

Makkah & Modernity: Islamic Principles that Complement the Values of Progress

The MWL Fights Extremism with Knowledge, Logic and Tolerance

The Humanitarian Initiative: A Humbling Responsibility and Duty

A New Museum of the Prophet: Tradition and History with a Modern Touch in Jakarta

The Riyadh Conference at the King Faisal Center for Islamic Practices

OCTOBER 2019

VOL 50 | NO 10 | DUL QADAH

IDEALISM & ISLAM

The MWL in Review





*A true Muslim is an
ambassador for Islam,
reflecting its values
and principles.*

— Mohammad bin Abdulkarim
Al-Issa, Secretary General of
the Muslim World League

About the MWL

The Muslim World League is a non-governmental international organization based in Makkah. Its goal is to clarify the true message of Islam.

Crown Prince Faisal, the third son of King Abdulaziz Al Saud, founded the Muslim World League during the meeting of the general Islamic Conference on May 18, 1962, in order to fulfill his dream for an Islamic Ummah. The establishment of the MWL continued the vision of the Crown Prince to enlighten and educate the international Muslim community, which began with the founding of the Islamic University of Madinah in 1961. The Muslim World League has grown into a worldwide charity to which the Saudi Royal Family remain active donors.

Ascending to the throne as King Faisal in November 1964, the Saudi leader remained steadfast in his faith, proclaiming: "I beg of you, brothers, to look upon me as both brother and servant. 'Majesty' is reserved to God alone and 'the throne' is the throne of the Heavens and Earth."

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In Praise of Global Vision: Non-Muslim Leaders & the MWL



“Whenever we have violence or attacks in the world, in America they say: ‘Where are the moderate Islamic leaders to condemn this? I say: ‘You must meet Dr. Al-Issa. He is the leader that does that.’”

– Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, May 2019



“I would like to point to the positive role of the Muslim World League, which, in recent years, have made considerable efforts to educate the Muslim youth in the spirit of peacefulness and solidarity. Orthodox Christians and Muslim belong to the same Eastern culture. We are aware of ourselves as one people regardless of religious affiliation, be it Orthodox or Islamic.”

– Patriarch Kirill of Russia, July 2019



“[MWL is] the leading global voice of Islam.”

– His Excellency Rabbi Schneier of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, on the MWL, April 2019

MWL in October

Highlights of the Month in Review



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa speaks at interfaith summit in Colombo in August 2019.

OCTOBER 2

The Muslim World League and the government of Indonesia announced the establishment in Jakarta of the largest museum dedicated to the life of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and Islamic Civilization. The museum will be a branch of the MWL headquarters and museum in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, which opened in September under the patronage of Prince Faisal bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, Governor of Madinah. The MWL received requests from twenty-four countries, including Indonesia, to help establish local branches of that museum.

“ The time is now for responsible leaders across all nations to come together and set an example. Leadership starts with condemning acts of intolerance and promoting a broad-minded approach that embraces our differences. I am proud to be a partner of the Muslim World League in this regard.

— Bawa Jain, President, World Council of Religious Leaders, March 2019



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and Indonesia's Minister of Civil Service and Reform, Dr. Safaruddin Campo, at the signing ceremony for the agreement to build Museum of the Prophet in Jakarta.

“ I think there are few groups that are exchanging perspectives as actively as Saudi Arabia and Europe on questions of religious tolerance and diversity. The KFCRIS builds from the legacy of the late King Faisal and has been a pillar in promoting Islam in this manner of debate.

—Michele Cervone d’Urson, European Union Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa speaking with attendees at event on Orphans in Ghana.

OCTOBER 11

The MWL condemned terrorist attacks in Paris and in Halle, Germany, in a statement rebuking every act of barbarity motivated by false and manipulative concepts of “religion.” In early October, an employee at the Paris police

headquarters stabbed four of his colleagues to death and injured two others in an apparent religious-extremist attack. A shooting took place in Halle on October 9 when an individual sought to enter the synagogue during Yom Kippur, killing two people and injuring two.

OCTOBER 16

In Riyadh, the European Union envoy to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia called for a global movement toward civilized norms of respect and cultural appreciation “to help bring diverse societies closer together.” Ambassador Michele Cervone d’Urso opened a conference in the Saudi capital at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS) titled Perspectives on Religious Tolerance and Diversity with presentation arguing that tolerance is core to the transformation of societies, especially in Europe, which across the continent has become more multicultural. H.E. Dr. Al-Issa told delegates that when he talked about tolerance in Islam, he meant tolerance as a permanent state of mature, civil society that applied and was governed by Shari’a law.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with former British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Jeddah.

🗨️ *Religious and intellectual extremism take place in an abnormal and isolated context, which the Islamic world fought before it fought anything else. The cultural contributions of the Islamic world have always been about the promotion of civilization and peace.*

—H.E. Dr. Al-Issa



AN IMPACTFUL PRESENCE

Striving to Make a Difference with Every Achievement

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019



“*Quranic text calls for tolerance and beneficence with all Muslims and non-Muslims.*”

— H.E. Dr. Al-Issa

This month we look back at the MWL’s work and achievements since Dr. Al-Issa became the organization’s Secretary-General in 2016. To be sure, the MWL has come a long way in forging a new image and identity for itself since being founded six decades ago. The mission then, as today, was to fulfill a set of beliefs and principles aimed at improving the lives of Muslims and non-Muslims alike in the spirit of faith, charity and tolerance—just as is emphasized by each of the three major Abrahamic religions. Dr. Al-Issa has established “words into action” as the guiding principle of this effort: ideas and statements must be backed up by on-the-ground, roll-up-your-sleeves work.

The Muslim World League, or *Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami* in Arabic, was founded in 1962 in Saudi Arabia to study and promote discussion of the affairs of the Muslim *umma* (or community) in view of the threats then posed to the Muslim world by communism,

secularism and nihilism (irreligion). The MWL today views extremism as the number one global threat to humanity, and the bulk of its activities in recent years has focused on addressing the scourge of terrorism and the consequences of terrorism for human society in nearly every sphere—religious, cultural, political, economic and educational.

Leaders from around the world representing nearly all faiths have praised the MWL's work and philosophical outlook under Dr. Al-Issa's leadership. Extremism, intolerance and radicalism in the name of perverse forms of "religion" have no place in modern civilization, and deviant "thought" is at the root of such aggressive behavior. The MWL's Secretary General spreads his message and seeks cooperation through high-level meetings, publications, conferences, seminars, charity work, academic exchanges and other activities, through which the Muslim World League invites others to coordinate

efforts and act jointly "to stop this abnormal terrifying phenomenon that poses threats to everyone in its tracks," in the words of Dr. Al-Issa. We invite you to join us.

This issue welcomes readers to explore the recent, past and present work of the Muslim World League.

It outlines some of the MWL's top accomplishments in humanitarian aid, charity and anti-extremism. In our Arts & Culture section we look at the new Museum of the Prophet and Islamic Civilization in Jakarta, the largest of its kind, inaugurated this month. Our historical essay looks at the life of the MWL's founder, the late Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Ibn Saud.

The Editors. ❖



Dr. Al-Issa on "One Humanity, One Soul"

Speech excerpt, New York, Conference on Islam and the West, November 2017

"The Creator has profound wisdom in the difference of our colors and tongues so that we take it as the general evidence for disposition of difference and diversity, whereas Islam has invalidated distinction among mankind except for the principle embodied in a particular verse in which Allah says:

'Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) most righteous.' (Qur'an 49:13)

Likewise, the Creator has destined the unity of the human family. He says:

'O mankind ! Fear Your Guardian Lord , Who has created you from a single soul.'(Qur'an 4:1)

Whoever has no patience with coexistence inside this universal one family is considered outside it; and whoever made distinction between it and its humanity is considered to have missed the very definition of that humanity."



THE MWL FIGHTS EXTREMISM

with Knowledge, Logic and Tolerance

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019



A Friday sermon at the Great Mosque of Kazan during a trip to Russia in early 2019.

