

ISLAMIC PEACE MOVEMENTS



**IKV PAX
CHRISTI**



A FIELD RESEARCH IN JORDAN, LEBANON AND SYRIA

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Picture on cover: Gabri Le Cabri

*Whoever killed a human being should be looked upon
as though he had killed all mankind [Qur'an, 5:32]*

*Fight in the cause of God those who fight you...
And slay them wherever ye catch them...
And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression
and there prevail justice and faith in God [Qur'an, 2:190-193]*

We wish to express our gratitude to the following persons, for their time, their insight and their precious help – without them this search would have been impossible: Siad Darwish, Lokman Slim, Inga Schei, Dimitri Avgherinos, Akram Antaki, Father Paolo Dall'Oglio and the IKV Pax Christi team.
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Introduction

Based on the cosmology suggested by the three monotheist religions – all born in the Middle East – the history of mankind starts with murder. Can we be freed from this condition? Are religions a key or an obstacle on our path?

Although this question preoccupies mankind at large on a philosophical level, historically speaking Europe has progressed a long way towards peace. But “Europe is governed by the mind, not by religion”, says Syrian Jawdat Saeid. Can the Middle East, plagued with all three forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence [Galtung],¹ and where religion is highly valued, follow the same developments?

Islam is too often associated in the West with war and violence. The five following factors have been identified as contributing to this situation: a competing aim for universality and conversion, both in Islam and Christianity; a confusion in the Islamic world between spirituality and political context of the times of the Prophet; the colonial legacy and the more recent wars on Islamic countries, which are not conducive to an *aggiornamento*; an ever-growing extreme access to information – which is predominately access to negative information, combined with a lack of knowledge about *the other*.

Islam has been demonised in many countries and by the media, to the extent that very marginal characters like Osama Bin Laden have become more famous than the millions who work daily for peace and dialogue. Historical non-violent Muslim figures like Badshah Khan, or contemporary ones like Jawdat Saeid, remain largely unknown.

“In this region, nobody supports the moderate forces. Western media, and even some Western embassies, meet the extremists but don’t dare to meet the moderates. They thus contribute to the promotion of the extremist forces and not the moderate ones”, says Lebanon based Sayyed Ali Al-Amine.

¹ Johan Galtung has identified three forms of violence in societies: direct violence (killing, maiming), structural violence (repressive economic and political structures such as apartheid, dictatorship) and cultural violence (any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural forms). GALTUNG Johan, *Violence, Peace and Peace Research*, Journal of Peace Research 6 (3), 1969

Further to this lack of interest and understanding at a superficial level, the real question is: do the history and the dogmas of Islam allow for peaceful resolution of differences with others and within the Muslim community? How is this experienced in practice in an Islamic context?

At the request of Pax Christi Netherlands, we have inquired into the topic of Islamic pacifism in three countries: Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

About the organisation

IKV Pax Christi is a civil society organisation working for peace, reconciliation and justice worldwide. It supports local peace efforts in conflict areas, in more than twenty countries spread over four continents. Its aim is to prevent conflict and to build a peaceful, democratic and just society.

In the Middle East, IKV Pax Christi works with civil society groups to increase freedom of expression in Morocco and Jordan, to broaden civil society’s room to manoeuvre in Syria and to prevent torture and improve the treatment of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and for a just and durable peace in Israel and Palestine. In the Netherlands, IKV Pax Christi calls for public and political support for peace negotiations, political transformation and reconciliation; elsewhere, it organises peace dialogues and supports local peace activists in their efforts to resist violence in the heat of conflict.

As an organisation with a Christian background, IKV Pax Christi is interested in the issue of ‘Islamic peace movements’, which it defines as “organisations or individuals that are inspired in their activism for peace and social justice by Islam”. To most people in the Netherlands, Islamic peace movements are unknown, especially since relations between the East and West have become polarised. A different focus and image is needed to overcome this polarisation. The ultimate aim of the research is to explore if cooperation with Islamic peace movements is possible. The first step is to undertake a ‘mapping’ of individuals and organisations in the wider Middle East, starting with Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

The rationale behind this research is that most people in the Middle East and in the Muslim community are believers and will give more credit to a message of peace that emanates from their religious leaders. There are obviously secular sources of nonviolence, sometimes associated to free-masonry; the challenge is to find a theologically-rooted case for nonviolence within mainstream Islam – and the messengers for this case. The importance of a peace message coming from mainstream

religious authorities has been underlined by many of the interviewees.

This research has taken us, in the period November 2008–January 2009, from the suburbs of Beirut to the Syrian desert, and from the Golan Heights to Jordanian royal houses. We have met several personalities, mainly religious leaders, who have explained their vision of peace and nonviolence and how their action is rooted in Islamic values.

Our research was limited, both in time and geographical scope. We will summarise our findings in this report, which we hope will encourage more research in this field.



Methodology

This document reports on two months of field research in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, with the aim of identifying “Islamic peace movements: organisations or individuals that are inspired in their activism for peace and social justice by Islam.”

The study comprised of pre-survey in-depth interviews with various Christian and Muslim key informants and NGOs for background information and contacts, and of questionnaire-based interviews with target persons/agencies.

The questionnaire (see page 34) was developed in collaboration with Karin Austmann from Pax Christi Netherlands and Cassandra Mathie. It was translated into Arabic by Hicham Jadaoun.

The criteria used to select the target persons/agencies specified that they:

- are based in one of the three countries for the survey,
- have a commitment/action for peace and nonviolence,
- ground their action in Islamic values.

For example, Muslims who work for peace but who do not base their work principally on their Muslim identity were excluded from the field of this research. Organisations or movements who group Christians and Muslims (like the Permanent Peace Movement in Lebanon) were also excluded.

Target persons for the interviews were primarily identified through key informants, who also facilitated the first contact. During the limited survey period of November 2008 – January 2009, 12 persons/agencies matching with the set criteria were interviewed. After reviewing the interview notes it was established that the majority of them had a certain level of religious legitimacy and/or an important constituency. Therefore interviewees who promote nonviolence but are simple individuals without a constituency were excluded from the report for the sake of coherence. It stands that there are certainly many more people who meet the criteria than those documented in this report.

Furthermore, there are persons that were identified but with whom we were unable to meet during the limited timeframe of the research. E.g. we were advised to meet Mohammad Chahrour in Syria but during the field visits to Syria, this person was unavailable. Mohammad Chahrour is a Sunni Syrian promoting nonviolence whose actions fall within the scope of this research.

We were also informed about other persons in Syria and Lebanon, but did not have the chance to establish if they fulfil the preset criteria. All interviewees met in Lebanon are Shi’a; however there are probably Sunni Lebanese who actively work for nonviolence based on Islamic values. This remains to be confirmed.

The questionnaire provided the basic structure for the interviews, but some encounters took the form of a conversation. The information gathered was then linked with the appropriate interview questions.

In addition to this report, an internal report with operational recommendations and contact details of interviewees is shared with IKV Pax Christi.

Lastly, this report has been informed by some of the available literature. A selected list is provided on page 33.

