



# GLOBAL PEACE AND THE FEAR OF ISLAM:

*Roadblocks On The Road To Radicalism*

4<sup>TH</sup> Framework Speech  
11th-13th December 2017





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*Roadblocks On The Road To Radicalism*

**4TH FRAMEWORK SPEECH OF THE  
ABU DHABI FORUM FOR PEACE**

11th-13th December 2017 , Abu Dhabi, UAE

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*By my life, such a home you are  
Whose dwellers are honoured  
And afforded your shade, reposing  
In the waning of the afternoon,*

We are here through the noble auspices and remarkable concern shown by the leadership of this good country. Their God-given patronage and concern are amongst the principal reasons for the successes of the Forum.

“

*The first step to challenging  
Islamophobia is to first rid ourselves  
of unjustified hatred of others. Let's  
start by cleaning our own house.*

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By H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH  
President, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace

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## IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

Today, during the Forum's fourth assembly, we will be taking a step back to look at the world around us at present. We will do so in such a way that does not distract us from but rather assist us in our ongoing quest for peace, as is evinced by the title of our speech.<sup>1</sup>

This topic has become especially important due to heightened concerns over the relationship between Islam and world peace, especially in Europe and the United States. Furthermore, we at the Forum believe that in the context of a globalized world governed by a single dynamism—the dynamism of globalization with its various manifestations, including free movement of capital and commodities, the process of acculturation, and the constant flow of migrants in today's ever-shrinking world—no society can maintain its homogeneity in terms of religion and race. This diversity in religious and cultural attitudes necessitates the awareness of a common destiny and a common course, along with the need for positive action, acquaintance, and coexistence, rather than discord, antagonism, hate, and discrimination.

On a separate note, one might say that the increase in hate speech and discriminatory policies provokes extremism at the other end of the spectrum, with extremist groups using these circumstances of globalisation as a pretext to acquire a form of spurious legitimacy and recruit more followers of their ideologies.

Therefore, when we speak of 'Islamophobia,' it is not only with the phenomenon itself that we must concern ourselves. Of course, it is important to state that Islamophobia has no logical or moral basis whatsoever. It causes great damage and harm to the fabric of composite societies, and that it is at variance with the principles of a social contract based on equal citizenship. But our primary concern in addressing this issue is to place roadblocks on the road to radicalism, by cutting it off from one of its main tributaries: the claim that there is an absolute separation between the Muslims and the rest of the world. This claim, which underpins the idea of Islamophobia today, is made with the aim of plunging the world into a futile

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<sup>1</sup> This is an edited and abridged version of the speech given by HE Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah at the opening session of the fourth Assembly of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, Abu Dhabi, 11 December 2017.

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and never-ending war, a war of all against all. This is the tragedy being played out between Islamophobia and extremists. The United States' recent decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is but one example of many decisions that serve religious divisions and interfere with the efforts of those who advocate peace.

The Forum, though being primarily concerned with Muslim societies by virtue of its designation, also places the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in societies with predominantly non-Muslim majorities at the heart of its concerns. This is due to the fact that the highly strained nature of this relationship has had deeply negative repercussions on social peace within Muslim and non-Muslim societies alike. We believe that the means we have adopted for strengthening peace in Muslim societies are likewise the means through which peace can be spread in all human societies, for the impediments to peace are the same everywhere, always linked to the dual phenomena of terror and Islamophobia.

### *1: Dealing with Islamophobia: Image and Factors*

First, we must assert that we are not concerned here with initiating legal proceedings against nor making legal arguments about what has come to be called Islamophobia. Rather, from the very first assembly of the Forum, the role we have chosen for ourselves is that of the firefighter, always seeking means to restore peace and wellbeing to Muslim and human societies. The fact that we mention the reasons behind the phenomenon does not mean that we seek to put others on trial nor pass moral judgements on them, nor do we wish to transform the Forum into a platform for leveling accusations or handing down acquittals. Rather, we are looking to build a positive approach that restores trust between Muslims and non-Muslims and brings the true image of Islam to the fore.

Having said this, we do not claim any guardianship over the citizens of other nations with respect to the legal means to which they resort for resisting violence and hate speech, as well as reclaiming their rights; each country has its own specific context and each society its own interpretations that fit within the framework of its general policy.

Our search is not a conventional one, but an effort to find a remedy to this phenomenon through monitoring its manifestations and exploring its factors. So, what are these manifestations? And what are the factors driving them?

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## 1. Manifestations

We can demonstrate manifestations of Islamophobia with little effort, since they are not only known through what is unveiled by the media but can also clearly be seen in official statements and declarations made by those in positions of power across the world. One of the primary manifestations of this phenomenon is the rise of discrimination and hate speech. These have moved from the edges of society and into the mainstream following the alarming growth of movements that were until very recently considered marginal, including extreme right-wing parties and neo-Nazis whose ideological discourse is built entirely on juxtaposing contradictions between themselves and others. It is noteworthy that this hate is no longer a purely Western phenomenon; there are many regions in the Eastern world that have become polluted by anti-Muslim hatred and racism, instigated by Buddhists and others.

*We believe that difference breeds religious pluralism, and we believe that religious pluralism in all nations is today a reality.*

Such nationalist and populist sentiments have existed since history began, but the shape and form they have taken in recent years is completely new. This element of newness—the defining characteristic of this crisis—lies in the fact that these piercing and indignant voices calling for exclusion have succeeded in attracting such broad segments of society to their cause, especially in the largest, most powerful and prestigious countries of the world. This gives this discourse a significant say in major policies formulated in these countries, especially those relating to immigration, the position of Muslim minorities, and the direction of foreign policy.

But, no matter how bad things have become, we must take care not to forget the prudent position taken by some Western governments and parties of demonstrable weight and prestige, nor overlook the fact that the majority of civic organizations within those societies have opposed anti-Muslim violence and hate speech through legal initiatives, awareness campaigns, and demonstrations of solidarity.

The French President, Emmanuel Macron, was very clear in his choice of words when he spoke of the tolerance of Islam, clearly aware that the ideas of extremists do not represent Islam. At the official opening of the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi in November 2017, he said, addressing H.H. Shaykh Mohammed bin Zayed and his guests, “Those who would have you believe that Islam was built on the destruc-

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tion of other monotheistic religions are liars and peddlers of deceit.’

## 2. Factors

Such phenomena emerge from a network of overlapping and intertwined factors. Some of these are objective and real, others subjective and fallacious. This diversity is what makes studying this issue so complex and obliges those who research it to examine its network of reasons, properly weighing and assessing them before determining which factor is the most dominant and merits the most study.

