



PROPOSAL

LIVING WHERE WE DON'T MAKE THE RULES

A Muslim Minority Leaders Colloquium

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The World for all Foundation is born out of the South African experience where millions of people were oppressed and discriminated against by a system of white supremacy called Apartheid. The World for all Foundation also carries within it the many lessons that emerged out of the difficult, yet peaceful, transition from Apartheid to a non-racial and democratic society, in which there is almost a unique co-existence between the former oppressed and oppressors. More specifically, The World for All Foundation is witness to the successful, and ongoing, process to build an inclusive, humane society where human dignity is paramount, irrespective of race, language, religion, culture, and gender.

It is against this background, and with the optimism that we can improve the world, that the World for All Foundation has engaged a number of organizations and individuals recently to discuss how we can overcome the many divisions, tensions, conflicts, misunderstandings and suspicions which dominate the global discourse. The particular strength that the World for All Foundation brings is that it has played an important role in the faith discourse – the site of much debate – and is born out of very specific ways in which a Muslim minority in South Africa has emerged from severe challenges to become equal and dignified citizens in South Africa.

The World for all Foundation believes that if we put our heads together, specifically as Muslim communities who constitute minorities, we can share many lessons – from South Africa and elsewhere – so that we do not repeat each other's mistake, follow each other's long and painful paths to dignity and inclusion, and exacerbate tensions and conflict in our quest for full citizenship wherever we are.

It is out of our analysis of both the global context and specific situations in which Muslims are, that we have begun to identify challenges that require coherent and implementable responses. For this to happen, we need to be talking to each other, sharing mistakes and successes, strategizing broadly for approaches and solutions, and pooling resources-material, human and intellectual – for an implementation plan that can create inclusive and shared societies.



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The World for All Foundation is, therefore, proposing a Colloquium of Muslim leaders, scholars and activists, drawn primarily, although not exclusively, from minority contexts, as a platform to engage each other, and as the springboard for a programme of work that can undo tension, suspicion, conflict and misunderstanding, while constructing an atmosphere of understanding, inclusion, co-existence and co-operation for good.

This work is urgent, and we need to create a network of structures and people to commence with work urgently.

IN THE EYE OF THE GLOBAL STORM

Some of the worst acts and attitudes of Islamophobia, and some of the worst manifestations of anger and violence by Muslims, have come in the recent period of globalization. Muslims are in the eye of a global storm, either as a result of what is done to them or what is being done in their name.

Globalisation has wrought some of the most devastating crises that the world has experienced, despite its attendant benefits of the communication revolution, technological advances, and unprecedented wealth creation. The world is caught up in an economic and financial recession, as well as an environmental crisis of growing proportions.

This is exacerbating the impact of poverty and its consequences for diseases, unemployment, homelessness and hunger. It is increasing inequality between rich and poor, and it is putting pressure on arable land, food security and the availability of energy and water. This creates enormous insecurities for ordinary people in the world.

At the same time, globalization is also driving an under-estimated crisis: the crisis of managing the mobility of people. People are moving in all directions in search of a better life for them and their children. As they move to new continents, countries and cities, they are identified and marginalized as "the other". In the popular imagination "the other" is further identified as the reason for job losses, insecurity, and the loss of historical social cohesion and national identity. Unscrupulous politicians further increase this alienation and marginalization of new immigrants or "the other" by targeting them in anti-immigrant campaigns.

In the last 50 years, millions of Muslims have moved to the West and to the North, and have settled into communities and employment. In many cases, host countries have not planned for such migration nor have immigrants fully understood how to integrate, other than seeking familiarity of religion, culture and language. This has often not been good for mutual knowledge, integration, and co-operation towards the common good.

Events around the tragedy of 911, and both the preceding and subsequent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as perceived bias in finding a just solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict, have all acted as the trigger for hostility, conflict and suspicion in an already divided situation.

Unsophisticated, un-nuanced and insensitive analyses after 911 and during the so-called "War on Terror" had the impact of holding both Islam and Muslims responsible for violence and terrorism



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in the world. A perfect storm was created when the limitations of a theological response to globalization was exposed, manifesting an absence of coherent leadership for Muslims to bridge the gap between a rapidly changing world and an interpretation of Islam able to manage that change. Dominant interpretations were locked in a time when Muslims were dominant and a majority.

This vacuum was filled by those preaching ideologies and theologies of certitude, and spoke to a Muslim anger that accompanies systematic emasculation both in the heartlands and wherever Muslims were now moving to. The result, of course, was an exacerbation of terror, violence, war on terror, suspicion, profiling, anger, terror... Ultimately it is the vortex of self-fulfilling prophecies on both sides.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS: MUSLIM MINORITIES

The reason for having to engage with the situation of Muslim Minorities is both to relieve their situation as well as to remove a global pressure on the entire Muslim Ummah. At the same time, the world needs tools to diffuse tensions and conflicts by finding more intelligent ways to deal with those who peddle, and act on, ideologies of certitude and extremism. The Muslim leadership also needs to put their heads together to develop ways to manage globalization and its impact, and to guide Muslims on everyday living in the face of new and unique challenges that come from not making the rules, not being dominant, and not living on your own terms in every detail.

