

THE NEW ALLIANCE OF VIRTUE

A Charter for Global Peace
and
a Social Contract that Humanity Aspires to



THE
NEW ALLIANCE
OF VIRTUE

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SATURDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2018
THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 73RD SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

We are convinced that lasting global peace can only be achieved by making peace between religions, the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies launched an international initiative to build an alliance among the Abrahamic religions and world philosophies. This alliance is based on the principles that go beyond the paradigm of religious argument and conflict and look towards a paradigm of mutual recognition and cooperation, guided by international covenants and the spirit of our noble values and shared virtues.

His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan



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FOREWORD



Dr. William Vendley's Introduction Speech at the Conference

RIGHTS PROTECT, VIRTUES PERFECT

The Charter of the New Alliance of Virtue calls religious and all other persons of goodwill to join in a global movement of solidarity in cultivating virtue.

A glimpse of the urgent need for and enormous promise of the New Alliance of Virtue is offered when we ponder the fact that “virtues” are an essential complement to “human rights.” Rights protect human dignity, while virtues cultivate, unfold and in some degree perfect it.

In this light, the Charter of *The New Alliance of Virtue* is a profound, necessary and fitting complement to the historic Marrakesh Declaration that focuses on the Islamic support for full “citizenship” and all related “human rights” for minority populations in Islamic majority States. Implicit in the Marrakesh Declaration is the invitation for each religious tradition to find within its respective spiritual rooting the support for the full citizenship and related “rights” of persons of minority in all States, regardless of which religion has a majority in a given State. In this sense,

the Marrakesh Declaration is an authentic Islamic “call” to itself and to all religious communities for solidarity in the protection of human dignity and the human rights that flow from it.

Protecting human dignity is utterly essential. It is, however, not enough. The human person cannot live and thrive on “rights” alone. For the Sacred’s gift of human dignity—the source of all rights—must be nurtured, unfolded and—with human effort and the Sacred’s help—more and more “perfected” as persons journey through life.

Virtues are related to decisions on what is worthwhile, what is valuable. A virtue is a habitual orientation to a value like honesty, kindness or justice. Virtues include habits linked to unfolding our personal potentials, as well as those linked to our just and caring relationships with others. Religions—each in its own way—have regarded the cultivation of virtue as the royal road for unfolding and realizing human potentials, achieving just and compassionate relations with others, and arriving at religiously sublime “states” of harmony, compassion and love.

For most persons across time, the primary “schools” of virtue have been the home and the place of worship—the mosque, church, synagogue or temple. *The New Alliance of Virtue* seeks to engage, re-animate and—perhaps most importantly—intentionally “connect” these original virtue schools and all persons of goodwill. This is vital work, for virtues not only help persons to unfold their human dignity, they also help to knit the fabric of trust and social cohesion essential for the true development of societies, including today’s emerging “global society.”

Human dignity needs the protection of rights and it needs to be cultivated by virtue. *The New Alliance of Virtue* invites us to draw strength from one another as we labor to honor and unfold the Sacred’s gift of our human dignity.

DR. WILLIAM VENDLEY

Secretary General Emeritus, Religions for Peace International
Vice President for World Religions and Spirituality



INTRODUCTION



The participants at the Alliance of Virtue Conference

At the start of February 2018, over 200 individuals from the three Abrahamic faiths and others, comprising religious leaders and senior politicians gathered at a hotel in Washington to relaunch the ancient Alliance of Virtue between religions. H.E. Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah, President of the Forum for Promoting Peace, had called for such a gathering at the inaugural assembly of the Forum in 2014:

“We seek those with some vestige of good in them in the world, people with intellect and distinction, so that we may form with them an ‘Alliance of Virtue’, calling to peace, love and harmony, and calling on people to rise out of the pits of conflict and war and scale the summits of growth and prosperity.”

H.E. Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah, March 2014

The original Alliance of Virtue (*hifl al-fudul*) was established in early 7th century AD (late 1st century BH) Mecca, in the house of Abdullah ibn Judan, one of the city’s leading men. Its purpose was to defend the weak and the innocent against the

rapaciousness of those more powerful. The Prophet of Islam, Mohammad, and the first of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Abu Bakr, were both present when the Alliance was formed, though it was before Mohammad's prophethood. He later praised it, saying:

"I was present in the house of Ibn Judan when an alliance was formed, and were I to have been called upon by it in Islam, I would have answered its call."

The new Alliance of Virtue follows the model of the original, on a global scale. It seeks to bring together those of good-will for the good of humanity. It is an effort across religions, despite their differences. It has nothing to do with conventional religious dialogue; its purpose, rather, is to enable its members to live side-by-side in peace and happiness. It does not seek to bridge theological differences, but rather to work on the basis of the common theology of God-given human dignity, to seek virtue for the benefit of all.

This new Alliance of Virtue is founded upon the principles espoused in the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim Majority lands, followed to their logical conclusion. The Marrakesh Declaration laid down the epistemic and legal groundwork that enables a call for genuine coexistence between citizens of different religious backgrounds in Muslim societies.

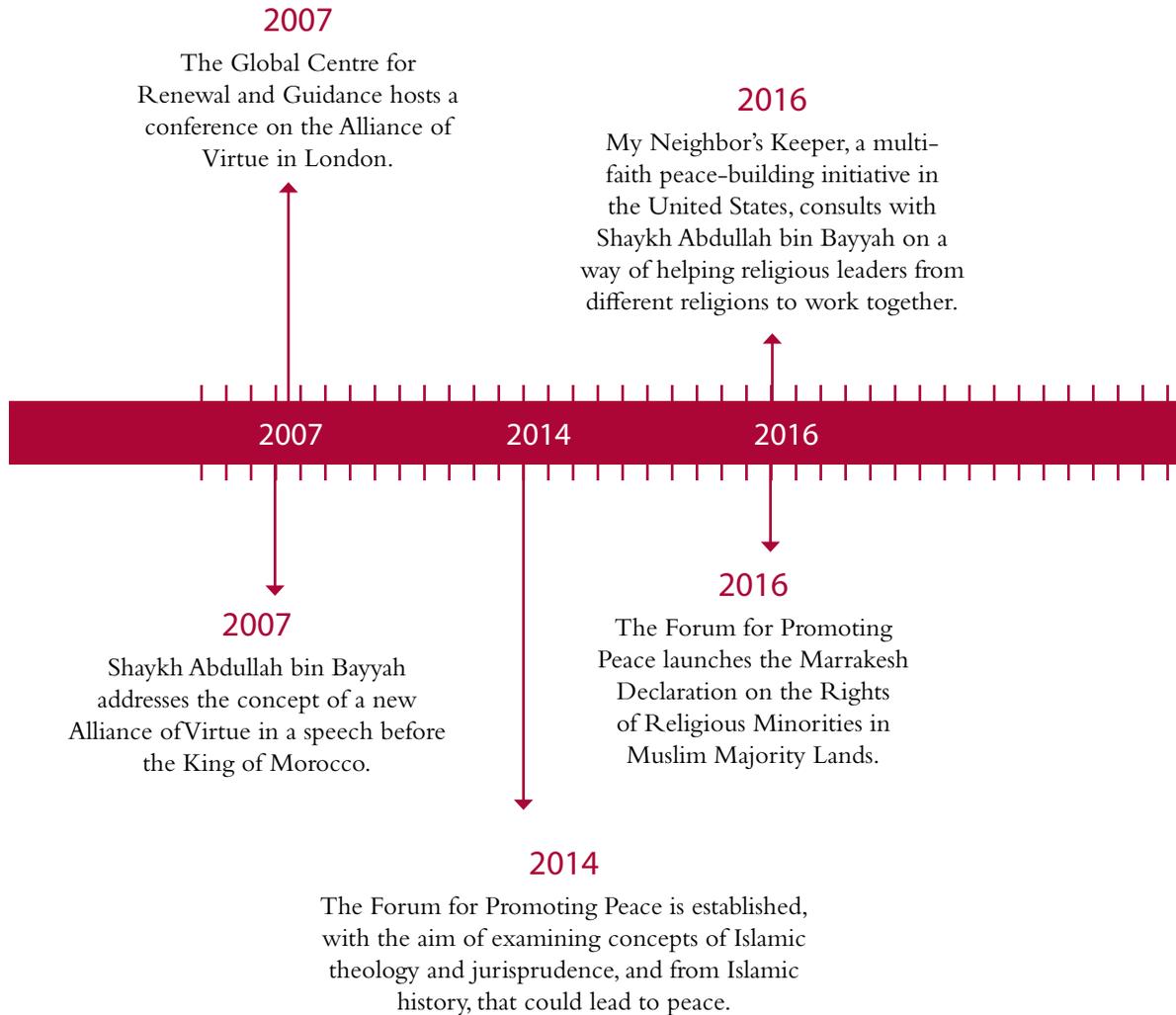
The Marrakesh Declaration was the catalysis for the American Peace Caravan, which brought together over 60 American religious leaders from the Abrahamic faiths, to explore:

- The way that members of different religious view one another and the effect this has on peace;
- The greatest challenges to peaceful coexistence and the greatest opportunities to foster and promote it;
- The central role of promoting concepts of peace in sermons delivered in mosques, churches and synagogues;
- Religion and the role it has to play in the public square.

It was the participants in the American Peace Caravan who formed the core of the gathering in Washington DC in February 2018, for a conference entitled the 'Alliance of Virtue and the Common Good'. The participants promulgated the Washington Declaration, an assertion of the three Abrahamic faiths' shared commitment to action in the promotion of peace, human dignity and the common good.



THE JOURNEY TO THE NEW ALLIANCE OF VIRTUE



May 2017

The first American Caravan of Peace takes place in Abu Dhabi, as a result of the My Neighbor's Keeper consultation. Thirty rabbis, pastors and imams from across the United States gather to explore ways of working together.

February 2018

The Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good conference is held in Washington DC, and promulgates the Washington Declaration calling for the establishment of a new Alliance of Virtue.

2017

2018

2019

November 2017

The second American Caravan of Peace takes place in Morocco, with a further 30 rabbis, pastors and imams from the United States.

December 2019

Launch of the Alliance of Virtue Charter.



Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah
President
for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf
President, Zaytuna College and
Vice President of Islamic Development Finance
www.zaytuna.org

FRAMEWORK SPEECH OF SHAYKH ABDULLAH BIN BAYYAH



The Need for an Alliance for Virtue: Its Foundations and Impacts

H.E. Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah, President, Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies

February 6th, 2018

Marriott Marquis Hotel
Washington, D. C.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

May God's peace and blessings be upon our master, his family, and his companions.

Respected ladies and gentlemen, I greet each and every one of you by your respective names and your beautiful qualities:

I would like to present a brief introduction to the Forum for Promoting Peace. Five years ago, we began a journey in search of peace and the ways and means to promote peace, not only in Muslim lands but around the entire world. We sought to develop ways to spread hope instead of despair, mercy instead of cruelty, and humanity instead barbarity. It is on this journey that I meet with you all here today as my brothers, sisters, and companions on this path.

Our work at the Forum has two components: the first studies the phenomenon of violence and its root causes, while the second undertakes initiatives and alliances with others seeking peace. As for the first aspect, we have already addressed many of the ideological problems. Among the questions we addressed were the following: is religion the root cause of violence, or is violence a product of other factors and religion merely a means to promote violence? How can we respond to these claims? How can religion be part of the solution as opposed to part of the problem?

These are some of the questions that confronted us, and given the claim of grievances and victimization, another question arose: does peace come first or justice? In answer to this question, we contend that social phenomena, by their nature, have many interrelated causal factors. Some of these factors are objective, and others are subjective; some of them are real while others are imagined. This multiplicity

of causative factors explains why analysis of a phenomenon produces divergent conclusions. One such factor, the cultural heritage of a region, should be considered in determining the root causes of a phenomenon, so we can better ascertain the type of solution that might be effective. In light of this, any analysis that seeks to address a social phenomenon must first examine the connected causative factors and assess the weight of their respective effects. This allows us to isolate the dominant factor that most deserves our consideration.

Based upon this understanding of the structure of the problem and the complexity of its arrangement, as well as interrelatedness of both its compelling and repulsive correlating factors that contribute to the phenomenon of violence, any proposed solutions must synthesize all approaches that enable accurate analysis and effective treatment. In addition, we believe, as stated by Ibn Qayyim (d. 1350 CE), that, like other human behavior, before violence tangibly manifests in the world as a willful act, it first develops in the psyche and festers in the mind, and only then do the volition and intentions come into play.

Looking at this conceptual causative factor of violence, we are able to incorporate the role of religion in some of its deviant forms as one of the many factors that lead to a culture of violence. Indeed, religion can be enlisted as either a cause of or a justification for violence. But, in such cases, it manifests as only one among other causative factors, such as frustration, humiliation, and failure. Religion then serves simply as a framing for the conflict and sometimes is even used to sanction or sanctify it.

For these reasons, religious leaders are obligated to search their sacred texts, histories, and traditions in order to find strong foundations for tolerance and coexistence. They must also seek out illuminating examples of such values applied in their history, so those narratives can promote the virtues of goodwill and peace in the adherents of those religions. Only by going back to our sacred texts and seeking out the most appropriate and moderate interpretations can we fight back against the peddlers of hate and the criminal impostors parading around in the garb of religion.

Our mission at the Forum for Promoting Peace involves developing and promoting a narrative and a vision – the narrative of Islam that calls for peace and tolerance as clearly established by its foundational sacred texts, judicious interpretations, and historical records. In opposition to this stands the distorted narrative promoted by the extremists who have strayed beyond the boundaries of both reason and religion. It is necessary for us to admit that the roots of these distortions and the ideologies that lead to violence are not novel phenomena particular to our age. Rather, they represent an inherited ideology found within the Islamic tradition and its history. The methodology of this ideology's engagement with sacred texts is

distinct and known for its literalist reading which employs no heuristic tools or figurative interpretations and no determination of the rationale for rulings, but instead it decontextualizes legal proofs that result in alternative rulings without any underlying legal theory and applies particularized proof-texts to the exclusion of the universal precepts governing them.

It is not only important but, indeed, of the utmost importance that through our behavior, our relationships, and our joint work, we provide irrefutable proofs that our religions are not a cause of conflict and hate despite the many painful examples, both recent and remote, that have been etched into humanity as calamitous collective memories. Even more bitter than that, we find the Enlightenment era philosophers made the expulsion of religion from the public space a foundational basis given that, according to them, religion by its nature was divisive, harmful, and the primary cause of conflict. Marx, for example, considered religious teachings the opium of the masses. David Hume considered religious belief to have no rational justification. Emmanuel Kant – who attempted to restore what Hume had undermined and reassert a sound grounding for faith and morality – proposed, through his famous rational methods, a practical religion that brings ethical values down from heaven to earth. Kant, however, disregarded the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – on the basis that they were dogmatic ideologies and thus could not be a basis for peace. Perhaps Nietzsche’s insight was clearer when he said in his *Beyond Good and Evil* that those who developed moral systems in human history were very few, among them, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

Our objection to Kant can be illustrated in two points: the first is that he judged these religions according to the practice of some of their followers who, through a distorted understanding, exploited it for political and hegemonic ends. This problem is one that we still deal with today and which we must address. It would have been more appropriate for him to evaluate these religions based on their foundational principles and seminal texts. Here, I find it most excellent to mention some of the passages from these religions’ scriptures that encourage the seeking of peace. To begin, let us look at texts from Christianity, the religion that we can suppose Kant most likely adhered to.