Scholars have pointed to several factors, each of which plays a part in creating the phenomenon of Islamophobia and shaping the problems and conditions which underpin it.

Some scholars look to its psychological dimensions for answers, for that is what is suggested by the choice of the term ‘phobia’, a term with highly emotional and psychological connotations. Others highlight economic factors, emphasizing the difficulties through which the world’s economies are currently passing and the role of foreign competition in the labour market, exacerbating levels of unemployment and leading to a decrease in wages.

Others prefer to unearth the historical roots of the phenomenon, highlighting the role of historical memory in casting negative stereotypes, stereotypes which can still be found in the public consciousness and which have framed much of the research written by certain orientalists and scholars.

This thought is a remnant of a bygone historical era, as it first emerged in the context of the Crusades and the Reconquista, then re-emerged in the context of Europe imposing its imperial hegemony on other lands across the world and its preparations to colonize North Africa. Let us be reminded of Ernest Renan’s speech given at the Collège de France on 23 February 1862. He said:

At the present time, the one essential condition for the consolidation of European civilisation is the destruction of everything connected with true Semitism: the destruction of the theocratic power of Islam. . . For Islam cannot be considered anything other than an official religion; when it is reduced to the position of a religion of the individual, it will die out. . . This is unending war; war which will only stop when the last son of Ishmael

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dies in misery or terror forces him to retreat to the farthest reaches of the desert. . . Islam is fanaticism. . . Islam is contempt of science, it is the annihilation of civil society; it is the dreadful naivety of Semitic thought, narrowing the human mind, closing it against every delicate thought, every fine feeling, every rational research.

This statement requires little interpretation. Indeed, as the fair-minded French orientalist, Vincent Monteil, says, commentary could only weaken it.

However, this speech was only representative of the ideas of some of the academic elite of the period and was not a viewpoint held by everyone, for there were many fair-minded orientalist and scholars who opposed the idea of Islam as the nemesis of the West. One of the most fair-minded amongst them was Thomas Arnold, the author of the book *'The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith.'* Just as terrorism does not represent the viewpoint of all Muslims, neither does hate speech represent the viewpoint of the West in its entirety.

*Human beings share many areas of commonality, but these are too often ignored in favour of areas of difference, resulting in much war and destruction, and the distancing of the human race from the values taught by the prophets: goodness, love, and compassion.*

Without negating other factors, we posit that the dominant factor and the overriding and influential cause in the spreading and escalation of Islamophobia is the alleged relationship between Islam and terrorism. Even the historical memory that reduces history to a series of collisions, which has been used by some to posit the inevitability of a civilizational clash, has fallen under the sway of the dominant factor of terrorism. This historical ill-will has been greatly aggravated in recent decades by a spate of incidents through which a few disparate individuals have done a grave disservice to the vast majority of Muslims. This has, in turn, caused the exponents of the doctrine of the clash of civilizations to consider themselves vindicated, and their prophecy has turned into a tragedy.

Ironically, the main victims of terrorism are the Muslims themselves. They suffer from this in two ways: firstly, it is they who suffer the lion's share of terrorism casualties, and secondly, it is they who are the first to be accused when an act of terror occurs, an accusation predicated on a profound ignorance of Islam and a misrepresentation of its concepts.

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The Forum remains loyal to its pledge and its promise, working hard to dispel the notion that there is a connection between the religion of Islam and violence, while also undertaking its role in dismantling the paradigm used by extremists to justify violence through religion.

Francis Fukuyama spoke about mad ideologies and mad religions and concluded that like mad ideologies, mad religions, too will die out. Even supposing we were to agree with him that it possible for there to be mad ideologies, we cannot agree that there can be any such thing as a mad religion. But we must concede that the manufacture of religiousness—being a human craft—has caused religion to mutate from its original form as a force for peace into a force for war, and for the manufacture of deadly bombs that destroy man, land, and beast. If we do not master the manufacture of religiousness and grasp its dimensions, it may well escalate out of control and transform religion from a source of mercy into a source of misery.

Muslim societies have suffered from the manufacture of this sort of religiousness in recent times, created and spread by extremist groups who judge the universal through the lens of the partial, ignore the contextual situation of the real world, and live in self-imposed bubbles. Hence, they produce fatwas made of branches without roots and partial rulings without universal objectives, putting aside what brings benefit and promoting what produces harm. They create a state of intellectual chaos that swiftly sanctions bloodshed and desecration, seeking refuge in a set of concepts such as *jihad*,<sup>2</sup> *al-wala wal-bara*,<sup>3</sup> the demarcation of the world into abodes of peace and abodes of war, *jizya*,<sup>4</sup> and *dhimmi*.<sup>5</sup> They take these concepts and remove them from their linguistic, jurisprudential, and historical contexts, steering them away from their original objectives and ignoring all prerequisites of jurisprudential review relating to them. They confuse the deluded people who follow them as to their true meaning and circumvent all the elements that underpin a correct methodology for dealing with juristic concepts and texts. This type of thought, and its methodology and deliverables, served as the subject matter for the Forum's work in previous years, during the course of which we corrected many

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2 Armed struggle for the removal of oppression.

3 Loyalty to and disavowal of others.

4 The covenant tax imposed upon non-Muslims subjects of historic Muslim empires, establishing a contract of protection between them and the state, and in place of (and often less than) the *zakat* which was required of Muslim subjects.

5 Non-Muslims under the protection of Islamic law.

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of these misconceptions and clarified the methodological elements that position juristic texts and the concepts thereof, as well as their positions, with an exegesis corroborated by evidence and juristic objectives.

Meanwhile in societies with non-Muslim majorities, Islamophobia—or rather, negative propaganda against Islam—has surfaced, fuelled either by evil acts or the ever-worsening situation on the ground in many Muslim societies. This has been responsible for the rise of negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims, particularly after these extremist groups succeeded in attracting to their ranks young men and women born and raised in the West. Such youth, who consider the West their homeland, have plunged headlong into wars of annihilation in the Middle East and other regions around the world, and perpetrated criminal acts in their countries of origin, regardless of whether they are converts or third or fourth-generation descendants of immigrants.

The negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims that have developed stem from a number of factors:

1. False beliefs about Islam emanating from ignorance. The rule says: he who is ignorant about something, opposes it. Thus, those who oppose Islam base their stances on the same misunderstanding of key concepts—like jihad and “allegiance and disavowal”—as the extremists who stand against them.
2. This false belief is based upon concepts that have been stripped of their linguistic, jurisprudential, and historical contexts and applied in a totally perverted manner, a manner which has caused immense harm, primarily to Islam and Muslims. The bombing of mosques and other places of worship is but one example of this. This distorted way of thinking, this extremist culture, is the underlying cause of it all, and it is based upon the misunderstanding and distorted perspective of a few isolated individuals and groups who are totally unrepresentative of the overwhelming majority. Their viewpoint is not the accepted one.
3. The idea of a clash of civilizations and a conflict between religions, predicated on the belief that Islamic values and the Muslim way of life are incompatible with those of non-Muslims and make coexistence with them an impossibility. This theory, put forward by intellectuals, strategic experts, political actors, media outlets, and artists, has come to be called the ‘clash of civilizations’ principle, and was originally proposed by Samuel P. Huntington. He insisted that

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the clash has been ongoing for centuries, and that it will not recede, thereby completing the picture painted by Fukuyama in 'The End of History and the Last Man,' wherein he declared the triumph of Western civilization. Implying the inevitability of a clash due to the multiplicity of civilizations is proof of the failure of every civilization in comprehending the importance of conceding the right to diversity; the right upon which we hope to build our vision for a remedy, given that it is the basis for dialogue and the means for acquaintance.

4. The negative attitude adopted by certain Muslim groups who live in societies with non-Muslim majorities and their reluctance to integrate into those societies who have given them a home, whether as a reaction to actual discrimination and hatred, or due to an improper understanding of what is meant by loyalty to religion or to one's country of origin. They have not understood that allegiance in this modern age is no longer just a matter of religion, but has become compound and complex, governed by intertwining and interdependent factors. These different levels and layers of loyalty pose opportunities for communication and interaction instead of conflict and clashing.

What is most terrifying about all of this, regardless of whether we look at it in terms of religious, sectarian, or doctrinal extremism, or in terms of Islamophobia, is that it coincides with an era during which humanity possesses nuclear weapons in a global system that is rife with terror and woefully lacking in guarantees to prohibit their use, to say nothing of the fact that some of these weapons are available beyond state oversight and control. For the last few years, we have been working hard to extinguish the blaze burning through Muslim societies. However, it seems we have a long and arduous task ahead of us if we are to extinguish the fires spreading across the globe. Global predicaments are exacerbated by regional disputes over sovereignty, natural resources and water, secessionist demands, organized crime, famine, and unregulated mass migration. In addition, we must not lose sight of the hazards of environmental pollution on a global scale, nor neglect increasingly important discussions relating to religious, doctrinal, and racial identity, nor ignore the stirring of a collective memory traumatized by violent cross-cultural conflicts that have taken hostage warring ideologues and extremists from both East and West. All of this has been exacerbated by a globalized world, teeming with various ideas and cultures and replete with economic exchange and technological innovation; it is paradoxical that the improved means of communication and transport have increased the gap between human beings instead of bringing minds and ideas closer and into fruitful exchange.

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All of the above-mentioned poses questions and demands answers. Should religions take sides in these conflicts, fanning their flames in some cases, serving as an instrument in others, and being used as a means to spread negative propaganda? Or should they act as a saviour for mankind and nations, thereby acting as a catalyst for building, not demolishing, and an agent for prevention, not infection? Is it necessary that we apply Hegel's saying: "We learn from history that we do not learn from history," or should we learn from history so that we can maintain world peace? Is it not high time to put Hans Küng's saying into practice: "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions"?

## *2. A remedial vision for confronting Islamophobia and preserving world peace*

Our remedial vision is dependent upon the nature of the treatment mentioned above, and upon what we established with respect to the question of difference and the relationship with the other. Hence, this remedy is comparable to a course of antibiotics which takes the following approaches:

1. Restoring the principles which govern human relations in Islam
2. Strengthening areas of commonality and promoting a culture of dialogue

### **1. The Principles which Govern Human Relations in Islam**

In order to portray Islam correctly, we must take heed of the following:

**First:** Islam considers all human beings to be brothers and sisters, thereby forestalling the countless wars over the course of human history that have been fought on the grounds of racial difference. Islam also recognizes the human right to difference: "*but they continue to have their differences*" (Qur'an 11:118).

**Second:** Islam recognizes other peoples' right to practice their religions, thereby forestalling wars fought on the basis of religion, of which there have been so many that all of human history simply appears to be a record of them.

**Third:** Islam considers dialogue and persuasion as the ideal means for resolving differences: "*Argue with them in the most courteous way*" (Qur'an 16:125).

**Fourth:** Islam considers peace, presented beneficently and justly, to be one's default relationship with others.

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We believe that difference breeds religious pluralism, and we believe that religious pluralism in all nations is today a reality. A clear injunction to which Islamic scripture attests is to accept this pluralism by applying the religious objective of establishing acquaintance and activating areas of commonality. Furthermore, we claim that Islam has been the most tolerant religion in history in terms of accepting pluralism, and the same applies to the Muslim *Umma*.

The '*Charter of Madina*', upon which the Marrakesh Declaration was based, served as a regulatory framework for nurturing a culture of accepting differences along with religious and racial pluralism in a single society. The charter bypassed all potential obstacles by prioritizing the interests of solidarity and cooperation in the form of rights and duties.

*The 'other' is either one with whom you share a common faith or one with whom you share a common humanity.*

Of all the human rights featured in the charter, perhaps the most important is its recognition of pluralism, and its affirmation of freedom of belief, by recognising the right of the followers of each creed to their beliefs. The charter also lays down the bases for equality in terms of the rights and duties granted to each person within the framework of civil society. Among its provisions it mentions the various different human and tribal elements that make up society, declaring them equal in terms of their role and responsibility in keeping society on an even keel. Each segment of society is considered equal to the others and treated in the same way as them wherever possible. There is no place in society for relationships based on subordination. The charter firstly highlights the duties of each segment towards its own constituent members, then secondly, towards the members of the other segments of general Madinan society and finally thirdly, towards those living in the surrounding areas. These duties have been formulated on the basis of maintaining justice and looking after society's best interests, both in times of war and peace, and were based firmly on the charter's principles concerning religious, racial, and tribal plurality, which considered justice as the bare minimum requirement for human interaction but encouraged people to go further still and make goodness the cornerstone of all their transactions and interactions. And it is not adequate for a just and good society to speak of minorities within a nation; rather it must speak of a single nation.