This is not the sole responsibility of Muslims. Today, 90% of countries in the world have significant minorities that constitute at least 10% of their populations. Today, about 25% of the global Muslims live in minority situations. In a country like India alone, the Muslim minority is over 100 million. Almost every Western country – Europe and North America particularly – have a Muslim presence that is significant.

The Muslim migration pattern has varied, as have the responses of host countries. Some Muslims have assimilated and forfeited their practices and identities in order to “belong” while others have isolated themselves in settlements with others who share their language, national origin, culture or religion, with very little evidence of an additional identity. But there are also Muslims who have been able to manage both their Islamic identity and a new national one, and all that goes with it.

On the other hand, some countries, societies, and governments have politicized migration, and campaign on the matter to win or confer power. They either want to halt, reverse or, make migration conditional on assimilation into the existing milieu. Authorities in countries or cities are also not proactive in managing migration, and often town planning does not manage integration – and therefore isolates and marginalizes immigrants – and does not plan for new needs of new citizens like integrated settlements and places of worship or burial.

All of these often result in an uncomfortable co-existence, and could often explode when inserted into global matters like the “War on Terror”, the “Danish Cartoons” and solidarity with the Palestinians. This often reflects the inability of Muslims as relatively new citizens to understand and utilize the



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political and social instruments that could facilitate their integration. Ominously, it may also put such communities at risk for the siren songs of certitude and extremism that prey on Muslim discomfort, alienation and victimhood.

All of these require skillful leadership that must be developed and brought together so that the vacuum existing in some places can be filled with best practices in other places where Muslims are a minority.

INTELLECTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Given the urgency required for Muslim and Global leadership to find solutions to this never-ending cycle of suspicion-tension-conflict in the relationship between "the West" and "Muslims", and given that the scale of the problem grows with every new wave of migration and attitudes harden with every act of violence, one would think that solutions are apparent and self-evident.

The long walk to freedom in South Africa shows that solutions and approaches only present themselves when they are preceded by deep intellectual and theological reflection and reengineering. This sequence prevents the easy reach for platitudes and superficiality in constructing sustainable and inclusive relations of dignity.

A gathering of Muslim leaders needs to identify and engage on the intellectual and theological matters that may hopefully become the precursors to a solution.

OUTCOMES FOR A SUCCESSFUL COLLOQUIUM

A colloquium of Muslim Minority Leaders cannot simply be a talkshop, given the urgency of the situation and the depth of the challenges facing almost twenty five percent of the Ummah. This means that such a colloquium must be convened urgently, but must also be prepared for in such a way that it leads to measurable and tangible outcomes.

These outcomes must, in turn, be underpinned by a set of outputs which would constitute a programme of action that could have a positive impact on Muslim minorities particularly, but also the Ummah and the world, more generally.

There can be no doubt that the overall strategic objective of the Colloquium must be to facilitate positive and wholesome co-existence between Muslims and their fellow citizens, and better prospects for peace in the world.

The core outcomes should include:-

- 1. Gaining greater conceptual clarity:** We will not be able to make progress towards a strategic objective of better and sustainable co-existence if we do not agree on a conceptual framework that at least acknowledges that Muslim minorities exist as a distinct religious group who are fewer than other fellow citizens in a shared national space. Other than number, they share, to a greater or lesser extent, the characteristic that Islamic norms, values, rules and practices do not constitute the dominant ones in their national contexts. We also need to acknowledge that in many contexts, Muslim otherness has been a source of tension either



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because of attitudes towards them (Islamophobia) or because the action, utterances and attitudes of some Muslims globally have invited suspicion or fear. Consensus around this has to be an outcome.

2. Developing Intellectual and Theological Tools: A major component of leadership to Minority Muslim communities is that it must overcome a disconnect between the dominant and inherited intellectual and theological assumptions by which such communities have to regulate their religious lives and the social milieu in which it finds itself. This ranges from having to co-exist with phenomena strange and sometimes antithetical to Islam, to having to manage with infrastructure deficits of mosques, schools, burial facilities etc. This means that a Colloquium of this nature has to examine how tools such as Maqasidus Shariah (living towards the objectives, rather than the letter, of the law) become relevant; understanding whether a Fiqh (Jurisprudence) for minorities is preferable; developing the assumptions that underpin Darus Shahada – a shared space that provides peace and security for all citizens in that space; and teasing out the merits of various models of co-existence. Such an outcome would constitute a giant leap forward for twenty five percent of the Ummah.