Dr. Al-Issa’s published an opinion essay in Fox News online on April 10, 2019, in which he defining the MWL’s mission and calling:

“[...] As I tell my American friends in and out of government when they ask about the integration of Muslims, the majority in any country has vital obligations. For one, they must create a framework of identity independent of religious or ethnic affiliation. The binding element should be love of country. The universal ambition should be to enable meaningful contributions to society.

I have dwelled upon this matter deeply in the weeks since a crazed extremist gunned down 50

Muslims in their houses of worship and injured 50 others in New Zealand....[T]he question goes to the heart of how we construe successful integration. My answer remains the same.

In fact, I believe the message is even more poignant today. To build tolerance and promote full national integration, majority and minority bear a responsibility that is, at its core, similar. It starts with embracing diversity and putting the interests of the entire nation first.” – H.E. Dr. Al-Issa, *Fox News* (op-ed), April 10, 2019

The Secretary General travels the world expressing these principles, from the orphanages of Ghana to the halls of the Hermitage; from Sri Lanka at a time of multi-religious tension to Senegal in an atmosphere of multi-cultural kinship; from tough talks at the United Nations to even tougher talks with Western journalists; from the brotherly welcome of a Roman Catholic cardinal in New York to the fraternal embrace of the most powerful Jewish religious organization of that city.

In an in-depth interview with Reuters in November 2017, Dr. Al-Issa said that he “would no longer sit by and let Islam be taken hostage by extremists.” By this time, Western media had grown aware that the MWL was being refashioned as an organization focused on promoting worldwide religious moderation and promulgating the proper interpretation of Islam as an open, tolerant religion. When the subject of the manipulation of Islamic char-



The MWL delegation with His Holiness Pope Francis at the Vatican, where the two faiths established a Permanent Committee on Communication.

ities for political ends resurfaced during this Reuters interview, Dr. Al-Issa emphasized the need to embrace tolerant Islam without denying the problems of the past: “The past and what was said is in the past. What happened in the past, and the way in which we worked then, is not the subject of debate.”

It certainly has not been an easy path to forge, and the promotion of interfaith dialogue requires overcoming lingering, sometimes daunting, interfaith obstacles. Under his stewardship, the Muslim World League, “an organization that hundreds of millions of Muslims know and revere,” according to the international nonprofit news site *The Fair Observer*, has taken on controversial topics such as the Islamic world’s relations with Israel and recognition of the Holocaust. Dr. Al-Issa joined the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the American Sephardi Federation (ASF) at the Center for Jewish History to sign the *It Stops Now* agreement of May 2019, aimed

at combating hate, bigotry and fanaticism. He also took the stage alongside Jewish leaders and ambassadors from several Muslim countries at New York’s Museum of Jewish Heritage to condemn Holocaust denial. The memorandum of understanding signed with the American Jewish Committee (AJC), also this past spring, was hailed as a milestone in Muslim-Jewish relations. At that event, Dr. Al-Issa announced plans to join the AJC on a trip to Auschwitz.

The Mideast watchdog news site MEMRI noted that only a few months into his position, the Secretary General was taking major steps to improve and modernize the image of Islam by emphasizing the tolerant nature of its fundamental religious values. In May 2017, he urged Muslims living in the West to respect local laws banning the veil, if the country in which those Muslims live has such a law, or else move to some other country in which they can wear the veil as they desired.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with world religious leaders after interfaith panel at the Responsible Leaders Summit in New York.

In November 2017, Dr. Al-Issa met with the Chief Rabbi of France and the head of the Great Synagogue in Paris. He was the first senior Saudi cleric to visit to the synagogue. He has also addressed the issue of nationalism, tying his comments on that subject to his general condemnation of extremism and hate-incitement in any form. In a February 2018 speech at the Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good in Washington, he “warned against the activity of new Nazi supporters who encourage barbarity, and against the support that religious leaders provide them, sometimes unwittingly.” That year he also visited the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in the Vatican, where an agreement was reached to establish a Permanent Committee on Communication between the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Religions Council and the MWL. He met with Douglas Padgett, Senior Advisor for Combating Violent Extremism at the U.S. State Department, and this year hosted the U.S. Evangelical Committee in Jeddah.

Dr. Al-Issa has always seen to it that his conferences are as inclusive as possible and incorporate Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Jewish participants—best exemplified most recently in the monumental Center for Responsible Leadership summit in May 2019 in New York.

It was the summit in Sri Lanka in August, however, that was “the first time that Dr. Al-Issa brought Christian and Jewish leaders to a trip abroad,” including an interreligious affairs representative from the Vatican, an American Sephardi Federation board member, a scholar in the Syrian Jewish community and Rabbi Elie Abadie, the Spiritual Leader Emeritus of the Edmond J. Safra Synagogue in New York City.

In November 2017, the Secretary General met His Holiness Pope Francis and expressed particular gratitude for the Pope’s fairness toward the Islamic world regarding claims that extremism and violence are inherent to Islam.

His Holiness has often expressed in statements that acts of extremism have nothing to do with Islam. Earlier this year, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, said, "Whenever we have violence or attacks in the world, in America they say, 'Where are the moderate Islamic leaders to condemn this?' I say, 'You must meet Dr. Al-Issa. He is the leader that does that.'" In the Orthodox Christian world, he has been honored by the Patriarch of Russia and received awards by the highest levels of the Russian government in recognition of the strong bond between the Eastern Church and the Islamic world, both historically and in the post-communist period.

Still, he is a realist. Understanding that long-standing differences can stifle any attempt to bring world faiths together under a single principle of tolerance and charity, Dr. Al-Issa has spoken frankly about the immense challenge of cultural barriers being manipulated into religious corruption and politicization: "We might differ, but we have to achieve love and humanity together," he told the World Council of Churches at a summit meeting in November 2017. "Religions have nothing to do with terrorism and violence. It is our responsibility to cleanse Islam from incorrect ideas. World religions are neutral, they have nothing to

do with profits and individual ambitions. The ones who kidnap religions are the ones that create the problems."



Vice President of Ghana Mahamdu Bawumia speaking at a international conference during H.E. Dr. Al-Issa's visit to Ghana.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa meeting with Buddhist leadership in Sri Lanka.

“ Religions have nothing to do with terrorism and violence. It is our responsibility to cleanse Islam from incorrect ideas. World religions are neutral, they have nothing to do with profits and individual ambitions. The ones who kidnap religions are the ones that create the problems

— H.E. Dr. Al-Issa



MAKKAH & MODERNITY

Islamic Principles that Complement the Values of Progress

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019

6TH POINT OF THE MAKKAH CHARTER

Makkah has a mystique all on its own owing to its central role as a sacred place visited by millions of Muslims from around the world. Yet it can only be known—really known—through an interior pilgrimage of the individual soul. It is a city that seems to us permanently ancient because it never has compromised its spiritual values.

The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and an observance of faith that every Muslim who is physically and financially capable is obliged to perform once in his or her lifetime. This renders Makkah more of a symbol and ritual than a city. Hajj occurs once a year during five days of the lunar Muslim calendar (and so moves forward about ten days every solar year). As reported in the JSTOR Daily, a databank of scholarly research going back more than a century, it is also the largest annual gathering of people on Earth. (Makkah hosts roughly 700,000 Saudi subjects and 1.3 million expatriates, set by national quotas). The pilgrims seek to perform a series of rituals over the course of the five days, including circling the Ka'aba, a large square structure at the Sacred Mosque, seven times; walking to several sites of religious significance in the region; and "stoning the devil" by hurling pebbles at three pillars. In sum, Makkah is metaphysical, a place that transcends mere everyday existence, everyday politics and the

commercial and civil concerns of daily life.

Makkah was then the appropriate site for a great conference of 1,200 religious leaders and scholars brought together by the Organization of Islamic Countries and the Muslim World League last May intent upon formulating a communique to the world, including Muslim countries themselves, concerning the meaning of Islam in the modern age. The intention was a formal document that would clear up "all misunderstanding" about Islam, in the name of Islam and for the sake of Islam. The Charter of Makkah, signed on May 29 and modeled after the Charter of Madinah, a document written in 622 by the followers of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him), which called for interfaith tolerance and benevolence. To be sure, Makkah has long been the site of international conferences for Muslim scholars on matters of faith and interpretation. But this gathering was "global Makkah," the city writ large beyond the Hajj, an event addressing non-Muslims and Muslims alike and bringing the city front and center into efforts to combat religious radicalization. The Charter of Madinah recognized 1,400 years ago that the dignity and reputation of Islam depend in large part upon the respect and tolerance it gives to non-Muslims, and the Charter of Makkah reaffirmed that those values of moderation, tolerance and respect for civil authority have existed for all time in the Islamic faith.