The Forum has started work on its Peace Encyclopedia project, with the first vol-

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ume, dealing principally with proper conceptualisation, to build a fence of protection around peace and non-violence with the aim to reclaim the true methodology of Islamic discourse, a methodology based on gaining a correct understanding of source texts and adopting an authentic approach to dealing with them based on the widely agreed-upon *usuli*<sup>6</sup> method.

## 2. Strengthening Areas of Commonality and Promoting a Culture of Dialogue

Human beings share many areas of commonality, but these are too often ignored in favor of areas of difference, resulting in much war and destruction and the distancing of the human race from the values taught by the prophets: goodness, love, and compassion.

These areas of commonality exist at different levels. They exist between adherents of a single religion; between members of different religions; and between human beings in general. The latter is the highest of these levels, for it promotes the embodiment of universal values among human beings of every religious and philosophical inclination. By activating these areas of commonality and bringing them onto the same page, we can succeed in repairing rifts, removing misunderstandings, and weakening the attraction of difference. We stand before the ruins of a failed civilization for whom humanity has ceased to hold value, for what is the point of traveling through space and reaching far-off planets if we cannot even come to terms with those with whom we have most in common, our fellow human beings?

In Islam, ‘other’ does not mean ‘non-existent’ as it does for Aristotle, for whom the philosophical antonym of existent or ‘être’ is ‘autre’ or other. Nor is it ‘the opposite’ that in Hegel’s view, ‘must be dominated to achieve self-consciousness as part of a self’s life-or-death struggle for recognition.’ Nor is it, as Sartre put it, ‘The Hell that dispossesses the self of its original perfection.’ The ‘other’ in the Islamic perspective can be summarized in the words of Imam Ali (may God be pleased with him), ‘There are two types of people: those who are your brothers in religion and those who have been created in a like form to you.’ So, the ‘other’ is either one with whom you share a common faith or one with whom you share a common humanity.

This is made abundantly clear by the fact that Islam gives priority to human dig-

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<sup>6</sup> That is, based on the foundations of sacred law.

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nity by describing it as the first area of human commonality, for God bestowed great honour on all mankind, regardless of sex, colour, language, or belief, when he blew His spirit into our forefather Adam عليه السلام. God says, “*We have honored the children of Adam. . .* (Qur’an 17:70). The dignity of being human takes precedence over the dignity of having faith.

With this holistic vision of the ‘other’, Islam places great emphasis on similarity and equality on the basis of a shared humanity and actively looks for ways to expand the areas of commonality between us and disregard all measures of discrimination, save those made on the basis of goodness and piety. Imam Ali put it beautifully when he said, ‘A person’s worth lies in that at which he excels.’

Man’s common ground lies in those universal values that are beyond dispute and remain untouched and unchanged by the passage of time, those values that cross boundaries and traverse dynasties, for their roots are buried so deep that none of these factors can affect them.

The philosophers have differed among themselves with respect to whether these common values exist or not. Alfred North Whitehead argued that, ‘There are no common values, for values are relative, not absolute. Every age has its own values, and the values that are considered lofty in one era are considered contemptible in another.’ He also said, ‘Any doctrine that posits a single source for universal perfection or ascribes it to a single form is a doctrine that is eminently worth ignoring.’

Most other philosophers, at the head of whom was Kant, the doyen of moral absolutism, believed that truth, good, and beauty are absolute values shared among all human beings independent of time and place. In other words, whatever was a value in the past is a value in the present and will remain a value in the future, and that value will be the same for everyone, even if they themselves are unaware of this. Although Kant desired to establish ethics outside the purview of religion and did not recognize its inherently religious origins and roots, his school of Moral Absolutism is, in my view, supported by the heavenly religions and is that most suggested by languages and the words used within them to describe such concepts. For example, ‘justice’ in every language and every context is considered a good word, and the same is true for ‘loyalty’. But the words for ‘injustice’ and ‘treachery’ are detestable in every language and culture. In fact, even one who is unjust and treacherous hates to be described as such, and prefers to be thought of as just and loyal.

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These common values must return to take their place in people's lives, given that they represent the core of the message of every prophet. All of humanity is in dire need of them today, especially since all of our zones of activity have been turned into minefields by the actions of deranged antagonists. These values are the never-changing values of peace, a universal constant whose constituent parts never differ, belonging not to one people over another, nor to one religion over another.

There were two pivotal moments in the evolution of values in Western thought that altered the course of humanity. The first happened during the Enlightenment, which took values out of the realm of the sacred and into the realm of the mundane. This was the moment Europe cut itself off from the light of divine revelation, although the precise manner in which this was done differed from region to region. It was at this time that values such as human rights, liberty, and democracy came to prominence, and man became his own moral compass and source of reference. These humanist values peaked in the wake of the Second World War, at a moment in which a human conscience, shocked by the calamity of war, finally awoke and produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, regrettably, the committee drafting the Declaration decided to exclude all mention of God and all reference to creation. Charles Malik, the sole Arab member of this drafting Committee—a committee whose members included John Humphrey and René Cassin—said, “So much did they excise God that it was as if man himself were God.” God is greatly exalted above what they say!

*It is not fitting that a just and good society speak of minorities within a nation, rather it must speak of a single nation.*

As for the second development, it is unfolding before our eyes in this era in which we live, the Age of Postmodernism, where even humanism has been declared dead, under the influence of the three leading advocates of the philosophy of doubt and skepticism: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. In this age, these values have become non-existent and have been supplanted by soulless technology and the relentless accumulation of material wealth. Violence has become all-pervasive, and self-interest has been installed as king. Technology is taking humankind in unthinkable directions.

Having seen what is happening, some philosophers and politicians have started to sound the alarm bells, as is shown by the titles they have chosen for their works. For example, the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo, gave one of his most im-

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portant studies the title, 'Twilight of Values,' alluding to the book of the German philosopher, Oswald Spengler, 'Decline of the West'. And the former Presidential Nominee, Patrick J. Buchanan, wrote a book entitled 'The Death of the West'. The pessimistic titles chosen for these books indicate that values have hit rock-bottom and that people need to return to God. These values that humankind planted in the earth and then abandoned now demand of them that they once again raise their heads and look skywards to catch a glimpse of the mercy of God.

It has become a matter of the utmost urgency to move past the stage of denunciation and warning to that of timely action, for future generations will not have any time to take action—the course will already be set in stone. Those generations will become prisoners of processes beyond their control, such as rampant population growth, environmental degradation and collapse, growing North-South disparity, and social discrimination. To wait until tomorrow means that we always arrive too late, for we are trustees of something extremely fragile: life on planet Earth.

