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Muslims and the Future of Civilization: A Vision for the 21st Century

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“We sent you not, but as a **mercy** for all the worlds”.¹

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”²

The twenty first century shall be spiritual, or, shall not be”.³

[In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,

"A. L. R. A Book
Which we have revealed
Unto thee, in order that
Thou mightiest lead mankind
Out of the depths of darkness
Into light - by the leave
Of their Lord -- to the Way
Of (Him) the Exalted in Power,
Worthy of all Praise!--"]⁴

Introduction:

(Whoever seeks knowledge in order to act upon it will be humbled by his knowledge, but whoever seeks it for other than that, will be increased by it, in arrogance).

A Muslim’s Quest for Justice and Peace: Genesis of my journey

Born in a religiously and culturally pluralist Muslim Sufi⁵ environment, where Spiritual excellence and knowledge were supreme values. I have embraced, since my childhood an understanding of my faith that is hospitable, inclusive and open. Out of

¹ Al-Anbiya’ 22:107, the Holy Qur’an.

² Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail.

³ André Malraux, French Minister of culture of General Charles De Gaulle Director General of UNESCO 1965-1972.

⁴ Ibrahim/Abraham, Holy Qur'an, Sûra XIV (14), 1, p 619

⁵ “Be divine (in essence), and be a creature in (form), and you will be by God a compassionate one, the Wisdom of Prophecy in the word of Jesus, the Bezels of Wisdom, Ibn-Arabi., New York, 1980.

Allah's (God) 99 beautiful names, Peace, the Merciful, and the Just were the names that I was attached to. I learnt that Allah (God) is One, His Message is one and Humanity is one. I also learnt that a believer's quest should be to strive and compete to do good deeds that please the Almighty.

I never accepted injustice and violence will attempt to articulate my vision, based on My research, observation and my life's work as a peacemaker and advocate, for what I believe Islam could contribute to human civilization in the 21st Century. I will Argue for the need to dare a new paradigm of world peace, from an Islamic and a Spiritual perspective, based on universal notions of justice and a compassionate and responsible exercise of power and liberty, in the service of the common good of all God's children.

I will also argue for a greater respect for international law and advocate core values for a leadership by example, dialogue and persuasion rather than falling to the temptation by the powerful to use force and coercion in the settlement of disputes.

When I decided to quit Sudanese diplomacy and working for UNESCO in 1981, I felt that, as a believer, my calling was to use the tools that God blessed me with, to educate, enlighten and raise the awareness of people to defend the cause of universal justice, peace and human dignity and freedom. To do that, I founded Salam... Sudan Foundation (SSF)⁶ in Paris, France in 1985. It is an independent non-governmental (NGO), non-profit cultural organization promoting peace, justice, democracy and human rights by advocating a culture of faith, truth, and people's rights through inter-cultural and inter-religious research, education, dialogue and cooperation.

In 2004, and as a response to the September 11th tragic attacks on America, I founded the International Peace Quest Institute (IPQI), a tax-exempt educational, non-profit and Non-Governmental Organization to raise public awareness through spiritual, cross-cultural, interfaith and development-focused research and education to encourage the emergence of a new peace paradigm for inner security, human solidarity, shared prosperity and a genuine culture of justice and liberty for all in the 21st century.

⁶ Website: www.salamsudan.org/

My decision was inspired by what I have experienced, observed, learnt and studied during my journey as a student, seeker and researcher. Also through my being part of various universities, in Sudan, Europe and the United States and the extra-curricula, advocacy, political and community activities I have experienced. And finally, through my dialogues with Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, followers of African indigenous spiritual traditions and Native American friends and leaders in these communities around the world with regard to theological, philosophical, ideological, political, economic and diplomatic perspectives on working for justice, ending conflict and creating peace.

A consensus emerged on the need of designing projects for societal renewal, the need for creative ways to cope with chronic and pressing problems of war and peace, minority rights, poverty, human, people's and cultural rights and democracy, the need for a more creative diplomacy to overcome the worsening polarization of relations within states, regionally and internationally.

As a believer and an intellectual who considers his faith as a Muslim the core of his identity⁷, I felt a personal responsibility to do something about the growing tension between Islam and the West. I tried to engage various actors in a dialogue on how to put peace as the epicenter for human development. For this purpose, I traveled frequently between Europe, the United States, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

My findings convinced me that it would be constructive and useful, indeed important from a geo-strategic Islamic Western long term perspective, to emigrate⁸ to the United States of America and engage in dialogue (in the best manner)⁹ with people of the Book over there who are working in this vital area for a change in the rules of the political game-turned drama and tragedy, and share with them this experience, as an independent channel for open dialogue between the two societies, cultures, faith traditions, beyond bureaucracies and red tape.