If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other one as well, and if someone takes your coat, do not keep back your shirt, either.

Luke 6:29

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.

John 14:27

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 14:19

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

In the Jewish scripture, the Old Testament, we find:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation.

Isaiah 52:7

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

Psalms 34:14

Better a dry morsel with quiet, than a house full of feasting with strife.

Proverbs 17:1

As for Islam, it should be noted that the passages above from Judaism and Christianity are not seen as foreign to the Islamic tradition, and Muslims consider themselves a continuation of the previous religious dispensations. A verse in the Holy Quran states:

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers'

Quran 2:285

In addition, the Prophet Muhammad – God's peace and blessings upon him – said, "I was sent only to complete virtuous ethics." Here, he presents himself as a consummation of something previous, and not as an innovator of something altogether new. The Quran states:

Say, "I am nothing new among God's messengers. I do not know what will be done with me or you; I only follow what is revealed to me; I only warn plainly."

Quran 46:9

It also states:

Good and evil cannot be equal: repel evil with that which is better, and your enemy will become as a close and warm friend, but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness.

Quran 41:34-35

In addition to these shared teachings, the Ten Commandments, as recorded in Exodus, are seen as capturing the essence of all three Abrahamic faiths.

All of these passages refute the claim that religion is the cause of all the world's wars. In truth, the real blame falls on the people who erroneously interpret religion, enlist it in their causes, or exploit it for their own gain. Religion, in and of itself, calls for love, toleration, forgiveness, solidarity, and helping one another. And so, this gathering of religious leaders from the Abrahamic family today represents not just a challenge to but a rejection of the theory that religion is responsible for the conflict and turmoil in the world; this gathering represents a confirmation that religion can pave the path towards peace.

The second point in our objection to Kant is that his categorical imperative entails no divine reward or punishment, nor does it have any implications for the afterlife. This makes it quite ineffective in deterring irascible souls and thereby making peace unachievable through it. Instead, it is simply a comforting theory for achieving peace for the philosophically minded or conscientious humanist but is unattainable for everyone else.

We agree with the philosopher Nietzsche who said that civilizations become diseased and their healers are the philosophers. I would modify this stating that their healers are the enlightened creative minority among the religious scholars, philosophers, and thinkers, for they bear the ethical responsibility to confront this phenomenon of violence that plagues humanity. No solution arises to address a crisis without the creative minority of intellectuals and scholars rising to the occasion as peacemakers, each within their own locale, area of concern, and sphere of influence.

In our work at the Forum for Promoting Peace, we have addressed the dilemma of either placing justice above peace or peace above justice. This question leads to relentless debates. Here, we must return again to Kant whose proposition that peace is unattainable without achieving justice is constantly referred to in this recurrent debate. At the Forum, our philosophy is to examine this issue on two levels: the first level is that of "permanent peace," and on this level we agree with Kant's position. The second level is that of a "temporary peace," by which we mean ceasing

conflict and ending bloodshed. At this level, complete justice is not a precondition to temporary peace; rather, temporary peace must be achieved in the fastest way possible because, in our estimation, peace is, in fact, a necessary precondition to attaining any justice. People often quote Dr. King's famous statement, "There can be no peace without justice," yet forget that he preceded it by saying, "But there can be no justice without peace." In the statement "there can be no peace without justice," Dr. King was speaking of permanent peace, but in the statement, "There can be no justice without peace," he was speaking of temporary peace. It is temporary peace that we are seeking in order to enable us to work for justice.

Naturally, justice is the foundation for peace. It is known that justice is the most important religious and human value, but peace is sometimes the result of mutual concessions and even, in some cases, one-sided concessions. In reality, the morally superior is the one who concedes. Sometimes the oppressor feels ashamed for transgressing the rights of others. One of the initiatives at the Forum for Promoting Peace is the Hasan Bin Ali Award, named in honor of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson after he abdicated rule in the interests of peace, as is well known historically. This award is intended to encourage initiatives that promote peace at a societal level. To date, this award has been conferred upon two peace coalitions between Muslims and Christians in Egypt and the Central African Republic.

As for the second aspect of our work, it involves initiatives and seeking out allies and partners on the road to peace. In early 2016, hundreds of Muslim scholars and religious leaders met in an historic summit to discuss the conditions of religious minorities in Muslim majority societies. This was shortly after some very tragic events had occurred in certain parts of the Muslim world. This summit produced a document, "The Marrakesh Declaration for the Rights of Religious Minorities." This declaration was inspired by the historic Charter of Medina, which we seek to revive, as it served as the first constitution in the prophetic era that formalized a system of coexistence and which, in the language of the time of its composition, established the concept of citizenship. The Marrakesh Declaration laid the epistemological and legal foundations for a discourse of coexistence between various religious communities in Muslim majority societies rooted in the concept of citizenship.

Forty years after the Helsinki Accords, the Muslim community developed an agreement on the freedom of religion and equal citizenship that was true to Islam's history and teachings. I am delighted that so many of you were present at that historic meeting. Fortunately, the Marrakesh Declaration has gained wide acceptance among various international organizations and universities. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation endorsed the declaration at its summit in Istanbul in April of 2016.

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, is a city that is home to many peace initiatives and is a place where all constructive and innovative ideas towards promoting a culture of tolerance and coexistence are welcomed. It was there that we welcomed the American Caravan for Peace led by people who believe that positive cooperation between the world religions is vital in order to mitigate and counter the discourses of nihilism and xenophobia. We welcomed this caravan with open arms and participated at each of its stages because we believe that it is critical that a peaceful approach be adopted and that the reasonably minded religious leaders of the world undertake the task of forging a united intellectual front as well as a humanitarian alliance that puts our shared values into action. It is the ignoring of these shared values and the emphasis on our differences that has led to wars and the fighting that we see.

Our next stop was in Rabat, Morocco, where a new group of pastors, rabbis, and imams met to join the Peace Caravan. A letter from King Mohammed VI was the primary inspiration for this initiative.

Our meeting here may be considered the consummation of the previous assemblies and has the following objectives:

- First is to reaffirm all of our critical previous work that embodies peaceful coexistence and the building of bridges of friendship and love between the religious leadership of the Abrahamic faiths. These are men and women who believe in our shared values and hold that the greatest of religious values is to honor humanity. We would like to commend you for your efforts, and we are grateful to have been a part of it along with you.
- Second is to discuss together how we can turn the positive consequences of our work thus far into a paragon of perpetual practice that is not limited to the followers of our specific faiths so that others might contemplate the spirit of our faiths that compel us to such actions and led us to share our ideas and calls of faiths that this might become a model for the followers of all religions and philosophies.
- Third is to present religion as a means for peace, love, and reconciliation, not as a means for conflict. Also, we must affirm that these are real possibilities, for dynamic love will always conquer hate. Love, peace, and friendship remain our message to all of humanity and continue to be our maxims.
- Fourth, we seek to develop our belief in love, friendship, and peaceful coexistence into the reality of humanitarian work aimed at helping the sick and the needy. These are the callings of our religious heritage. And so, on this occasion, it gives me great pleasure to announce the “Give Food”

initiative that seeks to feed the hungry from every race and creed; and we will host them at the Banquet of the Abrahamic family. And this initiative, in addition to being a good deed, is also the embodiment of our forefather Abraham's practice, upon him be peace, given that he used to feed the guest: the Qur'an mentions, "To Abraham Our messengers brought good news. They said, 'Peace.' He answered, 'Peace,' and without delay he brought in roasted veal" (Qur'an 11:69).

- Fifth is that we ally with one another in pursuit of the common good, as was done in the original Alliance of Virtue, an alliance that emerged in Mecca before Islam. The Prophet Muhammad –God's peace and blessings upon him – deemed it a righteous one. It was an alliance based upon universal values, not upon tribalism or religious sectarianism; this indicates that it was open to people of various religions and beliefs. It stipulated helping the oppressed to remove all oppression and supporting the destitute and downtrodden to eliminate want of bare necessities.