About the author:

Cynthia Petrigh is an expert in Middle East issues, with a background in international law and conflict resolution. She has worked with the International Institute for Humanitarian Law (Sanremo, Italy) as refugee law course director. In Lebanon, she opened the Danish Refugee Council mission to work on undocumented Palestinian refugees; more recently, she set up the Centre Nassim for the rehabilitation of victims of torture. Cynthia Petrigh is currently based in London. Contact details: cynthia.petrigh@gmail.com

Main Findings

Based on relevant literature and field interviews the main findings of the report are:

1) There is a peaceful message in Islam, and the majority of the Muslim community longs for peace

Islam is a religion that accommodates diversity; its texts and tradition can present very different and at times contradictory messages. Even within this limited research – in terms of time and focus – our interlocutors offered sometimes very different explanations of the same word, verse or event.

For example, for some the death of Hussein (third Imam) at the battle of Karbala is glorified as symbolising the utmost spirit of sacrifice and *jihad*, whereas for others it represents a sacrifice to avoid bloodshed, guiding the way to nonviolence.

In the Qur'an as well as in the *hadiths* (sayings and actions of the Prophet) one can find calls for the most extreme violence and the most peaceful prose. There is no hierarchy among the different norms created by the religious texts. As a result, the most contradictory concepts and actions can find a theological justification.

There is however agreement on the fact that "*Islam*" comes from "*Istislam*" (surrender) and "*Salam*" (peace). The concept of Islam encompasses the idea of surrendering to God, of a community of submissive men, and of the civilisation formed by these submissive men.

More concretely, grounds for peace and peacework in Islam, as summarised by Bouta, Kadayifci Orellana and Abu-Nimr, are:

- *Salam*. Peace is a central theme in Islam - peace with God, with oneself, with other human beings and with nature;
- *Tawhid*. Unity with God, but also unity with other human beings in one, peaceful community;
- *Rahma and Rahim*. Compassion and mercy are also central themes. They characterise God, but also suggest the path for human beings;

- *Fitra*. The individual is endowed with reason; there is an individual responsibility to live in peace and harmony.²

As expressed by many authors and interviewees, the aim of Islam is to live in peace and social justice.

"Justice is paramount to Islam, as Law is to Jews and Love is to Christians", says Baker Al-Hiyari, from the Jordanian Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Dialogue.

However the concept of social justice can have different interpretations, and e.g. in Islam it does not necessarily encompass the universal, Western-developed, vision of human rights and women's rights.

The history of the first stages of Islam reveals two distinct periods: the period of the development of Muslim spirituality, in the first 13 years, when the Prophet was in Mecca – which was not understood by his contemporaries; and a period of a more down-to-earth message and achievements, like the creation of the State. The latter period, which took place during the *hijra (exile)* in Medina, lies within the framework of the particular historical context of a community of Bedouin tribes in the Arabian Peninsula.

One of the challenges facing Islam is that this historical context is binding to date for many, and that an *aggiornamento* in the Vatican-II style has not been possible.

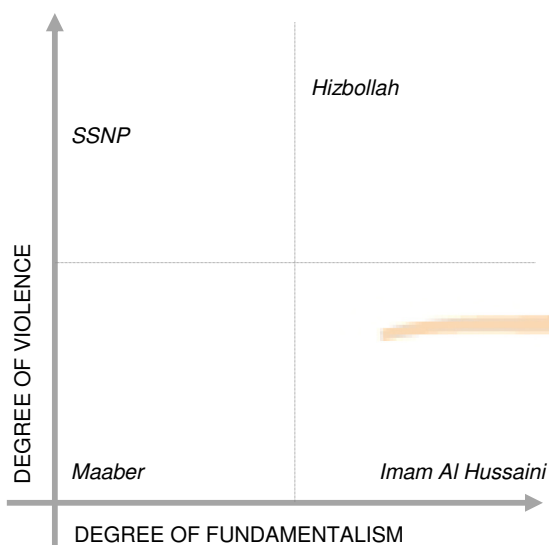
For some Muslim believers of nonviolence, it is important to return to the initial, spiritual period, in order to be released from this historical and political limitation (Akram Antaki, referring to the teaching of Sudanese non-violent Sheikh Muhammad Mahmoud Taha) and pursue the quest for peace, which is a state of "physical, mental, spiritual, and social harmony" [Qur'an, 5:64].

This research also provides evidence that, contrary to a widely held belief in Western societies and Western media, there is no correlation between fundamentalism and recourse to violence. This

² BOUTA Tsjeard, KADAYIFCI-ORELLANA S. Ayse, ABU-NIMR Mohammad, *Faith-based Peace-Building: Mapping of Christian, Muslim and Multi-Faith Actors*, Clingendael – Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, Washington D.C., November 2005, p. 12

misconception is amongst others created by the use of the term “moderates” – which tends to refer to countries/regimes considered as “friendly to the West” (i.e. Saudi Arabia) rather than qualifying as a moderate religious practice or a non-violent approach to conflict resolution.

The diagram below illustrates that one can be a fundamentalist and support violence, like Hizbollah; one can also be a fundamentalist, like Imam Al Husseini, who sponsors veiling ceremonies for young Lebanese girls, but says that “life is beautiful, life is love, life is peace”. One can also be secular, like the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP) political party in Lebanon, who took part in the armed civil unrest of May 2008 against the elected and ruling majority. Others, like Syrian Al-Maaber, are secular and non-violent.



2) There are obstacles to non-violent peacemaking in Islam

These are mainly rooted in the history of Islam and in the post-colonial legacy.

Firstly, Islam was born in a specific historical context where war and violence were omnipresent, including wars of succession. The issue of succession and access to power was not clearly solved by the Prophet, and after his death the different caliphs

have been appointed by various means (consultation among the close followers, assassination or inheritance). To date, Muslims live under structures that are not pacific at all [Slim]. Some argue that the difficulty in accessing and giving up power in Arab countries to date is rooted in this history [Khuri]. Others explain that the conflict between spirituality and political reality in the Middle East, sometimes referred to as the *Arab malaise* [Samir Kassir] finds its roots in a psycho-historical structure of self-justification [Dall'Oglio]. In other words, “The tyrant needs to construct a theory based on which he is himself a victim”.

Secondly, positive characters in Islamic tradition and culture are predominantly fighters. Being a martyr and giving one’s life for God is a commended act – although many authors underline that the “supreme” *jihad* is over oneself.

Still, the role models in Islamic culture are combatants. Even figures recognised for their spirituality were fighters. *Jihad* does not equal holy war but the problem is that, in Islam, the skilled practitioners of *jihad* and the great thinkers were also the good fighters [Dr El Ammar].

What is Jihad?

Jihad and *Jihadist* have become commonly used words, to describe Islamic combatants. In Islam, there are two ways of jihad:

- the lesser jihad, or holy war, which was extensively used during the phase of Islamic Conquest, and presents similarities with the *Just War theory* (defining which authority is qualified to launch jihad as well as the conditions under which they can do so are codified).
- The greater jihad, or efforts towards oneself.

Jihad is not one of the five compulsory precepts for the Muslim.³

The challenge today is to enrol youth in peace and nonviolence by representing peace as a struggle, not as a surrender [Darwish].

