to the Department of Defense personnel who know practically nothing of this cultural structure.

Another point of explanation was the structure of Shi'a religious authority, beginning with Ayatollah at the top.

In Iraq now we are entering the world of shadows. There are many factions of insurgency and power struggles. Some of it is Mafia-like contention for power.

Ayatollah Al-Sistani is from the quietist tradition, but nonetheless he has been the strongest voice calling for peace and sanity. He has been speaking against foreign jihadists creating instability.

Meanwhile, many of the Sunni have been fighting in the name of revenge. The military does not realize this cultural tradition.

**Presenter 2: Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana: “Peace and Development through the Experience of Muslim Peace Building Actors in Africa and the Balkans”**

The study found that development, especially for women and youth, must be a part of peacebuilding work if it is to be sustainable. Recognition of human dignity, ecological balance, and respect and celebration of religious and cultural diversity are all central to peacebuilding as well.

Religion is inseparable within Islamic societies. Islam calls for harmony for all life, not just human beings. Islam always has had humanitarian agencies; but some today do not respond adequately to modern challenges.

There are important concepts in Islam one must know such as: the concept of unity within plurality, the concept of justice (ecological as well as social), the concept of mercy and compassion, the concept of shu'ra: decision by consensus for social issues and the concept of balance within nature.

What needs to be done is to bring these issues to Muslim peacebuilders. This network should contribute to that.

**Presenter 3: Putut Widjanarko: “A Transnational Community in the Making”**

**Abstract:**

In the wake of September 11 attacks, the nature of relationships between Muslims in the United States and the American society in general has changed. Since originating from many different countries, cultures, and various schools of thought in Islam, a monolithic perspective and treatment towards Muslim communities in the US will not help us in understanding the aspirations and internal dynamics of each community. The Muslims from the Malay-Indonesian region are largely overlooked in the discourse of Muslim-West relationship.

This paper deals with Indonesian Muslim community in New York City, a small fraction of Muslim community in the US. It is expected to challenge such a monolithic perspective towards the Muslims in the US. This paper discusses how this community, as a part of the larger Muslim community in the US, as well as a part of what Forner (2000)

calls second wave of immigrants in the country, deals with their community building efforts. Consequently, it also discusses how they locate themselves in the larger American society; among other things is their inter-religious interaction. The Indonesian community has established a mosque, Masjid Al-Hikmah, for their religious and social activities.

Nevertheless, this paper will show how the internal consolidation of the community lead to the lack of attention in organizing systematic outreach programs such as interfaith dialogs. It will also explain how Indonesians Muslims are not involved in the larger agenda of Muslims in the United States. There are such involvements, however, which stem from a personal interest, such as shown by Shamsi Ali, former the Vice Chairman of Board of Directors, Masjid Al-Hikmah. His roles in interfaith dialogue programs and across-ethnic Islamic activities are also discussed in this paper.

### **Presentation**

Putut Widjanarko is working with Indonesian immigrants in New York City and is a Salam fellow through the CTG (what is CTG?). The focus of this subject is based on this overlooked population in the US: about 2,000 immigrants in New York City – 600,000 Muslims in New York City, and 100 mosques. The main activities which take place in the mosque are: prayer, special weekly/monthly gatherings, and Saturday elementary/middle school, social activities (e.g., sent help and donations during the tsunami effort). Although, there are many social and community building activities there are no significant interfaith activities. The Imam considers the Muslim community to be too small to develop interfaith dialogue.

**Conclusions:** There is no specific program designed for inter-religious dialogue. Concern: how does the Muslim community see themselves as the *ummah*? In daily life, the Muslims do not see themselves as a united ummah in NYC. The Muslim community in NYC is still fragmented and not united around the ummah concept (maybe reflecting global idea of ummah but certainly not the local concept).

### **Questions and responses:**

#1: Ayse mentioned the importance of several concepts that are profound. But, how can the Muslim mind understand these concepts today? In Aceh work, the importance was training the teachers in these Islamic principles so that they could in turn teach their students. Muslims are not abreast of these conceptual issues. In terms of the Iraq situation – the information presented is high school level! It is reprehensible for the US government not to understand these cultural issues in Iraq. They did not bother to consult these resources. Hussein's regime displayed horrible authority – but some survived and escaped his clutches (i.e., Sistani).

[Ayse: in full agreement of teaching professionals and Muslim teachers in understanding these concepts. Islamic history is very rich in Islamic justice concepts – Muslims simply do not know their own history. Muslims have made a significant contribution in this area – not just using Western concepts in conflict resolution.]

[Kathleen: Yes, this is high school information – agreement in deficiency in American politics.]

There were several comments in support of Kathleen’s work with the DOD in bringing cultural awareness to the American military. Kathleen noted that there is a progressive internal movement in the military (several officers, etc) that are working to move the military system into better international relations.

**Question 2:** How can we figure the line between what is Islamic and what is cultural (non-Islamic)?

Ayse: We have to recognize that there is an inclusion of cultural practices as long as they do not interfere directly with Islamic principles. Muslims today need to note what the core Islamic beliefs are – this is a major problem in Islam today. Deals with our adjustment with modernity, and our ignorance with past Islamic sources and writers. Need to discuss openly what Islam is to us.

Putut:[noted several cultural practices in Indonesia regarded as “Islamic.”]

Abu-Nimer (final comments): Journey into ‘Islam and peace’ is difficult in trying to make actual practices from the Islamic concepts. There are limits to cultural understanding within peace-building – what if American politics did know cultural issues and used direct violence? How would they then respond to sectarianism, etc.? How do we translate these into practices?

Struggle to understand the relationship between culture and religion. If we try to take out culture, we still have language! Currently, Abu-Nimer tries to culturalize the Islamic concepts as they relate to the communities.

Kathleen: implementation of practices is always the problem. What is the value of cultural training? One has to start with small steps, and hope for institutionalization of cultural training. Some sort of mediation is in effect in Iraq – but minimal and not consistent.

## **Panel 2: Intra-Muslim Dialogue**

**Presenter 1: ‘Abd al-Hayy M. Weinman: “Action Research, Dialogue, and the American Mosque.”**

From the intercultural communication department in conflict resolution – conflict that comes from diverse interacting cultures. Identity is important in dialogue – Muslims and others must face the identity question with its complexities. Who are we? Who are we again? The complexities of identity must continually be revisited – identity changes as a result of dialogue and research.