In conclusion, let us ask ourselves is it possible to revive an idea such as this alliance in our modern societies? Can we come together to spread such goodness? I sincerely believe that we are indeed able to do so as long as we do not despair from either the grace of God or from one another. We find in the counsel of our master Jacob to his sons, "Never despair of the grace of God, for only those who disbelieve despair in God's grace" (Qur'an 12:87).

I sincerely thank all of you for attentively listening, and I truly hope that you have a successful conference.



AMBASSADOR BROWNBACK SPEECH



Ambassador Brownback addresses the conference

Good morning. I'm very pleased to be here today. I thank Shaykh Bin Bayyah for his leadership on this very important initiative. It's an honor to meet you, sir. I've heard many great things about your work and look forward to partnering with you and your growing global network of interfaith leaders going forward.

I think religious freedom is the most important topic in foreign relations today.

The Marrakesh Declaration, an initiative of Shaykh Bin Bayyah and all of his partners in the global Islamic scholarly community, is a great example of how civil society leaders can play a tremendous role in helping to set the tone for protecting the human rights, including those related to citizenship, of members of religious minorities.

You all are in a unique position to advance religious freedom within your communities and congregations in ways the U.S. government or any government would not be able to do. This is not easy work. Many of you are doing this at great risk to your

own safety and sometimes at great political cost. I appreciate that sacrifice of each and every leader gathered here today and applaud you for your work.

I am the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. I was appointed by President Trump and recently confirmed by the U.S. Senate. This is my first full week on the job. I can think of no better way to start off than to go hand in hand with the leaders and thinkers who have dedicated their lives towards promoting religious tolerance and pluralism.

A little background about myself and my role: I was most recently the Governor of Kansas, where I had the great honor of serving the people of my state for the last 7 years. Prior to that, I was a Representative and later a U.S. Senator representing Kansas. It was during my time in the U.S. Senate that I helped put forward the legislation creating the office I lead now.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 made the promotion of religious freedom worldwide a U.S. foreign policy priority. It created an Office of International Religious Freedom within the State Department, which is presently a staff of approximately 25 foreign and civil service officers, led by an Ambassador at Large.

My role is to advise the Secretary of State and senior Administration officials on what the religious freedom challenges are and how we are best situated to advance the universal human right to religious freedom globally. Our government's commitment was further strengthened by the December 2016 Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act – adding additional tools and more resources to such a vital effort.

As I acclimate to this new role in the coming days, I will be looking to you all for your insights on what has been successful in promoting peace and interfaith harmony and identifying the challenges that stand in the way of people being able to live their lives in accordance with their consciences. Most importantly, I will seek your guidance on how the U.S. government can be more effective on promoting international religious freedom in all corners of the globe.

I firmly believe we have to approach these issues with a great sense of humility.

Your initiative serves as a model for what can be achieved when people of Abrahamic faith backgrounds join together in common cause.

I commit to you to highlight your initiative to foreign governments at the highest levels. This and similar initiatives are critical and we'll do whatever possible to be supportive.

One of our jobs is to work to ensure that positive initiatives by religious freedom

advocates are encouraged and protected. We also have a range of tools at our disposal to promote international religious freedom. This Administration has made it clear that this is a foreign policy and national security priority. I look forward to hearing from you on how we can collaborate to achieve our shared objectives.

I am honored to be speaking with you during the opening of this conference. I am inspired by your dedication. Thank you for the work you are doing. My best wishes to Shaykh Bin Bayyah and all of you for a successful conference.



Rabbi David Saperstein, Imam Mohamed Magid, and
Pastor Bob Roberts discuss the Alliance of Virtues

MESSAGE FROM RABBI DAVID SAPERSTEIN



David Saperstein addresses the conference

The following article is taken from remarks made by Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein over the course of the Alliance of Virtue conference in February 2018:

Please indulge me for a minute to ask some questions.

I know that if I asked how many people at this conference were deeply engaged in interfaith activities, literally everybody would have raised their hands. It's one of the reasons you are here. But if I asked the question of how many people at this conference have spent time working on the issue of combatting violent extremism, how many would raise their hands? How many people have been involved in education on behalf of religion and peace, in terms of your own communities?

Well I could go down the list of asking about the values that Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah spoke about so eloquently, and that he has devoted his life to perpetuating, and I suspect there is a who's who, at this conference, of extraordinary figures making

a difference day in and day out, in local communities, in national communities, and in international communities. We are hearing from some people who we could have swapped out forty times in this room with people with equally impressive stories and important insights and lessons.

Nigeria is an interesting case study of a problem that exists in many parts of the world at this moment of history, and one that we who are gathered here want to address. If one travels to the Middle Belt of Nigeria or areas of the North, and speak to people who are over fifty years old, almost every one of them will tell you a story of how they grew up in mixed communities, they had friends from different religious traditions, they went to schools that were mixed, they socialised at life-cycle celebrations of people in other communities. The violence of the last thirty years has driven many of these naturally-occurring interactive communities apart. And therefore you have to develop new constructs, new ways of achieving the same result. How do you make those connections? How do you persuade people who aren't naturally interacting in the way they used to?

There is something that you may not know about the United States. If you have a look at the demographic data, in 2008, only 54 per cent of Americans were whites who identified as Christians. Today – ten years later – that number is only 43 per cent. This is an extraordinary change in our country. It is becoming this immensely diverse country racially, religiously, ethnically, in American life. And so our work here is important as a model for the rest of the world of how this extraordinarily diverse country can be able to work together. Sociologists tells us that there are 2,000 religions and faith groups in the United States. I know what you're thinking: 1,900 of these are in California! But nonetheless, this is an extraordinarily diverse country.

What I've heard at this conference is that it's not just interfaith co-operation and interaction that counts, it is the depth of that engagement. And ideas like the American Peace Caravan can, through retreats and sharing each other's religious holidays and social events, really deepen that engagement and enable the deep discussion of things necessary to bring a transformation.

I've heard that we need to respect each other's difference: we're not looking for the lowest common denominator, but looking for the richness that each of our religious traditions can bring to the discussions that we have.

I've heard that it is often the breadth of a coalition that can help make a difference at a given time, particularly in cases of national conflict. Broadening interfaith coalitions is vitally important.

I've heard that it is vitally important too for religious leaders, political leaders and

civil society leaders to stand up and denounce hate speech, to denounce crimes and hate acts, to denounce violent extremism, to denounce conflict when it happens, and to offer a better path.

I've heard that we must work to change the way that the media portrays religion, both through our own religious media, but also through engagement with general print media, written media, electronic media and social media. This is something that interfaith coalitions can play an effective role in.

And crucially, I've heard that this is about the youth: what we have to build for the next generation. Everything that you have devoted your lives to, we must, with conscious effort, develop the strategies and tactics that will bring it to the next generation.

Extremism is not just a Muslim issue. It is one of fundamental human rights, of ethnic cleansing, of religious cleaning, and all people of conscience have to stand together when we see a group persecuted. We do it as a matter of moral principle, but we also do it as a matter of pragmatic reality, because we know that if any group in our society can be the subject of persecution and discrimination, then no group is safe. We are all in this together and must work together to make a difference.



MESSAGE FROM PASTOR BOB ROBERTS



Bob Roberts addresses the conference

The following article is taken from remarks made by Pastor Bob Roberts over the course of the Alliance of Virtues conference in February 2018:

Our country is not in a very good place right now. We are very tribal, and as a result of that we don't get along. Evangelicals have the most negative view of Muslims of any group. The only group that is worse is Evangelical pastors!

It's bad for our country, but it is also bad for our faith, because our faith teaches us that we have to love Jesus, and that means that we have to love everybody: our family, or friends, and even our enemies.