³ The five compulsory precepts are: *Shahada* (testament of faith), *Salat* (ritual prayer), *Zakat* (almsgiving), *Ramadhan* (fasting) and *Hajj* (pilgrimage –if one can afford it).

“We have first to dispel the myth that nonviolence is a form of surrender in which the victim waits to be slaughtered and accepts such a fate”, says Abu Nimr, who explains that contemporary thinkers prefer the term “civic jihad” to “*la `unf*” (“nonviolence”, a term broadly used by NGOs), which according to him has a “negative connotation of surrender and passivity in Arabic”.⁴

During this research we became aware that even the use of the word “peace” is not always recommended, as for many it sounds like “Peace with Israel” – capitulating to Israel’s forceful *fait accompli*.

To overcome this flaw, defenders of nonviolence argue that “nonviolence is in fact innocence rehabilitated as the virtue of the strong and the wisdom of the just”. [Muller]

Thirdly, Muslims, especially in the Arab world, hold very strong feelings regarding their perceived oppression, unjust treatment and occupation by foreign powers. In their experience of the West, they still recall vividly traumatic event like the Crusades and the signing of the Sykes-Picot agreement.

Political Islam was born in the early 20th century as a reaction to the political and social changes in the Arab world and the loss of identity experienced through the – at times violent – exchanges with the West, culminating with Ayatollah Khomeyni’s enforcement of *Veliyat e-Fakih* (a theory in Shi’a Islam which holds that Islam gives a *faqih* (Islamic jurist) political guardianship over the people) and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moderate or secular regimes are challenged due to their inability to enforce just relations with the West, to liberate Arab land and to rule with justice.

The long-lasting occupation of Palestine, and recent conflicts, namely the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, are further fuelling the discourse of armed resistance.

In Jawdat Saeid’s mosque, where an educative campaign is taking place alongside prayer, one can see the maps of Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine pinned to the walls.

⁴ ABU NIMR, Mohammad, *Nonviolence in the Islamic Context*, initially published in Al-Hayat (2003/08/24); and reproduced by Fellowship of reconciliation: www.forusa.org/fellowship/sept-oct-04/abu-nimer.html

The occupation of the Palestinian territories is a major obstacle to a discourse of peace in the Arab world. “Peace”, argues Lebanese Paul Salem, “benefits those who have achieved their goals and want to preserve the *status quo*.” This is not the case for the Arabs, who often live under the oppression of tyrannical regimes, or under Western or Western-supported occupation (the US in Iraq, the Israelis in Palestine). “How can I talk about peace when my house is destroyed in front of my eyes and my children killed?” questions the Palestinian.

Furthermore, Western pressure on Islamic rule has had the negative impact of closing the door on revisiting Islam. The wars perceived in the Middle East as opposing the West and Islam (as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine) are not conducive for intellectual reconsideration of past experience [El Ammar]. As a result, some of our key informants associate Hizbollah with “theology of liberation” [Ghanem].

3) There are many Muslim scholars, clerics and individuals who are actively engaged in the promotion of peace and nonviolence

Within the diversity of norms and actions that exist in Islam, some scholars and thinkers have clearly chosen the path of peace and nonviolence. They have found theological justifications for this, and their daily actions and their struggle are the embodiment of nonviolence in a very challenging context.

In the recent past, one of the most prominent such men was Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known as Badshah Khan, or “The Frontier Gandhi”. A companion of Gandhi, Badshah Khan consistently opposed non-violent resistance to the British rule and later to the new Pakistani Islamic government, in spite of the fact that he was constantly harassed and that he spent most of his life in detention or exile.

Among his most quoted sayings is: “I am going to give you such a weapon that the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the Prophet, but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it.”

What is the legacy of such men, and is non-violent resistance applicable today in Muslim countries? For some, “Palestinians could follow the same path –

mobilizing hundreds of thousands of nonviolent soldiers instead of relying on small armed groups or individual bombers” [Abu Nimr].

The use of nonviolence is therefore not only an ethical choice, but a necessity when violent response has proven to be inefficient.

In our Euro-centric conception of security, we sometimes forget that the political violence used by extremist fundamentalists is a threat first to Muslims themselves. The calls for internal violence and the declarations of apostasy against Muslim leaders and scholars by extremists create huge distress in the Muslim communities. In the absence of a central authority in Islam, how can extremism on the margin be counteracted?

A Jordanian initiative, the Amman Message, provides an answer from within the Muslim community. By acknowledging the diversity in Islam, but also by recognising which are the acceptable schools and who is authorised to promulgate a *fatwa*, the Amman Message sidelines extremist preachers such as Osama Bin Laden and warns the Muslims against their commands and deeds (see page 15).

In practice, we found that in both Sunni and Shi’a traditions there are authoritative scholars and religious leaders who preach the path of peace and social justice as an answer to Western or internal violence imposed on their societies. This report will take ten examples of such actors encountered in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.



Summary of Interviews – Jordan

In Jordan, where the Royal Hashemite family is a descendent of the Prophet and enjoys a high level of recognition in moderate Islam, we found that peace initiatives are mainly carried out by the royal family.

The kingdom is a majority Muslim country, with near to 90% of Jordanians following Sunni Islam. There is a significant Christian minority which constitutes approximately 10% of the population (and is mainly composed of Greek Orthodox, Catholic or Coptic) and a small Shi'a minority, estimated at 2% population. Freedom of religion is respected in Jordan and the presence of churches is noticeable when visiting.

In spite of a revival of fundamentalist Islam and the growing political influence of the Muslim Brotherhood since the 1980s, Jordanian society remains a tolerant one. As the official face of moderate Islam, the country is at the forefront of Muslim-based initiatives to counteract peacefully extremist fundamentalists.

Peace was signed with Israel in 1994.

Jordan has offered one of the most interesting tools to limit the influence of extremist fundamentalists from within the Muslim community, with The Amman Message.

During our research, we met persons/agencies who work at various levels: local, national, regional, international. The agencies met in Jordan are not predominantly based on a local constituency; they have an international audience. They address the Muslim world at large and all those interested in Islam as a religion and a culture.

In the following pages:

- *Islamica Magazine*
- Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies
- The Amman Message



Islamica Magazine

Meeting Date: 12 January 2009
Contact person: Sohail Nakhoda, Editor-in-Chief
Based in: Amman, Jordan (editorial team), US (as a charity organisation)
Geographic scope: International

Description:

Islamica Magazine is an international quarterly magazine. Its main aims are to broaden perspectives on Islam and provide a voice for Muslims to articulate their concerns while establishing cross-cultural relations with their co-religionists and neighbours.

The magazine covers topics including Religion, Family, Politics, History, Philosophy, Sociology, Health, Education, Culture, Science & Technology, Media, Literature and Art.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

Islamica Magazine is edited by a Sunni publisher attached to the four schools of Islam, and respectful of Shi'as, Ibadis and other religions. It considers that there is a broad base for peace and nonviolence in Islamic texts and traditions, most notably through the notion of mercy.

Islamica advocates that mainstream Islam and the vast majority of followers are more affected by extremism within Islam than those in the West, and while preserving Islam's diversity is crucial, violent extremists should be disqualified.

