

The role of media in disseminating values of tolerance and counter–extremism

The Intellectual agenda

Introduction

Tolerance is the most prominent human values that has contributed to the sustainability and prosperity of human societies throughout the ages. As some social philosophers and thinkers say "taking positive stance towards tolerance is to recognize the rights of others to enjoy human rights and fundamental universally recognized freedoms" Tolerance includes dealing with a series of ethical and moral values that encourage recognition of the Other, embrace them in one human crucible, respect pluralism and diversity among people and societies as a natural phenomenon that must be honored and turned into opportunities for solidarity among different cultures and religions. The concept of tolerance is the minimum of that series of co-existence moral values, as it means that there exists a party that is tolerant towards the existence of another party. Upon ensuring consolidation of values of tolerance, we must seek to establish values of co-existence and harmony to reach the ideal formula of co-existence that our societies have known for decades. The concept of tolerance is contrary to the concept of intolerance and xenophobia which leaves no space for the Other to freely and openly express their views and thoughts. Hence, intellectual extremism and rejection of the Other is the moral basis of political or intellectual tyranny and a factor of demolition of societies, as those who adopt it possess no moral courage to recognize the Other, but "led by pride to further sin" in clinging to their views regardless of the others. The concept of tolerance further includes the value of co-existence and common fate at the level of geography or culture, so that everyone seeks to achieve the common human objectives under a constructive diversity not a destructive one.

Although disseminating the values of tolerance and counter-extremism is a task undertaken by the different sorts of social, educational and cultural institutions, the major responsibility in achieving this task lies on mass media with all its sorts due to the ability of media to reach millions of people and to influence them.

The role of mass media in disseminating the values of tolerance and counter-extremism

Mass media is one of the most influential social and cultural institutions when it comes to disseminating the values of tolerance and counter-extremism or vice versa, as mass media institutions have become the most powerful means of human communication that influence the culture industry, shaping awareness, identifying trends of people in different communities, due to its broad and effective capabilities very swiftly spreading all forms of information to a wide scope of audiences through different news, entertainment, commercial, cultural and religious programmes. To achieve the aspired role of the media in disseminating the values of tolerance and counter-extremism, it must be based on a comprehensive long-term strategy through which a group of objectives is identified for all the media and community groups to jointly seek to achieve. Studies have proved that mass media plays an important role in shaping public opinion, social education, consolidating cultural values and raising awareness of the Other. Therefore, it is a key drive to trigger tolerance and counter-extremism.

Towards building a media strategy for the dissemination of the values of tolerance and counter-extremism

Media plays an essential role in disseminating the values of tolerance and counter-extremism, within the context of a comprehensive strategy that

includes recruitment of traditional and modern means of communication to achieve the following strategic and media objectives:

- 1) Build a public opinion supportive of the values of tolerance theoretically and practically at the level of individuals and groups.
- 2) Promote communication and dialogue between Arab and Islamic peoples with other peoples through popularization of the tolerant aspects of the Arab and Islamic civilization which are inconsistent with practices of terrorism and extremism.
- 3) Encourage Arab intellectual and media talents to produce mass media through the traditional and modern media channels that promote values of tolerance, recognition of the Other, co-existence and peace as human values deeply rooted in the Arab civilization.
- 4) Attract influential figures and institutions in the West to interact with Arab societies through conferences, seminars and studies in order to highlight the civilization and human dimensions of the Arab societies.
- 5) Launch intensive media campaigns targeting intellectual extremism at the Arab and international level to expose aspects of this ideology to the world.
- 6) Provide cultural and media opportunities for the youth to exercise their right of communication and responsible cultural expression to serve their nations and communities.
- 7) Encourage the establishment of media institutions specialized in combating intellectual extremism through a sensible constructive dialogue.
- 8) Focus on unity not division, and on commonalities among cultures, civilizations and religions.

- 9) Prevent media access for extremist religious discourse, and avoid unintentional contribution to its dissemination. On the other hand, give way to the sensible, tolerant and moderate religious discourse.
- 10) Enhance human cadres in the Gulf and Arab media institutions to enable them to efficiently deal with intellectual extremism lexicon and to promote the values of tolerance and peace.
- 11) Reform the media discourse so as to become more inclusive of the values of tolerance, counter extremism, acceptance of the Other and co-existence.

Proposed media initiatives

- 1) Launch press and online channels and institutions specialized in building the culture of tolerance, anti-terrorist ideology and intellectual extremism, in Arabic, and intended for all segments of the society.
- 2) Launch media and intellectual rehabilitation and training programmes for journalists to enable them to interact successfully with issues of intellectual extremism through a media discourse that defends the values of tolerance and co-existence and fights terrorist and intellectual extremism.
- 3) Launch programmes that encourage international journalists and key actors to visit the Arab region and get acquainted with the reality of tolerance and co-existence in some distinct models in the region.
- 4) Revise university curricula with regard to media and communication to include important lexicon of dissemination of tolerance and counter-extremism through mass media.