Understanding this crisis, our common responsibility reveals itself; a responsibility that the Prophet ﷺ made clear through the metaphor of the boat when he said:

The likeness of the man who observes the limits prescribed by God and that of the man who transgresses them is like the people who get on board a ship after casting lots. Some of them are in its lower deck and some of them in its upper. Those who are in its lower, when they require water, go to the occupants of the upper deck, and say to them: 'If we make a hole in the bottom of the ship, we shall not harm you.' If the occupants of the upper deck leave them to carry out their design they all will be drowned. But if they do not let them go ahead, all of them will remain safe.

Now, today, all of mankind is in a single boat that is about to capsize, and thus the righteous must take steps to prevent those who would sink the ship from doing so.

To do this, we must nurture a sense of shared responsibility that will, in turn, give rise to a shared desire to see peace in place of war, love in place of hatred, and harmony in place of discord. This will help mobilize religious figures, intellectuals, and academics from every religious and cultural background—all of those with some vestige of virtue and good—and encourage them to align their efforts to ward off this civilizational threat and enter into a new 'Alliance of Virtue'.

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This Alliance is founded upon the centrality of the value of dialogue, since dialogue is not only a need of our current times but is both a religious duty and a human necessity. Dialogue is a fundamental principle of religion and one of the requirements for human relations, hence God Almighty says: *“Argue with them in the most courteous way”* (Qur’an 16:125), and *“[Believers], argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly”* (Qur’an 29:46). It is only through dialogue that opposing sides can become acquainted.

Dialogue is tangible proof of each party’s readiness to share valuable ideas and information to help resolve the problems of the planet upon which we live. Dialogue is a value, and the key to solving all of the world’s problems. Dialogue is respect for difference. Those who advocate dialogue not only respect different opinions, but love them, for they see them as a source of enrichment and a thing of beauty, as the basis upon which human complexity and diversity is founded and built. Dialogue falls within the scope of the Almighty’s instruction: *“[Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend”* (Qur’an 41:34). Is there still hope for us today? Can dialogue be the means to fostering and developing the good and noble human values that we share?

The basis for dialogue is difference: we do not engage in dialogue except with someone who views things differently. Indeed, one might say that we only enter into dialogue with him when we are polar opposites or, to put it another way, when we hold diametrically opposed positions, for such is the requirement of dialogue and debate. There must be two opposing sides, one who is called the ‘Proponent’ and the other who is called the ‘Objector’. The proponent advocates and believes in a particular position while the objector denies that position and believes it to be wrong.

Dialogue can take many different shapes and forms. It can be facilitated through many different forms of media, such as in the press or on the television, or in forums, conferences, consultative councils, and parliaments. It can take the form of commercial negotiations carried out within the walls of international trade organizations or barter between individuals in the marketplace or stock exchange.

Each of these types of dialogue has its own means and methods. Dialogue can take place within a single people with the purpose of expanding their areas of commonality; it can also take place between different peoples, such as the ongoing dialogue between East and West, or that between those of different religions and faiths. It is

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the human perspective that shapes and determines the prospects of dialogue.

Dialogue, as Plato teaches us, offers an alternative to violence, for it is the platform upon which common ground may be sought and compromise made; compromises that serve to guarantee the interests of both sides. Dialogue allows us to postpone violent confrontation and find areas of accommodation and accord, for such areas are a natural part of human existence. This is why Islam attaches such importance to it, and, through it, supplies the world with solutions of compromise that take context into account and weigh up potential benefits and harms. When we use dialogue to resolve existing problems, we will soon start to see that many of those problems are imaginary and baseless. And in the face of the solutions yielded by dialogue, many feuds, disputes, and sticking points will swiftly lose their significance.

Dialogue should be as deep as the problem it seeks to resolve, and last as long as it takes to tackle it at every level and cover all its sectors, moving from the simplest levels of societal life to the most compound and complex, from the home to the university. Let us plant the seeds of a culture of tolerance within the hearts of the people. We must use all the cultural resources at our disposal, especially the tools of education and mass media, to instill these values and concepts and curb people's violent tendencies, and tip the balance in favor of tolerance and acceptance of the other. In short, we must create community spirit and encourage constructive coexistence among the individuals who make up society.

This means that the ideals and values that are taught to individuals within a society, whether through education or media or any other reasonable, tolerant, and balanced means of mass communication, must never stray beyond the mainstream nor go outside the accepted norms of society, in an attempt to stir up emotion and inflame passion without thought of consequence nor consideration of repercussion. In short, we must adopt an interventionist approach: a lively, informed discourse based on renouncing violence and cultivating a culture of peace, tolerance, and love; offering economic, social, and cultural alternatives to the youth; attempting to rechannel their efforts towards activities that benefit society and bring growth; building bridges and mending relations between various factions; restoring a mindset to society of conciliation and mediation; and coordinating the efforts of the educated class to promote this culture within universities and schools, and through the media.

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We at the Forum believe that Islamophobia and every other form of discrimination and racism is spreading, and that extreme right-wing politics - with its total rejection of the principles of mutual cooperation, freedom, and recognition of the other - is gaining significant ground in Western democracies. Yet, we also believe that the majority of people still have a proclivity for goodness and a desire for peace. They aspire to what is good and let reason, common interest, and their decisions are made with the interests of shared values in mind. They keep alive the spirit of searching for contented coexistence among religions and display a true keenness for the principles of tolerance and acquaintance.

In this context, the Forum was fortunate indeed to host the American Peace Caravan in 2017, an initiative led by a group of individuals who believe strongly in the need for positive cooperation between the followers of major religions, thereby weakening the drive towards nihilism and banishing the spectre of hatred and racism that has cast its dark shadow over their societies. Rabbi David Saperstein, Pastor Bob Roberts, Imam Mohamed Magid, and Rabbi Bruce Lustig, alongside scores of rabbis, priests, and imams from all over the United States, joined hands in this initiative to form a movement for peace, concord, and fraternity that embodies the true spirit of the heavenly religions. We are genuinely hopeful that this procession shall culminate in a large congregation of clerics and give birth to a new Alliance of Virtue.

The Caravan of Peace can become the template for a new type of dialogue and acquaintance, for it shows that people are able to be together in the same time and space, even if only for a limited period, living, working, eating, and sleeping alongside one another and traveling together (and, according to some, travel was called *safar* by the Arabs because it reveals (*yusfiru*) a man's true character)<sup>7</sup>, and yet not compromising on their own personal religions, fulfilling their daily religious rites in full view and full hearing of the others. Yes, they speak and study, but, more importantly, they watch and witness, ultimately enabling them to see that they are truly brothers, with far more in common than they thought.