The editorial team believes that peace cannot equate to the mere absence of war; it is more, and primarily an end to injustice (comprising of poverty, genocide, oppression or tyranny). The editor-in-chief of *Islamica Magazine* underlines that peace movements are relatively new in the region – noting that since post-colonial times there have only been upheavals and peace has not been at the forefront (mainly due to poverty and political violence). He considers that this

is the beginning of peace movements and that whilst there are currently no large or unified structures, new individual movements like The Amman Message (see page 15) will crystallise.

Quote:

Islam is one of a handful of topics in the English-speaking world for which expertise or knowledge is not a prerequisite for voicing one's opinion. The result is akin to a playground where the one who yells the loudest is by default correct. While this process of discerning right from wrong and good from bad is hardly acceptable in any other area of human concern, it often passes as expertise for inquiries on Islam. The mainstream voices are drowned out not because they don't exist, but because no one can hear them.

Activities – Current:

Islamica publishes a quarterly magazine and hosts a rich website: www.islamicamagazine.com

It seeks to promote the Muslim heritage, to give a voice to moderate Muslims and to encourage dialogue with other religions.

Islamica is also engaged in inter-faith dialogue and is a supporter of The Amman Message (www.ammanmessage.com) and of the Christian/Muslim initiative, A Common Word (www.acommonword.com).

Activities – Intended:

Islamica is considering establishing an initiative similar to the Christian/Muslim project, A Common Word, but to engage Muslims and Jews. At the time of writing, the situation in Gaza makes this venture impossible.

Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies

Meeting Date: 13 January 2009
Contact person: Baker Al-Hiyari, Deputy Director
Based in: Amman, Jordan
Geographic scope: International

Description:

The Royal Institute for Inter-faith Studies is Prince Hasan Bin-Talal's inter-faith institution.

Jordan's royal family leads a politically moderate country that represents moderate Islam and is a descendent of the Prophet and the guardian of the Hashemite tradition. As such, it takes pride in organising high-level inter-faith dialogue and "keeping channels open".

The Institute is one of the structures put in place by Prince Hassan to ensure human, financial and organisational resources are permanently allocated for inter-faith dialogue.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

Baker Al-Hiyari believes that religion is a main driver for people; both communal interaction and society-to-society interaction, he says are influenced by the individual religious status of human beings.

The Institute promotes that Islam, as well as other religions, encompasses many peaceful ideas as well as upholding justice as an important and central idea (i.e. like law in Judaism, love in Christianity). Baker Al-Hiyari states that if justice is achieved, then peace will prevail.

He believes that although religions can be misused as political tools, in their essence they have clear indications and strong paths to peace. His idea is that religion should be neutralised and moved away from politics – not as secularism, but as a return to where it belongs: a source of inspiration, values and standards.

The Institute upholds the idea that no religion should be used as a political tool to achieve an earthly goal.

Al-Hiyari considers that because Sunni Islam is not an organised religion and does not require a hierarchy, people do not feel the need to group themselves. He comments that unless people have political goals and are part of an organisation like the Muslim Brotherhood, Islam-oriented organisations focus more on welfare – and groups like San Egidio or Pax Christi cannot be found.

Based on the diversity of Islam, Al-Hiyari believes that the sense of majority that Muslims feel in this part of the world does not allow them to run efficient organisations as other minorities do.

Quote:

Without social, economic and political justice, there is no peace.

Activities – Current:

The Institute is the official agency for inter-faith dialogue and operates mainly at senior political, religious and academic levels.

Its main activities are: research, publications, conferences, dialogue and high-level meetings. It is also involved in capacity building for local Jordanian agencies.

The Institute is one of the promoters of The Amman Message (see page 15).

Activities – Intended:

The Institute is working on the creation of a Middle-East Inter-Religious Council for Peace. The Council's role would be to exert sufficient pressure and influence on political leaders to achieve peace or at least bring an end to hostilities.

The Amman Message

Meeting Date: 13 January 2009

Contact: Jordan Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute is the guardian of the Amman Message.

These notes were gathered based on various sources: conversations with Sohail Nakhooda (*Islamica Magazine*) and Baker Al Hiyari (The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies and Aal Al-Bayt Institute); an essay by Sohail Nakhooda 5 and the website: www.ammanmessage.com

Based in: Amman, Jordan

Geographic scope: International

Description:

The Amman Message was promulgated in 2004 by H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein in Amman, Jordan.

The Message seeks to define what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent Islam and what actions do not.

For this purpose, it specifically recognises the validity of all eight legal schools of Islam and gives a precise definition of a Muslim as being “any person who respects the five pillars of Islam and who recognises one of the eight schools”.

Based on this definition it forbids *takfir* (declaration of apostasy) between Muslims and it sets forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas* (legal rulings).

In doing so, the Message rejects the sayings and actions of extremist Muslims who under the criteria of the Amman Message are deemed unauthorised to promulgate a *fatwa*. This includes figures such as Osama Bin Laden.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

The authors of the Amman Message describe the goal of Islam to be the realisation of mercy and good for all people; based on the idea that relationships between Muslims and all others are grounded in peace.

They believe that Islam calls for treating others as one desires to be treated and that any assault on the life of a human being is, in fact, an assault on the right to life of all human beings.

The authors consider that Islam rejects extremism, radicalism and fanaticism, considering them as recalcitrant ways and forms of injustice. On both religious and moral grounds, they denounce the contemporary concept of terrorism, associating it with wrongful practices.

The Message condemns these practices and believes that resisting oppression and establishing justice should be undertaken through legitimate means. It calls for the people to take the necessary steps in order to achieve the strength and steadfastness required to build identity and preserve rights.

The authors decry the campaign that portrays Islam as a religion that encourages violence and institutionalises terrorism.

The Message calls upon the international community to work earnestly to implement international laws and honour the international mandates and resolutions issued by the United Nations, ensuring that all parties accept them and that they be enacted without double standards, to guarantee the return of rights to their rightful holders and the end of oppression. The authors believe that achieving this will be a significant contribution to uprooting the causes of violence, fanaticism and extremism.

Quote:

This is good news not only for Muslims, for whom it provides a basis for unity and a solution to infighting, but also for non-Muslims. For the safeguarding of the legal methodologies of Islam necessarily means inherently preserving traditional Islam's internal 'checks and balances'. (from www.ammanmessage.com)

Activities – Current:

In order to bestow the Amman Message with indisputable religious authority, the following three questions were sent to 24 of the most senior religious scholars, representing all the branches and schools of

⁵ NAKHOODA, Sohail, *The Significance of the Amman Message and the Common Word*, text of a lecture given at the 4th Annual Ambassadors' Forum, Amman, 30/12/2008

Islam, around the world (including the Sheikh Al-Azhar; Ayatollah Sistani and Sheikh Qaradawi).

(1) Who is a Muslim?

(2) Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (*takfir*)?

(3) Who has the right to undertake issuing *fatwas*?

200 scholars from 50 countries endorsed the answers in order to create The Amman Message, which today is approved by hundreds of Muslim scholars and thousands of experts and citizens.