- 5) Establish media observatories to follow up on the Arab and global media coverage of intellectual extremism and public opinion trends based on modern analytical approaches.
- 6) Establish partnerships between media institutions and cultural, educational and social institutions to provide intellectual flows from these institutions to media space.
- 7) Launch intensive media campaigns through the traditional, social and online media to raise awareness of the values of tolerance and warn against intellectual extremism.
- 8) Benefit from institutions and forums that take to the mentioned principles and publish their outcomes, including talk shows and radio and television series and encourage writers and thinkers to embrace these principles in their writings.
- 9) Encourage production agencies and individuals to produce cultural programmes that focus on tolerance, moderation and acceptance of the Other and encourage dialogue of civilizations.

Intellectual, religious, moral and legal terms of reference as a base for the media to disseminate the values of tolerance and counter-extremism

No media endeavour can succeed in achieving the desired level of disseminating all forms of values of tolerance unless it is based on credible intellectual, religious, moral and legal terms of reference at the regional and international levels. Over the past years and with evolution of conflicts and war outbreaks in various regions of the world, including the Arab region, the culture of tolerance has become one of the areas that received wide attention in modern societies at the official, national, regional and

international levels, so that it has become a pressing concern for the peoples of the world who seek stability, peace and security. Numerous conferences were convened and many initiatives were launched to encourage promotion of the culture and values of tolerance and combating xenophobia in world societies, that primarily aimed at developing joint cooperation among peoples and states to foster and spread this culture.

- 1) **The tolerant Islamic values and principles:** our true Islam encourages tolerance and coexistence, combats intolerance and extremism in the context of the culture of co-existence for all members of the society regardless of their cultural, ethnic or religious affiliations.
- 2) **The Declaration of Principles** on Tolerance endorsed by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session held in Paris from 25 October to 16 November 1995. This Document stipulates that tolerance is the only way that leads to peace. The Preamble of the Declaration and six of its Chapters include the approaches that ought to be adopted to apply the principle of tolerance in our society and modern communities. The Document defined tolerance as “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures and our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief.. And that tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace". The Document also noted that tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and

fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values. Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and states. It further emphasized that tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights and pluralism (including cultural pluralism) democracy and the rule of law. It involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism and affirms the standards set out in international human rights instruments. Also the practice of tolerance is consistent with respect for human rights. It does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. Tolerance means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behavior and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others". This Article illustrates the richness of the concept which makes it difficult to determine through a thorough definition.

- 3) Bahrain Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations** The Declaration issued by the conference on Civilizations in Service of Humanity, convened in May 2014, called for the promotion of the spirit of moderation and spread of the culture of co-existence within the scope of respect for safety of nations, and seeks to enhance fraternal relations among human beings within the context of the Divine honor bestowed on them. The Declaration stressed that human rights cannot be efficient or effective unless they apply within unified standards in the pragmatic application among all civilizations, urging national and local policies at the global level to be in line with the goals of the civilization dialogue. The

Conference was held in response to the noble will and sensible initiative of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain, to establish an alliance of civilizations, in which humanity converges in a system of common values to confront the scourge of intolerance and hatred, extremism and terrorism, in order for the world to continue building balanced human relations that are essentially based on human beings – self and value–, not only on their individuality but also on their affiliation to the country, nation and the world.

- 4) **Muslim Wise Men Council** convened in Abu Dhabi on 9–10 March 2014 endorsed its action plan and strategic objectives based on dissemination and popularization of the true Islam to understand its noble message, achievement of which requires to seek firefighting and the need for cross–interaction of cultures at different religious, ethical, philosophical or knowledge levels, shaping the next generation of sensible and enlightened scholars, in order to inhabit the Earth with peace and harmony rather than with war and dispute.

Final conclusions and recommendations of the Forum

- 1) A large part of the troubles experienced by the Nation today is due to the misperception over unquestionable Sharia concepts in the minds of a broad spectrum of Muslim societies, i.e. the application of Sharia, prevention of vice, Jihad and obedience to the rulers.
- 2) The cited concepts originally constituted the fence for peace, the tools to safeguard life and a manifestation of the Divine Clemency brought by Islam by the Prophet of Mercy, Muhammad (Peace be upon him). When those concepts were misinterpreted, they turned into practices that altered their original meanings, purposes and goals.

Consequently, compassion turned into torture for the Nation scorching both the convict and the innocent; a torture which both the intellectual and the ignorant shared to spread.