Context of the American Muslim community: Islam is coming to America – 1) we are witnesses, and 2) we are participants in this action.

Interfaith workers are the intercultural communicators of their communities. Intra-faith dialogue is essential to interfaith dialogue. Some of the staunch Muslims call interfaith dialogue as “haram” – against dialogue. Dialogue people tend to go to the fringe of our community – and intra-faith brings us back to the center of our own communities.

Muhammad Deedat was great for Islam – but he was not into dialogue. Making da‘wah is being a Muslim – not necessarily talking about it. Many Muslims think that Deedat is dialogue – but the polemics are not necessary. Dialogue is about creating relationships with each other – mutual relationships, respect, and confirmation. Dialogue does not necessarily happen because it is named as such – oftentimes, only lectures are given with small questions – this is not a dialogue.

How do we facilitate dialogue inside the Muslim community? In general, the immigrants are communally individualistic (e.g., Pakistanis keeping with Pakistanis). Americans who come into Islam are often not satisfied, since the immigrant communities separate from the American Muslims. Also, immigrants are holding to Islam because of the strong familial tradition, while the converts are rebels in their community. If the immigrants will take the hands of these “rebels,” things may be able to change within the Islamic community. Example: the Medinan community of the Ansars and immigrants – noting that this is a context for discussing American Islam.

### **Presenter 2: Dr. Hamid Mavani: “The Prospect of Sunni-Shi’a Rapprochement”**

Muslims demonize each other and dilute their influence when they do not participate in intra-faith dialogue. One of the most contentious issues between Sunni and Shia is succession.

Fundamentals of Islam via al-Ghazali: 1) Belief in Tawhid, 2) Belief in the affirmation of the Prophet Muhammad, and 3) Belief in the hereafter.

Shia theology: al-Ghazali’s three plus, 4) justice of God, and 5) process of succession (12 saints). Major differences have arisen because of #5 in the Islamic ummah.

Need to emphasize to all Muslims that the intellectual currents in Islam did not emerge in a vacuum – the notion of a stagnant Islam that one blandly practices is not true. Islam emerged in a particular milieu. Need to appreciate this diversity – Islam is not a monolithic entity. Islam is not homogeneous! Plus, the “different expressions” of Islam reflected in various cultural practices follows the Qur’anic principles of pluralism – God made the world this way. To unify Islam under same principles/practices/theology is undermining God’s work.

Need to teach the ethical teaching in Qur’an: concept of patience, forgiveness, promotion of welfare, non-judgmental attitude, humility, no vengeance. Need to appreciate the diversity within Islam: not try to convert Sunni to Shia or Shia to Sunni. Even Muhammad knew that he was not in the place of God. Showing devotion to the family of the Prophet – both Sunni and Shia do this.

Controversial issues: 1) *taqiyya* – has to do with saving one’s life in crises; 2) critiquing the “companions” of the Prophet – this is different than condemning the companions. Shia “critiques” but does not condemn. Sunni’s must think differently about this; 3) *Ijtihad* – “fresh reflection” – responding to the challenge of modernity. Need to embrace the Shia school with the classical four.

Need to dialogue within the Muslim community, *especially* within the American community, *as long as we have no vested interest*. No hidden agenda.

**Presenter 3: Abbas Barzegar: “Muslim Communities in Atlanta: Discursive Themes and Inter/Intra-Faith Activity”**

Developing a methodology to study Muslims in America – trying to inform the academy from the ethnographic perspective, and inform the local Muslim community about the research.

What do we mean by “Muslim identity”? In most writing about the topic, the answer was presumptive. Identity is more of an ideology – who we are going to be (i.e., Esposito, Yvonne Haddad). Talal Asad, a Muslim anthropologist provided an alternative approach: we cannot be in the business of defining what a Muslim is – we can only describe how a Muslim community defines themselves. This way you do not have to call the “Nation of Islam” some nationalistic, millenarian sect of Islam, rather, the focus should be on “discourse performance”. When we talk about being Muslim, in what context are we discussing this identity? This information will also give non-Muslims information on Muslim identity in the American context.

There are six categories of discursive elements: 1) Abrahamic Americanism/Humanism: produces the idea the American Islam is just another appendage to the Abrahamic tradition. Drawing elements from Constitution of Medina and the Pact of Oman 2) Redemptive social activism – Islam is seen as a reviver of American religiosity; 3) Salafi Sunni theme – born out of the tradition of ibn Wahhab – pietistic movement. 4) Revivalist Mathabi scene – reinvigorate Islam in American – Sufism is brought into American discourse. 5) Progressive Reformism – born out of academic processes – reorientation of foundational Islamic texts. 6) Homeland homesick theme – immigrant communities coming to American and practicing their traditions in foreign ways (foreign to American culture).

Atlanta Muslim community: 1) Warith Dean Muhammad community; 2) Ismaili community, 3) 14<sup>th</sup> St. mosque – the major Mosque of Atlanta. The only intra-faith Muslim communities were those involved in interfaith dialogue. Those communities who are most marginal (e.g., Ismaili), become some of the greatest spokespeople for Islam. Warith Dean Muhammad community: The leader of Muslim activity in America, although it is still criticized for its roots in the Nation of Islam.

**Questions:**

**Question 1:** On Barzegar's paper: attempt to be analytical in approach and deconstruct the various layers of the Muslim community. But, there are overarching parts of our Muslim identity. Diversity is good in forming a new identity of Islam in the American context. South Asian Islam is a good example of a new form of Islam that has emerged from cultural practices. Move ahead with your simplistic research – complement your research to benefit the future direction of Islam in this country.

**Question 2:** *Who* is the one to facilitate intra-faith dialogue? There is clear leadership from the Shia community, but what about the Sunni? This leadership includes discussion of gender, etc. Where is the voice of the women in Islam?

**Question 3:** How to develop the norms or processes that help communication to be resilient in the face of conflict?

**Question 4:** Shia theology is on the crucial axis that the first three imams after Muhammad are demons. This tension must be dealt with in Sunni-Shia discussion.

