

A Call for Reassessment

A Letter Addressed to Intellectual and Opinion Leaders in the 'West'

From the Conference on
Glorification of the Sanctities of Islam
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Preamble

In the name of Allah, the Unique One, who is no God but He, and no one deserves to be worshiped but He, the Lord of the prophets: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, the seal of all prophets, (Peace be upon all of them).

This letter was drafted by a group of Muslim scholars and intellectuals who recently gathered to discuss development in the relationship with the 'West', and the best and most logical manner to deal with the acceleration of infringements on the sanctities of Islam and Muslims by individuals, and by governmental, religious, and media organizations in the 'West'.

We, the signatories to this letter, address western thinkers, intellectuals, and decision makers as well as the leaders of grass-root movements and religious institutions. To all of them we state the following regarding this current phenomenon:

When an entire nation faces repeated and accelerated aggressions directed towards what is respected and holy to its people by groups from other nations, reactions will emerge and questions will be raised as to the rationale behind these transgressions, and the environment which created the milieu for these continued attacks. Nonetheless, it is for the benefit of all humanity that these transgressions and attacks come to an end.

No other community on the face of the earth today suffers from occupation, injustice and transgression from certain western forces more than Muslim world. No other peoples or nations are currently mocked, ridiculed, and hence suffered because of the western attacks on their religion and their holy symbols as much as the Muslim world. This phenomenon has reached an unacceptable level of infringement and injustice considering that these actions are directed at a worldwide culture and exceptional civilization with an immense history and against a divine religion representing more than a quarter of the world population. For this reason, we believe it is important to draw attention to our position concerning this phenomenon to allow for mistakes to be addressed and path to be rectified.

Present Relationship

We realize that the western perspective regarding Islam was not initially positive for several reasons, the most important of which is that Europeans did not deal directly with Islamic culture which led to a continuing sense of unease and apprehension. Disunited Europeans eventually attempted to create a Christian front against Islam. Islam became

the exterior enemy capable of unifying a Europe which was until then no more than scattered groups killing one another.

There is no doubt that generalizations may lead to misjudgments. In this regard, we are aware of how Europe and America have attempted over past centuries to rid themselves of the western civilization's deficiencies in dealing with the concept of 'Others'. However, incidents during the past few years have totally shattered these attempts.

In this letter, when we address the 'West', we mean western society in general. We are not only addressing the forces antagonistic to Islam, but also those who are fair, and we realize that the 'West' is diverse.

Examples of Aggressions

We draw the attention of the intellectuals and opinion leaders of the 'West' to the gravity of the increasing and accelerating attacks. It is unconceivable and unacceptable to witness - in less than three years - a series of attacks on what is sacred to us beginning with an assault on our Lord's holy book (the Noble Quran) by the authoring, publication and distribution of a parody of the Quran in which the beliefs, legislations, ethics, and history of our religion are ridiculed. This was followed by a prejudiced and malicious campaign against the person of our Prophet (peace be upon him) describing him with the most repulsive attributes and picturing him with the most mocking and ridiculing caricatures.

The source of these attacks emerged from a Danish newspaper spreading to several European countries where certain news outlets supported and others encouraged the spread of these caricatures. The situation grew even worse when the Roman Catholic Pope described Islam, the Quran, and the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) in a prepared public speech with attributes that are unjust, to say the least.

Muslims worldwide are also closely following the repeated assaults on the noble Quran at the hands of American soldiers in detention centers of Abu Ghraib in Iraq and Guantanamo in Cuba where the degradation of human beings was coupled with the humiliations of the Quran.

It continues to surprise Muslims worldwide to follow the news about infringements of personal freedoms of Muslim citizens and residents in the largest capitals of western countries. Let us also not forget the repeated attacks on mosques in occupied Iraq and Afghanistan sometimes through direct destruction, or by other means such as forced entry into mosques under the pretext of rooting out and killing militants, which, in turn, leads to the killing of innocent people inside these mosques.