Evangelicals are pretty passionate about what we believe. We're pretty conservative. And so we have stayed away from interfaith things, because we don't want to be viewed as narrow-minded, or bigoted, or something else.

So we had to do a few things to change that. First, we had to create a new language that Evangelicals could understand: we started to talk about ‘multi-faith’ rather than ‘interfaith’. Multi-faith said, you don’t have to give up on your faith to be in a relationship with other people. Second, we had to build relationships. Imam Mohamed Magid and I got together with twelve pastors and twelve imams, from twelve different cities. We took them to a ranch, took them horseback riding, shooting, fishing, and everything else! And in the midst of that we started having conversations. On the first day, no one talked to one another, but by the third day, everyone was laughing and having fun. I went to a retreat in Houston, and pastors were coming in saying ‘why do the Muslims do this and that’, and afterwards I had a text saying ‘I’m transformed! These are good Muslims!’

We need to do a few things to build those relationships. Number one, we get them to go to each other’s homes and eat a meal: it makes you a real-life person. Number two, we get them to do an event together, so that relationship extends to everyday believers. Number three, we get them to do community projects. We all live in the same community, pay the same taxes, go to the same schools.

This is the next generation of interfaith. We can’t start with the head, or we’ll argue with one another. Dialogue has to become less, and engagement more, or it will die – because the younger generation is not interested in sitting around, talking about theology. They want to know what difference faith is making. They want to get their hands dirty.

Getting hands dirty together requires deep relationships with others. I can’t read the Muslim community or the Jewish community, but I can speak to my friends in those communities, and they can say ‘here’s what’s going on’. And we can then speak back to our own people.

A lot of Christians say ‘when are the Muslims going to say something’. And I can say, ‘they’re saying something all the time!’ It’s why I like the Marrakesh Declaration, because I can point and say: ‘these are the top Islamic scholars. They’re trying to do something; we’ve got to come alongside them and affirm them!’

In our faith, the Apostle Paul, if he was alive today, would be at something like this. I get criticised for going to speak in synagogues and mosques – but Paul would have done that. He wasn’t holding events for Christians; he was being invited to speak by non-Christians! Evangelicals don’t get invited to speak much now; we’re hateful, we don’t love people. But Jesus loves people. It is the tribalism that we are going down today that will destroy us, that poisons our believers, that poisons Christianity in the eyes of the world. That’s why I’m here.



MESSAGE FROM IMAM MOHAMED MAGID



Imam Mohamed Magid addresses the conference

The following article is taken from remarks made by Imam Mohamed Magid over the course of the Alliance of Virtue conference in February 2018:

Please indulge me for a minute to ask some questions.

In every corner of the globe we can see encouraging signs of people who have decided to get together and work together to create a harmonious society, and to stand up for each other. We can see it also in the United States. Myself, and Rabbi David Saperstein and Pastor Bob Roberts have been working to address these issues. We assembled two Caravans for Peace of Rabbis, Pastors and Imams in Morocco and Abu Dhabi, and then returned to work in cities in the United States – twenty cities now – to bring people together.

This kind of effort does not make it into the news. What dominates the news is violence, extremism, and a negative view of religion. But we need to see this kind of story told in every city, every community, to generate goodwill and encourage

more people to join the effort.

We have seen the effect of the Marrakesh Declaration. It has become one of the most important documents that Muslims have produced. 57 countries acknowledged and accepted the Declaration. Morocco adapted it for its own use. We've used it in training – I led a training session in Nigeria – and we've used it in dialogue. This document has generated great discussions and energy and implementation of its principles even here in the United States! We have Pastors and Rabbis and Imams working together here in America to protect minorities (it could be Muslims, it could be others), and working together in the neighbourhood to promote its principles.

We all face the challenge when we engage in interfaith work: will people think that I am watering down my own faith? That I am losing my faith? One of the most important aspects of our work now, when we gather Imams and Pastors and Rabbis, is that we talk about what each of our faiths mean to us, how important it is to us. We have to use the theology of peace – but we are using our own texts to reinforce those principles and virtues.

One of the things that really changes people's minds is when people stand up for each other in the most difficult circumstances. In my community, we have synagogues that have opened their doors to us. Of the seven branches that the ADAMS Centre has, two are in synagogues! I don't have to tell my members how good our relationship is with the Jewish community, because they pray every Friday in the synagogue!

We have to understand that this is not about watering down your religion, but living your faith. Part of that understanding comes through education: Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah is always working on this, telling Muslims that these principles are from our texts, from our traditions! Our challenge to the Jewish community and the Christian community is to respond from your traditions. That is how people become comfortable with the process.

This Friday I will be preaching on the Alliance of Virtue. I challenge all of the pastors and rabbis in this room to preach on Saturday and Sunday on the Alliance of Virtue. Our challenge is to the next generation. My succession plan is that it will be them sitting here on this stage next time and reporting to you what they have done in transforming their communities and taking our Declaration today into action.

Our challenge today is not to listen to those who would like to discourage us. Instead, we need to extend our hand to those who disagree with us, to explain ourselves to them, and to bring them on this journey. Some people will refuse, but we must stand for what is right, and people will eventually see the light.





Imam Mohamed Magid of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society mosque in Northern Virginia, left, and Pastor Bob Roberts of NorthWood Church in Texas joined a discussion during the opening dinner of the Alliance of Virtue conference in Washington on Wednesday. (Rodney Bailey)



Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah addresses the conference

On 8 February 2018, the Washington Post published this article on the Alliance of Virtue:

Acts of Faith

How the National Prayer Breakfast sparked an unusual meeting between Muslims and evangelicals

By **Michelle Boorstein**

Feb. 8, 2018 at 11:00 a.m. GMT

Texas pastor Bob Roberts has traveled to Washington before for the National Prayer Breakfast, a Christian-organized networking event where evangelicals come to schmooze about topics including their shared goal of bringing people to Christ. That was Roberts's focus in the past. This year, he'll attend with one of his closest current collaborators: an 85-year-old Islamic scholar visiting from Abu Dhabi.

Roberts and Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah are attending the Thursday breakfast following an unusual gathering that was held during the previous three days: Four hundred faith leaders coming together to forge ties, work that has been common for many U.S. faith groups for decades but often has eluded one particular pair: Muslims and evangelicals. White evangelicals have the most anti-Muslim views of any American faith group, polls show, and the meeting — timed so Bayyah could attend the huge prayer breakfast in Northwest Washington — reflects the urgency an increasing number of imams and pastors feel at a time when the world seems especially tribal and explosive.

The sight of a massive hotel ballroom of evangelical pastors and imams — as well as a smattering of Jews and Catholics — brainstorming on how to build ties showed how the stable of people doing such work has grown in recent years. As they met downstairs, TVs in the upstairs lobby of the Marriott Marquis showed news reports of proposed restrictions from the White House on Muslim immigrants.

“Evangelicals are making it much worse,” Roberts said of the negative views many Americans have of Islam. The pastor, a tall man with a Southern drawl, spoke in a busy hallway at the conference. “And pastors are worse than the people in the pews.”

Roberts lost hundreds of congregants in the early 2010s after he began his outreach, including bringing Muslims and Jews on stage at his nondenominational megachurch,

North Wood, in Keller, Tex. He'd been urged by a Saudi prince he met while doing traditional mission work in the Middle East to focus on outreach in America. When he reached out to his first American imam, he "was scared to death," he said.

North Wood was labeled "a Muslim church." Critics accused the Southern Baptist graduate of two seminaries of being a "closet Muslim," Roberts said.

Less than a decade later, Roberts has "planted" more than 100 churches, and his church has nearly 3,000 members. In 2014, he launched a program called "My Neighbor's Keeper" that pulls together small groups of rabbis, imams and pastors, puts them through intensive group training, then requires they commit to working with, visiting and publicly defending one another.

The initial plan was to do small groups in 10 cities over a decade, and this year alone, the program has trained 20 groups. Without major funders, they get space donated by random people: A hockey player in Phoenix lent his ranch one year. Then a Turkish American organization provided its center in Washington.