### **Responses:**

Weinman: Dialogue must go through the entire community. Shia-Sunni is a “family feud” – this is one perspective. These differences/ideology were cemented over time. “Appreciative inquiry” is needed in intra-faith dialogue – using the good that one has to re-imagine the future. Two-levels of dialogue: 1) the people coming to the dialogue, and 2) the facilitators – the people who create the space for dialogue. We need to create a place for the women to come to the dialogue table. Dialogue must be slowly learned, one does not know how to do it! Not everyone can dialogue. Sometimes dialogues will not benefit the community – so the facilitator must know the timing.

Mavani: In the Shia tradition, the “preachers” are the ones with the most influence on the grassroots community. How can we train these scholars to appreciate differences in diversity? The dehumanization and demonization of the first three caliphs in Islam is an issue that the Shia community must work out. Ali himself accepted the three caliphs – but he regarded himself as the spiritual leader after Muhammad. In the original sources, Ali accepted the leadership of the first three caliphs. But, this view goes against the early *tafsir* and polemics. We cannot rely just on religious scholars. We must cultivate the community participation in trying to transcend the sectarian disputes.

Barzegar: We have to be scrutinizing when it comes to our own positions. We must recognize the terms of the debate and our positions. There are no truths other than the way we describe them. Barzegar is a cultural anthropologist and what he has to offer entail descriptive findings for the use of interfaith workers. There needs to be identification of who is in charge and who can use the descriptive material. How do we accept within our fold those who do not accept us? We need to tolerate the intolerant and we need to identify who is in charge. Instead of training these leaders, let's identify the leaders and their discourses, so that we can construct with them.

#1: These types of ideas are rare in Muslim communities. Perhaps in America there is a place to capture this creativity and exploit fresh ideas for making their own messages. The polemics of the “companions” is crucial – and the way out is the critical historical analysis – a willingness to sacrifice some of the historical mythology. Historically, there were opportunities to make peace between Sunni and Shia. But, the door was closed each time. In order to go forward, we must be willing to pay the price – and give up something.

#2: There is incredible need to develop intra-faith Muslim dialogue. The other problem is with the tools – how do we do it? Need to develop manuals and disseminate the material. Hopefully, we can move this into the practicality of translating the ethics, tools, and topic of intra-faith dialogue. There is no person in charge – the Muslim community is large and diverse – leadership is on all levels. It is frightening to give all authority to the imams and “preachers” to lead all dialogues.

#3: Need to identify the sources of the particular conflicts we are dealing with. Also, need to inform the media of these progressions.

#4: Difference is the beauty in Islam – we need to become comfortable with this.

#5 (from Chad and Sudan): Hadith – One Muslim should not hurt another Muslim with his hand or tongue.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Weinman: experiment in Albuquerque – Muslim intra-faith dialogue – Muslims are learning about neighbors, and other local Muslims for the first time.

Mavani: Should not limit our efforts in the hadith only. Our efforts should be broader. But, the leadership from the Islamic scholars/preachers should not be minimized. Muslims accept what they hear from the “leader”/ “preacher” without critical questioning. The kind of compartmentalization that places one in the Dar al-Harb or Dar al-Islam is dangerous. Being a Muslim is an ongoing commitment in our ethics and mutual respect to humanity.

Barzegar: “tolerating the intolerant” – we must push humanistic values of loving something so much that it leads to hate for the antagonists. American context: for the first time – Muslims are living in urban environments with Muslims from all over the world. If we do not like the other Muslim, we simply separate. America gives us this space. Intra-Muslim dialogue must be goal oriented so that differences can be left aside.

### **Panel 3: Islamic Approaches to Mediation and Conflict Resolution**

**Presenter 1: ‘Abd al-Hayy Weinman: “Constructive Conflict Resolution from a Muslim Perspective: An Integration of Universal and Local Perspectives in the Muslim World”**

Muslims are usually invited to interfaith dialogues as the token “Muslim word” rather than a true reflection of dialogue. We must notice the different perspectives in conflict resolution – cultural definitions of conflict resolution.

“Limization” – when cultures meet; *Unity and Variety in the Muslim Civilization*, Grunenbaum – Islam as three principles: 1) the goal of life in Islam is the other-worldly (*akhira*), 2) individual is continually responsible for salvation throughout one’s life, 3) unified political organization of the ummah is the concern of the all Muslims.

**Presenter 2: Muhammad Shafiq: “Problem and Prospects in Interfaith and Intra-faith Dialogue”**

It is difficult to create a good intra-Muslim dialogue because many Muslims are not familiar with “dialogue.” It is either: “Are you with us or not?” This patterns the current American political system. A centuries-old Muslim culture has contributed to this mentality and it is an obstacle.

“Political culture” – this has been seen as monolithic – that one cannot speak out against the political system or the person will be jailed, silenced, etc. Political freedom of thought is essential for dialogue.

“Theological discourse” – This Islamic part of the culture has much goodness. In most of the universities, theology is not even taught as a subject.

“Social dynamics” – The role of women in Islam is becoming highly controversial. Also, education in mosques is minimal. American Muslims are highly afraid of “kafir” and “haram.” Wearing a beard gives you more respect among American Muslims, whereas wearing a suit decreases the respect.

Need to go back to Western/modern history and find where we need to reform our attitudes in the political, religious, and/or social worlds.

Interfaith dialogue is easier than intra-faith dialogue. Shia and Sunni dialogue is still a dream. Interfaith dialogue does not have many obstacles, especially in America. 70-80% of Muslims in America favor dialogue with Christians and Jews.

**Presenter 3: Mohamed H. Mukhtar: “Jama’ah Institution and Conflict Resolution”**

Mukhtar from Somalia –

There are several ayahs in the Qur’an speaking about peace – Salam is one of the names of God.

African conflict resolution: Conflicts are inevitable: Proverb: “Even though the tongue and teeth are close together, and work together, the teeth often bites the tongue.” African Islam uses the “Jama’ah Institution” to resolve conflicts. Their major concern as an institution is to place themselves in conflict areas – between two conflicting clans making a buffer area. They invite people from both tribes into the buffer zone, to create a “new community.” Mosques, schools, etc. are created for them in the buffer area. A common agricultural space is provided for farming and grazing. Although the Jama’ah use local resolution practices (e.g., finding an elder within the community who is charismatic and respecting to act as mediator), they also use the Islamic concepts of peacebuilding.

Arbitration, negotiation, and mediation are significant in Islamic history. But, there is a lack of knowledge about all these things. Important to indigenous approaches to conflict across cultures.