His Majesty King Salman with H.E. Dr. Al-Issa after the signing of the Charter of Makkah.

Like the Charter of Madinah written 1,400 years ago, the Makkah Charter is a visionary document that represents values that have existed since the beginning of the Islamic faith.

The Muslim World League understood that the symbolic weight of Makkah was necessary to fight extremism in the consciousness of millions of Muslims worldwide. This was not an attempt to politicize Makkah, but a means to reclaim Islam from those who were attempting to hijack it and its holiest sites by deviant interpretations of the faith. The Charter of Makkah firmly rejects the intellectual and spiritual desecration of Islam.



Top Muslim leaders gather in the Holy City of Makkah for a Conference on Moderate Islam.

WITH POINTS 20, 24 AND 22 OF THE MAKKAH CHARTER.

Some 1,200 Muslim scholars, hailing from 139 countries and representing twenty-seven Islamic sects and schools of thought, approved the Charter as a foundational statement upholding the values of coexistence with and tolerance toward followers of all religions, cultures, races and sects. The name of the four-day conference, “Values of Moderation in the Texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah,” reflected this objective. Delegates emphasized that “deviants” would not be welcomed in any scholarly, media or educational platform to advance the view that the Islamic faith can be expressed through calls for acts of extremism. Rather, the conference decreed that only gatherings of well-established scholars can pronounce rulings on the issues of the Islamic umma (community). In this world, troubled radicals intent upon manipulating religion to their own ideological aims are not welcome to and cannot speak for Makkah.

The Charter of Makkah advances noble moral values, promotes high social ideals, encourages cooperation in addressing challenges faced by all humanity, and calls for the protection of proper values against the destructiveness of extremist thought and corrupt social systems. It also underscored “the importance of joint religious and humanitarian work aimed at benefitting all without exclusion, racism or discrimination against followers of any religion.”

The Charter is, effectively, the most important document to be sponsored by the Muslim World League to date in the organization’s fight for moderation. In following the example of the Madinah Charter as defined by the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) fourteen centuries ago, the MWL demonstrated once more that the principles that transcend time are the most modern of all.



THE HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE

A Humbling Responsibility and Duty

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with Senegalese schoolchildren at the opening of new school.

It is an unfortunate observation of the contemporary global situation that the presence of thousands of charities upon this planet can often inspire more wearied cynicism than energized optimism. One cannot help but wonder why, with so much activism and humanitarian assistance, the plight of the gravely ill and impoverished in world can appear to be getting worse, or at the very least, not improving in any substantial and lasting manner at all.

Charity is the Third Pillar of Islam, and to be charitable and provide for the needy are important responsibilities of every Muslim. There are several different categories of charity defined in Islam, the two most important being zakat (obligatory charity) and sadaqa (voluntary charity)—the first a specific, standardized percentage of one’s extra wealth that must be given to the poor and those in need. The second, sadaqa, is voluntary and can take different forms—wheth-

er monetary assistance, physical aid, helping to build a home, giving time as a teacher, and so on. The Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) emphasized this principle repeatedly, stating: “A charity is due for every joint in each person on every day the sun comes up: to act justly between two people is a charity; to help a man with his mount, lifting him onto it or hoisting up his belongings onto it, is a charity; a good word is a charity; and removing a harmful thing from the road is a charity.”

Also, according to the Zakat Foundation of America, it is important to refrain from turning to charity when one can avoid it. “One should be wary of repeatedly soliciting and taking from sadaqa and zakat funds. Those who refrain from taking these funds (so that more will be left for the other needy) will be provided for by Allah and be made self-reliant by Him.”



“ The upper hand is better than the lower hand (he who gives is better than him who takes). One should start giving first to his dependents. And the best object of charity is that which is given by a wealthy person (from the money left after his expenses). And whoever abstains from asking others for some financial help, Allah will give him and save him from asking others, Allah will make him self-sufficient”

[Cited from the hadith collection of Mohammad Al-Bukhari, b. 810 AD]



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa at ceremony of the opening of a MWL watering well project in a Ghanaian village.

Therefore, to the MWL, to engage in acts of charity is to exercise a blessing bestowed upon the organization as an Islamic institution.

“ The manifestations of moderation in Islam is what is described as qualities of goodness, nobility, tenderness, justice, fairness, mercy, brotherhood, love, renunciation of unjustified violence and aggression, advocacy of forgiveness of wrong doers, patience, and charity and mercy to others. He said all Muslims have to show the bright side of Islam by behaving with virtuous Islamic ethics, showing good treatment, demonstrating tenderness, speaking good words, correlating words with deeds, observing honesty in financial and commercial transactions, honoring contracts and promises, keeping away from injustice, treachery, lying and harming others, and respecting people in their blood, money and dignity”

– Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Alsheikh , Chairman of the Founding Council of the MWL, Makkah, October 2017.



MWL food distribution in Chad.

Dr. Al-Issa has argued that words without action are in effect an insult to principles. An overview of the MWL's direct charitable acts since August 2016 demonstrates the Islamic imperative to serve humankind wherever help is needed. Examples of these acts include:

- **July 2019, WATER DISTRIBUTION, ORPHAN CARE in GHANA:** Dr. Al-Issa launched development projects in Ghana for water and food distribution and new advances in well technology. He also announced the MWL's sponsorship of thousands of orphans and the establishment of a vocational and technical center dedicated to them.
- **2018-2019, FOOD BASKETS & MEDICAL FACILITIES in DAKAR:** The MWL has distributed more than 1,500 food baskets in Malika, on the outskirts of Dakar, and truckloads of food aid to Kolda, the site of a devastating fire. The MWL also organized a cataract-treatment program at a Dakar hospital that has treated several hundred patients. In the city of Tiyas, the Secretary General laid the cornerstone for the "Al-Afiah Model Dispensary," which will be the first of its kind in the region and will serve thousands of people in the city and surrounding villages.

- **December 2018, UNHCR COOPERATION:** The MWL entered into a formal agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to assist in providing training for humanitarian and emergency relief workers in places around the world where the MWL has maintained a long-term presence in established aid and charity programs.
- **November 2018, ORPHANS and MEDICAL RELIEF in SUDAN:** The MWL launched a heart surgery program for the elderly, assistance for 14,000 orphans, and a program to fight disease in Sudan's eastern state of Kassala.
- **August 2018, EARTHQUAKE RELIEF in INDONESIA:** The MWL sent a team to the Indonesian island of Lombok that was struck by a powerful earthquake that caused heavy losses and destroyed thousands of buildings. The event demonstrated the MWL's emergency humanitarian response system, which many states and relief organizations recognize as being one of the most responsive and efficient.
- **July 2018, BLINDNESS in NIGERIA:** The MWL conducted 4,000 operations in Nigeria as part of its health initiatives on the African continent. One million people benefited from a series of medical projects, including camps to combat blindness and treat orphans, and a new charitable hospital.
- **July 2018, HEART SURGERIES in MAURITANIA:** Through its Relief Organization, the MWL conducted "cardiac catheterization, clogged arteries & tight valve" operations in Mauritania.
- **May 2018, HOSPITALIZATION of SYRIAN REFUGEES:** The MWL provided hospital aid in several countries for Syrian refugees suffering kidney, heart and blood ailments.