"If I told evangelicals I have a plan to convert Muslims, they'd give me money, even if it was a bad plan. But if I say I just want to be friends with them ..." his voice trails off, and he shakes his head. "And Muslims are afraid evangelicals want to convert them."

Of course they want to bring others to Christ, said Roberts and other pastors who have been trained through his program. But among evangelicals, there has been a mobilization, a growing — if still relatively small — number of leaders who are investing in learning more about Islam, forming personal relationships and working to bring their congregations together.

Some of the reason for what conference attendees described as the quiet shift is cultural, some political — and some theological. The idea that Christians shouldn't wait for some future heavenly kingdom, but instead view current life as the kingdom of God, fosters a willingness — and in fact eagerness — to work with a broader circle of humanity.

"Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer — 'Thy kingdom come' — and when Jesus is defining that kingdom — 'on Earth as it is in heaven.' The guiding principle for Christian life is: How would I live my life if this was heaven today? I'd love my Muslim neighbor, my Jewish neighbor," said Steve Bezner, pastor of the Houston NW megachurch. Bezner did a retreat with Roberts in Abu Dhabi last year and another one with local clergy this month. He was among the dozens of evangelical pastors at the D.C. conference this week.

Bezner and others said one reason evangelicals are becoming more comfortable

with Muslim engagement is because this generation isn't called "interfaith" — which makes evangelicals nervous because many are theologically conservative and don't like the concept of watering down the differences among religions. They call it "multifaith," which to Bezner feels more frank about the goal: different faiths standing side by side, not one big squishy group.

"The first time I met an imam in my neighborhood, we're five minutes into the conversation, and he said: 'Do you think I'm going to hell?' I said: 'That's what my tradition teaches, yes.' He said: 'Good, I think you're going to hell, too, so now we can have an honest conversation.' "

Ossama Bahloul, resident scholar of the Islamic Center of Nashville, was also at the conference. He was imam of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, Tenn., when it faced in recent years massive protests and legal challenges over trying to build a new building. Bahloul has been involved in interfaith work for many years.

"We've been working for years with Catholics, Jews, Methodists [and other groups] — the only one left is the evangelical," Bahloul said in Washington. "That's what makes this [conference] so unique."

Notably absent or played down at the conference was talk about the Trump administration, rising anti-Islam rhetoric since his campaign and legal challenges such as the draft report published this week by the Department of Homeland Security urging authorities to conduct "long-term surveillance" of Muslim immigrants deemed to have "at-risk" demographic profiles, as *The Washington Post* reported this week.

Bahloul said people didn't talk a huge amount about U.S. politics, despite the starkness of it, because they didn't want to get derailed. Most evangelical pastors "have never interacted in their entire life with an imam," he said. "We're just trying to know each other."

A 2017 Pew survey found that 35 percent of white evangelicals say they know a Muslim — the lowest percentage for any racial, political or religious group. Pew said their sample size of Muslims was too small to get a sense of how many Muslims know an evangelical.

Bahloul said the rising anti-Muslim sentiment and division overall seems to have made it easier for Muslims and evangelicals to meet — and it's more urgent.

"I think what's going on in the country makes it easier because it encourages everyone who cares about the country to step up — otherwise, we'll lose the country," said Bahloul, who came from Egypt originally. "There is division and hatred, and most of these people care deeply about the country. Maybe what's going on politically

motivates many of them to move forward more vigorously.”

There’s also pragmatism here. More evangelical churches are coming into contact with immigrants and refugees as their communities diversify. To turn away or turn off newcomers is a bad business model.

Micah Fries, pastor of Brainerd Baptist in Chattanooga, Tenn., said his church has 150 refugees in ESL classes on Sunday nights. When they wanted to send relief to northern Iraq — where there are many displaced Christians — the church did so through a nearby Kurdish mosque, not a Christian aid agency. Some of his two young daughters’ closest friends are Muslim.

“The national rhetoric is worse than ever, but I’ve never been more hopeful at the local level,” he said.

The reality is, there is major distance here. A 2015 survey by the Christian firm LifeWay Research found the majority of evangelical pastors say Islam is spiritually evil, is dangerous and promotes violence — all up 5 to 10 percentage points from 2010.

If a big part of the conference was aimed at soothing anti-Muslim sentiment, equally on the table was the treatment of religious minorities — especially Christians — in Muslim-majority countries. The gathering this week, called the Alliance of Virtue conference, was viewed as a follow-up. In 2016, Muslim scholars and leaders from dozens of Muslim-majority countries met in Morocco to sign the Marrakesh Declaration, which called the oppression of religious minorities contrary to Islam.

The meeting this week ended with the signing of a broader document, called the Washington Declaration, which is an overall call to freedom of speech, religious liberty and tolerance. It called for the provision of a billion meals for victims of violence and conflict.

The majority-Muslim event also kicked off with an intriguing honoree: Doug Coe, one of the longtime core organizers of the breakfast, a behind-the-scenes D.C. power broker and a spiritual mentor, named often to lists of America’s most influential evangelical leaders. Roberts and Bin Bayyah wanted to honor Coe, who died a year ago — just after the annual event — and was the person who pushed them harder to bring their communities together.

He also, Roberts said, told them just before he died that they better speed up their shared work. “We needed to because the world is so messed up.”





Doug Coe's family are presented with an award honour of his work for peace



The Gala Dinner

THE WASHINGTON DECLARATION



February 7, 2018

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation.

(Isaiah 52:7)

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called into one body. And be thankful.

(Colossians 3:15)

Good and evil cannot be equal: repel evil with that which is better, and your enemy will become as a close and warm friend, but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness.

(Quran 41:34-35)

Introduction

On January 27, 2016, more than 250 Muslim scholars from 120 countries gathered in Marrakesh, Morocco, and affirmed in a landmark statement that the oppression of religious minorities contradicts Islamic values, and they called for equality of citizenship, regardless of faith tradition, in Muslim-majority societies. The Marrakesh Declaration was inspired by the famed Charter of Medina, which had, 1,400 years earlier, recognized that all residents of that holy city, no matter their religious beliefs, had equal rights and responsibilities.

This week, more than 400 representatives from the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, assembled in Washington, D.C., in the spirit of another historic initiative that came to fruition on the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century of the Common Era. The Alliance of Virtue was first formed in Mecca, and was conceived and implemented to support the rule of law and to ensure fair treatment for the vulnerable and disadvantaged throughout the Meccan community. Key adherents of the Alliance included Muhammad, prior to his prophetic mission, and leaders from a variety of ethnicities and religions. Similarly, the troubled times we live in today compel us to proffer a vision of a revived Alliance

of Virtue, global in nature, inclusive of men and women of every faith, race, and nationality, and dedicated – like its earlier namesake – to joint action in the service of sustainable peace, justice, equality, compassion, and mutual respect. We believe that individuals and communities need to move beyond mere tolerance and dedicate themselves to work towards a future in which everyone can flourish and in which all – empowered by faith – can foster reconciliation and seek to heal the wounds of violence and war and bring closer a world of justice and peace for all.

Preamble

With heartfelt sorrow, we observe that armed struggle, terrorism, and other manifestations of conflict are causing civilian deaths, the displacement of populations, the suffering of innocent people, and the desecration of sacred places and shrines. Sectarian rivalries, religious prejudice, and unchecked nationalism contribute significantly and tragically to violence that – due to the relentless advances in weapons technology – poses a dire and imminent threat to the wellbeing of all people.

Despite some gains, there remain gross inequalities in the human condition: vast wealth and affluence amidst deep poverty, chronic malnutrition, lack of access to education, deadly shortcomings in health care, and callous indifference – even among the outwardly pious – to human suffering.