There is also an air of superiority transpiring from the sayings of many leaders and politicians, the writings of some thinkers, and also in diverse media productions such as movies, series and novels that made it a habit of stigmatizing Islam with defects, violence and terrorism.

We are perplexed by the continued lack of public outcry from the majority of intellectual and opinion leaders against these repeated acts of aggression which occur in your

countries in the 'West'. It leads us to question which side you belong to: the side of freedom for all, protecting human rights of others, and supporting the global ethic of respect, or the side of repression and curbing other people's desires to preserve their own identities? We indeed ask: Are you siding with the insolence and mockery of the prophets in the name of the freedom of expression, or siding with freedom against the phenomenon of repression and suppression?

The Attack on the Prophet of Islam (Peace be upon him)

Although some civilizations have engaged in wars against Muslims in the past, most have not retained the hatred heritage toward the Prophet of Islam when compared with the small countries of Europe and their churches at the same time. Furthermore, Christian animosity toward Islam and the Prophet of Islam outside of western Europe were never transformed into what has been observed in western Europe; an historical abhorrence which was celebrated and emphasized during religious occasions and was portrayed on the walls and ceilings of cathedrals and houses of worship. It is a phenomenon worth studying and it is more important to limit its negative impact.

We question the reasons behind the endeavors of certain people in the 'West' to destroy the reputation of historical and contemporary role models. For those who live with no role models, we believe they will have no future; and a nation with no sense of history is like a building with no foundation.

Is this, perhaps, the fundamental *raison d'être* for the focused attack on our Prophet? Do certain movements in the 'West' - calling for materialism and decadence - want human beings in general, and Muslims in particular, to abandon their desire to follow the steps of enlightened historical role models?

We are convinced that attacks such as these recent ones on the best role models in our tradition are nothing but a clarion call in a chain of events attempting to eradicate the historical value of these exemplars.

We remain confident that the Muslim world will never waver when it comes to defending the Prophet of Islam and all other Prophets. This is a dividing line which we will never allow it to be crossed on the false pretext of free expression of opinions or views. Furthermore, the Muslim world can not be forced to accept all the outcomes of freedom of expression in the 'West' just as the 'West' does not want to accept some of the outcomes of other human freedoms in the 'East'.

We call upon western intellectuals to take a strong stance in dealing with these attacks. We expect they will be more concerned with protecting the accomplishments of the western civilization rather than protecting the 'rights' claimed by some in the 'West' to scorn others and ridicule Prophets.

The Aggression on Al-Aqsa Mosque (The Mosque of all the Prophets)

We consider the occupation and repeated attacks on Al-Aqsa mosque to be yet another example of aggressive behavior on what is considered sacred and holy to Muslims everywhere. These transgressions are happening with the support or silence of most western governments and the approval of some western religious movements as well.

It is worth noting that the Veto right of United States of America is rarely used in the United Nations for any purpose but to defend repeated Zionist attacks on occupied Palestinian land and to protect Jewish domination on Al-Aqsa mosque, which Muslims worldwide will never forfeit.

We reiterate our inquiries to the intellectual and opinion leaders: What is your position regarding these transgressions on what is sacred to Muslims in Palestine, and regarding injustices incurred by the Palestinian people who are deprived of their most basic rights.

We observe the blatant contradiction of the 'West' when it calls upon Muslims to adopt western forms of democracy while the same western governments agonize over what kind of free elections and what form of government Palestinians can be free to choose.

The silence of western intellectuals and thinkers about these transgressions on what is sacred to Muslims in Palestine is humiliating; it is a stain on the foreheads of those who champion freedom and democracy in the 'West'.

We call upon you to remove this stain by joining forces with many impartial intellectuals worldwide who are actively defending the rights of peoples and nations to liberate their occupied lands, to recover their holy sites, to fight for their rights to freely choose their representatives and those who would manage their political and social affairs, to retain their human dignity and their ability to resist humiliation and occupation, and to stand against injustice using all legitimate means.