- **April 2018, BOREHOLES/WELLS and SOLAR PANELS in AFRICA:** The MWL implemented charitable projects in Central African villages, where wells are pumped using solar panels to save costs and inculcate environmental values.
- **March 2018, BILL GATES at MWL CENTER, CHAD:** Mr. Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft and Chairman of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, visited MWL's Charity Center in Chad and met with its director, commenting: "We seek to benefit from MWL's social development experience."
- **July 2017, BLINDNESS in SOMALIA:** The MWL conducted five hundred operations to combat blindness in addition to distributing eyeglasses in Somalia.
- **April 2017, EMERGENCY RELIEF in SOMALIA:** The MWL organized an emergency relief campaign for victims of a severe drought that overwhelmed the country that spring.
- **2016-Present: REFUGEE RELIEF in CHAD [armed conflict since 2003]:** The MWL implemented an urgent relief campaign distributing food baskets to more than 40,000 refugees from Central Africa who are residing in refugee camps on Chad's borders. As Arab News commented in December 2018: "[The MWL] is the only international humanitarian organization that is still providing aid for Central Africans, with the big support of relevant governmental and security bodies in Chad, while all other organizations have stopped their work on the borders for different reasons." There are 304,650 Sudanese refugees in Chad as of April 2016 and 8,000 Chadian refugees in Sudan, the majority of whom sought refuge from violence and armed conflicts.
- **2015-Present, CONFLICT in YEMEN:** The MWL has delivered over a thousand food baskets in various governorates of that country.

Excerpt from Arab News, December 2, 2018: "Muslim World League's Relief Campaign Targets 40,000 African Refugees."

🗨️ *The secretary-general of the MWL, Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa stressed the need to continue supporting these vulnerable groups [in Chad], formed mostly by women and children. The aid must cover all their basic needs, along with health requirements and clothes, he added. [...] The MWL has pledged to continue aiding the displaced Central Africans, no matter how dangerous the conditions get, as it strongly believes in the greatness of its humanitarian mission and the cause of the Islamic religion that is tolerant toward all religions and races. [...] The team was also able to include 150 new refugees who escaped to a border school in MWL's distribution plan, thanks to the league's long experience in the field and in recognition of the new refugees' urgent need for relief, after the long distances they had traveled to reach the safe area. The MWL said that it will not fail to implement health, developmental and relief works in Africa in general, and in Chad in particular."*

— Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Alsheikh, Chairman of the Founding Council of the MWL, Makkah, October 2017.



NOTABLE & QUOTABLE: THE BEST OF DR. AL-ISSA

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019

“*The MWL has never hesitated for a moment to condemn all types of persecution, oppression, and suffering anywhere in the world. In these matters, the MWL has had many famous and well-known announcements, statements, and conferences.*

— Dr. Abdulaziz Sarhan, Director, MWL office, Italy, February 2018.

Below we have compiled excerpts from some of the most notable speeches, scholarly articles, sermons and op-eds authored by MWL Secretary General Dr. Al-Issa.

“Religion has never been a threat to humanity ... Our duty as leaders, references and religious figures is to confront this false claim.”

— Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 2019

“It is no secret that ideological extremism has given rise to organizations which practice violence and terrorism in the name of religion and under its motto. It is an expansive phenomenon that has cast its gloomy darkness over Muslim communities. They have weakened them and terrorized them through strife and bitter conflicts, they undermined security and busted the economy. Social relations within communities have been impacted negatively and deteriorated extremely. It must be well understood that in order to address this phenomenon, comprehensive analysis in a wide-ranging manner and in all its aspects must be undertaken. Investigating its ideological, psychological and social dimensions is required in order to evaluate its causes and monitor its various effects and impact. Then, once overall conclusions have been reached, a suitable remedy must be extracted to deal with its ills.”

— Islamabad, January 2017

“Preachers and thinkers in the Muslim world need to intensify their efforts to confront extremism and terrorism that spread their poison among the Islamic youth. Deviants take advantage of our failure to explain the legitimate position of Islam on controversial issues and this failure is used by extremists to serve their objectives once they achieve victories in the promotion of fallacies and illusions.”

— Islamabad, January 2017

“The core of moderation that characterizes the final Shari’a of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be upon Him) lies in lifting distress off people. Allah also says in Surat Al-Hajj, verse 78: “I have been sent with a pure and tolerant (religion)” [...]He also repeated the following warning thrice: “Perish those who seek and follow extremes (in religion).” He further stated: ‘Beware of extremism in religion, for excessiveness in religion has destroyed those who came before you’. Islam is universal and eternal message, it enjoys acceptability and is predisposed to be disseminated with peace and calmness; it is after all a message of mercy.”

— Islamabad, January 2017

“The Clash of Civilizations theory is in grave error. It is based upon a stirring up hatred and racism and erecting imaginary barriers. What is important is our understanding of the need for co-existence and cooperation in the light of this understanding to serve not just mutual interests, but to also serve all humanity, to promote social peace and intellectual security and to defeat evil, while enshrining the concepts of righteousness, charity, all without religious, sectarian, ethnic, political, intellectual or other distinction.”

— New York, September 2017

“Muslims have indeed loved each other for the sake of Allah as they loved benevolence for each human being. Since their bodies united over a single name and slogan, which is Islam, their souls need more than ever before to meet and become close to each other. The Muslim World League seeks according to its renewed vision to enhance these values in the Islamic conscience together with bridging the relation of human exchange with all. Therefore, it is an incumbent duty upon it, as an international Islamic organization, to achieve this objective by removing the dividing barriers that have been installed by extremism, apprehension as well as falsely created and nourished by fanaticism, hatred and material calculations.”

— Pilgrims Royal Reception in Mina, August 2019



“We cannot force others to take our opinion, and if we don't believe in these divine rules, so humanity will be in a permanent conflict because there cannot be a single opinion on the land.”

—New York, September 2017.



ADHERING TO ISLAMIC TEACHINGS: THE MWL'S ACHIEVEMENTS (2016-2019)

1. MEDICAL WORK: Providing State-of-the-Art Care
2. MODERATION & ANTI-EXTREMISM: Combatting Extremism in All Its Forms
3. EDUCATION AND HONORS: Receiving Awards for Trailblazing Efforts
4. ORPHANS: Providing a Better Future for All
5. KEY INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND STATEMENTS: Historic Moments on the International Stage



H.E. Dr. Al-Hssa visits patients and is briefed at the hospital in Burundi.



MWL at ceremony on a MWL sponsored hospital extension in Senegal.

We devote this issue to an overview of the record of the Muslim World League since Dr. Al-Issa assumed leadership in August 2016. This summary is intended to show examples of the strength and breadth of the campaigns the MWL has undertaken in the name of moderation over the past three years.

MEDICAL WORK: PROVIDING STATE-OF-THE-ART CARE

1. The MWL launched in SENEGAL an urgently needed cataract-treatment program at a Dakar hospital that has so far treated hundreds of poor patients. In Tiyas, the Secretary General laid the cornerstone for the Al-Afiah Model Dispensary, which will be the first of its kind in the region and will serve thousands of people in the city and surrounding villages
2. In CHAD, the MWL is currently running one of the best health centers in the capital, as well as multi-purpose medical campaigns and camps.
3. In NIGERIA a campaign against blindness has been underway since 2008, with the MWL having undertaken 4,000 operations thus far as part of its health initiatives on the African continent.

The MWL estimates that approximately one million individuals have benefited from continent-wide medical projects, including camps such as those to combat blindness and the establishment of charitable hospitals

4. In MAURITANIA and SOMALIA, the MWL opened field hospitals for cataract surgeries, lens transplants and the distribution of eyeglasses.
5. In Harare, the capital of ZIMBABWE, the MWL opened a medical camp for cataract surgeries, the second of its kind for the MWL in that country. Technical assistants and medical staff have thus far carried out 500 cataract surgeries after examining 1,500 patients, and provided the rest with medications and eyeglasses.
6. In BURUNDI, a new MWL-supported hospital in Bujumbura performed the first operation to remove cataracts in the program under the MWL's program to combat blindness in Africa.
7. In COMOROS and SOUTH AFRICA, field hospitals for anti-blindness procedures were established and functioning in 2018.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa at the Responsible Leadership Summit in New York in 2019.