This is why we hosted the Caravan and accompanied it every step of the way, seeking to firm up this template and turn it into an effective practical tool for promoting cooperation and coexistence. And, to make this model even more effective and practical, we must work hard to roll it out across the world so that all may

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<sup>7</sup> All Arabic words have a 'root', usually of three letters. Words that are derived from that root are often connected in conception. The root letters for 'to reveal' (*yusfiru*) and 'travel' (*safar*) are: s-f-r.

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benefit from it. We believe that the Caravan will become not just the template for dialogue but the template for positive acquaintance and constructive collaboration. We hope that it will mark the beginning of a new age in relations between monotheistic religions, and thus become a watershed for possessors of enlightened minds to work together to set right the course of humanity.

The premise for the Caravan of Peace is based on the Marrakesh Declaration, which laid down the epistemic and legal groundwork that made a call for genuine coexistence between citizens of different religious backgrounds in Muslim societies possible. The initiative was born out of the growing awareness that there is an urgent need to adopt a new strategy to bring about peace, one in which religious leaders and thinkers fulfill their roles and create a unified intellectual front and a humanitarian alliance that works to actualise and activate areas of commonality.

The most important of these areas is that of religious commonality: that which all followers of Abrahamic faiths have in common with one another. This constitutes a sound starting point, both in religious and rational terms, and in terms of the common good. The day that the followers of the heavenly religions join hands in cooperation to look beyond their differences and become bonded by feelings of human fraternity, will be a bright day indeed in the history of humankind.

*Man's common ground lies in those universal values that are beyond dispute and remain untouched and unchanged by the passage of time, those values that cross boundaries and traverse dynasties, for their roots are buried so deep that none of these factors can affect them.*

It is high time for religious leaders to become more involved in the affairs of human society and to demonstrate that it is they who are best suited to restoring right guidance and banishing the spectre of war and bloody conflict that looms large. We at the Caravans Initiative want to prove to people that religion can—and should—be a means of healing the open wounds of human society and eradicating the diseases of rancor and deep-seated hatred. This is the moral message we hope to deliver to the world through these caravans.

All the religions are making great efforts towards establishing peace, especially through the medium of prayer and supplication. But this movement towards solidarity and cooperation must ultimately accomplish things at a civil level in order to prove to the whole world that religion in its true form is a force for good and that

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it will be through it that mankind realizes his salvation.

This places a significant burden and responsibility on the shoulders of men of religion to combat the extremism that has appeared within their ranks and rid their flocks of the carriers of disease. They must restore balance in their religion so that they can then build bridges between their own faith and others, bridges built on solid ground with foundations strong enough to remain in place so that the connections between those relations cannot just survive but thrive, and not just remain but strengthen. Together, they can announce victory over evil and defeat the armies of the devil. “*Satan is your enemy—so treat him as an enemy*” (Qur’an 35:6).

In conclusion, it is an individual obligation on each and every one of us to carry forth the message of peace. Therefore, we must do the following:

- Be aware of the true significance of the concepts that provide the framework for peace, while, at same time, remaining aware of how those same concepts are misinterpreted and perverted by extremists
- Spread this correct understanding using all the means at our disposal, including the press and educational curricula
- Carry out field initiatives to help spread peace in societies in which we live
- Encourage tolerance and coexistence programs
- Put forward an authentic interpretation of Sharia and frame mandatory rulings within their proper contexts. In other words, interpret scripture in light of real-life situations in order to keep sight of the objectives of the Sharia.
- Stand in solidarity with all remaining peace-loving people worldwide to spread the values of peace.

To actualise these points we should be moving in three directions and focusing on three areas:

Firstly, the house of Islam must be put in order by dismantling the conceptual framework of the extremist way of thinking, exposing the manner in which they misuse textual evidence and showing the superficiality of the methods which they use to derive rulings. This will be accomplished by highlighting correct methodologies and promoting sound ways of dealing with textual proofs in the Qur’an and Sunnah; giving precedence to universal rulings over individual ones; collating and combining proofs rather than using them in isolation; and using the core objectives of the religion to unveil the true significance of religious texts and show us to what

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degree they should be implemented and how they can be coordinated and made consistent with our present circumstances.

By following this methodology, we will make it clear that the Sharia was only revealed to best serve the long and short-term interests of human beings, that the final message of Islam was sent as a mercy to all peoples, and that there is no contradiction between reason and scripture. In this way, we will ultimately debunk extremist thought and ideas and rid the Muslim *Umma* of them.

It is necessary to clean our house in this way if we want to do away with an extremist ideology that has severely damaged perceptions of Islam and provided others with ample justification for hatred, for there is an almost symbiotic relationship between the extremist terrorists and the peddlers of hatred; they fan each other's flames and affect each other in a proportional way.

Secondly, it is necessary that we take dialogue beyond the parameters of intellectual discussion and engage in global dialogue, presenting everyone with the genuine version of Islam that proves to them that peaceful coexistence with Muslims is possible. This will be accomplished by emphasizing the openness and tolerance that runs through Islamic scripture and tradition, highlighting the web of interests shared by Muslims and non-Muslims in all societies and emphasizing the value of citizenship and other noble humanitarian values.

Thirdly, we must progress to the stage of solidarity by joining forces with like-minded individuals to promote the values and ideals shared by the entire human fraternity, in order to create a new Alliance of Virtue that rejects discrimination and hatred and refuses to blame an entire religion or civilization for the crimes of a few isolated fools. Such an Alliance will act on the principle that "*no soul will bear the burden of another*" (Qur'an 6:164), and call for peace and fraternity amongst all men. This Alliance must comprise the *crème de la crème* of clerics, philosophers, intellectuals, and academics from all religions and philosophies. This is what the Forum strives to accomplish, and this is what we must all work for.

We ask God Almighty to guide our Forum to success, give it sound judgment and keep it on the straight path.

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*Most people in the world are religious  
And all religions encourage Peace. There  
can be no World Peace until there is  
Peace between religious communities.*

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By H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH  
President, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace



*Islam considers all human beings to be brothers and sisters, thereby averting the countless wars over the course of human history that have been fought on the grounds of racial difference. Islam also recognizes the human right to difference: “but they continue to have their differences” (Quran 11:118)*

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H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH  
President, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace



## **BIOGRAPHY OF H.E SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH**

H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH bin Bayyah is recognized by Muslim scholars around the world as perhaps the greatest living authority on the Islamic legal methodology known as *Usul al-Fiqh* (Principles of Jurisprudence). Beyond that, he is known for his scholarship drawing on scripture and traditional texts across all four major Sunni schools of jurisprudence to address the crucial contemporary concerns of Muslim communities. In recent years, he has been the driving force behind the establishment of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, which seeks to unite Muslim scholars around the world in pursuit of peace, and to address the crises facing Muslim communities worldwide.