Mocking the Islamic Veil

Personal freedom is central to western democracies. It can be seen in western contemporary social life and also in intellectual literature. It should then be one of the fundamental rights of women in a democracy to have the personal freedom to choose their own clothes as far as they are not contradicting any general moral or social value.

The Muslim world is astonished to watch the increased attacks and mockery of the veil of Muslim women in the 'West'. These attacks directly contradict democratic principles which are currently being promoted in the Muslim world. The world's women-rights groups have not taken any concerted steps to defend the rights of Muslim Women. We cannot help but wonder how the right of nudity is accepted and defended while the right of decency is attacked and questioned?

One of the basic human rights in the 'West' is the right for one's identity to be preserved and even protected and not attacked. How can the 'West' allow attacks on its own Muslim citizens for exercising the right to wear what suits them? Furthermore, we ask: what happened to the religious, social, and intellectual heritage of the western world? Modest western women would –and still do– wear decent clothing which closely resemble the Islamic dress code as in the cases of nuns and countryside women?

If the 'West' has abandoned this legacy of decency, does it mean the rest of the world must follow suit? We reject the 'war on decency' in today's world. We also do not accept the notion that this is the price to be paid for modernity and prosperity. Could the attacks on the veil of Muslim women result from the fact that, in itself, it represents just another symbol of decency?

The laws and regulations that were passed recently by several European countries to limit the rights of women to wear the veil appear to be a clear negation of their civil liberties. We wonder: is this happening because of a continued sense of animosity toward Islam by some, or because of the anti-decency position of some liberal supporters, or is it simply to please supporters of social and moral decadence? These are questions directed at western thinkers and intellectuals by the Muslim world. Our expectation is that they must stand firm against double standards in western intellectual norms which this phenomenon points to.

Confrontation of Ideas

Islam has been stained with numerous accusations in the last few years by a group of thinkers and religious and political personalities in the 'West'. The accusations range from allegations that Islam has spread by the sword, that 'Reason' has no place in the Islamic intellect, that Islam is a religion of terrorism and backwardness, and other false accusations.

This letter does not aim at providing a detailed refutation of each of these allegations. We, nevertheless, highlight the fact that they contradict rational discussions and also breach basic research principles accepted worldwide. It seems, however, that these allegations correspond well with the policy of 'War of Ideas' which some American influential institutions are calling for in order to alter Islam.

We recognize that Islam has propagated through Jihad for the cause of Allah and it also has spread by other peaceful means. In fact, all civilizations have acquired and used force to preserve and defend their accomplishments and values. Moreover, we draw your attention to the fact that the concept of 'Just War' was accepted by the European Church and the secular movements in order to preserve the interests of the western civilization. Why then deny the same philosophical position when it comes to Islam?

Any person studying world history would realize that millions of people in many countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines as well as some Asian and African nations have accepted Islam even though they were never invaded or attacked by any Muslim military force.

Another question: Why does Islam continue to grow worldwide nowadays and more particularly in the 'West' with no use of any military force to propagate it? It is happening, we believe, because of Islam's inherited influence and its harmony with the best of human nature.

As for the fundamental place of Reason in Islamic civilization in comparison with other civilizations, we must begin by stressing that historians unanimously agree that western

history is full of incidents which either disregard the role of reason or idolize it; thus in fact, moving from one extreme to the opposite.

On the other hand, the Muslim world has been known for its moderation in the use of reason to properly serve humanity. We ask: why do certain religious leaders in the 'West' try to attack the role of reason in Islam? Is it to conceal deficiencies they encounter within their own faith, or to align forces with the secular movement in its confrontation with Islam?

We call upon Church leaders to reexamine their own beliefs beginning with the concept of divinity. Upon rigorous introspection and research, they will perhaps recognize the more-than-ample rational contradictions that this concept holds. The overpowering domination of Church leaders and their hostility towards science and reason could have been the main reason for the revolution against the Church in the past, and could also have inspired the materialistic and atheist wave which has developed throughout western countries.