The three points of The Amman Message are:

- Whoever is an adherent to one of the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi`i and Hanbali), the two Shi'a schools of Islamic jurisprudence (Ja`fari and Zaydi), the Ibadi school of Islamic jurisprudence and the Thahiri school of Islamic jurisprudence, is a Muslim. Declaring that person an apostate is impossible and impermissible.
- There is more in common between the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence than there is difference between them. All believe in God; that the Qur'an is the Revealed Word of God; and that Muhammad is a Prophet

and Messenger unto all mankind. All are in agreement about the five pillars of Islam (the testament of faith – *shahadat*; the ritual prayer – *salat*; almsgiving – *zakat*; fasting the month of Ramadan – *sawm*; and the pilgrimage – *hajj*).

- Acknowledgement of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence within Islam means adhering to a fundamental methodology in the issuance of *fatwas*: no one may issue a fatwa without the requisite personal qualifications that each school of Islamic jurisprudence determines. No one may issue a fatwa without adhering to the methodology of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence. No one may claim to do unlimited *Ijtihad* (opinion based on the interpretation of the Islamic sources by a qualified scholar independently from established jurisprudence) and create a new school of Islamic jurisprudence or to issue unacceptable *fatwas* that take Muslims out of the principles and certainties of the Shari`ah and what has been established in respect of its schools of jurisprudence.

Activities – Intended:

The authors are gathering web-based commitment to the Message: www.ammanmessage.com

Summary of Interviews - Lebanon

Lebanon enjoys a plural society and political landscape, with 18 official religions and numerous political parties. The country is composed by minorities and major decisions are taken by consensus among the political and religious forces. Once a predominantly Christian country, Lebanon is now Muslim in majority. There are no official population figures – the last census took place in 1932 during the French mandate – however the main religious groups are understood to be: Shi’a, Sunni, Maronite, Greek-Orthodox and Druze. None has the majority and therefore none can impose decisions of national importance without the endorsement of the others.

During the war which is officially dated 1975-1990 and often referred to as “the civil war”, the different religious groups fought each other (and also among themselves) through the creation of militias. In 1991, the militias were disbanded, with the notable exception of Hizbollah, an armed Shi’a group and probably the most important force in today’s Lebanon.

Lebanon enjoys a freer political regime than its Arab neighbours, and the Lebanese civil society is very vibrant. There are many secular or Christian-dominated organisations working for peace and nonviolence. In the Muslim community, non-violent Islam is mainly expressed by Shi’a clerics who are opposed to Iranian-backed Hizbollah. They relate more to an Arab and Lebanese context and promote a spiritual rather than a political approach.

Lebanon is still technically at war with Israel, who withdrew its troops from South Lebanon in 2000 after 22 years of occupation. It is taboo to talk about

peace with Israel, due to the combination of two factors: the heavy toll of the occupation, the frequent incursions and the indiscriminate use of violence, which has made it difficult for the population to accept; the pressure from Syria, a country led by a regime who considers that Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine are part of Greater Syria and cannot sign peace separately from Damascus. An initiative of Lebanese President Amine Gemayel to make peace with Israel in 1982 was spoiled by Syria and its Lebanese allies.

Although civil society is more active in Lebanon than in Jordan and Syria, nonviolence is a new phenomenon and has yet to be consolidated in more structured movements. The consent of these persons/groups has however to be confirmed, as Western support to their initiatives could affect their credibility among their constituency.

In Lebanon, the persons interviewed have a large local constituency, first and foremost in their own sect, Shi’a Islam. Although their history and number of followers vary, they all preach to thousands of believers and train hundreds of young scholars. Furthermore, due to their link with other Shi’a movements in the region – and sometimes to their discourse in link with the Lebanese political situation, some have become internationally known figures.

In the following pages:

- Religious Association Imam Sayyed
- Alsayed Mohamad Ali Al Hussein
- Sayyed Ali Al-Amine

Religious Association Imam Sayyed

Meeting Date: 1 December 2008
 Contact person: Sheikh Mohammad Ali Al Hajj
 Alamily
 Based in: Beirut, Lebanon
 Geographic scope: Local / National

Description:

The Religious Association Imam Sayyed is a locally based organisation and Shi'a religious school providing formal religious studies and training to clerics and community leaders based on the Islamic principles of justice and peace. Their aim is to form a new generation of Muslim clerics who are not fundamentalist and accept the differences of others.

The school (*haouza*) is located in Dayieh (southern suburb of Beirut), and trains students from the following Lebanese regions: Metn, Dayeh, Beirut. It has expressed an interest in expanding their presence to other areas of Lebanon with a significant Shi'a population.

This school is the only Muslim school in Lebanon that teaches Christianity and inter-faith issues - traditionally only Christian schools include inter-faith studies.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

The Association believes that the true Islamic values are nonviolence and tolerance. Their aim is to create a generation of Shi'a clerics who endorse dialogue between sects and religions, with the ultimate vision of building harmony amongst different communities.

The Association considers the majority of Islamic values contribute towards peace and specifically draw attention to the fact that the struggle for Shi'a Islam, is a defensive one – not offensive. Sheikh Al Hajj Alamily evidenced this through the historical examples of Prophet Mohammad's refusal to respond to violence with revenge after his wife was killed, Imam Ali's call for peace after the death of the Prophet and Hussein's demonstration of self-sacrifice for the benefit of peace and prosperity in the battle of Karbala.

He mentioned how the concept of care in Islam is extended to animals and nature.

The Association believes that the views upheld within the Shi'a community or the wider Islamic community determines not only their cultural beliefs but also the relationships with their neighbours.

The Association seeks to promote dialogue and debate about the real values of Islam.

Having witnessed how celebrations like *'Ashura'* have over the past 20 years been taken away from their religious context (for example through their politicisation by Iran and Hezbollah), Sheikh Mohammad recognises a need to return them to religion. He reminds us that there are 12 imams, and that Hussein's life is only one experience and is not necessarily applicable to everybody. Sheikh Al Hajj Alamily encourages the celebration of religious events in the home to remove them from a political context.

Quote:

Justice and peace are the main messages of Islam.

Activities – Current:

Religious schooling for 50 – 60 male and female students.

Activities – Intended:

The Association intends to expand its activities outside the educational framework and into the wider community by promoting debate about the 'real' values of Islam in the home and within the Shi'a community. On one level, this would take place through promoting the celebration of traditional religious events (e.g. *'Ashura, Eid* etc) in the home - to reconnect religious events with their original cultural context and sever the celebrations from a common and political agenda.

It also seeks to expand the hosting capacity of the school by creating a dormitory for female students.

Alsayed Mohamad Ali Al Hussein

Meeting Date: 25 November 2008
Contact person: Himself
Based in: Lebanon (South and Beirut)
Geographic Scope: Local / National

Description:

Alsayed Mohamad Ali Al Hussein is a Lebanese Shi'a Imam whose aim is to encourage a religious-based discourse of peace, based on the principle that people respect religion.

His religious and charitable activities are mainly channelled through the institution Thul Corba.