⁷ Seera Wan Fatahat, TV Show, Arab/Muslim-American relations, Beirut, December 2002.

⁸ (see Qu'ran 8:30, 9:40).

⁹ *“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the **best manner**; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from His path, and He knows best those who follow the right way”*. 16:125 Qur'an

I was blessed to be born, raised and educated in a religiously and spiritually loving family and in a society attached to the values of justice, peace, liberty, dialogue, truth, solidarity, love, hospitality and the passion for learning.

Islam and Muslims in the 21st Century: Challenges and Promise

A man said to Prophet Mohamed (May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): Council/Advise me. The Prophet said: “**Do not become angry**”. The man repeated his request several times, and the Prophet repeated his advice: “**Do not become angry**”.¹⁰¹¹

The September 11th, 2001 hijacked airplanes attacks on the World trade center in Manhattan, New York, the Pentagon, in Washington, DC and Pennsylvania dramatically pushed into our collective conscious the degree of polarization and the escalation that we see today between the World’s super power the United States, the United Kingdom, the West and Russia on the one hand and the Islamic world on the other.

The ideological gulf between the West and the Muslim World has its origins in the Crusades. Recently we can point to its revival since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the advent of the Iranian revolution in 1979, the first Afghan war 1979-1989 the Iran – Iraq war 1980-1988, the first Gulf war 1990-1991 and the ongoing Iraq war of 2003-2004. This ideological schism needs to be approached, in my opinion, spiritually and intellectually rather than militarily.

The brilliance and excellence of Muslim contribution to civilization through the enlightening Andalusia experience of inclusive governance, where Muslims, Jews and Christians created a Culture of tolerance in (756-1492), made Medieval Spain of the time the Ornament of the World.¹² The latter history of the interaction between the Muslim world and the Western colonial powers led to the current situation of

¹⁰ Abu Huraira, related by al-Bukhari, Hadith 16, An-Nawawi’s Fourty Hadith

¹² Maria Rosa Menocal, “The Ornament of the World”.

stalemate between the two and is best reflected in the tragic strife in Palestine/Israel, the rise and fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the ongoing war in Iraq.

While the Qur'an¹³ and the Sunna¹⁴ of the Prophet (PBAH)¹⁵ teach us that defending oneself against injustice is a right and a duty, it lays down clearly the rules of how to do that. It prohibits harming the innocent, the children, the women, the elderly and the sick. Based on this I believe that all acts of violence in the name of Islam that do not abide by these rules are un-Islamic, but rather politically motivated tactics inspired by extreme anger and a strong desire for revenge, albeit not thoughtful.

Rather than being the end of history¹⁶, the demise of the communist regime and the fall of the Berlin wall, should mark the beginning of a new era in human history. An era where humanity should engage in a calm, patient, and mature debate where the ideals of human dignity, liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, democracy, human, people's and cultural rights finally be enjoyed by all cultural, spiritual and religious traditions and thus by all men and women.

Capitalism and the market economy having won over communism, have an equally serious challenge from those who feel that neither money nor gun can replace man's yearning for God. Human beings have shown their vulnerability, weakness to temptation and greed, and in the process, becoming oblivious to the injustice that they create. This is illustrated by the fall from God's grace through the rebellion against God's command, the loss of paradise and the ongoing tragedy symbolized by the story of Abel and Cain¹⁷.

A fundamentalist capitalism and market laissez-faire dominant new ideology where money and gun power are the sole, ultimate and supreme value inevitably provokes a

¹³ "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do NOT transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors" [Surah al Baqara (2): 190]

¹⁴ the Prophet said:
"Do not be people without minds of your own, saying that if others treat you well you will treat them well and that if they do wrong you will do wrong; but accustom yourselves to do good if people do good and not to do wrong if they do evil." [Tirmidhi 5129]

¹⁵ The Battle for God and Muhammad: Karen Armstrong, 2000 and 1993.

¹⁶ The End of History and the Last Man, Francis Fukuyama, 1992.