We invite western intellectuals and thinkers to unshackle themselves from an intellectual position that was inherited from unjust religious wars, which the 'West' itself called 'Crusades'; wars that perfectly fit today's definition of 'terrorist warfare'. As for those who accuse us today of terrorism, they were and still are the cause of most of the horrors and catastrophes of wars that have decimated tens of millions of persons in our contemporary world, especially the two World Wars, which the Muslims had no role in igniting.

Intellectuals in the Islamic world continue to notice the changes taking place in the tactics used by some adversaries in the 'West' who are shifting their position from attacking Muslims to attacking Islam, and from efforts to change Muslims to attempts to 'reform' Islam. We pronounce: Islam is in no need for a contemporary Protestantism, which would corrupt it, because Islam is well known for its ability to renew itself. Furthermore, Islam is spreading with no need to modify it. We question then, why some in the 'West' demand to alter Islam?

It is interesting for us to note that extreme egoism has caused some western intellectuals and decision makers to call for intellectual and religious reforms in a faith in which they barely know. They call for the reform of Islam simply because it is different from what was agreed upon in contemporary Christianity when it merged with western liberalism to form a new religion whose followers are arrogant enough to demand that others must change their own positions to match and adhere to the norms of this new religion.

We are confident that our religion, which will never be altered, is quite capable of healing the problems of western civilization. This may explain the uphill struggle of some opponents in the 'West' who are trying to get rid of the pure form of Islam. Furthermore, we believe that to maintain an unaltered Islam would obliterate for some the 'End of History' myth.

We strongly reject any attempt to repress the right of our community to adhere to its own intellectual reasoning system. We affirm at the same time our interest to get acquainted with other civilizations and to benefit from what they have, and is useful to us.

It is important to stress that the western thoughts in the domain of values, morals, legislation, and creeds are neither universal nor sacred. Attempts to make them as such will never succeed. Muslim societies in general are beginning to believe that attacks on Islam by some westerners under the banner of 'War of Ideas' only reflect their own fear of the enlightened message of Islam which stands firm against western domination.

What you are accustomed to call the 'War of Ideas' is a preference which we do not approve of. Nevertheless, we will never hesitate to face up to whatever hurts our sentiments. The theatre of war in the field of ideas is our own battleground. We will excel in this war not necessarily because of the superiority of our intellectuals or decision makers, but rather because of our unwavering confidence and certainty in our fundamental principles. We are confident of our ability not only to reveal, but also to cure the severe contradictions western civilization has in the domain of ideas, intellect, and beliefs.

How to Explain the Attacks on our Sanctities?

It appears from the official statements of some western leaders and from verbal or written opinions representing the prevailing intellectual trend today that the attack on the Islamic world is not an isolated event or in response to a specific incident. It rather appears to be the outcome of a master plan that was carefully constructed to eclipse the impact of the Islamic community on the world.

The development of this master plan could be detected in the use of the word 'Crusade' used by U.S. President George W. Bush in describing his open war on what is being called 'terrorism' in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

It could also explain statements by the former Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, who claimed that western civilization was superior to that of Islam. Berlusconi said that Islam was 'racist, inflammatory, and uneducated' ignoring Islam's long history of accomplishments. Such statements were also echoed by the former German Chancellor who remarked that he would not allow Islam to become a threat to the European civilization. An important question comes to mind here: What is the real purpose of this multifaceted attack on Islam?

If the explanation is the freedom of expression in criticizing other religions, then we do not see in contemporary western literature similar attacks on other religions such as Hinduism, Judaism, and Buddhism. We only observe continuous attacks on Islam. We also wonder: could this campaign of aggression be in response to recent political incidents? We must also disagree with this reasoning because aggressions against Islam have long preceded the recent events when a small group of Muslims has been accused of initiating aggression.

Many Muslim leaders and intellectuals perceive current attacks on Islamic rituals and sanctities as a direct result of the realization of some western leaders and intellectuals that the Islamic world is experiencing a revival, and is going through a fundamental renaissance. It also appears they realize that the Islamic world is resuming its mission to

reform humanity to bring real happiness, and that Islam is becoming a real contender in intellectual and civilizational areas.