### **Questions and responses:**

**Question 1:** Are the Jama’ah institutions actually working in Somalia and Darfur?

Mukhtar: No, they generally have not worked in these regions. This is because there are so many other influences, especially the foreign influences that keep the mediation and resolution from being local and indigenous.

**Question 2:** Discuss some of the success stories from the Rochester community.

Shafiq: The Imams in Rochester are in general not doing dialogue: 1) the ones who do *salat* (i.e., come to daily worship) are mostly opposed to dialogue – in thinking that the process is trying to create one religion. 2) The Christian and Jewish clergy and leaders are well-educated and able to discuss deeper issues.

But, the success dialogues happens when the participants are not trying to merge faiths, but fairly, clearly, and honestly trying to delineate viewpoints, commonalities, and differences. Muslims will soon have their guidelines for dialogue, like the Catholics and WCC have.

Modern crisis of Islam: how the intersection of Islam and culture come together. This is crucial for Muslims to consider and figure out. Cf. Olivier Roy’s book on *Globalization and Islam*. Culture-free Islam does not exist, says the hard-line salafis. The “culture imperative” for American Muslims is for the future of peace and coming generations of Muslims in the United States. For example, cannot Muslims follow the American Thanksgiving in dedication to God? The Salafis say this is haram because there are only two Islamic festivals.

## **Panel 4: Peacebuliding, Democracy, and Human Rights in the Islamic Context**

**Presenter 1: Sana Saeed: “Muslim Women as Leaders of Peace”**

Thesis Purpose: for Muslim women to have a center point in their participation and leading of dialogue in Islamic world.

Review of Fatima Merissi's article and Amina Waddud's book: discusses the various women in the Qur'an and hadith (i.e., 'Aisha) and the women empowerment implicated in the narratives. Mina Sharifi-Funk's article on women and spirituality in the Sufi tradition. There is also discussion of "Tawhid"- human worth in peacemaking.

Meena Sharify-Funk: the "sola" process that diplomatically resolves conflict. Women are used for mediation of anger, even though their value is undocumented and under-evaluated.

Aisha, the Prophet's third wife, influenced Islam centrally. She produced 15% of the shia and several hundred Hadiths. She was also an effective politician contributing to Islamic law. The Queen of Sheba is another example. The Koran encourages the use of women as leaders. Creation of women in Koran also is much more equitable than Jewish or Christian. It does not state which sex is created first. Women have taken peacemaking roles, especially in the sulha process. Oppression of women in Islam is the result of paternalist cultures, not Islam.

**Presenter 2: Afra Jalabi: "A Nonviolent Reading of Early Islamic History: The Civil and Pacifist Strategies of the Meccan Phase"**

**Abstract:**

Violence is the most repeated charge against Islam. This charge has become a historical institution with the recent Danish cartoons as its latest manifestation. Muhammad has been always depicted as a violent Prophet who founded Islam by violence.

In my paper, I will directly ask this question: Was Islam founded violently?

My paper will answer this by relying on the original sources of early Islamic history.

Muhammad's prophetic career lasted for 23 years. The first 13 years were in Mecca and marked by a radically pacifist approach until he established Medina, which could be described as the first city state of ancient Arabia. Most historians and scholars of Islam consider this peaceful approach a pragmatic tactic to avoid a clash with the Meccan elites who had been bent on destroying the new creed.

However, in my paper, I will argue and demonstrate that the Meccan peaceful phase was based on a moral principle in which nonviolence and social activism constituted the early paradigm of Islam. The paper will show how peacefully Muhammad arrived to power and founded Medina.

The paper will realign the early Sira (Prophetic biography) to some of the early Quranic revelations to establish the moral and ethical ambiance of this phase. The early Quranic

revelations, given their focus on narratives of other prophetic traditions, will provide a concrete model of the nonviolent paradigm of resistance and reform which guided and inspired Muhammad's strategy in Mecca. The stories of the early struggles will also provide case studies of the tactics and tools utilized by early Muslims who refused to comply to Meccan persecution while declining any engagement of violence even in cases of self defense.

## **Presentation**

Current modern debate: 1) whether Islam is pathologically violent, or 2) whether Islam is slightly violent! Jalabi wishes to persuade that Islam is nonviolent. There is a rich nonviolent tradition in Islam (e.g., Cain and Abel story in the Qur'an) – how come this has not been recorded in the collective Muslim consciousness?

Founding years of Islam: first 13 years in Mecca (2/3 of the Qur'an) was marked by a nonviolent and pacifist strategy – an egalitarian project. During the Medina phase (10 years), Muhammad engaged in political warfare, and as the empire expanded it became more violent. Premise: In the development of Islam, there was a void in articulating a theology of resistance as the Meccan phase records. Apparently, Muslims did not see the Meccan phase as political model, and did not align the political actions of Muhammad to the Qur'anic revelations.

The early Muslim converts were subject to a great deal of torture and economic sanction in Mecca. The strategy of nonviolence then was a principled ethical strategy. 2/3rds of the Koran were revealed during this Meccan phase, focused on this nonviolent phase. Later on this was not recognized as important, politically, as the second phase. Jihad was part of the first phase -- not violence, but 'to exert energy'. "Kital" is fighting, or warfare. In the Meccan phase, shaheed, comes from 'to witness' and is about speaking truth to power, not martyr. Quranic roots do not support current misunderstandings. She also speaks about Rosa Parks who can link with the first Islamic nonviolent female. The example of Sumeiyya and Rosa Parks (both nonviolent black African women) connect two continents, traditions, and contexts that will help us in forming a Muslim identity for America.

## **Presenter 3: Nader Hashemi: “ Hamas’ Smashing 2006 Electoral Victory: New Opportunities for Peace and Justice in the Middle East”**

### **Abstract:**

Hamas' electoral victory in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary election was described as a major setback for peace in the Middle East. Three reasons for this perception were advanced: 1) Hamas is a terrorist organization with a long history of violence against Israeli civilians; 2) Hamas has refused to recognize the state of Israel and 3) Hamas has steadfastly opposed the Oslo peace process. For all of these reasons, Hamas' electoral achievement is viewed in ominous terms as a setback for peace in the Middle East at best or a global disaster at worst. This paper breaks with this widely held

view to argue that Hamas' election triumph carries the latent potential of both enhancing a just and lasting settlement between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as contributing to the democratization and liberalization of the Arab-Islamic world. Three separate but interrelated arguments that support this thesis will be advanced.