Born in eastern Mauritania in 1935, the Shaykh grew up in a family known for its grasp of the Mauritanian classical curriculum. His father, Shaykh Al-Mahfoudh bin Bayyah was a senior judge and chosen twice as the head of Ulema (religious scholars) of Mauritania upon the country's independence. From an early age, the Shaykh demonstrated his exceptional memory and understanding of the Mauritanian texts.

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Under his father's tutelage, he developed an advanced understanding of Arabic grammar and rhetoric, and knowledge of pre-Islamic Arab poetry. He also developed an advanced understanding of the Qur'anic sciences: legal theory, syntax, language, orthography and the ten forms of Qur'anic recitation. He specialized in the Maliki school of jurisprudence, and was qualified to give authoritative legal opinions (fatwas).

In his early 20s, he was selected as part of a group of scholars to go to Tunisia for training in modern legal systems, which were to be introduced to Mauritania. He graduated at the top of his group, and on his return to Mauritania was appointed a judge, rising to become Minister of Justice, Minister of Islamic Affairs, and eventually Vice President.

When some government officials criticized his lack of fluency in French, he taught himself the language by listening to French radio with a dictionary in hand. He later surprised his critics by addressing a ministerial meeting in the language. His mastery of French has allowed him to study European thought and the history of ideas. He is rare among contemporary Muslim scholars for his knowledge of the work of Western philosophers and social theorists.

In the 1980s, Shaykh joined King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where he taught several subjects, including Qur'anic studies, jurisprudence, and advanced level of Arabic, for over three decades. This allows him to combine the study of the scriptural sources of Qur'an and Hadith, the various schools' approaches to *Usul al-Fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence), and *Maqasid al-Sharia* (the purposes of Islamic law). This breadth of study has allowed the Shaykh to develop a universal framework in which Islamic jurisprudence can be adapted to local contexts while maintaining its essential principles and purposes and ensuring its continued relevance in the lives of an increasingly diverse global Muslim population.

The Shaykh has developed theories of Islamic jurisprudence in secular or non-Muslim societies, called the Jurisprudence of Minorities (*fiqh al-aqalliyyat*). He is also an outspoken critic of terrorism, authoring several articles and books exploring Islamic responses to the issue. He has applied this work practically, not least in the successful efforts to secure the release of French war correspondent Florence Aubenas, and her translator Hussein Hanun, in Iraq in 2005.

Over the past 25 years, the Shaykh has taught students who have become some of

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the most prominent scholars in the Middle East and North Africa. In the late 1990s he started to visit the West, particularly teaching British and American students, gaining a following amongst prominent Western Muslim leaders. He has written several books and hundreds of articles and essays, mostly in Arabic, which are used by scholars around the world.

The Shaykh's work has not been focused on scholarship for its own sake, but on applying it to address some of the most pressing issues facing global Islam. In 2008, he became the founding President of the Global Centre for Renewal and Guidance (GCRG), a London-based think tank that applies scholarship to strategic solutions to pressing intellectual and spiritual issues facing global Islam. This reflects the Shaykh's belief that ideas can only be defeated by ideas, and that Islamist extremism must be answered by sound reasoning drawn from orthodox, accepted sources of Islamic jurisprudence.

This approach was applied in Mardin, Turkey, in 2010, when his organisation convened a conference to examine a fatwa issued by the 14th century scholar Ibn Taymiyya. His Mardin Fatwa is widely used by jihadi groups to justify attacks on both non-Muslims and Muslims who do not follow their understanding of Islam. The 2010 Mardin Conference revealed that a transcription error had been introduced in a 1909 edition of Ibn Taymiyya's fatwa, turning the verb "to treat" into the verb "to fight" and that jihadi groups were relying on the incorrect version. Under the Shaykh's leadership, the conference published a report entitled, *Challenging the al-Qaida Narrative: The New Mardin Declaration*, correcting the jihadi understanding of the fatwa. Three separate spokesmen of al-Qaida responded to this threat, attacking Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah by name.

In 2014, the Shaykh established the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace (ADFP) in Abu Dhabi, under the patronage of Sheikh Abdallah bin Zayed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates. The vision of the ADFP is to address the crises facing global Islam from a framework of Islamic tradition and legal theory, applied to local contexts. Over 1,000 of the world's leading Muslim scholars from a variety of traditions, as well as academics and thought leaders, attended the ADFP's launch. The ADFP is the first global gathering of scholars designed to provide a response to extremism, sectarianism and terrorism.

Since the 2014 Forum, the Shaykh has travelled widely to advance its work, in North Africa, the Middle East, Far East and the West. This included a conference

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with the African Union on tackling the religious conflict in the Central African Republic, and the release of the Chibok girls by the Nigerian jihadi group Boko Haram. He has led Imam training initiatives in the US, UK and Europe, and spoken widely on the issue of global peace, including at the World Economic Forum in 2015 and 2017, and at the UN Countering Violent Extremism Summit in 2015. In 2014, the Shaykh's work and that of the ADFP were referenced by President Barack Obama at the UN General Assembly. Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah thus became the only Islamic scholar ever to be publicly quoted by a sitting President of the United States.<sup>8</sup>

In January 2016, the Shaykh convened the Marrakesh Declaration, as the culmination of an effort running since 2011 to address the issue of violence and oppression against minorities in Muslim majority countries. The Declaration applied traditional Islamic texts, and in particular the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ *Charter of Madina*, to affirm the Islamic principle of equal citizenship as prescribed by the Prophet ﷺ. It was signed by scholars and politicians from across the Muslim world.

In February 2018, following the Shaykh's initiative, hundreds of American religious leaders, scholars and politicians, as well as others from around the world gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss the 'Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good'. This conference promulgated *The Washington Declaration*, calling on the leaders of the Abrahamic faiths to join together in a new Alliance of Virtue, using their shared values to promote the global commonweal.