¹⁷ Hebrews 11:4, the Bible.

counter reaction from quarters that genuinely hold God and religious teachings as the ultimate truth and the apex of supremacy for the defense of which they are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

The perception that colonialism and the imperial onslaught of the Europeans and lately the Americans is inspired by an aggressive Western and Christian fundamentalism, wild materialism and the xenophobic and exclusive Eurocentric concept of the Nation-State, devoid of any moral scruples (justified by a secular fundamentalist model, rooted in the French Revolution and the European experience) are held, by public opinion in the Third World in general and in the Muslim and Arab World in particular, as responsible for the dominant culture of injustice in international relations and the ongoing scourge of wars which imposed and continue, alas, to impose untold sorrow and suffering on mankind, and specially on Muslims.

They point to the two world wars, the Korean War, the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967, 1973 wars and the painful and tragic ongoing bloodletting over Palestine. Others include South Africa, Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq, the second and ongoing third Gulf war against Iraq, the Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Kashmir, Sudan, the Somali, Ethiopian-Eritrean, Western Sahara and the Yemeni wars (all the latter in Muslim land!) in addition to all on-going wars of liberation in Africa, Asia and Latin America and namely the wars in Chad, Congo, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sri Lanka, Angola and Rwanda.

The salvation of contemporary civilization¹⁸ resides partly, in our view, in the capacity of the courageous and innovative thinkers from all religious traditions and cultures¹⁹ to avidly seek wisdom by liberating themselves from the shackles of prevailing dominant paradigms and labor for the emergence of a new paradigm of renewal that integrates in a synthetic and a creative way all religions and cultures, as a democratic imperative, for a new, just and genuinely universal vision suiting a renewal that all societies need and crave for today.

¹⁸ The Dignity of Difference, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, 2002.

¹⁹ The Healing wisdom of Africa: Finding Life's Purpose Through, Nature, Ritual and Community, Mailwoman Patrice Some, 1999.

**The United Nations System:
The need for Respect of International Law**

[Now when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Schemata, saying, "They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shitake."]²⁰

Despite the objective limitations of the United Nations system, that is nothing but a reflection of the limitations of the some total of our nation-states systems; it is all that we have as communities of nations as an arbiter in international relations and war and peace issues. The Bush doctrine of unilateral preemption is a dangerous departure from the universally accepted norms that govern the international system.

The preamble of the United Nation's charter signed on 26 June 1945, in San Francisco states:

"WE THE PEOPLES
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

DETERMINED

To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our life-time has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

To establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

To promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom

AND FOR THESE ENDS

To practice TOLERANCE and live together in peace with one another as GOOD neighbors, and

To unite our strengths to maintain international peace and security."

²⁰ The Chronicles 12-7; "Egypt attacks Judah",
The Holy Bible, the New King George's version, (p 494).

The preamble of the UNESCO constitution adopted in London on 16th November 1945 states:

“The Governments of the states parties to this constitution on behalf of their peoples declare:

That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed,

That the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfill in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern.”

I believe that America would in the long run serve its national interest better by working with others, despite her frustrations by a system that many influential groups in the United States perceive as incompetent if not dangerous in that it is the only institutional structure that rivals America’s supremacy.

Sudan and the West: Charity Starts at Home

“Where there is no vision, the people perish”.²¹

In the context of my peace quest through cross-cultural and inter-religious research, education and cooperation, I visited the Sudan a number of times between 1996 and 2000 and had meetings with the religious and political leaders and shared with them in frank and candid discussions my perspective on the Sudanese crisis. I advised them on the need to make headway in the efforts to establish peace, the country's most pressing and urgent priority, to review their foreign policy vis-à-vis their neighbors and, and to tone down their Islamist revolutionary rhetoric against the West by sending a clear signal of moderation to all.

I reiterated the same in interviews to the various media: newspapers, radio and television²². I also spoke of our efforts for the defense of a culture of dignity, peace and North-South, Christian-Muslim understanding via our Paris-based non-governmental organization Salam...Sudan, which since 1985 has been engaged in initiating, and promoting inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. I also distributed and presented on TV issues of our organization’s French language publication "Le Messager (The Messenger)", which has the originality of providing a forum of free debate on international issues from a spiritual perspective.

Though the Sudanese society, where Islam was spread by Sufism, is deeply spiritual and tolerant, the Sudanese state has mostly been fundamentally undemocratic, oppressive and tyrannical. Because of these governance issues, the Sudan, like most countries in the African, Arab and Muslim worlds, has been deprived of the healthy and progressive political and socio-economic development that it deserves. Its demagogues, extremists and hard-liners bear that responsibility.

²¹ Proverbs 29:18, the Holy Bible.