First, judged in terms of democracy, the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections were arguably the freest and fairest elections ever held in the Arab world. The transparency of the electoral process, the nonviolent nature of the political exercise and the peaceful transference of power from Fatah to Hamas bode well for the long term political development of Palestinian society.

Secondly, the inclusion of religious parties in free and fair national elections was a historic first for Palestinian and Arab politics. This trend carries the possibility of moderating the behavior of religious parties and reconciling their political theologies with the requirements of secular democratic politics. If history is any judge, there are historical parallels that are worth noting between the positive contributions made by Christian Democratic Parties in Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and Muslim political parties in early 21st century with respect to the democratization of their societies. In the case of the former, Catholic parties in Europe, like Hamas today, first entered electoral politics with a decidedly illiberal, authoritarian and nonsecular agenda. Yet they underwent a political metamorphosis as a direct result of participating and contesting democratic elections. Are the two cases comparable? Will Hamas undergo a similar political transformation? If so, what changes will Hamas have to undergo to make a lasting contribution to the liberalization and democratization of Palestinian society? This paper seeks to answer these pressing questions.

Finally, it will be argued that Hamas' electoral victory has enhanced the prospects of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. If Israel can reach a political settlement with a Hamas-led government within the framework of international law, this will contribute to Israel's gradual acceptance in the region as a legitimate state. Because of the credibility Hamas possesses in the Arab-Islamic world as a credible national liberation organization, any peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians that is endorsed by Hamas, possesses the potential of enhancing Israel's acceptance and integration into the Middle East, at the grass roots level of society (not the elite level of the state) where Israel is viewed as an illegitimate colonial settler state by most Arabs/Muslims.

In short, this paper seeks to break with the dominant paradigm that has interpreted Hamas' 2006 electoral victory as an unequivocal setback to the cause for peace and justice in the Middle East. When judged in terms of the variables of democratization, diplomacy, and the peace process, the rise to power of Hamas can be interpreted as a new opportunity to enhance the cause of peace and justice both within Palestinian and Arab societies and between Israelis, Palestinians and the larger Arab-Islamic world.

### **Presentation:**

1) 2006 elections was a watershed event in advancing Palestinian democracy.

- 2) The coming to power of an Islamist group bodes well for the long-term effects of democratization in the region.
- 3) Hamas victory has potential in making a sustainable peace between Israel and the larger Islamic world.

Positive development: the Hamas election was the best ever democratic election that has happened in the Arab world. The election had a large amount of female candidates (18 women candidates) – voting was widespread – electoral collage system functioned properly. Palestinians voted in a way that could not have been bought – this shows a high level of maturity among the electorate.

Role of religious/political participation: positive thing in trying to reconcile how religion and politics go together. Hamas, an outright religiously charged party, won the political election. Parties like this are often marginal to the main infrastructure of a political organization.

If a peace agreement can be drawn between Hamas and Israel, this agreement would disseminate throughout the Islamic world and influence the reconciliation between Israel and the Muslim world.

These positive contributions that may emerge must be bracketed and qualified by the developing political context in which Hamas took place – namely, that of occupation. The situation is very instable – and stability is needed for peace. So, have cautious optimism in the positive impact of Hamas on the Muslim world.

The UNDP has a Gender Empowerment Measure. The Arab world ranks very low, only sub-Saharan Africa is worse. In the Palestinian election, there was significant female involvement and leaders elected.

Participation of Hamas is good for the long-term because the idea of a religious political party to take part and take power is encouraging. To have their ideas and policies tested. It is a big 'if' ... if there can be a two-state solution that results from these elections that can contribute to a just and lasting peace in the region. Especially since Israel has such a great lack of credibility in the Arab world, especially grassroots. Peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt are seen as treaties with dictatorships, not with the people of Jordan and Egypt. If Hamas could conclude a peace treaty, it couldn't be argued that such a treaty would be illegitimate.

For an extreme example, Iran ... at the start of Oslo negotiations, a debate in Iran began since Arafat was seen as legitimate...the one wing in Iran argued they couldn't be 'more Catholic than the Pope'. There is thus a great potential with Hamas in this regard.

The argument that Hamas is driven by 'the word of God' has little credibility among social scientists. Religious views are always influenced by political and historical circumstances. E.g., Christianity supported slavery, Crusades, etc.

In Hamas, over time there has been a steady accommodation to Israel's existence. Nonetheless, all of this must be bracketed by the context of Hamas's victory: occupation of the West Bank. At best such a situation is unstable. Consolidation of democracy is always difficult, made more so by the threat of war breaking out at any time.

### **Questions and Responses:**

**Question 1:** In war-torn contexts, what happens to the right of self-defense that can be justified by an Islamic tradition? If we say the core of Islam is nonviolence, what do we tell the persecuted and oppressed in Iraq?

#### **Response:**

Jalabi: Islam is a religion of pacifism and struggle. But, we have to know when and where and under what conditions. There is a profound need from an Islamic perspective for a new ethical rereading of the Islamic sources. No self-defense does not signify passivity. Nonviolence refers to the act of not acting violently when provoked. Current Muslims think of Martin Luther King and Gandhi as foreign concepts of nonviolence – this is not right. Islam has a tradition from Muhammad himself of nonviolence, justice, and peacemaking.

**Question 2:** How is Hamas dealing with the Palestinian Christian population? Many Palestinian Christians voted for Hamas.

#### **Response:**

Hashemi: there is clearly internal debate within Hamas about how to deal with Israel. Hamas should recognize Israel, but also Israel should recognize Hamas' legitimacy! Three times as many Palestinian civilians have been killed than Israeli civilians. The Palestinians should renounce violence – but the same claims should be put to Israel. The Palestinians are still in a pre-state existence, and thus there is no stability to make any clear headway with the Palestinian Christians. All the Palestinian Christians I talked with were favorable to Hamas. The biggest issues were the Israeli occupation, and then internal issues.

Abu-Nimer: Nonviolence emphasizes resistance, not pacifism. Imam Shirazi example in Iran.

Saeed: women empowerment would have to arise from the Imam's leadership in recognizing the legitimacy of women's higher roles in Islam. Women's leadership in peacemaking is happening at the grassroots level.