Al Hussein dissociates himself from the main Shi'a political party in Lebanon – and the only force that was not disarmed after the war, Iranian-supported Hizbollah. He grounds his action and his historical and cultural roots in Arabic history – as opposed to Persian. As such, he claims that his security is at risk and therefore he has created a personal protection force.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

Imam Al Hussein is a Shi'a Imam. He stresses that Shiites are not only found in Iran and that Lebanese Shiites are Arabs.

He believes in a culture of peace and love and argues that love is the language of life, and war is the language of death. He describes life as being beautiful.

For Imam El Hussein, war destroys everything – populations, wealth, etc. He claims that all difficulties can be resolved through dialogue, and that dialogue results in peace. Peace is the language of people.

He argues that, as the majority of people are believers, a discourse of peace issued by religious leaders carries more influence. Imam Al Hussein regrets that many religious men encourage war. "Why not encourage peace and work with the others?" he asks, referring to Europe where an era of war has given way to a united and peaceful existence.

Quote:

A discourse is stronger than a bomb.

Activities – Current:

Imam Al Hussein operates a religious school, preaches and organises veiling ceremonies for young Lebanese girls.

His association issues publications, and distributes material and medical assistance to the underprivileged areas in South Lebanon to counteract the funding coming from warmongers.

It conducts significant media and outreach activities (conferences, publications, and a website: www.alhuseini.net)

Imam Al Hussein believes that the children they are currently assisting will be the peace workers of tomorrow. He would like to take them to Europe to visit and share.

Activities – Intended:

Alsayed Al Hussein shared a number of prospective projects. Amongst others, he intends to establish his own TV station (budget estimated at 4 million USD), and have 14 MPs – including women – elected in next Lebanese general elections.

Sayyed Ali Al-Amine

Meeting Date: 16 December 2008
Contact person: Sayyed Ali Al-Amine
Based in: Lebanon (South and Beirut)
Geographic scope: Local / National / Regional

Description:

Sayyed Ali Al-Amine is a Lebanese senior religious cleric known in Shi'a Islam as an Ulema. Previously part of the political violence in his country, Sayyed Al-Amine has progressively disassociated himself from the main political parties active in his community.

He has become increasingly involved in preaching peace and nonviolence and became known to a wider public when he took a strong stand against the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. He has a group on Facebook.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

Sayyed Ali Al-Amine founds his work on the Prophet's quote: "I was sent by God to preach the good word".

He believes the goal of Islam is not to create soldiers, but to preach the "good word" and to establish moral references rather than to conquer square kilometres.

Islam (as is the case for Christianity) should not be defined and understood only by the deeds of Muslims. He considers that humanity has suffered as

the result of the actions of people who do not represent their religion.

Sayyed Al-Amine believes that we must not only work towards promoting the culture of peace, but that peace must become the general culture, and that warmongering becomes an exception.

Quote:

Hitler was a Christian but Christianity is not responsible for the occupation of Europe. Similarly, the Ottoman imperialistic project was not a Muslim project. Can we assimilate Christianity to the IRA, or Islam to Al-Qaida?

Activities – Current:

Sayyed Al-Amine preaches, is involved in advocacy activities and attends meetings that promote a culture of peace and dialogue.

He has a website (mainly in Arabic): www.al-amine.org

Activities – Intended:

He would like to see the development of a Council of the Sages from all religions, which would provide reliable interpretations of religious texts and confront extremists who hijack these texts. The Council would be founded on the notion that moderate voices from all religions can provide a safeguard.

Summary of Interviews – Syria

Syria is a Muslim country, with a Sunni majority and several minorities, including Christians, Alawis and Druze. The Alawi minority monopolises the political power since the early 1960s through an authoritarian regime. The country is under a state of emergency since four decades.

The creation of the ruling Baath party was based on a secular ideology. Although Islam is not the religion of the state, Islamic law is a major source of legislation. Freedom of religion is officially guaranteed and the different groups enjoy freedom of practice as long as this remains outside the sphere of political action. The growing influence in the 1970s of the Sunni-led Muslim Brotherhood resulted in armed confrontation with the authorities till 1982 with the massacre of Hama and the eradication of opposition. The regime however actively supports armed Islamic fundamentalist parties in neighbouring countries: Hamas in the Palestinian Territories and Hizbollah in Lebanon.

Political activism and non-governmental action are severely restricted. Syria is at the forefront of the confrontation with the West, and an ally of Iran. Western support to Syrian groups could be seen as suspicious and expose them to harassment or arrest by the authorities. Therefore we strongly advise that the consent of the persons is sought before any cooperation is considered.

Due to the internal and regional circumstances, active nonviolence could be seen as opposition to the regime and thus unacceptable.

The Sunni majority has made the choice of nonviolence by not confronting the ruling minority

(Alawis) with the use of force. The actions of many Syrian figures of nonviolence extend beyond passive nonviolence and have led to the development of a very sophisticated theoretical discourse. However, due to the above-mentioned considerations, their stand can hardly be translated into concrete action.

Since 1967, part of the Syrian territory is occupied by Israel (the Golan Heights) and discrete peace negotiations have started between Israel and Syria. It is however taboo to talk about peace with Israel, who is still considered to be an enemy. The discourse of peace is hampered by this fact, and it is therefore less controversial to talk about nonviolence.

In the Syrian context, the persons met conduct their non-violent action in a local setting – with the notable exception of the Kuftaro Foundation which is an official institution. All other interviewees operate in a similar fashion: they teach to dozens of followers, in their homes or in their mosques. One could think that their constituency is limited to those groups. However, the thinking of persons like Jawdat Saeid or Sahar Abou Harb have reached other communities in the Middle East and influenced the creation of non-violent movements abroad.

In the following pages:

- Dr Muhamamd El Ammar
- Jawdat Saeid
- Sahar Abou Harb
- The Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro Islamic Foundation

Dr Muhammad El Ammar

Meeting Date: 3 December 2008
Contact person: Himself
Based in: Daraa, Syria
Geographic scope: Local / National

Description:

A member of Jawdat Saeid's group (see page 26), Dr El Ammar is an intellectual concerned with sharing knowledge and culture and searching for the roots of nonviolence in Islam.

Sensitive to the complexity of his own political environment, Dr El Ammar also confronts Europeans with their own contradictions regarding the political situation in the Middle East.

As the creation of organised non-governmental agencies is restricted in Syria, he is open to informal cooperation/collaborations with others,

Dr El Ammar is a general practitioner who believes in helping his fellowmen. For him, the importance of life lies in practising nonviolence.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

A Sunni Muslim, Dr El Ammar states that a belief in nonviolence is more important than one's religion. For him, religion is a relationship between an individual and God, not via a political party.

Based on the Qur'an, Dr El Ammar believes that the link between Islam and peace is a necessary ontological development and refers to the following story: when God decided to create mankind, the angels disagreed because they said it would lead to bloodshed. God replied: "I know things that you do not". This, he says, is evidence that man has the

potential to escape from this condition and that the evolution of mankind is towards peace.

He understands the use of violence when mankind was still riding horses and donkeys and were Pagans.

Documentation proves, says Dr El Ammar that for 13 years the Prophet did not use violence. This non-violent era was the period of building the Islamic society – the violence that followed, after Hijra, he argues, was born from a necessity of the state. Until now, he says the state is not free from the use of violence.

