

Oslo Conference on Religion, Democracy and Extremism

A diverse group of forty religious and political leaders, scholars and government officials, from a range of Muslim and Western countries met in Oslo, 15-16 May 2007, in a dialogue aimed at generating mutual respect and understanding. The group met under the theme “Religion, Democracy and Extremism”, with a view to build bridges and transcend hostile images, stereotypes and generalisations of one another in the wake of recent political and military actions that have fed into the polarisation between “the Islamic world” and “the West”. The participants came to Oslo with the mutual recognition that the polarisation only plays into the hand of hard-line elements on both sides of this unnecessary divide, elements which use the rifts as means of justification for violence and use of force.

The Conference was convened by The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights (OC) and The Foundation for Dialogue among Civilizations (FDC) in collaboration with the Club de Madrid (CdM) and sponsored by the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway. The Conference was co-chaired by former President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami (FDC), former President of Chile, Ricardo Lagos (CdM), and former Prime Minister of Norway, Kjell Magne Bondevik (OC). The participants and their respective affiliations are listed in the attached addendum.

The participants discussed and endorsed the ideas and intentions contained in this Conference statement. While there are several ongoing international initiatives with a view to reducing conflict based on differences and providing platforms for peaceful dialogue, the participants underlined the need to build further momentum in this regard.

Among other issues, the participants discussed the following:

- There is a need to develop further dialogue within and among religions, as a means of proactively and positively managing and fostering diversity.
- Dialogue is not negotiation nor is it evangelizing or preaching. Dialogue is opening the window of one’s heart to other human beings and to create and share empathy for their circumstances and suffering.
- A main cause of suffering and violence is the existence of a variety of identities that hold rigid views, while seeking to prove themselves by way of negating others. Such rigidity makes the holder of that identity suffer from self-importance and egotism.
- There is no culture, religion or civilization that can dictate to others certain values as if they were the only valid ones. Religion should not be allowed to be abused for political, economic or other power purposes.
- We must retake public opinion from the extremists. Religion is inherently not an element to encourage violence, but rather to create the finest munificence and promote the most ethical relations among people, and can be a part of the solution.
- We underline the importance of education and training that promotes tolerance and understanding, mutual respect and acceptance, for all, including the media and public opinion leaders.

- Tolerance means to respect diversity and differences of opinion. Those who have strong convictions themselves, including religious ones, should be the first to understand others who have theirs.
- The common ground between religions, such as Christianity and Islam, should be built upon to enhance freedom, equality, human dignity, tolerance and peace, including for the benefit of religious minorities.
- Universal human rights should be respected by all civilizations and states. There will be no conflict in the relationship between state and religion if the state is genuinely democratic and religion is committed to universal human rights and a pluralistic society.

In line with these principles, the participants highlighted the following specific objectives:

- To promote intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity and human rights;
- To reduce hostile images by creating trust;
- To enhance understanding in the West of the nature of Islam, and in the Islamic world of the West, and thereby reduce the scope for misunderstandings and misrepresentations;
- To raise awareness in the West of humiliating practices towards the Islamic world, and in the Islamic world of incitements against the West;
- To devise more productive and constructive ways of dealing with extremism and terrorism;
- To deny letting extremists define the relationship between the West and the Islamic world;
- To focus on disparity of resources between the rich and the poor;
- To ensure equal participation by Women;
- To encourage and equip youth to participate and exercise leadership in political processes and institutions.
- To implement the objective recommended in the Millennium Summit in 2005 regarding dialogue among civilizations and culture of peace.

To these ends, the participants committed to work together, including in preparation for a follow-up conference in Iran in 2008. The three co-organizers accepted a call from participants to:

- 1) Work actively for increased public understanding, awareness and mutual respect of each other and our respective civilizations, including by creating greater media attention to voices of reason;
- 2) Study further and apply lessons learned from inter-religious conflict and dialogue, as brought forward in the Conference, in order to inform the further work;
- 3) Include in dialogue activities those who may not have access to or predisposition toward processes of peaceful dialogue;
- 4) Communicate and collaborate with other initiatives which share similar objectives.

Oslo, 16 May 2007

Participants

Kjell Magne Bondevik

Prime Minister of Norway (1997-2000, 2001-2005). Founder of the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights

Ricardo Lagos

*President of Chile (2000-2006).
President of the Club of Madrid.*

Abdulkarim Al-Eryani

Prime Minister of Yemen (1980-1983, 1998-2001). Member of the Club of Madrid.

Cassam Uteem

*President of Mauritius (1992-2002).
Member of the Club of Madrid.*

Kjersti Andersen

Deputy Director, Section for Peace and Reconciliation, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Andre Azoulay

Counselor to His Majesty Mohammed VI of Morocco

Merete Bilde

Policy Advisor, Secretariat General, Council of the European Union

Dr. Tariq Chaudhry

UN Political Officer for Somalia; Expert in Inter-religious Affairs; Former Pakistani Diplomat and Representative to the UN

Dr. Saad-Dine El-Otmani

Member of Parliament in the Kingdom of Morocco; Secretary General of the Justice and Development Party

Tore Hattrem

Director, Section for Peace and Reconciliation, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Vigdis Kjelseth Garborg

Advisor, Middle East Section, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mohammad Khatami

*President of Iran (1997-2005).
Founder of the Foundation for Dialogue Among Civilizations*

Sadig Al-Mahdi

*Prime Minister of Sudan (1966-67, 1986-89).
Member of the Club of Madrid.*

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir

*President of Iceland (1980-1996).
Member of the Club of Madrid.*

Mohammed Reza Alborzi

Former Iranian Ambassador to the UN Organizations in Geneva

Evan Anderson

Deputy Director, International Reconciliation and Peacemaking Program, Washington National Cathedral Center for Global Justice and Reconciliation

Rev. Canon Dr. Trond Bakkevig

Dean and Senior Pastor of Vestre Aker Parish, Church of Norway

The Right Rev. John Bryson Chane

Eighth Bishop of Washington, Episcopal

Dr. Essam El Erian*

Muslim Brotherhood Spokesperson

Dr. Leonardo Emberti Gialloreti

Neuroepidemiologist

Dr. John Esposito

Director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University

Sadegh Kharazi

Former Iranian Ambassador to France

Imam Senaid Kobilica

Head of the Islamic Council of Norway, and the Imam responsible for Bosnians in Norway

* Prevented from attending by Egyptian authorities.

Professor Souad Krafess

Member of Parliament, Morocco

Lena Larsen

Research Fellow, University of Oslo

Professor Federico Mayor Zaragoza

Chairman, Foundation for a Culture of Peace

Ambassador Joseph Montville

Senior Associate, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Dr. Gregory M. Reichberg

Ethics, Norms and Identities Programme Leader, Peace Research Institute Oslo

Bishop Mano Rumalshah

Bishop of the Diocese of Peshawar

Dr. Kari Vogt

Associate Professor, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo

Dr. Ahmad Jalali

Member of the Council of the United Nations University; Professor of Philosophy, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran; Former Iranian Ambassador to UNESCO

Dr. Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad

Theologian and University Professor, Tehran

Fernando Perpiñá-Robert

Secretary-General, Club of Madrid

S. Iqbal Riza

Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on the Alliance of Civilizations

Bishop Gunnar Stålsett

Bishop Emeritus of Oslo, International Co-President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, and Co-Moderator of the European Council of Religious Leaders

Bishop Dr. Munib Younan

President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land; and President of the Evangelical Fellowship of the Middle East

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