²² Mushwar al-Massa show, Sudanese TV February 2000

Unjustified and imposed humiliation leads to injustice and injustice leads to anger, hatred and violence. For the Sudan, Africa, the Muslim and Arab world to develop and move forward, I believe in the necessity and the importance of democracy and respect of fundamental human rights and liberties. The Indian example in democracy needs to be studied and made use of. I also believe that only through genuine and free debate and dialogue can informed and enlightened political, economic, social and cultural choices be serenely, soberly and wisely arrived at; nationally, regionally and internationally.

The State against the People: the need for the Emergence of Creative Civil Society Initiatives

A number of intellectuals, men and women alike (journalists, lawyers, academics, businessmen, etc.) responded positively to the concept that Salam...Sudan is striving to achieve in France, the European Union and the United States, and took the initiative to establish a federal Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Sudan where Muslims, Christians, believers in African spiritual traditions, ethnic minorities can work in liberty and unison for the achievement of peace and the transformation of the prevailing culture of war and violence to a true culture of dignity, peace, justice, democracy, human, peoples' and cultural rights for all the Sudanese in their homeland.

They approached the Sudanese Government who welcomed the idea and promised to facilitate the legal registration and welcome the initiatives of the new NGO. However, it was regrettable to find out that while they talked a good game, when it came to action, they were not as good. They refused to allow the legal registration of the new Salam Sudan-inspired NGO, because of partisan considerations.

Our research, field studies and observations concerning the problematic of African/Arab development based on an independent, non-partisan commitment and thirty years experience in Governmental as well as in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) World University Service (WUS), the African Jurists Association (AJA) and in international organizations such as the World Bank, UNESCO, the European Union and others, and the critical evaluation we made of the post-independence period have convinced us of the need for a new approach.

We have been saying since the year 1981 that African and Arab social scientists had to shoulder their responsibility in producing endogenous African social science knowledge inspired by the African and Arab cultural realities and make this the core of all intellectual efforts in rethinking Africa's and the Arab world's development, while remaining open to ideas and wisdom coming from elsewhere.

Towards a New Sudan: Challenges and Potential

The main challenge for the Sudan to achieve peace and development is, I believe, to embrace a new paradigm of a governance vision that is inclusive, cross-cultural, inter-religious and pluralist. A new national consensus constitution that enshrines all the fundamental human, cultural, religious, economic and political rights of every Sudanese must be widely discussed, debated and adopted by the people.

It is important that all Sudanese feel that they are equal before the law. This could lead to national cohesion and create the necessary conditions that can unleash the untapped

genius of the Sudanese people. Such a Sudan can quickly grow to become a model and a source of inspiration for others to emulate.

As I repeatedly said the Sudanese political elites since the country's independence in 1956, continued applying an Ottoman-British-style colonial and neocolonial concept of governance based on tapping the human and natural resources for selfish ends that excluded the people, denying them their fair share. All Sudanese governments since independence fell in this trap. They all failed to try a new and endogenous approach to the Sudanese society's chronic problems.

That is why I always thought that, beyond partisan self-righteous rhetoric blaming this or that, the problem is societal and needs courageous, caring, honest and thoughtful diagnosis. Only such diagnosis could lead to identifying the ailment and prescribing the adequate remedy. That is impossible without freedom of thought, expression, organization, respect for human rights and democracy.

We should stop playing with fire. We maintain and continue to affirm to the powers that be in Sudan, France and the United States since 1975, that sheer military might and power could be dangerous since it could lead to the temptation of the powerful to become arrogant and over-confident. It should therefore be balanced by a high level of moral and ethical exigency.

We hope that the peace agreement between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) will be signed before the end of this year 2004 and that its spirit helps to resolve the Darfur tragedy sooner.

Ijtihad: Islam's Future and its best Way Forward: Toward A New Vision for the 21st century

Liberal and Marxist thinkers of the North (First World) as opposed to thinkers of the South (Third World) share this irrational and utterly biased and condescending attitude. More than just economical, the North-South gap, in a deeper analysis, is one of values, of vision, of a way of life, and therefore, a gap of thought? This is the rational explanation of the first most shameful stigma of the lowest level to which humanity has fallen and by far it's most criminal and barbaric enterprise, the ominous slave trade.

This explains, say some writers, how the Church and many intellectuals in the West, instead of resisting the selfish, egotistical, racist and treacherous imperial and colonial designs, justified and served them. No wonder then that they later went on to justify and defend the Apartheid system in South Africa, Zionism in Palestine, the genocide of the Iraqi children, ethnic cleansing in ex-Yugoslavia and Rwanda etc.