MODERATION & ANTI-EXTREMISM: COMBATting EXTREMISM IN ALL ITS FORMS

1. The International Conference of Islamic Universities and the Promotion of Moderation, organized by the MWL and Indonesia's Al-Azhar University in Jakarta in August 2017 brought together Islamic scholars from Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Malaysia to explore the role of universities in strengthening moderate Islamic thought. Scholars in attendance said intensifying dialogue on moderate Islam would help steer young Muslims away from those "who want to destroy the religion, its people and its civilization." In his opening remarks, Dr. Al-Issa said a small faction of the roughly 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide had distorted understanding of Islam.

2. In October 2018, the MWL organized the Second Conference on Cultural Rapprochement Between the United States and the Muslim World, an ambitious event with an extensive agenda. The participants reached agreement on several important points, including: **a)** to invite relevant scientific and intellectual institutions in the Muslim world and the United States of America to launch programs and initiatives that stress dialogue cooperation, identify mutual interests and establish principles of confidence and harmony

in the face of the campaigns of hatred and hostility; **b)** to launch dialogue programs and initiatives between "Islam and the West" and empower the Muslim World League to organize a world conference in this regard; **c)** to invite individuals and competent foundations to exert all-out efforts to involve social media and artistic production to promote rapprochement between cultures and civilizations; **d)** to value and commend the initiative of the Muslim World League in supporting the positive integration of religious and cultural minorities; **e)** to launch a convoy of peace messengers independent of any political affiliation and have representatives of the three Abrahamic religions visit all holy places in the city of Jerusalem and discuss a solution to the long-standing strife of that region; and **f)** to value the historic initiative of the 2017 Riyadh Summit between Muslim countries and the United States of America.

3. In August 2019, the MWL launched a historic inter-faith summit in Colombo in the presence of Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, with participants including Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu religious leaders, as well as more than 2,000 religious scholars, politicians, intellectuals and media professionals. The MWL gave one of its largest-ever donations to the country to support its fight against extremism, totaling \$5 million.

4. The MWL and the Centre for Responsible Leadership co-sponsored the Responsible Leadership Summit at UN Headquarters, in New York, May 1, 2019. The summit brought together more than 100 leaders from international politics, business and religion. The objective was to fuse interdisciplinary thinking into an actionable strategy for addressing challenges facing humanity. "From economics to environmentalism to the basics of religious coexistence, we are seeing the virtues of responsible leadership under assault," said Bawa Jain, the founder and president of the Centre for Responsible Leadership. "There is a gap in global leadership that we must immediately fill. It is time for responsible leaders in all walks of life to unite behind clear action plans for improving our world." Participants included former U.S. senators, senior executives from major companies, and religious leaders from the major faiths of the world.



For us, contacts with Muslims are very natural because for one thousand years we have lived together with Muslims in our country; we are brothers and fellow citizens who have never had conflicts or discords between them. And since Orthodox Christians and Muslims belong to the Eastern culture, the relationships of our communities are always simple and sincere.

—His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow.

5. In a visit to New York on April 29-30, 2019, Dr. Al-Issa and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, the founder and president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation and senior rabbi of Park East Synagogue, signed an agreement to unite their efforts for the protection of religious sites around the world. The agreement was reached after Dr. Al-Issa visited Rabbi Schneier and his congregation at the New York synagogue. It was the first such trip to a Jewish house of worship in the United States by a head of the MWL. Dr. Al-Issa also signed a historic memorandum of understanding with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) that committed the MWL and the AJC to a joint visit to Auschwitz in early 2020.

6. In September 2019, the Muslim World League and La Fondation d'Islam en France hosted Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders from around the world at the Paris International Conference for Peace and Solidarity. The gathering of imams, rabbis, and Christian clergy of all denominations fostered a major discussion of what the attendees could do to reduce conflict and bridge the differences between Europe and the Middle East. The Grand Mufti of Lebanon, Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, was quoted in the press: "Dialogue between religious groups should be based on friendship." He gave as an example "the Charter of Makkah signed by Muslim ulama belonging to several countries of the world, "but also with the Pope and the Great Imam of Al Azhar."

7. On March 30, 2019, the Muslim World League launched an international conference on religious peace and coexistence in the Russian capital of Moscow. Titled "Islam, a Message of Mercy and Peace," the three-day conference included participants from 43 countries, representing senior muftis, scholars, intellectuals and politicians. It included a session in the Chechen capital of Grozny, and Dr. Al-Issa gave a Friday sermon at the Grand Mosque in Grozny in the presence of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Head of the Chechen Republic. Russia has a large Muslim population, and the Russian Orthodox Church and the Muslim world traditionally have had a close relationship, so this trip and the events it featured had cultural, historical and political significance. The Russian Academy of Arts and Sciences awarded Dr. Al-Issa an honorary PhD this past summer.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa signed a historic MoU with prominent French Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders in Paris at the conclusion of the International Conference for Peace and Solidarity.



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa receiving an honorary doctorate in Moscow in July 2019.



Extremists “hold on to imaginary ideas stemming from a misunderstanding of the past and present.

— Dr. Al-Issa, Paris, September 17, 2019

EDUCATION AND HONORS: RECEIVING AWARDS FOR TRAILBLAZING EFFORTS

Dr. Al-Issa has been given awards and honorary degrees by some of the world’s most respected universities and academies in 2018 and 2019. These

included the European Galileo prize, for exceptional cultural achievement in the realm of multicultural and interfaith social relations; recognition of scholastic achievement in Islamic jurisprudence by the Collège des Bernardins in Paris, one of the oldest Catholic colleges of the University of Paris; and an honorary doctorate from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

ORPHANS: PROVIDING A BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL

Since its inception, the Muslim World League has placed priority on the care of orphans worldwide. Some of its first large-scale endeavors on this front include an orphanage for 350 children in Kampala, Uganda, and then the service and care for approximately 2000 Palestinian children. When Communism collapsed worldwide, the MWL launched programs to care for orphans and elderly in countries such as Russia and Yugoslavia. The organization has founded major hospitals and field hospitals in fifteen countries on the African continent. Here below, we highlight a few of the most active orphan programs currently maintained by the MWL.

1. In the summer of 2019, the MWL inaugurated a package of developmental and orphan sponsorship projects in the Republic of Ghana. Dr. Al-Issa kicked off the projects by participating in the International Festival of Orphans that July, which was organized by the MWL and attended by thousands of orphans in El Wak Stadium outside Accra. He also announced the establishment of a vocational and technical center under the supervision of the government of that country.

3. In Pakistan, more than 1,500 orphans throughout the country are provided with all the necessities of life through the MWL's branch of the International Islamic Relief Organization. The MWL organization has many partnerships to help serve orphanages, including Pakistan Sweet Home, which operates the Al-Furqan School for Orphans in Karachi, serving over 1,000 orphans. The MWL keeps contact with exceptional orphans after graduation from high school, granting them scholarships to different universities.

4. More than 50,000 Syrian and Palestinian orphans and widows have benefitted from MWL support over the past decade. In 2014, the MWL, through its branch of the International Islamic Relief Organization, signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) "to establish a mutual cooperation framework to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees." Peter Ford, representative of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, said, "We are very pleased to be renewing and intensifying our cooperation with [the IIRO], which has a high reputation for professionalism as well as humanitarian concern."



A worthy celebration for a worthy cause: H.E. Dr. Al-Issa with orphans in Ghana.

The MWL's inaugural ceremony for their orphan aid program in Pakistan.

🗨️ *The MWL organization has many partnerships to help serve orphanages, including Pakistan Sweet Home, which operates the Al-Furqan School for Orphans in Karachi, serving over 1,000 orphans. The MWL keeps in contact with exceptional orphans after graduation from high school, granting them scholarships to different universities.*

—H.E. Dr. Al-Issa



At the Conference on "Friendship Among Peoples" in Rimini, Italy, August 2019.

KEY INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND STATEMENTS: HISTORIC MOMENTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

The Universal Message of Faith

Compiled by the United Nations on the occasion of the United Nations Plan to Safeguard Holy Sites, September 12, 2019, sponsored by the United Nations and the Muslim World League

1. Summary of The United Nations Plan to Safeguard Holy Sites (United Nations and MWL-sponsored)

September 12, 2019

This document recognizes religious sites as representative of the history, social fabric and traditions of people in every country and community and calls upon nations to respect them as places of "peace and harmony where worshippers feel safe to practice their rituals."