The Forum provided for this misperception due to the following motives:

- a. Disengagement of *taklif* (address of accountability) and *wad'* (enactment). An enactment with cause, condition and hindrance which conform to fulfillment of the address of accountability, whereas the latter shall not be effectively enforced without an enactment; in other words, the rules of Sharia change upon change of four: the time, the place, the human being and the condition.
- b. Therefore, an obligation towards a certain duty is not unreasonable, but must be placed within that four-dimension situation. Jihad, for instance, is an obligation, but which situation jihad would be an obligation, and which one it would be prohibited as causing harm and strife that contradict the purposes of Sharia in safeguarding religion, soul, mind and money.
- c. The ambiguity of the relation between means and purposes. Often means turn into purposes and vice versa, as with the case in the Arab world today, where power which is supposed to be the means to safeguard human life, has shifted into a purpose that groups and sects struggle over while taking millions of lives.

- d. The decline of the four principles of the Sharia; namely: Wisdom, Justice, Compassion and Interest, as Ibn Al-qayyim, God bless his soul, said "The main foundation of Sharia is based on judgment and human interests in life and death. It is all justice, all compassion, all interests and all wisdom. Every matter that turned from justice to injustice, from clemency to its opposite, from interest to vice, from wisdom to the absurd, is not of Sharia even if these were somehow interpreted in Sharia".
- 3) Peace is among the higher *maqased* (purposes) of Islamic Sharia, as a guarantor of all the essential purposes and their emanating degrees of interests; as spelled by the divine provisions of Islamic law, and proven by the Prophet's actions, then followed by his companions, God bless their souls, and their good successors who followed their suit. Therefore, acquiesce to the priority of peace over any other interests is a Sharia obligation before being considered as human experience and a lesson from the wisdom of mankind.
- 4) If reclaiming a right is a right per se, then it is more righteous to seek peace.
- 5) There are no rights without peace: Missing peace means missing the entire rights, including the right to exist! Peace is the key right and the supreme purpose that governs all particles of rights
- 6) The peace system: Jurisprudence, practices and concepts of the peace system do not aim at the suppression of rights, but at changing access to them by more effective and sensible means, least of which the time wasted in fighting and struggle, if used rationally in the

- context of {Repel evil with good deed –Fussilat: 34}, would lead to striking outcomes that would satisfy all parties and may enjoy the acceptance of God Almighty because they have prevented bloodshed, safeguarded money and honour, reduced hatred and brought hearts together.
- 7) All the guiding concepts referred to in cases other than legitimate self-defense, to justify the legitimacy of violence and fighting among Muslims as implementation of Sharia rules, changing vice, Jihad and fighting aggressors, all of which included within the address of accountability (taklif), are concepts tuned by Sharia itself through the enactment (wad'), i.e. the provisions of implementation, so as not to annul the purpose of peace. Those who desire to apply Sharia, must be warned against the disengagement of both the address of accountability (taklif) and the enactment (wad').
 - 8) Goodwill is not a reason to invoke the goal, –no matter the nobility of ends– by war and spread of hatred and dispute, because noble goals must be accessed through noble means. Therefore, goodwill must not be invoked as a justification of evil means from the justifier's viewpoint.
 - 9) Islam set up an inclusive jurisprudence to resolve disputes by peaceful and sensible means. Its provisions are reflected in *Kitab al-solh* (the Peacemaking Book) which is a *Mua'akada* (contract) through which reconciliation is achieved between the parties in dispute.
 - 10) The dialogue system that heritage included to achieve some sort of satisfaction and agreement through dialogue to sign a

"reconciliation contract", and the adjoining safeguards, in addition to broadening its scope of function to include all forms of disputes and disagreements starting from family dispute to international conflicts, with diverse tools; I.e. arbitration, discharge or pardon, is considered as one of the richest legislative and ethical systems.

- 11) The rules and totalities of peace jurisprudence are:
 - a- Consideration of implications and consequences
 - b- *Dar' al mafased* (Prevention of vice) takes priority over *galb al masaleh* (bringing benefits)
- 12) Consideration of priorities of variation in interests and vice, thus most important takes priority over the important.
- 13) *Furud al-kifayat* (collective obligations) are divided into what the general public may or may not do, which is the general governing rules applied by *uli al amr* (those charged with authority); i.e. application of *hadd* (punishment), mobilization and declaration of war and peace among nations, as well as other different measures of community benefit
- 14) *Jihad* originally is a way to peace. It includes all worships, and is lasting until doomsday with all its different types (defensive jihad, scholarly jihad, money jihad-zakat-, and jihad against the Self...etc). However, *jihad al-talab* (offensive Jihad), meaning incursion upon other nations is not acceptable in our time due to the cessation of the materialistic power that prevents communication with people and inviting them for the good.