Jalabi: when violent resistance happens, women are automatically taken out of the picture. Resistance is for muscle-armed men, whereas nonviolent resistance includes larger segments of society. The kids throwing rocks at tanks in the first intifada (although technically violent) really changed the resistance image. Nonviolence has the

idea of submission in many groups – but nonviolence resistance is about disobeying. Walter Wink's third way for the Christian is also preached in the Fatihah and throughout the Qur'an – not the lost ones, or the wicked ones, but the middle way which is God's way. The antidote to tyranny is disobedience.

**Question 3:** How does Hamas deal with the religious other? In particular with Palestinian Christians...as an indicator of their future actions.

### **Response**

I cannot agree with the view of Hamas. It refuses to renounce destruction of Israel's existence and its use of violence.

Without a stable economy -- and withdrawal of aid -- liberalism can't exist without full stomachs.

### **Response**

Mohammed Abu-Nimer: Hamas election may be useful because both Israel and Palestine are both the 'opponents'. If an agreement is reached, it will stick. We can't ask Hamas to be super-nonviolent without asking Israel also to be nonviolent. Nonviolence is not about pacifism but resistance. The Meccan phase was a period of resistance. We must be careful not to couch nonviolence as surrender. In Iraq, there is more loss due to internal violence.

### **Comments:**

About teaching nonviolence in Palestine or Iraq. In 1988 I was part of nonviolence in the first Intifada. But the founders of Hamas said it was too late. So to promote nonviolence in Fallujah or Jenin, it might be said to be too late.

Reply about Hamas:

There is clearly an internal debate within Hamas towards the existence of Israel. Israel must also recognize Palestinian right to exist. It has to be reciprocal. The question of violence is the same thing. To dictate this ignores the certifiable war criminal Ariel Sharon, as well as the terrorism of Israel in 1948 that expelled 3/4 of Arabs.

Reply from Afra Jalabi:

When you have violent resistance, you remove women from the struggle. Nonviolent resistance has larger segments of the society.

Little kids throwing stones at tanks -- though minor violence -- helped diminish the view, in the first intifada, as Palestinians blowing up planes and killing Olympic athletes (at that point).

Muslims pray five times a day for 'the third way' of nonviolence. Koran continually creates three groups: oppressors, the lost ones who fight violently and the third group of prophets who find the third way.

The surha: "Humanity has within it tyranny. Disobey it!" Islam has in it the policy of disobedient. The Koran is always about justice. People always have that right. People in Iraq need to be empowered to disobey. They were submitting to Saddam; they are resisting the Americans. They should have always disobeyed injustice.

### **Panel 5: Islamic Approaches for Interfaith Dialogue**

#### **Presenter 1: Imam Ibrahim Kazerooni:**

Understanding of the supposed “universals” change according to social location – interfaith and civil society change their meaning according to the experiential factor as well. Civil society: Linking individuals with the center of power, government. From an Islamic point of view, civil society includes: 1) belief in human dignity, 2) pluralism in thought, views, understandings, etc., 3) belief in communal ethical values, 4) tolerance and respect.

Dialogue is a more general notion that seeks interaction between different beliefs. The essence of this dialogue is to inform the community at large that the notion of ‘us and them’ has to be removed. It is not the winning of one community against the loosing of another – we all stand together or fall together. We must discuss this in dialogue.

How do we express to the community that we do not live in a cocoon inside the American community? Muslim community is the minority in the US. Dialogue and interfaith has an added urgency because of the minority status. This is the only platform to discuss who and what we are.

Is there another alternative? The media is not prepared to give another platform other than interfaith dialogue. How can we reform the community from confrontation to cooperation with the US context? Interfaith and dialogue becomes the only battle. Interfaith goes through a number of different stages. 1) Establishing a platform, 2) Understanding and convergence on related/common social issues, 3) co-existence and cooperation. The idea is not to convert the other; it is only a platform to express yourself. Academic discussion in dialogue then progresses to sharing meals.

#### **Presenter 2: Rosalyn King & Zainab Alwani (and students): “New World Quest: A Game to Promote Global Understanding and Build a World Community: Assessment of a Semester Pilot in the Community College Classroom”**

##### **Abstract:**

This game, “**New WorldQuest**” is a problem-solving simulation and action game. It is designed to promote communication and global understanding between diverse student

populations in the college classroom. The game is designed to create a new paradigm that shapes thinking and behavior to teach individuals about the importance of communication and cooperation, and how to build cooperative structures, moving across difference in resolving conflicts, and developing strategies for the betterment of the nation and world.

This presentation will present an overview of the game and the impact of games. Participants will be asked to play the game to gain insights into the practical and educational utility of the game.

Participants will critique the value and worth of the game and make comments on the potential value of the game. In addition, participants will address the particular skills that can be gained as a result of participating in the game from both a teaching and learning perspective.

Participants will comment on the skills acquired relative to thinking, writing, strategic planning, group interaction, team leadership, collaboration, cooperation, cultural understanding, subject matter content and understanding of national and global issues.

The value and use of such games as an instructional tool that provides learning opportunities and skills development; while also developing global understanding and building cooperative structures and the learning of conflict resolution, will be highlighted.

## **Presentation**

Exercise game description: developed in 2004 as a possible way of getting students to have more dialogue about cultural diversity. Designed to shape behaviors, and move the student across differences. The premise of the game rests on the notion resolving conflicts by dialogue rather than war. Designed to teach and promote global awareness.

Action: group is gathered and told to create a utopian society, and write it down.  
Object of the game: as students, they want to gain a better understanding of how the world works. Different coalitions (e.g., social system, health care) form and pose interests to the “government.” Project that continued throughout the semester as a main project. Meetings weekly and every other day throughout the semester. The entire project was voluntary.

Guidelines are set out from the beginning: everyone must be involved – diversity is to be valued and woven into the final outcome – no competition within the process – everyone must share and add to the utopian society. Even though the project is better over a longer period of time, they ran this project in a class of 56 over 2.5 hours with positive results. As a short exercise with a diverse group of people, the purpose would be to ignite the thinking and processes that contribute to existing in diverse contexts – working with interests and positions in a hypothetical way. [Good about creating processes for engagement in interfaith groups.]