The pervasiveness of conflict, injustice, oppression, and hardship constitutes a direct affront to the aspirations of the Abrahamic faith traditions to which we – who have gathered this week in Washington – adhere. The gap between our shared hopes and a wounded world is but a warning that we must heed.

The Washington Declaration

Though mindful of our differences, the ethical values we hold in common obligate us to chart a new course guided by old wisdom, a journey that must begin with the knowledge that all humans have a single origin, that each is endowed by our Creator with intrinsic human dignity and inalienable rights, and that we cannot love and serve God if we fail to love our neighbors – including the strangers in our midst.

We recognize that our shared values are more important than our differences and that we are strongest when we act together. We pledge to work together to foster unity, aid the impoverished, protect the vulnerable, heal the poor in spirit, and champion all measures that affirm the dignity of every human being. We will be guided in these endeavors by convictions that flow from our deepest theological understandings:

- All people, irrespective of faith, are entitled to religious liberty. There is

no room for compulsion in religion, nor are there any legitimate grounds for barring the followers of any religion from full and fair participation in society. This cardinal principle in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is deeply rooted in the United States, where the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom preceded the adoption of the nation's Constitution and was a precursor to its First Amendment; and is a central principle of rights guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

- All people, men and women alike, are entitled to equality and due process under the law. All are entitled to freedom of movement within their states, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom from political persecution, freedom from torture, the right to seek political asylum, the right to a nationality, and to all other internationally recognized human rights.
- Each government is obligated to respect the rights and the dignity of all who dwell within its jurisdiction. Each should use its resources to mitigate the root causes of inequality and to create opportunities for people, so they may use their energy and talents to provide for their families and contribute to society. Each government should also be a faithful steward of the natural environment, which we hold in trust, for future generations. Each state has a duty, as delineated in the United Nations Charter, to refrain from aggression or attempt to subjugate others and to cooperate in resolving disputes peacefully, lawfully, and justly. Governments should respect, promote, and implement international human rights standards.
- People from all sectors – including public service, religion, business, academia, civil society, and the arts – share a responsibility to foster international and inter-cultural understanding and to oppose any effort to convey information that is false or defamatory about any ethnic, racial, or religious group.

We believe that religious leaders have a special responsibility to ensure that the tenets and teachings of our faiths are not deployed for wrongful purposes and to recognize that they are the embodiment of God's love at work in the world. In light of that responsibility, we must reject the polarization that leads to conflict and war. We are determined to deepen our solidarity and to ensure that religion, once again, becomes a force for reconciliation and harmony. We pledge to work across confessional divides to promote virtues central to each of our faith traditions, including peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, justice, and truth.

Together, we can establish, by example, that doctrinal differences are no bar to cooperative deeds; on the contrary, these differences enable us to address common challenges from varied vantage points and through different strategies. In that spirit, we promise to exchange ideas, encourage and train our congregants to engage in joint projects and advocacy, form partnerships with relevant national and international actors, build bridges with leaders of other faith and ethical traditions, and create a successful model of collaboration that people of all religions can emulate in support of the common good.

In reviving the historic Alliance of Virtue, we forge ahead certain in our belief that, for all the ignorance, enmity, and perplexity that plagues our world, love remains a more potent force than hate in shaping human behavior; hope is more resilient than fear; and the desire to build will always trump the impulse to destroy. We go forward seeking God's help to liberate us from the snares of prejudice and narrow-mindedness – to give us ears that we might listen across the distance of our differences, hands that we might reach beyond the boundaries that separate us, and minds that we might remain open to the thoughts and needs of our fellow human beings.

May God's blessings enlighten and inspire us all.

Call to Action

- We call for the establishment of an Alliance of Virtue to implement and advance the Washington Declaration.
- We call for the provision of one billion meals to feed and strengthen the communities made vulnerable by the violence and conflicts that challenge us on the path forward.
- We call for the creation of a multi-religious body of prominent religious leaders to support mediation and reconciliation that will act in accordance with our shared values to promote peace in the world.
- We will establish a committee to adopt these recommendations that reflects the vibrant and dynamic diversity of our communities and of our world.



INITIATIVE FOR THE CHARTER OF THE NEW ALLIANCE OF VIRTUE



Preamble

The signatories of this Alliance,

AFFIRMING the shared values of the Abrahamic faiths, as well as the rights with which all human beings are naturally endowed;

ASSERTING that religions of the Abrahamic family have common and distinct theological and ethical traditions, each of which values human virtues, and each of which requires peace and mutual respect and tolerance in order to flourish;

ASSERTING that collaboration between people of all religious faiths or beliefs provides an effective vehicle to strengthen the foundations of peace in the world;

ASSERTING that an alliance among people of all faiths, each drawing upon his or her respective tradition to elevate the virtues conducive to respect, tolerance, and peace, can help extinguish the flames of war and defeat the agents of terror and conflict;

RECALLING that in important instances the institution of accords and charters, historically, have had great impact upon international relations and the establishment of peace, justice, liberty, and tolerance;

RECALLING that among such accords historically was the Alliance of Virtue, which was convened in 7th century Mecca;

RECALLING that another such accord was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was promulgated in 1948;

CONSIDERING the current state of global affairs, and recalling that religion continues to play a vital role in global governance and cultural diplomacy, there is a dire need for a 21st Century Alliance of Virtue;

BUILDING UPON international law and the resolutions of the United Nations;

BUILDING UPON the Amman Message (Nov 2004), the “Common Word” open letter (Oct 2007), the Marrakesh Declaration for the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim-Majority Lands (Jan 2016), the Washington Declaration of the Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good (Feb. 218), Human Fraternity Declaration

(Feb.2019), Makkah Declaration (May 2019), and;

ACKNOWLEDGING the Roman Catholic Church's Declaration of Religious Freedom which laid the foundation for the Roman Catholic Church to recognize religious freedom for other people based on human dignity;

ACKNOWLEDGING also other declarations affirming the values expressed in this Charter and their importance in various religious traditions and denominations;

INSPIRED BY the American Peace Caravan in Abu Dhabi (May 2017), Rabat (Oct 2017), and the numerous conferences in which the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim societies has participated;

CONSIDERING the recommendations from the five annual assemblies of the Forum for Promoting Peace (2014-2018), which inspired the New Alliance of Virtue;

Hereby endorse **The Charter of a New Alliance of Virtue.**



SECTION ONE DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE



Article 1 - Definitions

This Charter includes the following terms:

- 1. Alliance of Virtue** refers, from the Islamic perspective, to the pre-Islamic pact that was founded on virtue, honorable character, and the noble values held in common among the human family regardless of tribal, ethnic, or religious affiliation.
- 2. New Alliance of Virtue** refers to the covenant detailed in this Charter; it calls for the elevation of virtues as understood by the three Abrahamic religions in the service of peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding between all people irrespective of race, ethnicity, or religion.
- 3. Abrahamic Family** refers to the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths, but lifts up values shared by so many of the world's faith traditions.
- 4. Strands of virtue** refers to those people who hold on to the shared values of humanity, and who love peace, justice, tolerance, and respect for all people.
- 5. Rights:** There are at least two ways to conceptualize human rights. One is rights created by governments, which are of most value when they apply to all and reflect norms of human dignity and justice. Another is rights that exist prior to the state and inhere in each human being by virtue of his or her existence. Such rights are typically understood as deriving from a greater-than-human source, such as God or nature, for the believer or non-believer. These rights must be acknowledged and protected by any just state. They should be understood as necessary to human dignity, as well as social flourishing.
- 6. Values:** Values have two dimensions: personal virtues, such as mercy and altruism, and civic virtues, such as hospitality, neighborliness, solidarity, and aid to those in need. Societies should foster both dimensions and organize societies in accordance with such humanitarian values.

Note: The definitions above are not necessarily the significations of the terms as they are used in other contexts.