3. A Common Programme of Action Must be Unfolded: While our various contexts differ, and we must cater for such differences, the overarching commonalities mean that there is space to devise a broad programme of action that can be implemented across the minority Diaspora. Such a programme could include:-

- An **engagement with leaders and ulema** about the conceptual, intellectual and theological tools discussed above;
- Launching programmes and projects focussed on significant sectors, like **women and youth**, within the Muslim community, that would advocate for the former's legal protection (as in the recognition of appropriate forms of personal law) and creating for the latter group a moral compass that would orient them to the norms and values of Islam, despite unfamiliar contexts;
- An analysis of the **form and degree of tension** in each specific context in order to assess the severity, diagnose the causal factors and identify the triggers thereof, and then to devise tailor-made responses or preventative measures;
- Finding small, but significant ways, to present **the Islamic character and message** free from either the mischievous distortions of propaganda or the misuse thereof in the name of Islam, in order to reach out to those with whom we seek to co-exist;
- Identifying areas of **service and philanthropy** in which Muslim communities can help the vulnerable, irrespective of religion, in various communities, while simultaneously creating opportunities for multiplying **entrepreneurship** economically and socially;
- Understanding that the world of knowledge and technology encountered is the opportunity to recover the **lost property that reconnects with the Islamic Civilisation**, and that we do not stand as strangers to this knowledge, but rather that we should seek to display excellence in all the sciences and professions as well as in the cultural and sporting arenas;



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- Making **alliances based on Interfaith partnerships** or political campaigns to build solidarity with others who are marginalized through migration, poverty, unemployment, etc;
- Creating opportunities for the **education and training of teachers and Imams** from local communities, so as not to be over-dependent on importing them from different contexts;
- Facilitating **participation in democratic processes** to enhance access to, and decision-making in, parties, councils, parliaments and governments; and
- Conceptualising **Media and Information campaigns** that advance the ideas of Wasatiyya (balance), rahma (compassion), salaam (peace), and ubuntu (solidarity), while repelling wisely the negative propaganda faced by Muslims.

4. Establishing a Global Network of Muslims in Minority Contexts: Such a network is essential to maintain the momentum of the Colloquium, direct the implementation of its outcomes, and co-ordinate the campaign decided upon. Furthermore, the Colloquium should establish Working Groups who should convene to give further content to the conceptual, intellectual and theological themes generated by the Colloquium, as well as a Media and Communication Secretariat. The World for All Foundation would be keen to constitute the Secretariat of this whole network, and ensure that it convenes at least every 2 years in different locations across the world.

5. A Conference Publication, as well as other media to capture the content and outcomes of the Colloquium should be a priority.

KEY TRANSITIONS EXPECTED FROM THE COLLOQUIUM

We need to ensure that a Colloquium of Muslim Minority Leaders should lead to shifts or transitions in behaviours, attitudes and lifestyles by Muslims. Many of these shifts and transitions can be inferred from the outcomes described, but lifting out a few would be beneficial as additional measurable goals we set for ourselves.

These shifts and transitions include:

1. From living with assumptions of dominance to **living where we don't set the national and global rules** – this could lead to analyzing what instruments are useful to exert influence, and which networks are important to enter or create so that we help create rules which are tolerant and inclusive;
2. From a world hostile to the other to **a world safe for difference** – how do we ingrain a respect for the other, and learn to debate robustly so that difference is not the object of scorn but the source of creativity and innovation;
3. From ideas and practices of exclusion to **inclusivity of those who look, talk, pray and eat differently** – this creates possibilities of exploration, analysis, identifying common ground, managing irreconcilable differences, and yet finding human connection between people;



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4. From maximalist interpretations of living your faith to understanding **how to live with that which your faith requires of you** for compliance, as well as that which resonates with the Divine wish for ease – this could lead to formulations which comply with what is needed to be a conscientious believer, but makes life liveable in terms of dress codes, dietary needs, the rhythms of time for spiritual obligations, as well as responding to the cultural diversity across the world; and
5. From images of Islam and Muslims which evoke suspicion, fear and hostility to a **projection of Islam and Muslims which evokes curiosity, respect and cooperation** – this allows for an analysis of both the Muslim image and the Muslim psyche, so that we can both rebrand the image and reconstruct the psyche.

PUTTING THE COLLOQUIUM TOGETHER

We need to ensure that an examination of the global context, an appreciation of the various national situations in which Muslim minorities find themselves, the overarching and specific challenges confronting Muslims, as well as the strategic objectives, outcomes and transitions that the colloquium must facilitate, that all of these must be translated into a robust and practical Colloquium Programme.

Such a Programme must maximize discussion over 3 days, and must balance theoretical rigour with practical direction. It must give leadership for global impact, but also for local implementation. It must draw on the lived experience of those on the forefront of living as minorities, but also from the scholarship of those who can apply the synthesis of Islam's timeless values, norms and principles, with the exigencies of the frontiers of the new contexts and milieus in which Muslims find themselves.

Most importantly, the programme must be designed to give leadership: theoretical, intellectual, theological. But it must also be leadership that can guide everyday life, engagement with the media, partnership with fellow citizens, and campaigns for inclusivity.

These are the expectations for the Muslim Minorities Leadership Colloquium.

