

Witnesses of **Mercy** for Peace and Reconciliation

An International Symposium

On 11 April 2015, His Holiness Pope Francis delivered the *Bull Of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee Of Mercy*. The Jubilee, held from 8 December 2015 to 20 November 2016, provided the impetus for the realisation of the *International Symposium on Interreligious Sharing and the Witnessing of Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation*. This event took place towards the close of the jubilee year – from 3 to 4 November 2016 – at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and was co-organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Holy See and the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID).

Pope Francis said: “Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.” The International Dialogue Centre believes that dialogue is an expression of mercy and that mercy is needed whenever dialogue is needed. The objectives of the symposium were therefore to share the imperatives and experiences of mercy between religions such that the commonalities between them become a force of unity and reconciliation. This book is a record of those two fruitful days of valuable exchange and appeals for collective peace.



Faisal Bin Muaammar
Secretary General, KAICIID

Witnesses of Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation

An International Symposium



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An International Symposium

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About the International Dialogue Centre



The KAICIID Board of Directors comprises prominent representatives from five world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) is an international organization with the mission of promoting dialogue to help people to understand and respect different religions and cultures.

The Centre works to counteract discrimination and transform conflict. It is the first intergovernmental organization that teams up policymakers and religious representatives to encourage dialogue between people who may never meet or enjoy mutual trust, and to talk through their problems, especially if there is a cultural or religious issue at stake.

The Founding States of the Centre – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Republic of Austria and Kingdom of Spain, with the Holy See as a Founding Observer – constitute the Council of Parties responsible for overseeing the work of the Centre. The governing Board of Directors comprises representatives of five major religions, representing approximately 80 per cent of the world's followers of religions, and is thus a unique asset to the international community. The Advisory Forum, comprising influential leaders from major religions as well as religious and cultural institutions and communities representing more than 20 countries, supports the activities of the Board of Directors and advises on the Centre's programmes.

Through its networks, the Centre has access to religious communities around the world. Combined with the

support of the member governments, the Centre promotes collaboration between religious and secular leadership that can create new, more inclusive solutions.

The Centre takes no side in any conflict since it is inclusive of all religions, yet not bound to any single faith or denomination.

By promoting dialogue, the Centre helps communities to build peace and harmonious societies. To achieve this, the Centre fosters cooperation between diverse religious communities to close the divisions created when religion is manipulated to engender fear and hatred.

Our vision is a world in which there is respect, understanding and cooperation among people; justice, peace and reconciliation; and an end to the abuse of religion to justify repression, violence and conflict.

Our roles

- ❖ We help create the platforms, knowledge, and commitment that foster interreligious dialogue (IRD) in conflict areas
- ❖ We support international and national institutions in using IRD to work for positive change
- ❖ We convene religious leaders, policymakers and other stakeholders to engage in IRD
- ❖ We create and disseminate knowledge on IRD to help achieve peace and reconciliation.

What we do

We promote IRD to help find sustainable solutions to contemporary challenges and conflict situations, working in four priority areas:

- ❖ Applying IRD for peace and reconciliation in four designated conflict situations in the Arab region with a focus on Iraq/Syria, Central African Republic, Myanmar and Nigeria
- ❖ Capacity-building efforts, which aim to empower religious leaders to become active peacemakers in communities experiencing conflict and division
- ❖ Working to advocate on behalf of IRD with international organizations, policymakers and other stakeholders
- ❖ Offering, through the Dialogue Knowledge Hub, a virtual platform with resources for the field of dialogue worldwide.

Acknowledgements

The International Dialogue Centre would like to extend its special thanks to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, and in particular to its Secretary, His Excellency Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, for their initiative and commitment as co-organizers of the International Symposium on Interreligious Sharing and the Witnessing of Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation. Without them, this event and this publication would not have been possible.

The Centre would also like to express its deepest appreciation to the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, its rector Nuno da Silva Gonçalves SJ, and its helpful staff.

We would like to acknowledge the collaboration of the Adyan Foundation in the symposium's organization. The Tanenbaum Foundation's support before and during the event was also very much appreciated.

The Centre is grateful to those who attended the symposium, including representatives of KAICIID's Council of Parties, Board of Directors, Advisory Forum, as well as the religious leaders and the exemplars of mercy from around the world who attended this symposium.

Photographs of the symposium are by Enrico Di Giamberardino. Photographs of the KAICIID Board of Directors, Advisory Forum members, Secretary General, Senior Advisers and Fellow Nang Loung Hom are by Daniel Shaked. The photographs of the address by His Holiness Pope Francis at the special interreligious audience are reproduced with the kind permission of L'Osservatore Romano Servizio Fotografico, Vatican City.

