

المجلس الأعلى للشئون الإسلامية
The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs

لجنة الحوار والملاقات الإسلامية
Dialogue and Islamic Relations Committee

الرئيس
President

The Role of the Media in Promoting Inter-Faith Dialogue

Modern society is very complex and leaves little time for in-depth analysis of information. The function of the media has also developed. People expect timely, accurate and comprehensive coverage of issues affecting their lives and the media meets that challenge. But there must be a compromise between the professional and sometimes sensational needs of the media and our goals of ethical and objective coverage, in order to realize our chief purpose: **Peace inseparable from justice.**

My twenty years of experience in the media have taught me that I cannot blame it for covering acts of violence, since I understand the media's right and duty to report the news. In our modern society power struggles as well as conflict of interests inhibit us from recalling our shared humanity

irrespective of race or religion. However the media can also report the Inter-Faith efforts and assist in the promotion of common values amongst the religions. What's more, we, as Inter-Faith leaders, must realize that we need to develop our relationship with the media, and take the initiative to address the media in its own language, clear, short and to the point.

The media has become an important power centre with its own systems and interests which aren't always close to the message of religious and spiritual values. The Davos meeting between leading businessmen - some of whom are owners or board members of media companies - and representatives of religious institutions and public figures is an ideal opportunity to reach a compromise between the interests of the media decision makers, and religious groups.

Allow me to make a few suggestions and propositions.

1. **First**, national, religious and media institutions must work on ways to spread the Inter-Faith message to the general public, especially the youth, our future. I think university research centers can support this goal.
2. **Second**, the danger of the rapid growth of extremism and violence can no longer be responded to by books, conferences and lectures attended only by thousands of people. Television and radio have an audience of millions and millions of people. Clearly the internet is also of great importance. This is only one of the ways a responsible and free society can positively and actively respond to violence and extremism.

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3. **Third**, I suggest a round table meeting in order to discuss ideas for a "Universal Dialogue Charter, elaborating on two main principles:

1. avoidance of generalization.
2. critical self-assessment.
- and
3. preventing any religious labeling of terrorism

International media organizations and Inter-Faith groups might work together on this Charter, to discover new approaches of resisting the extremism and violence, which threaten free dialogue. An important principle to be included, is the avoidance of generalization and stereotyping. The idea is to discourage judgments against a whole community because of the actions of some individuals, as in the case of the aftermath of 9/11, the Taliban, Bin Laden and the Islamic Community. Another example is when a New York Priest insults the prophet of another religion; we mustn't generalize about the entire Christian Faith. Likewise, even when Israelis commit violent acts or injustices we shouldn't jump to condemn all Jews.

As for critical self-evaluation, we must be able to honestly assess ourselves, which is also an invitation for humility. We must be open to evaluating ourselves, and one another, in a spirit of teamwork and partnership, as well as respecting our differences without imposing one viewpoint over another.

The third principle is the Prevention of any religious labeling of terrorism. We must insist on separating religious terminology, from all acts of violence and extremism, which, clearly contradict, the peaceful and loving edicts of religions.

These were the principles and suggestions discussed, and a final objective of the round table could be to prepare a "Working Paper" describing ways to ensure ethical media practices, and, counter measures guaranteeing accuracy and objectivity.

4. **Fourth**, in order to realize this, an International conference to examine and debate the suggestions of this "Working paper" could further the process of implementing the relevant steps together with the decision makers of global associations, as, for example, in the case of the "World Economic Forum in Davos.

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The ultimate objective would be to adopt the "Universal Dialogue Charter" in order to support the continual, and, unshakable respect, of the principles.

5. Fifth, without ever justifying violence or extremism, we must find equitable solutions, for the worst situations in crisis zones where aggression and humiliation, push people to despair. These root causes must be practically dealt with, and that means that we can no longer have degradation and lack of respect for human rights, in any part of the world. Since these are long-standing objectives, they must be addressed in parallel, with our other efforts against violence and extremism.