The Forum concluded a set of ideas to deal with the issue, including:

- 1) It is high time that all Muslim communities, individuals, groups, political parties, governments and countries cooperated on piety and righteousness, on advancement of the higher interests of the people and nations before private interests, and on adoption of dialogue and unity as an only approach to achieve comprehensive development.
- 2) Call for openness among all parties, and for building communication bridges for all to cross to peace.
- 3) Call for the establishment of a new "*helf al-fudul*" (League of the Virtuous) of the *Umma's* wise men, and for the elaboration of a theory for acquaintance as a firm and unwavering basis for international relations as God Almighty says, (*and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other*).
- 4) Reinstall the reference authority in the nation through restoring the distinctive and pioneer position of scholars within Muslim communities, to fulfill their duty in promotion of virtue and prevention of vice according to Sharia, while avoiding involvement at any conflict, intellectual or political trend so that they express the Nation with all its constituents and their speech is appreciated and respected if not be unanimous.
- 5) Clarify the danger of extracting rulings from Sharia and jurisprudence texts, bare from their reasons and circumstances, for the educated factions of the Nation, judging the truth solely on its own merits.
- 6) Revive jurisprudence with its origins and scientific traditions as a protecting fence of nations from social strifes, and curb *fatawas* (rulings) through restraining those in charge of issuing them, conditions and limitations.

- 7) Democracy is not an objective or a goal per se; it is rather a tool in disposed environments in order to address the diversity of intellectual ideologies and political endeavours. Therefore; it is the duty of reform advocates to achieve justice and equality, without consecration of mechanisms, recalling historical contexts and norms of their communities so that democracy does not become a call for civil war in some societies.
- 8) Pay due attention to the culture of peace in Muslim societies after having declined and weakened, and space has been given to the culture of violence, fighting, usurping rights with every means, regardless of their human, social, economic and political cost.
- 9) Revive peace doctrine which is deeply rooted in Islamic jurisprudence books and fatawas and develop this stock through extraction of its origins, assets, rules and provisions to invest, reform and build on it.
- 10) Establish an integrated educational and modern system that emanates from the Nation's potentials and sources, and upholds the values of peaceful co-existence, harmony, tolerance and respect for diversity and difference.
- 11) Consolidate instructive conscious in education systems, correct stereotypes that confine religion and Sharia to punitive inhibition and the executive authority.
- 12) Prioritize dissemination of the culture of peace and values of harmony to children and youth, calling them to engage actively in spreading the culture of peace in Muslim communities, and develop a new discourse that suits their needs, because on one hand, they constitute the group that enjoys the least immunity against hate and

violence discourse and, on the other hand, they constitute the Nation's hope to change itself.

The Forum identified a group of measures to gain access to the aforementioned, including:

- 1) Benet from all strategies aimed at disseminating the culture and values of peace, and the accumulated experience of mankind including means and mechanisms of conflict resolution, i.e. international arbitration and mediation institutions.
- 2) Invest all available means to disseminate the culture of peace and harmony (books, magazines, brochures, leaflets, media channels, internet websites, youth assemblies, and forums ...)
- 3) Call upon media, internet websites and social media networks to undertake the responsibility of speech, consider its implications on co-existence and harmony, and to engage in the promotion of the culture of peace in Muslim communities.
- 4) Call on intellectuals, writers and innovators to support the mandate of this Forum and to contribute to the promotion of the culture of peace and co-existence in Muslim communities.
- 5) Benefit from scholarly outcome of Sharia academic research with regards to jurisprudence of peace, cohesion and reconciliation (catalogue, categorize and assess studies and publish what is deemed worthy of publish...)
- 6) Support Muslim societies in the West, educationally and jurisprudentially to enable them and future generations to understand tolerant and moderate Islam, preventing them to slip into the abyss of

extremism, violence and clash with the different components of the society, and to encourage them to engage in the development of their nations, so as to ensure co-existence for all and rectification of the image of our true religion and that of its followers in the West.

As for the media, the Forum called for the following:

- 1) Encourage dialogue among the different factions at the national and international levels, as it is a human and social need to foster co-existence between the followers of religions, civilizations and cultures in the cultural, media and education communities.
- 2) Pay attention to the religious education at schools, families and society, highlighting its impact on refining the human being, enhancing noble values and encouraging constructive dialogue among peoples.
- 3) Mass media ought to pay due attention to dissemination of the culture of peace and understanding, to ensure accuracy, objectivity and documentation when dealing with issues of significant impact on human societies, and to avoid associating terrorism with the religion of its perpetrators.