Above all he believes that conflict comes from the inability to manage differences; violence is the failure to accepting differences. The Qur'an considers differences as fact.

Dr El Ammar seems particularly preoccupied by the fact that some stereotypes are difficult to change, like the notion of "Islamic terrorism". Nobody talks about the terrorism of George Bush, who is as much of a Christian as Bin Laden is a Muslim, he argues. We should also talk about Christian terrorism, and, he concludes, if you measure the results of both, it is scary!

Quote:

Freedom at the individual level is more important than state-based freedoms. I live in a dictatorship, but I feel free.

Activities – Current:

Dr El Ammar participates in gatherings / discussions about peace and nonviolence. He practises and encourages nonviolence daily.

Jawdat Saeid

Meeting Date: 8 January 2009
Contact person: Himself and Dr El Ammar
Based in: Jasem, Golan Heights, Syria
Geographic scope: Local / National / Regional

Description:

Jawdat Saeid is a Syrian Muslim Sunni Sheikh and a member of the Cherkess minority – an ethnic group originally from the north-western Caucasus region. He was educated in the prestigious Cairo-based El-Azhar Theological University in the 1940s.

Following the internal unrest in the early 1980s, Jawdat Saeid left Damascus and is now the Sheikh of Jasem's city mosque.

In a country that remains partly occupied; is under a state of emergency for more than 40 years, and whose regime supports Hamas and Hizbollah, Jawdat Saeid is possibly the most impressive personification of the struggle for peace and nonviolence.

He receives followers at home for discussions about peace and nonviolence, and he has published books on the subject. His spiritual influence and peace work have experienced far-reaching impact. A peace movement based on his teachings has been established in Morocco.

At the time of our interview, the situation in Gaza, under Israeli attack, had left him very bitter and is a reminder of the challenges peace workers face in war-torn regions.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

All three religious books (the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an) refer to the significant story of Adam's sons Cain and Abel. For Jawdat Saeid, failure lies with the son who used violence. He killed his brother who rejected violence, and upon realising his loss he regretted his action.

Jawdat Saeid believes in peace and that violence always results in a negative outcome. In the case of Iraq, he considers that everyone including the US is

losing. He observes that the more people use violence, the less they use their brains.

According to the Qur'an, God announced to the angels that he wanted to create a Caliphate on Earth. The angels replied: "But Mankind will ruin the world". God replied that he knows what the angels don't know. Based on this story, a possibility exists for man to overcome his initial condition and develop into a better being. Jawdat Saeid attempted to interpret this paradigm at the light of History. He believes that there were two revolutions in mankind's history: an astrological one (with Giordano Bruno's discovery) and a social one (with the advent of democracy).

Jawdat Saeid considers that Europeans have learnt from their sufferings. After they experienced all manner of wars and felt pain, they united peacefully. He summarises that neither Napoleon nor Hitler united Europe.

He underlines that Europe is ruled by the mind not by Church. Simultaneously, he expresses regret that Europe, the US and the UN are not serious about spreading peace and democracy in the Middle East.

Concerning *jihad* and his views on nonviolence, Jawdat Saeid refers to a conversation with a Syrian Minister, where he explained that there are two pre-conditions for a legally acceptable *jihad*:

- The one who declares jihad must be democratically elected,
- Those who jihad is declared against are ruling with violence.

For Jawdat Saeid, *jihad* equals freedom of belief; you cannot force somebody into religion.

God trusted Man enough and he gave him a brain. God sent the Prophets to rule with justice – for all, not only for the believers.

Quote:

One day, Jawdat Saeid received the visit of the Indian Ambassador and told him: If Indians were loyal to

Ghandi's principles, they wouldn't have made the atomic bomb. Nonviolence is about using your brains, he added. Not about using atomic bombs, nor about surrendering.

Activities – Current:

Jawdat Saeid preaches at the Mosque, conducts a weekly class and organises a monthly gathering of his followers at his home.

He also authors and publishes books on nonviolence.



Sahar Abou Harb

Meeting Date: 3 December 2008
Contact person: Herself
Based in: Damascus, Syria
Geographic scope: National / Regional

Description:

Sahar Abou Harb is a Syrian woman who believes in nonviolence. She has studied and interpreted the Qur'an to underline its non-violent message.

Like other enlightened peace heralds in her country, she receives her followers at home for a regular talk on peace and nonviolence.

She teaches, gives lectures and has published three books on this theme to date.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

For Sahar Abou Harb, Islam means nonviolence.

Referring to the same story as Jawdat Saeid (see page 26) and others, Sahar Abou Harb argues that Cain and Abel were *men*. She believes that, as a woman, she can offer a new approach to the reading of Islamic texts and tradition.

Having observed that people appear to think, based on the Qur'an, that they should be either like Cain or Abel, Abou Harb claims that there is a need to build a 'new man' who is neither like Cain nor Abel. She believes that our choice is not limited to dying or being an assassin. Abou Harb believes in life and more specifically that human life is invaluable and this basic belief leads to peace and nonviolence.

She challenges the idea that only male scholars should preach about Qur'anic verses related to

women; claiming that women, naturally, have a better understanding of issues that affect them (divorce, inheritance, being widowed etc.).

In the Qur'an, many verses that speak of struggle and violence can be found – but we should understand that they are linked to a specific historical context and are not applicable at all times.

For her, the Qur'an is not a ceiling, a barrier that prevents us from growing; to the contrary she sees it as being behind us and pushing us ahead.

Abou Harb believes there is a need to go back to the Qur'an, and find nonviolence.

She considers that believing in God is respecting everybody else.

Quote:

Some people read the verses like criminals and they feel frightened when they read the Qur'an. But if you have a key to read it, you can find nonviolence.

Activities – Current:

Abou Harb hosts a monthly meeting of followers at home, participates in conferences and has written three books (in Arabic) on nonviolence.

Activities – Intended:

She would like to create a Centre for Nonviolence in Damascus and has submitted a request to the authorities in this view.

She currently receives many visitors in her house who feel relieved when she offers her interpretation and would like to train students and provide them with exchange opportunities.

The Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro Islamic Foundation

Scheduled Meeting Date: 3 Dec 2008 / 8 January 2009

NOTE: An interview was unable to be arranged during our two stays in Damascus, due to different constraints including a protest march for Gaza. A questionnaire was handed to the Foundation representatives but was not returned. Therefore all information is compiled mainly from publications provided by the Foundation.

Based in: Damascus, Syria

Geographic scope: National / International

Description:

The Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro Islamic Foundation comprises of an educational institution, a mosque and the largest charitable institution in Syria. It is an official institution created by Salah Kuftaro, the son of late Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, with the agreement of the authorities.

The Foundation includes three Islamic colleges, two Shari'ah institutes, research and translation centres, dormitories for males and females, and the Al Anssar charitable society, which sponsors 2,000 orphans.

Vision of Peace and Islamic Values:

The Foundation was established on the values of Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, the previous grand Mufti of Syria. Initially Naqshbendi Sufis, the family today represents conservative Sunni Islam. They work to actively promote better understanding and cooperation between the world's major monotheistic religions in order to bring about constructive dialogue.