We have always underlined the fact that to rid this world of violence and war and to work more seriously and sincerely for World peace, a universal front for the eradication of injustice needs to emerge. Injustice is the root cause of discontent, anger, hate, rebellion, war and revolution. Based on this premise, it seems as if the history of the last 600 years is responsible for a lot of violence. It is in this context that the phenomenon of violence in Muslim societies and violence against Muslim minorities in Western societies needs to be examined.

We should never forget that it was the feeling of the Germans that the treaty of Versailles was excessively unjust by wounding their dignity as a people that opened the way for Adolph Hitler to succeed in mobilizing Nazi Germany and lead it to the most barbaric and devastating mass killing and destruction of human life. The scars of the First and Second World Wars remain in our view, the root cause of the prevailing evil, and an important component of humanity's dehumanized, sadist, agonizing and hurt conscience.

The present Zionist-imperialist dynamic, seen, rightly or wrongly, by many in the Muslim world, as a world cultural and political sacred alliance against them, should, in our opinion, like that of the cold war, be a thing of the past. Salvation will perhaps come when democratic values prevail at the level of the "global village" in the fair and equal participation of the-so-far- excluded cultures and philosophical traditions, namely those of the Orient and Africa.

We trust that human civilization can progress only if this chapter of falsehood and lies, wrong-doing, injustice, lack of fair-play and violence is finally and forever closed. That the end of the twentieth century marks the end of humanity's adolescence and the third millennium marks the beginning of its age of maturity and, with some optimism, its wisdom.

We sincerely believe that civilization could gain in starting a new course, a new beginning of history. A fresh start based on a critical and objective evaluation of humanity's political, religious, economic, scientific, cultural, military, technological and historical record to date, is long over due. Lessons should be learnt, mistakes should be rectified democratically and collectively, in strict observance and respect to cultural, religious, spiritual and conceptual pluralism, considered a source of enrichment rather than of conflict.

We need to invent a new paradigm, a new project of societal renewal and revitalization capable of bringing forth ideas and policies that make what we quoted earlier from the UN charter and the UNESCO constitution equally meaningful to all peoples, all cultures and all religions, Islam included.

We need a fresh positive start liberating our souls, minds, hearts, consciences from a moribund and cynical psychology of incurable, un-assumed guilt, self-flagellation, never-ending lies that we continue to repeat mechanically and a suicidal culture of eternal crusades: crying devil at all that which falls out of our terms of reference, our "civilization", all that which is not a replica of ourselves, all that which we dislike, because it is different from what we are used to, because we ignore it, and because we are too self-righteous, self-sufficient and condescending to consider exploring it!

We believe and many of our American and European friends agreed with us since the late seventies in academia, the media and among politicians, in Washington DC, Boston and New York, Paris, the Hague and London, that: materially, America had all that qualified it to play a leading positive role in the world. What it miserably lacked though, was a compassionate, generous and a globally justice-inspired vision based on a genuine,

profound, critical and a morally responsible reading, analysis and understanding of the history of human civilization.²³

In this context we firmly believe that intellectual co-operation between truth seekers and researchers in the areas of peace research, democracy, religion, strategic and international affairs, inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue and understanding, and centers and universities involved in these pursuits, should play the role of torch-bearers rather than remaining places where cynical politics seek crafty formulae to justify the unjustifiable, and defend the indefensible.

The fantastic technological feats that America and the West have achieved during the last two centuries and specially with the advent of the computer age, the internet and the communication revolution symbolized by satellite TV could positively contribute to making this "dream" a reality by putting it in the service of cultural and spiritual pluralism in the World.

We need to work towards the emergence of a world where leadership will be based more and more on a profile that, in addition to managerial and administrative talent, integrates universal values of faith, truth, justice, peace and love and a life-generating option for humanity in its diversity in which resides its real strength and wealth.

An option respectful of Almighty's ambitious design for humanity enabling man to rise up and finally becomes the trustworthy heir and guardian of His Creation and thus deserve the rank of being the only creation made in God's image, by assuming a necessary global moral and ethical responsibility.²⁴

An enlightened Christian-Islamic dialogue, indeed a global interfaith and inter-religious dialogue could be an indispensable instrument and a much needed source of inspiration for a SPIRITUAL RENEWAL, the absence of which is, in our opinion, the underlying cause of humanity's fast rolling towards a visibly apocalyptic fall. It could be the pre-requisite for a new reconciled and wiser beginning of History.