### **Presenter 3:**

**Junaid Ahmad** (Junaid S. Ahmad is a law student at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA. He is on the Executive Board of the Domestic Violence Resource Project. He is an editor of the Richmond Independent Media Center and works with the National Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice. He has been a longtime activist on issues related to corporate-led globalization, HIV/AIDS and gender justice, militarism and war, and Palestine, working in organizations such as Amnesty International and Al-Awda (the Palestine Right of Return Committee). In Pakistan, he has worked with groups such as Aurat Foundation (a women's empowerment NGO), Educate Pakistan, and the Peoples Rights Movement, the latter being at the forefront of issues related to social and economic justice in Pakistan. He continues to maintain an association with Positive Muslims, the Cape Town-based organization working on issues related to Muslims, HIV/AIDS, and gender justice, a group with which he worked while he was in South Africa in 2004. Most recently, he, along with other Muslims, has formed the Abu Dharr Collective which is committed to the ideal of social justice and to articulating an Islamic theology of liberation.)

### **“Transforming Inter-Faith Dialogue to Inter-Religious Solidarity for Justice”**

#### **Abstract:**

Inter-faith dialogue is essentially about the open-ended sharing of religious perspectives in the belief that such sharing will contribute a climate for peaceful coexistence among various religious traditions. The vast majority of those engaged in the organization of such dialogue initiatives come from the modernist-liberal streams within those traditions although attempts are very often made to involve those from the more traditional or orthodox streams in such dialogue. Such dialogue initiatives range from high-powered international conferences along the lines of the Chicago Parliament of World Religions attended by the Dalai Lama and the World Assembly of WCRP, held every five years and attended by among others, Pope John Paul II. Occasionally though these groups may also engage in small group discussions in countries such as India, New Zealand, Indonesia and the United States on the various religious responses to the multifarious challenges facing humankind. In a number of countries these initiatives are accompanied by small but concrete inter-faith projects such as tree-planting in India and campaigns against the arms industry in Germany. The last mentioned example is, however a rather isolated one for those who are committed to political action are in rather short supply in the inter-faith movement. Furthermore, where international organizations put a large premium on securing the support or participation of the grandees of formal religious institutions then this is often done at the cost of eschewing controversial grassroots action which could be construed as ‘politically insensitive’. More often than not, there is simply no space on the agendas of these organizations for concrete action which may be directed at the root cause of a problem rather than its manifestation (e.g., addressing the economic exploitation of workers rather than organizing soup kitchens for the hungry).

Religious progressives tend to avoid the time consuming butterfly dances of inter-religious politeness for more concrete action for justice and peace. My experience in working with the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice though has shown that this schism between liberative praxis and inter-faith dialogue is not unavoidable. I believe that this experience, if taken further, can result in the inter-faith movement being transformed from a cozy collection of likeminded and polite individuals to a vibrant movement which transforms its own adherents and others as a part of the struggle to create a just and peaceful world. For this transformation to take place, I argue that we need to move beyond meetings to encounters, from dialogue to solidarity, from peace rhetoric to social analysis and from disempowering the powerful to empowering the weak and vulnerable.

### **Presentation:**

Dialogue is usually performed by the ‘liberal’ strands in different religions, with an attempt to include all the conservatives. Most of these dialogues deal with superficial subjects about understanding the other, politeness, etc.

- 1) Moving beyond meetings to encounters: Need to challenge each other for greater authenticity.
- 2) Moving from dialogue to solidarity: no communal dialogue happens in a vacuum. To recognize the structural injustices of political systems which disempower the minority communities.
- 3) Moving beyond the peace rhetoric to concrete social analysis: “No justice, no peace.” This calls upon people of faith to disturb the waters of “peace” under which lie the demons of injustice. Everyone wants peace – but what kind of peace do we want? Need to deconstruct the dominant discourses around ‘peace.’

### **Questions and responses:**

**Question 1:** The game is to be commended. But, individuals come to the game, which does not account for the community dynamics from home country.

#### **Response:**

King: Pilot testing this game with a variety of people – but important to represent the individual psyche (said as a psychologist).

**Question 2:** what is the interest of the different parties when they come into dialogue? What brings us to be in the conversation of dialogue – that we need to receive something?

#### **Response:**

Ahmad: religion can be a tool of oppression and liberation. Interests should be spelled out.

Kazerooni: It is clear that interfaith goes through a number of phases. Everyone that participates has to consider the reasons for dialogical deliberation. Once trust is established, you can critically approach one another with other issues. Ultimately, we need to stand together against all injustices in the world.

**Question 3:** How do we dialogue with those who are anti-religious/atheist?

**Response:**

Ahmad: Atheists involved in the progressive movement have good reason to be skeptical to organized religion. Taken positions on the social issues and being active is the best way to gain credibility with the anti-religious.

Students of the game: The game went off the separation of church and state as the Constitution reads. Individuals will believe as they wish without interference of the government.

**Response**

All the presentations discussed the going out 1) sharing meal to action, 2) social activism, 3) education and working within the larger society. We must avoid idealizing religions and only judge religions based on what they are doing – Islam is what Muslims are doing, and Catholicism is what Catholics are doing. This is how to stay away from judging other religions.

### **Panel 6: Successes, Lessons Learned, and Challenges Facing Muslims and Muslim Organizations Working for Peace and Justice**

**Presenter 1: Samina Faheem Sundas: “American Muslim Voice: Justice for All”**

**Abstract:**

AMV has actively participated and hosted multiple noteworthy events, from which community members benefited. The organization seeks every opportunity for cultural barriers to be broken, where dialogue between two or more parties sparks an exchange of ideas.

Another very successful event was the Global Exchange Women's Activism Camp, where workshops were held by AMV to enlighten individuals on building solidarity with Muslim and Arab women, and debunking the myth about the role of women in the Muslim world.

AMV also participated in and hosted a wide variety of interfaith and inter community dialogues, with emphasis on youth groups and participation by families as opposed to just individuals.

AMV hosted inaugural open house events this past year to set a precedent. As visualized, the events brought people together, building friendships across racial, cultural, and religious gaps. This very simple essence is the secret to AMV's success.

Impacts:

AMV impacts many people's lives daily, be it from directly fighting for one person's civil rights to educating the community about current political policies or the misrepresentation of Islam. AMV affects people's lives through these and other measures of activism but perhaps more profoundly through the friendships within communities that develop as a result of this activism. Many have taken notice as AMV forged alliances with a wide variety of groups nationwide and was recently nominated for the Agape Foundation Rising Peacemaker award in 2005.