The inspiration for this agreement was the horrific events that took place in the spring of 2019, which included the New Zealand terrorist

attacks, the "Easter bombing" in Sri Lanka and multiple shootings at synagogues in the United States—in San Diego, California and in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Prompted by this surge of intolerance-driven violence, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres requested the High Representative of the United Nations' Alliance of Civilizations to develop a Plan of Action for the UN to explore actions that would prevent such attacks and guarantee the sanctity of religious sites and the safety of worshippers. August 22 was selected as the International-



This Plan is a global call to rally around our most basic tenets of humanity and solidarity and to reaffirm the sanctity of all religious sites and the safety of all worshippers who visit houses of worship in a spirit of compassion and respect."

— Excerpt from Preamble of the UN Plan to Safeguard Holy Sites

Day Commemorating Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, with the UN describing that commemoration as a “step forward” in putting the issue on the agenda of the international community. The resulting Agreement states in its Preamble:

As co-sponsor of the Agreement, the Muslim World League looked to religious sources to provide compelling messages related to historical traditions of shared humanity and mutual respect. Citing the Marrakesh Declaration of January 2016, the Agreement refers to the inspiration of the Charter of Madinah, written in the year 633 by followers of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him). That document recognizes diversity and freedom of religion, while establishing the principle of equality in rights and responsibilities of all citizens.

The UN agreement also makes reference to the twenty-nine principles of the Charter of Makkah, adopted during a conference organized by the Organization of Islamic Countries and the Muslim World League, which emphasizes the values of tolerance and equality and denounces all forms of discrimination against “the other.” The Charter of Makkah also encourages enforcing laws against preachers “who sow the seeds of violence and hatred.” It stresses as well women’s religious, political and social rights.

Specifically, the agreement calls for a mapping of religious sites around the world to be developed in full cooperation with governments and other relevant stakeholders. This, in turn, will be used to produce an online interactive tool that will serve as a reminder of the universality of the world’s religious sites and contribute to fostering respect and understanding of their profound significance for individuals and communities on every continent. This mapping will also be promoted to help identify best practices in the safeguard of religious sites which can encourage cross-fertilization among relevant actors on a voluntary basis.

The Appeal of Conscience Foundation and the Muslim World League, April 29, 2019

On the occasion of the historic April 29, 2019 agreement with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation

2. A Summary of: The Agreement Between the Muslim World League and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation

The cause of protecting religious sites and houses of worship was taken a step further with a similar agreement between the Muslim World League and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation in April of this year when the MWL visited the American Jewish Committee in Washington and New York City.

The agreement was concluded on April 29 between H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and Rabbi Arthur Schneier of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation for the purpose of joining forces and forming “a platform for advancing peace, diversity and harmony.” Like the UN agreement, this will be dedicated to elevating advocacy for the protection of religious sites worldwide.

The two organizations will work together for the protection of religious sites, whether they are churches, mosques, temples or other places of worship, veneration or commemoration. They will also call upon religious leaders, educators and scholars and all individuals of leadership and influence “dedicated to the pursuit of teaching the Truth” to condemn and reject any form of violence or other crime in the name of religion, which is the greatest crime against religion.



Violence and crime committed in the name of religion, is itself the greatest crime against religion.

—The Appeal of Conscience Foundation and the Muslim World League



H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and Rabbi Arthur Schneier at signing of Agreement between the Muslim World League and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

Finally, they will work with leaders with whom they hold some influence to reject any form of speech that could be “inflammatory or violate the sanctity of human life,” with the conviction that religion shall not be misused “to teach or inflame the passion of enmity” and that generations of children to come will live in a world where people are not taught to hate one another.

The American Jewish Committee and the Muslim World League, April 30, 2019

On the occasion of the landmark agreement with the American Jewish Committee

3. A Summary of: THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE AND AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE. April 30, 2019

Preamble

“In a time of increased hateful rhetoric and violent attacks, responsible leaders of religiously identified communities must unite to promote mutual understanding and interfaith cooperation. Muslims and Jews must be allies in this effort.

“Both Islam and Judaism envision a more peaceful, just, and secure world and mandate that we work toward its realization. Through a series of

initiatives, the Muslim World League and American Jewish Committee will raise awareness about these two faiths’ common mission to pursue respect, human dignity and interreligious harmony.”

Signed by Mr. David Harris of the AJC and Dr. Al-Issa of the MWL, the two sides decreed that:

- H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and Mr. Harris will lead a joint AJC-Muslim World League delegation to Auschwitz in January 2020 for the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp.
- Dr. Al-Issa will address the AJC Global Forum taking place June 14-17, 2020, in Berlin.
- The parties resolve to explore other joint efforts to elevate the promotion of Muslim-Jewish understanding and foster broader interreligious dialogue and cooperation.
- Mr. Bawa Jain, Founder and President of the Centre for Responsible Leadership, will serve as guarantor of this agreement, entrusted with ensuring the two sides’ faithful implementation.

4. A Summary of: The Resolution of the "ISLAM, A MESSAGE OF MERCY AND PEACE" International Religious Conference (Moscow – Grozny, Russia. 28-30 March 2019)

Representatives of no fewer than forty-one countries attended Dr. Al-Issa's delivery of a declaration that Islam brings the ideas of humanism, mercy, fairness and moderation to the world in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. The declaration was contained in one of his most well-attended speeches, "Islam, a Message of Peace and Mercy." Dr. Al-Issa described how Muslims strive

for unification aimed at securing peace and conciliation worldwide, for the thwarting of all forms of extremism and terrorism, and seek openness to other cultures. He said that Russia provided an example of the successful promotion of an atmosphere of intelligence, reason and moderate outlook, dialogue between civilizations, and recognition of laws of the country of Muslims' residence. "We state that for many peoples of the Russian Federation that have been living in this land since time immemorial, Islam is the traditional religion, a basis of their culture and worldview," he stated in his address, noting the fact

that in Russia, primarily in the Caucasus, "Islam was spread during the reign of the second caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) and Derbent is one of the places where 40 companions of the Prophet (may Allah bestow His mercy on them), who brought genuine faith to the Caucasus almost 1,500 years ago, came, were living and buried."

Dr. Al-Issa then noted that in Russia today, the preamble of Federal Law 125 "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations," adopted

in 1997, states that Islam, together with Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism, constitutes an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia. In the introduction to the law, it is emphasized that the government "has respect for" Islam equally with other religions traditional for Russia.

His words reflected the admirable commitment on the part of Russian President Vladimir Putin to tolerance for Islam in Russia, as noted in his speech on the occasion of the re-opening of the Great Mosque of Kazan: "The present-day laws

of the Russian Federation are the most favorable for Muslims ever in the history of our country as they ensure freedom of faith and legal equality with the rest of citizens. The government statutorily guarantees not only the freedom of individual and collective exercise of religion, but also the participation of representatives of Muslim communities in discussions of policy decisions affecting the interests of the faithful."

Dr. Al-Issa concluded his speech by calling on Muslims to respect the laws of the nations in which they live and, specifically, to live

up to the ideals of Islamic principles requiring them to: a) strive for bans on false, extremist interpretations "that seduce the faithful out of the straight way"; b) prevent publication of fatwas that accuse "others" of a perceived lack of faith and to resolve disputable theological issues through a dialogue between authoritative ulemas and Islamic academies; c) to more actively demonstrate tolerance and ensure cooperation between peoples and religions and their peaceful co-existence; e) and orient Islamic youth on acquiring knowledge, learning spiritual and cultural values, and condemning violence and evil.



In practice, the change inside MWL appears to have begun with the August 2016 appointment of Al-Issa, a former Saudi justice minister. Taking his lead from Mohammad bin Salman, the current crown prince who has vowed to cleanse his country of extremism and return it to "moderate Islam," Al-Issa seems to have a specific mandate to transform the MWL from an organization synonymous with extremism to one that preaches tolerance."

— Dr. Robert M. Satloff, Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Dr. Al-Issa's Historic Rebuke of Holocaust Denial and Response by Dr. Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute of Near East Policy, January 26, 2018.