With this positive perspective the Islamic endogenous project of societal and civilization renewal that Muslim and other thinkers are working for, could, from an intellectual point of view, be a timely blessing for much needed new daring and creative initiatives for salvaging a spiritually and morally decadent international disorder.

Cynical, myopic, ultra-nationalistic and crusade-type political calculations aside, the emergence of an endogenous Islamic approach to the development of Islamic societies is in and of itself legitimate. However, this is impossible in the absence of a much-needed ijthihad that is inconceivable without freedom of thought and expression. The Malaysian and Turkish experiments successes and failures in this regard need to be seriously studied and fairly and objectively assessed, rather than dismissed, as they are described by Muslim secular fundamentalists as taking us back to the "Middle Ages"!

It deserves to be fathomed, appreciated and accepted as an integral part of an inevitable and, in our view, healthy and positive trend for a global endogenous development paradigm. A paradigm capable of availing these societies a genuine sense of their identity,

²³ Hashim El-Tinay, "The Awakening of Humanity and the Humanness of the Awakening", Al-Bayan, 1990).

²⁴ The Power of Apology, Beverly Engel, 2001

of their relationship to the world around them, self-confidence and their finally earning and regaining a dignity that they have been deprived of by, what many perceive as a Western colonial, imperial, monetary and military arbitrary hegemony and tyranny, all done, alas, claim some writers, in the name of "civilization".

The West, lead by America and the European Union, as the (Haves) as opposed to the (Have-Nots) have a long term interest in addition to a historical and a moral responsibility to lead the way, in partnership with the South, and open the road for an urgent political dialogue with the Muslim world which constitutes an important geo-strategic and geo-political region and a big portion of humanity. This is the challenge the West needs to address rationally and soberly.

The Muslim world needs a spiritual renewal to survive. This is the challenge that Muslim intellectuals, thinkers, scholars and researchers must courageously take on. They must embrace a long overdue *ijtihad*²⁵. Anger, hate and the arbitrary un-Islamic use of violence for revenge or getting even is not the answer. Humility and brave self-examination is the answer. Muslims need a spiritual revival to be able rise up again from the ashes and the sad state of Affairs of the Muslim Umma today. Muslims need to establish a modern system of governance that suits the 21st century. It needs to dare a new interpretation of the moral and ethical values in the Qur'an and the Sunna.

The European Union's "critical dialogue" formula needs to be developed into a more positive cultural and political dialogue with the Muslim World. For this a spiritual revival of biblical, moral and ethical values in America and the West previously preached by Western propaganda to justify the various "missions" to "civilize" the "primitive", "underdeveloped" South is an urgent necessity!

Can the West and America deliver? That is what the Islamic world and all other cultural identities hope for. We trust that if the West is convinced of the idea of a global and universal reconciliation that excludes nobody, it can deliver. The real question becomes does it want to?! Although we know that certain powerful circles are against this and doing their best to avoid it, we are aware that many of the enlightened circles in the West do.

This is what I had been sharing with Presidents Jacques Chirac of France, George W. Bush²⁶, President of the United States of America and with my lifelong Christian friends in the West (Europe, America), new Jewish friends working for peace and justice in the holly land²⁷ and my Muslim friends in Africa, Asia and the Arab World who, in return, shared with me their perspectives on issues of mutual concern and the various activities they are involved in to promote via a true inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, justice and real societal peace and harmony within and among nations.

We agreed to co-operate whenever possible, with grassroots organizations, think tanks, public and private foundations, governmental and non-governmental bodies as well as individuals on projects that can concretely contribute to the emergence of a much-needed new paradigm and new vision capable of stopping people from perishing and of

²⁵ *Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the 21st century*, United States Institute of Peace, August 2004.

²⁶ www.salamsudan.org/

²⁷ The Tikkun Community, Rabbi Michael Learner.

offering civilization a renewed hope for a brighter and more humane, peaceful and prosperous future.

Finally, we are also ready to look into all genuinely inspired initiatives in this direction emanating from quarters who share our perspective and concern based on the premise that dialogue of all religions and all spiritual traditions, cultures and civilizations, like that between political parties and individuals, constitutes a pre-requisite and a supreme value in the quest for true justice, peace, liberty and democracy that humanity craves for and deserves to attain, by conviction and not by coercion, in the twenty first century.

END