We examine with interest the report published by the 'Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance' which estimated the number of Muslims in 2003 to be 1.226 billions representing 19% of the world population that year. The report also confirms that Islam is the only religion whose adherents' proportion is increasing while the proportion of the other major religions' adherents is decreasing. The organization also predicts that before 2023, Islam will be the world's first religion. Could these and other similar statistics be the driving factor behind the return of the fear of the Islamic world among certain western thinkers and leaders? The question is directed to you.

We are convinced of double-standards when we witness western leaders and intellectuals stress upon the value of individual liberty and democratic processes while at the same time they suppress freedom rights for Muslims in western countries. They promote the intolerance of Islamic symbols appearing in the daily lives of Muslims in the 'West', and even attempt to harm Muslims in their own homelands. Moreover, they continuously export oppression and colonial domination to the Islamic world.

We notice that the atmosphere of hostility from some western leaders has permeated some populations under the effect of the media and the hostile policies which are being falsely justified both culturally and intellectually. We believe the western media is no longer completely independent from policymaking. It rather appears sharing roles with decision makers. As a result of the media's ability to incite people and disseminate policies, a more dangerous effect is also developing: It is the deterrence of nations from accepting the divine guidance.

It is interesting to note that the religious movement in the 'West' has strongly participated in this campaign by either concealing the truth about Islam, attempting to defame it and alienate people away from it, or by hiding the explicit 'Good News' pointing to of the prophet-hood of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) in the Old and New Testaments.

There is another trend of concerted political and media attacks on any impartial western writing which appears to be unbiased towards Muslims. This trend confirms to us that certain western political and intellectual forces consider it in their best interest that people in the 'West' get a somber image of Muslims and the religion of Islam.

In Conclusion

We affirm the importance of proper inter-cultural dialogue in reaching the truth and limiting unjust aggression on others. Nonetheless, we are certain that talking about dialogue for some people is nothing more than a way to justify actions of the 'West' and to suppress the dissenting opinions and the authentic Islamic thinking and ideals. We stress the fact that communication between civilizations is quite possible in today's world but on the condition of establishing justice and fairness.

The contemporary western civilization is an outcome of the accumulation of the accomplishments of all previous world civilizations and their civic and progressive creativities. Nevertheless, the 'West' desires to monopolize its benefits for itself, and only

for those who circle in its orbit. The 'West' appears to be adamant about depriving the Muslim world of the means of technological and materialistic progress to keep it occupied with inter-fighting and struggles fueled and instigated by the 'West' itself.

The stagnation of Muslims in development and creativity - due to many reasons - is an exception to the norms of the history of the Islamic civilization. This stagnation does not indicate that we are a backward community in terms of civilization or values. On the contrary, the Muslim world community encompasses a wealth of morals, ideals, values, and sources of guidance and enlightenment, and it will never abandon them. It will always carry the responsibility of calling humanity to these virtues.

We call upon you to reconsider the position of claiming civilizational supremacy over others. We further urge intellectual and opinion leaders among you to maintain neutrality and fairness with regard to Islam, its noble values, and its good virtues which has bequeathed humanity over ages.

The current situation of our Islamic world might not be great, but the foundations of Islam in creed, legislation, civilization, and ethics are nonetheless magnificent and applicable to every time and place. Furthermore, it is important to state that while the 'West' has achieved strong materialistic progress and technological innovation, the foundations of its civilization as they currently stand are not beneficial to humanity in the long run.

The defects of our current situation do not affect our conviction of the value of our religion and our civilization for humanity. This is why we are addressing you, the opinion leaders and decision makers, and we address through you the silent majority of the western peoples as well as those who are implicated in the campaigns of aggression on our sanctities and our resources and we demand from all the following:

First: Stop inflicting injustice upon us. Bring to an end the interference in our affairs, and stop attacking what is sacred and holy to our Muslim world community. Continuing these acts of aggression will not serve your vital economic interests in our countries. The only way to preserve these interests is through justice and fairness.