Article 2 - Scope

1. The signatories of this Charter, whether from the Abrahamic Family or other belief traditions, commit themselves to live by the values contained herein.
2. Nothing in this Charter violates the authority of nations, nor does it contravene their observed laws consistent with Article 29 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.



SECTION TWO MOTIVATIONS



Article 3

The motivations for the New Alliance of Virtue include:

1. The increasing cases around the world regarding religious persecution and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, and attacks on places of worship, as noted in the resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief,” (A/HRC/RES/16/18, 2011).
2. The false accusation that religion qua religion is inherently violent and thus responsible for the phenomenon of terrorism. Violent extremist and intolerant forms of religion threaten freely-embraced and freely-exercised religion.
3. The conviction that we indeed have shared values -- universals that transcend culture, era, or region -- and that they must be actualized. The shared values of the Abrahamic religions include, in particular, faith, kindness, prudence, and a belief in universal human dignity.
4. Existential angst resulting from: the modern loss of transcendence, a development model whose materialist premises ignores the needs and moral well-being of the world’s inhabitants, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
5. Globalization, with the resultant tension between a globalized reality dominated by standardization, the hegemony of secularism, and consumerism and the provincialism of customs and beliefs of many societies grappling with the new conditions.
6. A technocratic mentality that greatly influences technological advancements, some of which, rather than being applied for the betterment of humankind, have the potential for immoral applications that may violate human dignity and may disrupt the ecological balance.
7. Economics divorced of a moral framework, as well as the uncoupling of *homo economicus* from *homo religiosus*, thereby replacing the human and spiritual with the corporeal and material.

SECTION THREE PRINCIPLES



Article 4

The New Alliance of Virtue is built upon the following principles:

1. Human Dignity

- All people, irrespective of their diverse races, religions, languages, and ethnicities, by virtue of the divine soul breathed into them, are endowed with dignity by their Omnipotent Creator.

2. Freedom of Conscience and Religion or Belief

- There is no compulsion in religion or belief—people have the right to choose their beliefs and to practice their faith without fear of persecution.
- It is the responsibility of the state to protect religious freedom, including diversity of religions, which guarantees justice and equality among all members of society.

3. Tolerance

- The beliefs of others must be legally protected and culturally respected; differences should be seen as a source of enrichment, not conflict.

4. Justice

- Justice and equity are the foundation of all human interaction, while charity towards others remains the more virtuous and fitting path.

5. Peace

- Except for self defense or the defense of innocents, violence should be rejected, whether on the individual or state level (war), and an adherence to all peaceful means to resolve conflicts among individuals or groups maintained.

6. Mercy

- Mercy is the central means to achieve the divine covenant of faith, truth, and charity: “Whoever shows no mercy to others deprives himself of God’s mercy to him.” “God shows mercy to those who are merciful.”

7. Kindness

- Such kindness toward others should make no distinction between kith, kin, or strangers, whether the deeds resulted from familial bonds or selfless concern for others.

8. Keeping Covenants

- The most consequential of duties is that of fulfilling contracts and covenants, as it assures security and social harmony.

9. Solidarity

- Solidarity expresses an existential identification with and commitment to the well-being of the other.



SECTION FOUR OBJECTIVES



Article 5

Enlisting Religious Leaders In Promoting Peace and Sakinah

In light of the principles above, it is a duty for religious leaders to work to spread and secure peace and Sakinah (tranquility) through the following:

1. Cooperation between the adherents of the Abrahamic Family and people of other faith backgrounds and beliefs from our extended human family.
2. Standing against extremism, violence, and any discourse of incitement and bigotry.
3. Promoting a conciliatory approach in every faith community so that mutual respect may be strengthened in all of its various dimensions.

Article 6

Positive and Accountable Citizenship

Citizenship is both beneficial and a civic duty when:

1. It is predicated upon liberty, equality, pluralism, and mutual respect.
2. The exercise of rights is consistent with the protection of social harmony and the preservation of public order in accordance with Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
3. It promotes non-violence and a culture of social solidarity in confronting societal challenges that arise.

Article 7

Encouraging People of All Faiths to Respect Each Other

At its base, respect for another's religion is respect for human dignity. Human beings are by their nature truth seekers. When they believe they have discovered religious truth, they deserve -- by virtue of their humanity -- the respect of their fellow human beings. As such, respect for another's religion is a primary virtue that supports both individual human flourishing and the common good.

In practice, respect for other religions entails:

1. Protecting the sacred symbols and religious sensibilities of other faith traditions.

2. Respect for other religions does not preclude honest dialogue about what is perceived to be true or false in other religions, including one's own.
3. Principled cooperation around shared values.

Article 8

Protecting The Rights of Minorities

All ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities have the right to live without any persecution of any kind. Further, they have the right to live as full and equal citizens in their respective societies, drawing upon their most fundamental beliefs about virtue and morality to engage in the public life of those societies.

Article 9

Support of International Accords

We support those international agreements and accords that elevate human dignity and virtue because:

1. They are a source of international law and norms. They can contribute to global security.
2. They constitute an important means to promote peaceful cooperation between nations with their varying political, social, and economic systems.
3. They embody the concept of “contractual” citizenship that is central to this Charter.



SECTION FIVE DOMAINS & MEANS



With respect to working to improve the human condition, there are many domains in which the New Alliance of Virtue can contribute. This can be done by utilizing some of the means listed below.

Article 10

The Domain of The Family

By restoring the importance of the family as the true starting point for fostering virtue, justice, peace, civility, and tolerance.

Article 11

The Domain of Education

This would entail:

1. Advocating that character development and education are inseparable, and that pedagogical methods should incorporate ethical frameworks. In this way, both individual and societal comportment will be refined.
2. Advocating that religious education be reformed and developed to keep pace with modern developments in other fields, including, for example, as discussed in the 2009 Abu Dhabi Guidelines on Teaching Interfaith Tolerance.

Article 12

The Domain of Humanitarian Work

This would entail:

1. Promoting and propagating the virtues of hospitality, good Samaritanism, sheltering refugees and immigrants, lifting up the poor, alleviating hunger and suffering, protecting the vulnerable, providing necessary care, and helping anyone in need wherever and whoever they may be.
2. Advocating for an escalation of humanitarian efforts, such as alleviating hunger.

Article 13

The Domain of Sustainable Development

This would entail:

Helping the United Nations attain its “17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Sept 2015).



SECTION SIX CLOSING REMARKS



Article 14 **Signatories**

All who affirm the above articles are hereby called to sign onto and join the New Alliance of Virtue.

Article 15 **Clauses & Amendments**

All signatories of this Charter are granted the right to submit reservations to any of its articles.

Article 16 **Official Languages**

This Charter was ratified in the Arabic and English languages. All other languages must rely on these versions.

Article 17 **Execution**

This Charter will be executed.



ONE BILLION MEALS



The One Billion Meals pledging conference in Kuwait

As a token of intent, the participants in the Washington Conference called for the provision of one billion meals for those suffering as a result of conflict. In response to this call, a donor conference was convened in Kuwait in November 2018 under the “One Humanity Against Hunger” initiative.

Donors at this conference pledged 2.2 billion meals for those in need this year. Countries making commitments included the United States, the United Kingdom, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and others.

Speaking at the conference, Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah said, “It is incumbent on religious leaders to take responsibility for their positions and to move from their circles of influence and interest to contribute to the restoration of the moral conscience of humanity, which reinforces the effectiveness of the values of mercy and relief. The principle, ‘do not divide; do no harm,’ is consistent with the spirit of all religions, requiring that we respond to human needs.”



BIOGRAPHY OF SHAYKH ABDULLAH 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.

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'ān 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-aqalliyat*). 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 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 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.¹

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 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.

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



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 Medina 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.



ABOUT THE ALLIANCE OF VIRTUE



The Alliance of Virtues 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.

It does not seek to bridge theological differences, but rather to cooperate on the basis a theology of God-given human dignity, seeking virtue and the benefit for all.



CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS















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