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The Aula Magna of the Pontifical Gregorian University anticipating the arrival of participants for the first day of the symposium



International Symposium on Interreligious Sharing and the Witnessing of Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation

Prof. Patrice Brodeur, KAICIID Senior Adviser

This book is the result of an event entitled: *International Symposium on Interreligious Sharing and the Witnessing of Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation*, which took place from 3 to 4 November 2016 at the Pontifical Gregorian University, in Rome, Italy. It was co-organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) at the Holy See and the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), Vienna, Austria, in collaboration with the Adyan Foundation, Lebanon, as well as with the help of the Tanenbaum Foundation, USA.

HE Bishop Ayuso, Secretary of the PCID, had invited KAICIID to co-organize this symposium following HH Pope Francis' wish, as described in *Misericordiae Vultus* n.23, the Bull of Indiction that launched the Jubilee of Mercy (8 December 2015 to 20 November 2016): "I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions (Judaism and Islam) and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination."

This citation was later quoted in the introduction by Cardinal Tauran, President of the PCID, to its document to Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences worldwide, entitled *Celebrating Mercy with Believers of Other Religions*, 16 June 2016.¹

This document helped prepare a special interreligious audience with His Holiness Pope Francis, which took place on the morning of 3 November 2016. While this audience was separate from the symposium, it nevertheless served as its prelude since all of the symposium's 51 invited participants from 20 nations and 8 religions, including 17 high level religious leaders and 12 multi-generational

exemplars of mercy of all continents, were in attendance. Given the significance of this special audience for the participants of the later symposium that officially began in the afternoon, special permission was granted to open this book with His Holiness Pope Francis' address to this multireligious audience.

Building on this papal address at this special interreligious audience, the aim of the symposium was to create a dialogical space to widen the possibility for interreligious sharing and witnessing, with two specific objectives: Firstly, to show how mercy is a common concept shared by all religions, and secondly, to demonstrate how its practice fosters inner and outer personal and collective peace, thus actively contributing to reconciliation and healing in a variety of conflicts, small and large. The two objectives were addressed consecutively over two days.

On the afternoon of 3 November, the symposium began in the Aula Magna of the Pontifical Gregorian University. This first day took place in the same hall in which the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* had taken place almost a year earlier, attended by several members of the KAICIID Board of Directors and staff. KAICIID had also celebrated that event at its headquarters in late November, 2015.

The afternoon programme started with opening remarks from HE Bishop Ayuso and HE Faisal Bin Muaammar, KAICIID Secretary General – see Chapter 1. They were followed by two panels, the first facilitated by Prof. Abu-Nimer, and the second by Prof. Brodeur, both KAICIID Senior Advisers. These panels included nine high level religious leaders who presented their respective views on mercy and its links to the promotion of peace and reconciliation. Each one explained how mercy is key to his or her religious tradition, and how mercy relates to other important values in their respective belief and



practice systems. While mercy was not necessarily interpreted the same way by each dignitary, it is clear that there was an important degree of overlap in meaning, and more significantly, a complete consensus on the importance of mercy in each religion. Chapter 2 includes all of these official remarks.

The second day featured two consecutive morning sessions during which four concomitant circles met to study specific case studies of mercy for peace and reconciliation. The composition of each group was mixed by gender, religion, age, and level of seniority, and the

Prof. Patrice Brodeur moderating the second panel on the first day of the symposium

members of each circle remained the same for both sessions. Each circle included a facilitator and rapporteur. The twelve multi-generational exemplars of mercy provided the thematic content and led the dialogue by first sharing their personal story of how their lived practice of mercy contributed to peace and reconciliation. The facilitators of each group – Dr. Nayla Tabbara, Rev.

Prof. Fadi Daou, Prof. Abu-Nimer, and Prof. Brodeur – with the help of their respective rapporteurs – Sherin Khalil, Bisan Liftawi, Elizabeth Perks and Dima Tarabeine – then reported back in plenary, summarising the main points of their respective dialogue circles. The lead presentations by those twelve exemplars of mercy and the points that emerged out of each circle, as summarised by Tabbara and Daou in their combined piece, are found in Chapter 3. Finally, Chapter 4 ends the book with the closing remarks of HE Bishop Ayuso and HE Faisal Bin Muaammar.