[Excerpt] "This Human tragedy perpetrated by evil Nazism won't be forgotten by history, or meet the approval of anyone, except criminal Nazis or their genre. True Islam is against these crimes. It classifies them in the highest degree of penal sanctions and among the worst human atrocities ever."

"One would ask who in his right mind would accept, sympathize or even diminish the extent of this brutal crime. However, our solace is that the memory of history is fair and vivid; and a justice, free of any other inclinations, would mourn this crime on behalf of all humanity. The victims have sacrificed their innocent lives to pen a memorable reminder of freedom and determination, an example of the extent of Nazi hate which has sunk the world into wars and disasters."

"History is indeed impartial no matter how hard forgers tried to tamper with or manipulate it. Hence, we consider any denial of the Holocaust or minimizing its effect, a crime to distort history, and an insult to the dignity of those innocent souls who have perished. It is also an affront to us all, since we share the same human soul and spiritual bonds."

[Excerpt] "In early December, I led a delegation of lay leaders of the foreign policy think tank I direct on a visit to Riyadh, the Saudi capital. Among the high-ranking officials we met during our three-day visit was Dr. Mohammed Al-Issa, secretary-general of the Muslim World League...I was skeptical..."

But in our December meeting, Al-Issa struck an impressive note. Not only did he underscore a commitment to religious outreach, speaking fondly of his recent visit to a Paris synagogue, he also refused to take the bait when asked about President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.... Instead, he politely declined comment, saying only that the League is committed to peace and is not a political body."

[He] stayed away from the issue altogether and instead affirmed the apolitical policy enunciated in our Riyadh meeting: "The Muslim World League is entirely independent of any political aims, tendencies or otherwise. It does, however, express its opinion with utter neutrality, an impartiality that doesn't carry any political tone at all."

Never in my wildest dreams did I think Saudi Arabia would merit inclusion on that list of "progressive" countries. But Al-Issa surprised me. I soon received a reply welcoming my invitation and agreeing to visit the Museum. While he wouldn't be the first Muslim notable to visit the Museum, the secretary-general of the Muslim World League would be the highest-ranking Muslim religious official—an important step in the process of legitimizing Muslim discussion of the Holocaust.

A few days later, I had another "why not?" idea. With January 27 approaching, I wrote Al-Issa asking whether he would send a letter to Bloomfield on the occasion of International Holocaust Remembrance Day that she could make public. The letter, I suggested, might reflect his and the MWL's approach toward the Holocaust and the broader battle for tolerance and moderation.

At most, I expected a brief, sterile note. After all, Saudi officials don't have much of a guidebook for how to write letters commemorating the Holocaust. But again, Al-Issa surprised me. He wrote a lengthy missive, all 623 words of which have been posted, with the Holocaust Museum's permission, on the Washington Institute's website. In it, he labeled the Holocaust "an incident that shook humanity to the core, and created an event whose horrors could not be denied or underrated by any fair-minded or peace-loving person."

All in all, it is a remarkable document—remarkable for its authorship, content, breadth and message. I assume there are many reasons—some sacred, some less so—why the head of the Muslim World League took pen to paper to denounce Holocaust denial. As my teenage son likes to say, this is not my first rodeo. But action matters so much more than motive. And having been written, Al-Issa's words cannot easily be undone. Thanks to him, this International Holocaust Remembrance Day will be recalled as the one in which Saudi Arabia—defender of Islam's two holiest sites—took a giant step toward joining the world in its recognition of the enormity of the Holocaust. Is more to be done? Absolutely. But let's give credit where credit is due.

Please see the feature that follows for a reprint of the letter to the Holocaust Museum.

LETTER from DR. MOHAMMAD BIN ABDULKARIM AL-ISSA TO MS. SARA BLOOMFIELD OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MUSEUM, JANUARY 22, 2018.

The following letter to Ms. Sara Bloomfield, director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, was sent via email on January 22, 2018. It was posted on the site of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Ms. Bloomfield,

It's my pleasure to write to you this letter on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, celebrating the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp. On this occasion, I confirm to you what I have already told my friend Robert Satloff, the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, about our great sympathy with the victims of the Holocaust, an incident that shook humanity to the core, and created an event whose horrors could not be denied or underrated by any fair-minded or peace-loving person.

This human tragedy perpetrated by evil Nazism won't be forgotten by history, or meet the approval of anyone, except criminal Nazis or their genre. True Islam is against these crimes. It classifies them in the highest degree of penal sanctions and among the worst human atrocities ever. One would ask, who in his right mind would accept, sympathize, or even diminish the extent of this brutal crime. However, our solace is that the memory of history is fair and vivid; and a justice, free of any other inclinations, would mourn this crime on behalf of all humanity. The victims have sacrificed their innocent lives to pen a memorable reminder of freedom and determination, an example of the extent of Nazi hate which has sunk the world into wars and disasters.

History is indeed impartial no matter how hard forgers tried to tamper with or manipulate it. Hence, we consider any denial of the Holocaust or minimizing of its effect a crime to distort history and an insult to the dignity of those innocent souls who have perished. It is also an affront to us all since we share the same human soul and spiritual bonds.

The Muslim World League is entirely independent of any political aims, tendencies, or otherwise. It does, however, express its opinion with utter neutrality; an impartiality that doesn't carry

any political tone at all. It looks at matters and judges them without prejudice and with transparency. We do not express our views on any dimensions other than absolute the human dimension: that of innocent lives. The latter have been protected and safeguarded in Islam, which decrees that anyone who assaults and kills an innocent soul will be held accountable as if he has killed all people.

Islam has, through long centuries, coexisted with all religions and respected the dignity of its followers. We are also aware that there are political slogans in all religions throughout history that exploit faith to achieve their goals and aspirations, however, religions are innocent of these schemes.

As a result, unjustified and unjust wars broke out, and blood was shed and still is, all in the name of religions. The law of the Creator came with peace, love, justice, and truth. On the other hand, we find extremists who are affiliated with all religions become active from time to time, in ebb and tide cycles throughout history. They swear hatred to others, even to people of their own faith. We Muslims have seen many terrorists who tried to falsify and distort religious texts and twist their historical facts. We have said in the past, and still do today, that there is no authority on religions except correct religious texts free of misleading, false, and distorted interpretations. We must also rely only on prophets and messengers of all religions who have conveyed the messages given to them the Creator of these faiths. The religion of God came as a mercy to mankind; it was not revealed to cause their misery and be a reason for wars and calamities. Please accept my best regards and appreciation.

Dr. Mohammad Al Issa

Secretary General

Muslim World League

President of the International Organization of Muslim Scholars



THE RIYADH CONFERENCE

At the King Faisal Center for Islamic Practices

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019



The King Faisal Foundation, Riyadh. Photo Credit: Riyadh Tourism Board

Tucked into the background of an event-packed month, the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS) played host to a

gathering of the top intellectuals, diplomats and scholars from around the world on October 16 to debate the issues of tolerance, forgiveness and

acceptance of others.

Opening the lecture at the Foundation building in Riyadh, the Italian diplomat and EU Ambassador Michele Cervone d'Urso addressed the 200 delegates at length about the primacy of tolerance in navigating a closely multicultural world and how this cast of mind was not only proper to human understanding, but core to the managing the transformation of societies, especially in Europe, which has become more diverse on so many levels.

"Today's European society is a mixture of cultures, faiths, values, ideas, and habits. The challenge is to make sure our society is more inclusive, enhance mutual understanding and promote tolerance and respect," he said.

He pointed to the United Nations' blossoming partnership with the KFCRIS and the importance of the lecture as key building blocks in the process of bridging cultural and religious gaps between

societies. "I think there is an increasing number of groups that are exchanging the Islamic and European perspectives of religious tolerance and diversity. All of us know that the KFCRIS builds from the legacy of the late King Faisal and has been a pillar in promoting Islam."

For his part, Dr. Al-Issa explained to delegates that when he talked about "tolerance in Islam," he also was referring to the tradition of tolerance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a state that was governed by Shari'a law, a body of principles that expressed the benevolent attitude of the religion towards human dignity and civil society. The Secretary General was in turn joined by the director of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Dr. Michael Privot, who himself converted to Islam some twenty-six years ago, and who spoke about how the EU was characterized by increasing diversity, including religious and philosophical beliefs, even from the Muslim perspective.