For the Foundation, Islam is a religion based upon the surrender to God who is one. They promote the definition of 'al-islam' in Arabic, to be at once both submission and peace, and believe that through submitting to God human beings can gain peace in their lives in this world and in the hereafter.

As a teacher of Islam, Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro used spiritual and rational education to develop righteous human beings. His message is dedicated to helping to build a civilisation on our planet based on the principles of peace, balance and prosperity.

Quote:

As a result of belief in God and the fraternity of all human beings, we must necessarily live a life of love, agreement, cooperation, and peace. (Late Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro)

Activities – Current:

The Foundation has formed a specialised committee which creates networks and inter-faith dialogue based on commonalities between Christianity and Islam and inspired by the Qur'an which "...has been the pioneer in calling all kinds of human societies to dialogue, to lay down the foundations of cooperation, and to agree on their common values in order to achieve universal happiness".

It has established a programme with the Japanese Government for educational exchange, scholarships and dialogue.

The foundation offers Islamic and Arabic studies to local and foreign students.

Conclusion

In spite of the diversity in Islam and of historical and political obstacles, a very vivid non-violent movement exists in Muslim societies. It is however mainly limited to the actions of individual persons and has yet to be translated into structured organisations.

Due to circumstance including the post-colonial wars; the structure of the regimes that were put in place after independence; or the difficult relation with the West; pacifist movements are still young in the Arab world. The majority of the Islamic leaders preaching nonviolence that we encountered belong to a younger generation. "Something will crystallise in the coming years," predicts Sohail Nakhoda from *Islamica Magazine*.

Hope exists; this report has identified a number of persons/movements working to this aim. From the most conservative clerics to moderate or even secular actors, all the interviewees encountered have defended nonviolence with passion. Each has found their way of expressing this belief and of conducting an action in keeping with this philosophy. They have studied the Islamic texts and tradition and can assert the theological backing for this movement.

In spite of challenging political times and the frustration experienced based on the relation with the West, many refer to Western sources and look forward to engaging in a more constructive cooperation with Western agencies. This request for closer relations [Bss0] is tempered by warnings against the risks partners would be exposed to [Antaki, Slim].

Many of these peace actors operate in countries where non-governmental action is restricted, and therefore they cannot translate their philosophy into concrete action. This has engendered a very sophisticated discourse, strongly rooted in theoretical and theological references. But concrete action is needed now to transform the war-torn Middle East.

Creativity and long-term investment will be decisive. Small contributions like the support to internet-based networks can prove very helpful in societies where public action is restricted. The way of supporting peace actors and contributing to the development of peace movements without negatively affecting the persons who are based in the Middle East by exposing them, is outside the scope of this research and will pertain to IKV Pax Christi and others.

List of interviews

1) In-depth pre-survey interviews

- Ziad Darwish, Peace permanent movement, 12/11/08
- Fadi Abi Allan, President Peace permanent movement, 14/11/08
- Lokman Slim, Inga Schei, UMAM/ Haya Bina, 24/11/08
- Nizar Ghanem, Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue, 27/11/08
- Akram Antaki, Maaber, Damascus, 02/12/08 and 09/01/09
- Dimitri Avgherinos, Maaber, Damascus, 02/12/08 and 9/01/09
- Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, Mar Musa monastery, Syria, 04/12/08
- Raed El-Rafei, Lebanese journalist (Los Angeles Times, based in Beirut), 16/12/08
- Nadim Koteich, Lebanese journalist (Future TV), 01/12/08
- Adib Khoury, Christian Syrian engaged in inter-faith dialogue, Nabeq (Syria), 07/01/09
- Trine Korvig and Jens Ole Hansen, Arab Initiative, Danish Embassy in Amman, 11/01/09

2) Questionnaire-based interviews

- Al Sayed Mohammad Ali Al Hussein, Islamic Arabic Council/ NGO Thul Corba, 25/11/08
- Imam Mohammad Ali Al Hage Alamily, Beirut, 1/12/08
- Sahar Abou Harb, Muslim woman engaged in nonviolence, 03/12/08
- Dr Mohammad El Ammar, Jawdat Saeid Group, Damascus, 03/12/08
- Imam Al-Amine, Lebanon, 16/12/08
- Abdo Bso, Director of Islamic school near Nabeq, 07/01/09
- Jawdat Saied, Golan Heights, Syria, 08/01/09
- Sohail Nakhoda, Editor-in-chief *Islamica Magazine*, Amman, 12/01/09
- Baker Al-Hiyari, Deputy director, Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, Amman, 13/01/09

An interview was scheduled with Dr Salah Kuftaro from the Salah Kuftaro Foundation, but was cancelled due to the Gaza events and his participation to the demonstration in Damascus. The page relating to Salah Kuftaro Foundation was compiled based on the literature shared with us (website, pamphlets).

The information on The Amman Message, a Jordanian initiative generated by the Royal family, is based on their website and other documents, and on already mentioned interviews with Sohail Nakhoda and Baker El-Hiyari.

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This is mainly a field research with limited academic input; however the following sources have been useful.

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Sample Questionnaire

- 1) Name of organisation
- 2) Contact details
- 3) Can your name/details be disclosed in a report? Yes No
- 4) What is the geographical focus of the organisation?
- 5) What is the main level of operation? (local/ national/ regional/ international)
- 6) Who does the organisation work with/ who are its partners? Are you member of a network?
- 7) Is the organisation looking for (other/more) partners/ partnerships/ contacts?
- 8) Is the organisation registered?
- 9) Does it have statutes / a mission statement?
- 10) How many people are working in the organisation? (paid and/or unpaid)
- 11) Does the organisation have members?
- 12) What is the mission or goal of your organisation?
- 13) With what kind of activities does your organisation deal with in particular?
- 14) Who is your target group and who are the beneficiaries of your organisation? Approximately how many people does the organisation help with its work for peace?
- 15) What does your organisation hope to achieve?
- 16) What is your vision of peace?
- 17) Could you explain something about the religious ideas that your organisation represents?
- 18) In your opinion, how is the work for peace motivated in Islam? / What Islamic values and principles can, according to your position, influence or determine the work towards peace?
- 19) What kind of specific projects or issues could benefit from peace building/ social justice based on religious values?
- 20) In your opinion, what do Islamic (peace) movements contribute to peace building/ social justice?
- 21) Could you mention any other Islamic organisations/ movements that are engaged in peace building/ social justice activities?
- 22) Is your organisation open for dialogue with people/ organisations from other faith/ convictions? If so, how does your organisation show this? If not, why not?
- 23) What is in your view the most effective way to promote peace / social justice work?
- 24) Do you, as an Islamic organisation, feel there's common grounds to cooperate with Christian organisations, or organisations other than Islamic? If so, what shapes this basis? Is there a need/ added value
- 25) On what specific fields would you wish to cooperate with other organisations?
- 26) Have you ever had contact with European organisations? If so, how did interactions with those contacts go? (Partnership or project-based? What were the difficulties?)
- 27) What kinds of assistance, interaction or collaboration would you like to receive in a cooperation? What should a cooperative relationship look like?
- 28) Would you like to add anything else?