It should be carefully noted that the dialogical space that developed during this symposium, especially during the second day, provided an opportunity to further interact among each other as well as with the leading exemplars of mercy. In the safe space provided by the dialogical circles of small groups, participants of all levels and backgrounds were comfortable in sharing their personal stories and each were able to gain further insight about each other. Many across the spectrum of participants realised their own commonalities across religions through the sharing and witnessing of these case studies of sufferings transcended through journeys of mercy, which often included profound examples of forgiveness.

The present book thus reflects the two-day dialogical journey undertaken by the above participants together. Its chapters follow the original programme, re-constituted here through revised written contributions and selected photographs. Hopefully, the book will also become a tool to further dialogue on the importance of mercy in creatively addressing current inequities and violent situations. Indeed, through the experience of such an interreligious dialogue that builds on an ancient awareness of the centrality of mercy within each one of our respective religious and spiritual traditions, one can emerge with a new multireligious consciousness about the key role that the practice of mercy plays in spiritually reducing or redressing, if not altogether disarming, many current injustices and conflicts.

1 This document includes a brief overview of how the concept of mercy exists, always centrally, in over eleven different religions, although sometimes with terms in other languages that are not completely equivalent. A summary of this document can be found on page 96

Prof. Patrice Brodeur

With over thirty years of experience in the area of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, primarily as an academic researcher and educator, the highlights of Prof. Brodeur's career include the development of an interdisciplinary research team on Islam, pluralism and globalisation at the University of Montreal, Canada, focusing on past and present intra-religious and interreligious, as well as inter-civilisational and inter-worldview forms of dialogue.

An esteemed author and multilingualist, Prof. Brodeur has received numerous prestigious awards, including fellowships, scholarships, research grants and prizes during his distinguished career. He won first prize in the Social Entrepreneurship Venture Plan competition at the University of Notre Dame Mendoza Business School in 2005, and received an Interfaith Visionary Award from the Temple of Understanding in 2010.



Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to representatives of different religions

Sala Clementina, Thursday, 3 November 2016

Dear friends, I offer you a warm welcome. I am pleased to meet you and I thank you for accepting this invitation to reflect together on the theme of mercy.

As you are well aware, we are approaching the end of the Holy Year, in which the Catholic Church has pondered the heart of the Christian message from the viewpoint of mercy. For us, mercy reveals the name of God; it is “the very foundation of the Church’s life” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 10). It is also the key to understanding the mystery of man, of that humanity which, today too, is in great need of forgiveness and peace.

Yet the mystery of mercy is not to be celebrated in words alone, but above all by deeds, by a truly merciful way of life marked by *disinterested love*, *fraternal service* and *sincere sharing*. The Church increasingly desires to adopt this way of life, also as part of her “duty to foster unity and charity” among all men and women (*Nostra Aetate*, 1). The religions are likewise called to this way of life, in order to be, particularly in our own day, messengers of peace and builders of communion, and to proclaim, in opposition to all those who sow conflict, division and intolerance, that ours is *a time of fraternity*. That is why it is important for us to seek occasions of encounter, an encounter which, while avoiding a superficial syncretism, “makes us more open to dialogue, the better to know and understand one another; eliminates every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect; and drives out every form of violence and discrimination” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 23). This is pleasing to God and constitutes an urgent task, responding not only to today’s needs but above all to the summons to love which is the soul of all authentic religion.

The theme of mercy is familiar to many religious and cultural traditions, where compassion and nonviolence are essential elements pointing to the way of life; in the words of an ancient proverb: “death is hard and stiff; life is soft and supple” (*Tao-Te-Ching*, 76). To bow

down with compassionate love before the weak and needy is part of the authentic spirit of religion, which rejects the temptation to resort to force, refuses to barter human lives and sees others as brothers and sisters, and never mere statistics. To draw near to all those living in situations that call for our concern, such as sickness, disability, poverty, injustice and the aftermath of conflicts and migrations: this is a summons rising from the heart of every genuine religious tradition. It is the echo of the divine voice heard in the conscience of every person, calling him or her to reject selfishness and to be open. Open to the Other above us, who knocks on the door of our heart, and open to the Other at our side, who knocks at the door of our home, asking for attention and assistance.

The very word “mercy” is a summons to an open and compassionate heart. It comes from the Latin word *misericordia*, which evokes a heart – *cor* – sensitive to suffering, but especially to those who suffer, a heart that overcomes indifference because it shares in the sufferings of others. In the Semitic languages, like Arabic and Hebrew, the root RHM, which also expresses God’s mercy, has to do with a mother’s womb, the deepest source of human love, the feelings of a mother for the child to whom she will give birth.