ON THE KING FAISAL CENTER FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

As one of the largest bibliographic databases in the Arab world, with over 1,200,000 subject headings, the KFCRIS library ingrains the Arab and Islamic cultural values that call for learning and enlightenment. It spreads the Arabic language, achieves cultural exchange, and gives researchers access to a wealth

of knowledge on the Arab cultural legacy. The library is not a mere collection of books, but rather, it aims to supply researchers with easy to use tools and references to find the material they need across a wide variety of disciplines.



The Al Azhar University of Indonesia

A NEW MUSEUM OF THE PROPHET: TRADITION AND HISTORY WITH A MODERN TOUCH IN JAKARTA

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019

The MWL announced on October 2 the establishment of the world’s largest museum dedicated to the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and on Islamic civilization, to be built in in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta. H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and Indonesia’s Minister of Civil Service and Reform Dr. Safaruddin Campo signed an agreement for the Museum, the first overseas branch of the institution that was opened in Madinah this past spring by the Emir Prince Faisal Bin Salman.

Since then, the MWL has received requests from no less than twenty-four countries to open branches, with each committing political, logistical and financial. Around four million people are expected to visit the Jakarta museum annually, and its construction work is expected to begin within a few months.

Dr. Al-Issa remarked at the signing that Indonesia was of particular interest to the MWL and to the Museum’s founders. “We are particularly honored

“The whole world has witnessed the signing of this agreement,” stated which will be launched like a ray of light throughout Indonesia and neighboring countries.

— Indonesian Minister Dr. Safaruddin Campo on the launching of the Museum of the Prophet in Jakarta, with MWL sponsorship, October 2019.

that Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, has become the first branch museum of the Museum of the Prophet, an international institution with headquarters and principal museum in Madinah. We cannot imagine a more fitting location for the showcasing of the contents of the Prophet's life story, and our own experience of Islamic civilization makes that story all the more a significant cultural, not to mention emotional, event for our country.”

Indonesian Minister Campo conveyed his country's gratitude and appreciation on the part of Indonesia's president, His Excellency Joko Widodo. “The whole world has witnessed the signing of this agreement,” stated Mr. Campo, “which will be launched like a ray of light throughout Indonesia and neighboring countries.”

The museum will be constructed on an area covering more than 1,000 square meters at a site in the Jakarta suburb of Biobo.



ISLAM in INDONESIA

Indonesia has a Muslim population of 225 million, making it the world's largest Muslim country. The overwhelming majority (99%) of Indonesian Muslims adhere to Sunni Islam, while there are around one million Shia (0.5%), who are concentrated around Jakarta, and about 400,000 Ahmadi Muslims (0.2%).

Muslim traders had been present in Indonesia for several centuries before Islam was established in Indonesian communities. Scholars identify two overlapping processes by which the “Islamization” of Indonesia occurred: (1) Indonesians came into contact with Islam and converted, and (2) foreign Muslim Asians (Indians, Chinese, Arabs, etc.) settled in Indonesia and mixed with local communities.

Islam is thought to have been present in Southeast Asia from early in the Islamic era. From the time of the third caliph of Islam, Uthman' (644-656), Muslim emissaries and merchants traveling to China would likely have passed through Indonesia on sea routes from the Islamic world, and Arabs became involved in the wealthy Sumatran trading state of Srivijaya between the 10th-12th centuries.

The earliest accounts of the Indonesian archipelago date from the Abbasid Caliphate. According to those early accounts, the Indonesian archipelago was famous among early Muslim sailors, mainly due to its importance in the lucrative spice trade.



HISTORICAL ESSAY

THE MWL BUILT IN THE IMAGE OF KING FAISAL

Edited by the editorial staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League | October 2019



His Majesty King Faisal, 1904-1975 Photo Credit: Wikipedia



One constant of his policy was to prevent at all costs the radicalization of the Arab world, preserving his prerogatives and those of his fellow monarchs.

— The New York Times, March 26, 1975

The Muslim World League was founded under the auspices of then-Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in accordance with a resolution adopted during the meeting of the General Islamic

Conference, held in Makkah on May 18, 1962, and following a meeting of twenty-two Muslim religious leaders held that same year.

King Faisal was not just a formal sponsor. The MWL reflected the values he lived and continues to embody his spirit today. King Faisal was one of the most important world leaders of his era, a monarch who was named TIME magazine’s Man of the Year for 1974 and called “a revolutionary force of civilized wisdom.”

He was the driving force behind the expansion of the Saudi oil industry on the world stage, yet “few noted the considerable historic irony that the world’s most advanced civilizations depended for this treasure on countries generally considered weak, compliant and disunited,” wrote TIME. “Now all that has changed, and the result has been a major economic and political dislocation throughout the world.”

King Faisal is remembered for his personal austerity, dedication to charity and his vision to balance the needs of modern technology with timeless values. Under King Faisal, there were vast development and social-welfare projects for the Kingdom, investments overseas, defense purchases, subsidies for Arab neighbors and charitable works. He spent no money on material excess, and preferred the pristine qualities of Bedouin simplicity. As the New York Times reported, he was a devout Muslim, “ascetic and unpretentious,” who dined on boiled vegetables and stewed fruits, prayed the obligatory five times daily toward Makkah, shunned smoking,

drinking and gambling, and worked most days from 8:00 a.m. until midnight. It was King Faisal who also came up with and insisted upon the title of “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques” rather than a royal title.”

But “simplicity” in this sense did not denote a lack of sophistication. He was the most “westernized” of his many brothers, having traveled widely. He studied Western technology and politics devotedly and acquired fluency in English and French. Seven of his eight sons began their formal education at the Hun School in Princeton, N.J., and went on to colleges in the United States or Britain.

The issues and causes closest to him were moderation, education and technological advancement. He faced an immense challenge in bridging his ambitious idealism with the on-the-ground realities of the Kingdom he inherited. In his day, less than a fifth of one percent of the land was under cultivation, and industry was virtually unknown. Education, particularly for women, was fragmentary. But Faisal introduced change steadily and deliberately, balancing the traditions of religious authority against the demands of modernization. By 1975, with a population of eight million, there were 517,000 boys and 210,000 girls in school. A vast list of development plans was under way.

King Faisal had a strong desire to see the Arab world unified and strong. The ideologies gaining strength in the 20th century struck him with alarm, whether radical nationalism, religious extremism, or Soviet communism and materialism. Islam, he felt, was robust enough to resist negative outside influences, but he believed Islam needed a unified and responsible voice.

In May 1962, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sponsored an International Islam-

ic conference in Makkah to devise ways to fight radicalism and secularism in the Arab and Muslim world. Religious authorities, intellectuals and leaders from all over the Muslim world attended the conference, which issued a rebuke to the kind of Arab nationalism.

The conference declared that “those who disavow Islam and distort its call under the guise of nationalism are actually the most bitter enemies of the Arabs, whose glories are entwined with the glories of Islam.” It was the first significant public statement of concern that Islam and its tenets were in danger of being manipulated to fit political agendas.

The conference ended with the formation of an International Islamic Organization called Rabetal -al - Alam- al -Islami, or the Muslim World League, with permanent headquarters in Makkah. From the start, the MWL aimed to spread the teachings of Islam and explain its principles. Willard L Beling, the historian of Saudi Arabia, wrote that the organization “progressed day-by-day with the continuing support of King Faisal.” It eventually established branches all over

the world and gained observer status in the United Nations

King Faisal once said, “I beg of you, brothers, to look upon me as both brother and servant. ‘Majesty’ is reserved to God alone and ‘the throne’ is the throne of the Heavens and Earth.” This is the standard to which the MWL aspires with every project, every appeal to interfaith tolerance and every act of charity.



*The best thing any ruler can do is to make a better life for his people and a better future for his country. He should be a useful member of the human race, a faithful servant of his nation and a wise guide in time of trouble.”—King Faisal, as quoted in *The New York Times*, March 26, 1975*

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