In 2019 the Shaykh launched *The Charter of the New Alliance of Virtue*, a voluntary document that seeks to bring together religious leaders of good-will for the benefit of humanity. It is an effort across religions to enable their members to live side-by-side in peace and happiness and cooperate on the basis a theology of God-given human dignity that actualizes virtue and benefit for all. In 2020, the Shaykh used this document to press for an attitude of 'the Spirit of the Ship's Passengers' which is a Prophetic metaphor for the status of human beings as the passengers of single ship with a common destiny. The Shaykh continues to argue that this is the only possible means for facing the challenges of war, pandemics, and climate change that threaten humanity.

The Shaykh has received multiple awards recognizing his work and serves in the

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<sup>8</sup> The White House Archives, 2014. See: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly>

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leadership of many organizations seeking peace, including as one of four Executive Co-Presidents of Religions for Peace, the largest interfaith organization in the world.



*The human being has discovered planets  
and galaxies but has yet to discover  
the human being next to him.*

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H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH  
President, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace



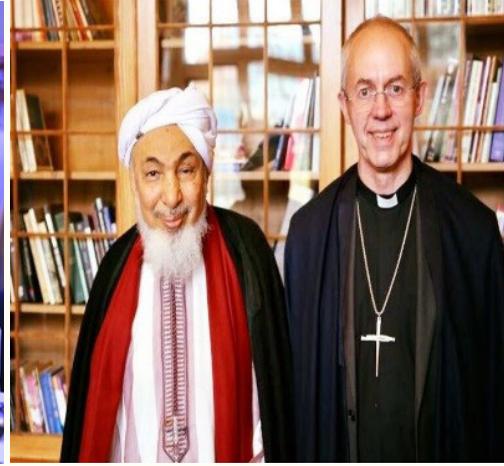
## ABOUT THE ABU DHABI FORUM FOR PEACE

THE ABU DHABI Forum For Peace, under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates was established during the pinnacle of social strife in the Muslim world following the Arab Spring. The Forum works earnestly to bring an end to conflict and establish peace through facilitating spaces for dialogue and the dissemination of a discourse of moderation. It strives to allow its participants to put behind them the differences of the past and focus on a secure, peaceful societies future together.

The Forum takes an academic and theological approach to the problem of violence, holding that any violent act begins as ideology before emerging as action. Wars are waged in the realm of ideas before they devastate the physical world. Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, the Forum's founder, teaches that we must construct defenses of peace in the heart and mind and inculcate a correct understanding of Islam. This is one of the primary roles of the scholarly elite and religious leadership in our time.

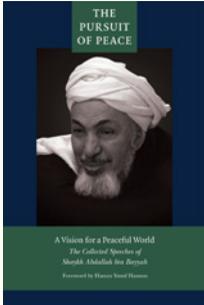
Likewise, the Forum focuses on securing the rights and safety of religious minorities living in Muslim lands. *The Marrakesh Declaration* launched in 2016, calls on Muslim states to accord the rights of equal citizenship to all minorities in their midst on the basis of *The Charter of Madina* and the Islamic values of benevolence, solidarity, human dignity, peace, justice, mercy and the common good. Most recently, the Forum has focused on elevating interreligious cooperation from the discourse of shared rights and responsibilities to the heights of a common conscience and genuine loving kindness towards the other. This is profoundly showcased in the promulgation of the 2019 *Charter for a New Alliance of Virtue* and the 2021 Abu Dhabi *Charter of Inclusive Citizenship*.



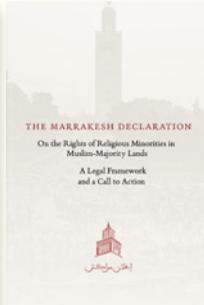




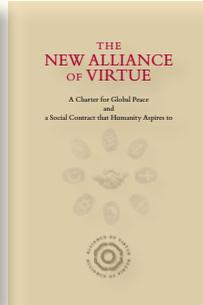
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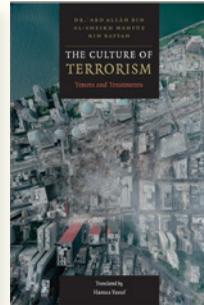
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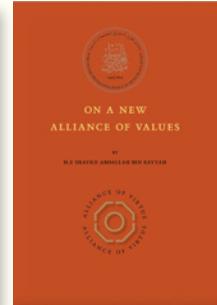
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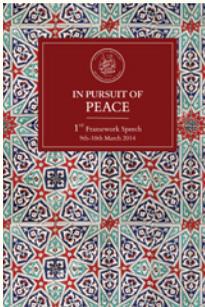
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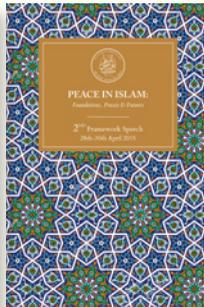
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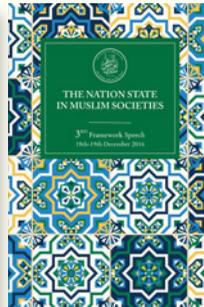
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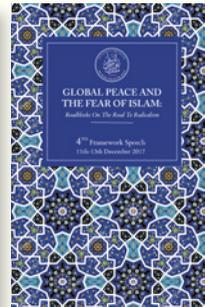
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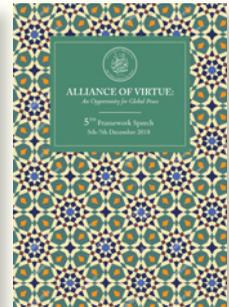
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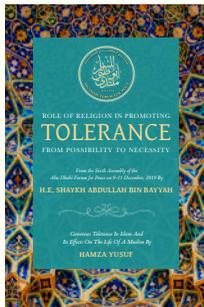
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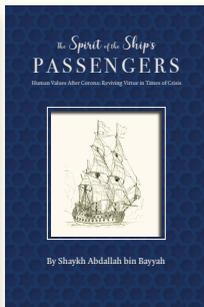
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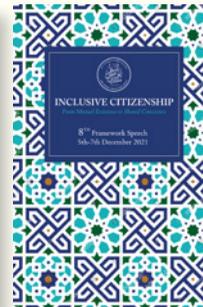
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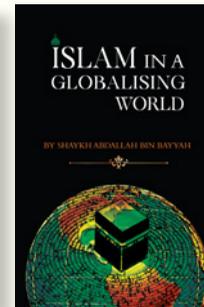
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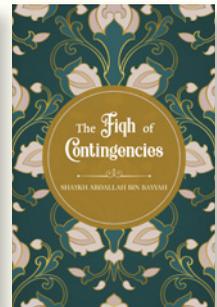
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8<sup>th</sup> Assembly  
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