Assets:

AMV's greatest assets to date are the relationships the organization has formed and the bonds that have already begun to strengthen ties between several communities. AMV believes that bridging the gap between communities has been paramount to all other successes the organization has achieved. Policies can be written, battles can be fought and in time, justice may be rewarded with new, unprecedented victories. However, the organization sees greater promise of and potential for a country that truly stands united for all when the bonds between all communities prove to be unshakeable. Without those firm, deep-seated bonds, AMV believes there can be no solidarity. Therefore, in the pursuit of that ideal, AMV's greatest asset is the formation of relationships that will ultimately be an asset for humanity.

We look forward to sharing our successes and the challenges we continue to face with others at the upcoming Annual Conference of Muslim Peacebuilding, Justice, & Interfaith Dialogue. We will also submit a complete paper at the conference.

**Presentation:**

Story: A Muslim man saved a little girl from an angry dog one day. A reporter saw the event and congratulated the man for saving the little girl from the animal. Afterwards the reporter learned that he was a Muslim, and the headlines the next day ran, "A Muslim terrorist attacks a dog." The angry dog became the victim in a flash.

It's time to claim America as our home and sincerely get involved. We need to close the door where we came from – not to ignore our roots but to turn to America as our new home.

American Muslim Voice – 1983 – nonviolent, interracial, immigrant organization that creates justice and works for peace.

The organization "Justice and Accountability" has been created to counter police brutality.

Muslims need to start living Islam, and stop strategizing. Need to stand for justice.

Never worry about the end results before starting a project.

Asking Muslim communities to get involved in local communities and invest themselves by having open houses, picnics, etc.

Using “each one, teach one” as a method of teaching Islam to Americans who are not aware of the religion and Muslim neighbors.

Challenges:

Lack of support of women.

Lack of funds.

Lack of opportunities to inform the Muslim ummah.

**Presenter 2: Umina Khan: Islamic Approaches to Youth Interfaith Service Work**

**Abstract:**

Conference Themes Addressed:

- Islamic Approaches to Peace and Interfaith Dialogue
- Successes, Lessons Learned, and Challenges facing Muslims and Muslim Organizations Working for Peace and Justice

Workshop Format: Short presentation (20-30 min) and training workshop (30-60 min)

Workshop Participants May Expect to Gain:

- A deeper knowledge of the unique Islamic approaches to interfaith youth service work
- The benefits for Muslim communities who engage their youth in interfaith youth service work
- An appreciation of the methodology used by the Interfaith Youth Core in conducting interfaith youth service work
- Hands-on practical skills on how to organize and run effective interfaith youth service projects

Workshop Description:

Presentation: The Muslim community in the United States is currently facing the challenge of articulating an American Muslim identity which showcases the Islamic imperative to civic and social engagement. Muslim youth are at the center of this struggle, and in light of current world events, Muslim youth in America are in a unique position to demonstrate the values of Islam through interfaith dialogue and service work. It is necessary to mobilize the entire Islamic community to support the future of young Muslims with such dynamic leadership opportunities.

Training workshop: Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) programmatic staff will give a comprehensive overview of planning, running, and evaluating effective interfaith youth service projects. Specific topics will include an explication of the key aspects of IFYC's methodology, facilitation of effective service-focused interfaith dialogue; getting Muslim and other faith communities involved; empowering youth as leaders; logistical challenges in interfaith work, and evaluating the project.

Organization Description: The Interfaith Youth Core is a Chicago-based international grassroots organization, founded in June of 1998 by a group of religiously diverse young people from around the world who found a common interest in integrating faith, diversity, and social action. We trust that the civic fabric of our city, our nation, and our world will be greatly strengthened if every community engages its religious diversity in working toward better understanding and cooperative service.

**Presentation:**

Muslim youth organization in Chicago – works with interfaith and couples with service community projects. Provides a safe place for youth to ask questions of faith, religions, and religious practices, etc.

Doing good works for the community is the drive for interfaith.

[Recommended Video: “Three Faiths, One God” – great video]

**Final Comments**

**Overall reflections/impressions/suggestions:**

Recommendation for ISNA: when will the ISNA organization bring the Shia community into its midst? This would be helpful. [Safi: two of the early presidents of ISNA were Shia – yet there is no sectarian approach to this organization. We welcome all Shia members. Let us use our new place in the US to blend the Shia and Sunni groups.]

Need to employ other anthropologists and sociologists for further research and keeping the network moving forward.

Need to develop methods of access to this information and network.

This network should not be nationalistic!

Continue to be critical and reflective (academically and spiritually) in our work.

Need to reach the entire community – scholars, leaders, as well as ‘laity.’ [Safi: noted the Fuller-Salam project that will hold interfaith conflict resolution talks in five US cities.]

**Suggestions for the continuing Peace Network:**

1. Salam Institute (Ayse): working within the Muslim community for two years, connecting Muslim peacemakers around the world. Building a peacemaking network within the Muslim world.
2. Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue (Shafiq): Two years old – academic approach is difficult to instill within the community. Purpose is to teach youth and others about interfaith and provide a place for practicing.
3. Muslim Peace Fellowship (Rabia Terri Harris): apart of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Working to raise awareness about the wonderful resources Muslims have for making a world of peace.
4. Kroc Institute of Notre Dame (Rashied Omar): really wants practicing Muslims to be apart of the institute’s peace studies.
5. Free Muslim Association: new office in Washington DC; featured a new book written in Arabic on “Islam and Peace,” written after the methods and teaching of Iraqi Imam Shirazi.

## **Highlights**

### First day Highlights:

- Relationship between Islam and culture
- Need for intra-faith between Sunni and Shia
- Need to understand the diversity of Islam internally
- Recover Islamic nonviolence from early tradition.
- Moving more to the shura model of community – Imams have too much power and too little learning/understanding of peacemaking from qur’anic principles.
- Need to bring Islamic women’s voices in intra-faith dialogue.
- Need to identify the main leaders of Muslim communities (Sunni and Shia) for training and dissemination.
- Learning how to “tolerate the intolerant.”

### Second day Highlights:

- Dialogue is essential for the US Muslim community, on account of its minority status.
- Practical aspects of peacemaking.
- Not only the intra-faith, but interfaith is important.
- Islam tradition has rich sources for conflict resolution and nonviolence.
- Importance of the integration within the larger American community.
- The presentations began inside the community and ended reaching out (intra to inter).
- Encourage and support each other.
- Start the peacebuilding network as an institution.