Second: We call upon you to join forces with us to stop media and cultural campaigns which insult what is sacred to us, ridicule our noble Quran, and attack the character of our Prophet. Otherwise, the Muslim community will have no choice but to continue exercising its legitimate right to resist the western oppression in all its forms: cultural, civilizational, political, and military.

Third: Rather than allocating resources and efforts on current campaigns aiming at containing and dominating us culturally, economically, politically and militarily, we urge you to allocate some of your intellectual and research efforts to determine the real causes of the rising civilizational conflict between us. We also urge you to research and study the real essence of the message of our Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). We call upon you to open your minds and hearts to comprehend and appreciate the universality of Islam and the realities of our religion before attacking them, or calling people away from them.

Fourth: It is more important for western intellectuals and leaders to focus on reforming their own countries before interfering in the affairs of other nations and civilizations. The

'West' is undeniably in need of several fundamental reforms. It is far more imperative to tackle these reforms than to impose western reform projects on the Muslim world. We are confident that western nations and societies are heading towards a grievous abyss of incoherence, deterioration, and cultural bankruptcy if their leaders continue their approach of exporting corruption and inequalities to the rest of the world. All these mounting abuses will eventually return back as arrows hitting the hearts of those who spread and propagate them.

To reiterate: This letter is a call to the intellectual leaders in western countries to implement a 'Western Reform Initiative' to rekindle the true virtues of faith which all Prophets called for, to pay due respect to these Prophets (Peace be upon them), to aid the innocent, and to prevent injustice and aggression in the entire world and not just in the 'West'.

Before making calls to reform the Islamic world (or the Greater Middle East as they call it), the thinkers and leaders of the 'West' should adopt a project to reform their own societies with regard to family values, marriage and virtue. We also call for a western economic reform, which will protect people and individuals from being 'terrorized' by corporations and capitalistic market forces. This reform will bring back respect and appreciation to moral values rather than market values. It is a reform project which will enable the 'West' to join global forces working together in order to stop the alienation of the underprivileged, and to reinstate intrinsic value to real education.

Now is the right time to launch this initiative to rescue the 'West' from the dominance of an atheist minority seeking to destroy all contemporary religious values and moral standards.

Fifth: The 'West' must apologize for its repeated assaults on Islam. Furthermore, it must apologize for the numerous crimes that were committed in its name against Muslims during, before, and after the colonial era.

Our message to those who are determined to continue their aggression against our Muslim community is this: The propagation of Islam never ceased when it was attacked at any time in the past nor will it come to an end if it is harassed in this era or until the end of age. The Muslim world has a unique resiliency; a capacity to rebound after setbacks as witnessed throughout history.

The role of our Muslim community will not be limited to defending our religion and what is sacred to us. It will also extend to expose the tactics of the enemies of humanity. Citizens of the western world will come to recognize that what the enemies of Muslims in the 'West' are doing will harm the western world far more than it will harm the Muslim community.

The 'West' could possibly lose the advantages of economic trade with 1.25 billion people representing an overwhelming market share of world consumers. It will risk trade relationships with many Muslim countries, which retain a vast wealth of all current natural energy resources needed to fuel the wheel of modernity and development. These are the same Muslims who carry the largest share of the burden of sustaining human fairness and justice.

We believe that welcoming the western technological advancements, which are beneficial to humanity, does neither indicate nor necessitate trading our own values in order to merge into western cultures. We reject blind adherence to the 'West' or anyone else. At the same time, we do not object to trade and exchange benefits with the 'West' or to make use of its technological and industrial innovations.

We call upon the intellectual and opinion leaders in the 'West' to truly understand the religion of Islam, and the Muslim community. What motivates us to do so, and our evidence to it, is the divine order in the Book of Allah – The Noble Quran, which we find to be the very best way to conclude our letter to you. The glorious God states: "Say: 'O people of the Scripture: Come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but God, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides God.' Then, if they turn away, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.'" [Quran,3:64]