

## Peace, Jihad & Conflict Resolution

The international seminar on Peace, Jihad & Conflict Resolution, jointly organized by AMSS, IIIT, and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), was hosted by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU), Georgetown University on November 2-3, 2002.

The seminar's goal was to bring a deeper understanding of the place and position of religion in general, and Islam in particular, toward the dynamic concepts of peace, jihad, political violence, and military conflict. The seminar got off to a lively start on Saturday morning with introductions presented by Dr. Jamal Barzinji (vice president, IIIT). Welcoming remarks were made by Dr. Ahmad S. Weld Abah (chairman, ISESCO Executive Council), Dr. Louay Safi (AMSS president), and Dr. John Esposito (CMCU director). The opening session was followed by an inspiring speech by Dr. Taha Jaber al-Alwani (president, Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences [GSISS]), on "Concepts between Islamic and Western Worldviews: Jihad as an Example."

Al-Alwani analyzed the meaning of peace, jihad, and conflict resolution from an Islamic jurisprudential perspective by examining how these concepts are governed by the values of *tawhid* (unity of God), *tazkiah* (purification of humanity), and *'imran* (establishing a values-based civilization). He discussed how practicing and establishing peace is obligatory for all people, because Islam considers humanity to be one family. Since most of Islam's jurisprudential rules are based on peace, according to al-Alwani, "both peace and jihad have different levels, and each one should be fulfilled by individuals, family, and society." He characterized jihad as: "There is no other concept that will match the meaning of peace in Islam except jihad," and argued that "jihad is based on different levels: to struggle is the major meaning of jihad, in order to elevate oneself to a higher level, they must strive." The concept of conflict resolution implies that many stages should be applied and negotiated before resorting to war.

Thirty-two papers were presented in eight consecutive panels during the 2-day seminar. The panelists approached the issues from theoretical perspectives and sociopolitical experiences in order to overcome stereotypical discussions and superficial impressions. On the first day, the following sub-themes were analyzed in four panels: "Jihad, War and Peace in the Islamic Authoritative Texts," "Positive Attitude toward the 'Other'," "Religion: A Tool for Conflict Resolution," and "Religious and Cultural Roots of War and Peace."

These panels drew attention to the need of developing an authentic methodology that deals objectively with religious texts and history. In the first panel, Dr. Jamal Badawi (St. Mary's University, Canada) offered a new vision in his analysis of how some misunderstood verses and *ahadith* have left a negative impact upon the nature of Muslim and non-Muslim relations. He addressed such questions as: "Does Islam teach hate toward others?"

and “Does Islam allow the killing of unbelievers?” In fact, Dr. Ingrid Mattson (Hartford Seminary, CT) reinforced this point in the second panel: “Positive Attitude toward the ‘Other’.” In her presentation, “Unjust Bias against Jews: A Theme of Early Islamic Literature,” she examined many angles through different examples from the Qur’an and the Prophet’s life and illustrated the significant meaning hidden in the Prophet’s marital relations with his two formerly Jewish wives: Safiyah and Juwayriyah.

In his keynote address at the Saturday evening banquet, John Esposito identified the major challenges American Muslims are facing in America today. He called on Muslims “to accept the challenges and increase their competency level through systematic examinations, research, and by visiting different academic institutions throughout America to overcome stereotypical impressions.” He encouraged Muslim scholars to study and examine the concepts and philosophies of other religions and compare them to Islam, and stated that since “the White House is open for suggestions, Muslims should introduce Islam in a strong voice to the media and the administration.” He urged Muslims “not to rely on someone else to do the work for [them].”

On Sunday, the following subthemes were analyzed in four consecutive panels: “Intercommunal Harmony and Tolerance: Historical Experiences of Muslims,” “Political Violence and the Nature and Causes of Terrorism,” “Political Domination, Imperialism, Colonialism, and Their Roles in Wars and Conflicts,” and “Strategies of Peacemaking: Local, Regional, and International.” Each panel was followed by a question and answer session.

The second day of presentations examined the concepts of jihad, peace, and conflict resolution and their reflection from various sociopolitical perspectives, including the western media experience. For example, in the panel “Political Violence and the Nature and Causes of Terrorism,” Jerald Dirks (Muslim author) used his “American Media: Misrepresentation of Islam and the Ummah’s Failure at Public Relations” to identify the areas of misinterpretation of Islam by western literature and art over the last millennium. He focused on two primary issues: how the American media contributes to the misunderstanding of Islam, and some of the reasons why the American-Muslim community has failed to counteract such methods.

In the panel “Strategies of Peacemaking, Regional and International,” Dr. Robert Crane (Center for Understanding Islam, NJ) examined how to promote peace and conflict resolution in “The International Criminal Court: Toward an Islamic Vision.” He called upon the leadership of Muslim community in America to infuse the universal principles of Islamic thought

(*maqasid al-Shari'ah*) into the emerging global rule of law. He stated: "This is the most effective way to address the concerns of the unilateralists in American policy-making circles."

On Sunday, the luncheon keynote address entitled "European-Muslim Contribution toward Peace," delivered by Lord Nazeer Ahmed (House of Lords, UK), was among the seminar's highlights. Ahmed laid down the foundations of a positive European-Muslim contribution toward peace in the last 2 centuries, especially during World War Two. He outlined the European-Muslims' positive contributions to Europe's socioeconomic, political, and educational conditions, and proudly revealed that "there are many Muslim mayors in the UK, two Muslims ministers in France, and at least one or more in other European countries." While highlighting the significance of having a Muslim voice in decision-making circles, because it helps build the political structure, he wondered why there were no American Muslims in Congress yet.

Lord Ahmed concluded his address by calling upon American Muslims to establish academic centers to improve the quality of their contributions to foreign policy decisions, and to establish media strategies that highlight Islamic concerns. He argued that since "media is a big business that creates fear in people's lives, Muslims must play an active role there."

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Ahmad S. Weld Abah credited the seminar's success to the presentations' academic depth and the panelists' practical analyses of the issues. Dr. Fathi Malkawi, the conference chair, thanked all participants and announced that IIIT plans to publish the conference papers as chapters in three books, because the issues addressed are timely and because Muslims and others need to understand how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

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