In this regard, the prophet Isaiah conveys a magnificent message, which, on God’s part, is both a promise of love and a challenge: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even though she may forget, yet I will never forget you” (*Is* 49:15). All too often, sad to say, we forget, our hearts grow heedless and indifferent. We distance ourselves from God, our neighbour and even our historical memory, and we end up repeating, in even more cruel forms, the tragic errors of other times.

This is the drama of evil, of the grim depths to which our freedom can plunge when tempted by evil, ever-present, waiting to strike and bring us down. Yet precisely here, before the great riddle of evil that tests



every religious experience, we find the most amazing aspect of merciful love. That love does not leave us prey to evil or to our own frailty; *it does not “forget”, but “remembers”*, and draws near to every human misery in order to relieve it. Like a mother. Whatever the evil done by her child, a mother always sees past the sin to recognise the face she bore in her womb.

In today’s ever more hectic and forgetful world, which leaves so many men and women behind as it races on, breathlessly and aimlessly, we need the oxygen of this gratuitous and life-giving love. We thirst for mercy and no technology can quench that thirst. We seek a love that endures beyond momentary pleasures, a safe harbour where we can end our restless wanderings, an infinite embrace that forgives and reconciles.

How important this is, when we consider today’s widespread fear that it is impossible to be forgiven, rehabilitated and redeemed from our weaknesses. For us Catholics, among the most meaningful rites of the Holy Year is that of walking with humility and trust through the door – the Holy Door – to find ourselves fully reconciled by the mercy of God, who forgives our trespasses.

HH Pope Francis addresses representatives of different religions at the special interreligious audience, Sala Clementina of the Apostolic Palace, Vatican

But this demands that we too forgive those who trespass against us (cf. Mt 6:12), the brothers and sisters who have offended us. We receive God’s forgiveness in order to share it with others. Forgiveness is surely the greatest gift we can give to others, because it is the most costly. Yet at the same time, it is what makes us most like God.

Mercy extends also to the world around us, to our common home, which we are called to protect and preserve from unbridled and rapacious consumption. Our commitment is needed for an education to sobriety and to respect, to a more simple and orderly way of life, in which the resources of creation are used with wisdom and moderation, with concern for humanity as a whole and coming generations, not simply the interests of our particular group and the benefits of the present moment. Today in particular, “the gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good,

embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity” (*Laudato Si’*, 201).

May this be the path we take. May we reject the aimless paths of disagreement and closed-mindedness. May it never happen again that the religions, because of the conduct of some of their followers, convey a distorted message, out of tune with that of mercy. Sadly, not a day passes that we do not hear of acts of violence, conflict, kidnapping, terrorist attacks, killings and destruction. It is horrible that at times, to justify such barbarism, the name of a religion or the name of God himself is invoked. May there be clear condemnation of these iniquitous attitudes that profane the name of God and sully the religious quest of mankind. May there instead be fostered everywhere the peaceful encounter of believers and genuine religious freedom. Here, our responsibility before God, humanity and the future is great; it calls for unremitting effort, without dissimulation. It is a call that challenges us, a path to be taken together, for the good of all, and with hope. May the religions be *wombs of*

life, bearing the merciful love of God to a wounded and needy humanity; may they be *doors of hope* helping to penetrate the walls erected by pride and fear.

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The above speech was delivered by His Holiness Pope Francis at the Interreligious Audience of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. The participants of the KAICIID event in Rome were invited by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to attend this Interreligious Audience.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161103_udienza-interreligiosa.html

HH Pope Francis with KAICIID Secretary General, HE Faisal Bin Muaammar, at the Interreligious Audience of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy



Chapter I

Introductory Words



Welcome and Opening Remarks

His Excellency Faisal Bin Muaammar, KAICIID Secretary General

Eminences, Excellencies, esteemed friends. This morning we were given a priceless gift. We learned from HH Pope Francis of the power of mercy. I am deeply moved by his words. He said that mercy is indeed a fundamental, a central and an essential value for all religions.

It is also a privilege to be able to join you at this symposium to celebrate how mercy brings peace. I wish to thank the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and in particular Bishop Ayuso for their initiative to hold this interreligious symposium.

Mercy is, I believe, at the core of all world faiths and religious traditions. It is the non-exclusive, universal message of prophets and men and women of faith – a word, a concept, a way of living that is fundamental to our humanity and obligatory for human compassion and coexistence.



Mercy completes us, and its absence from faith, in my opinion, is akin to loss of faith. It is an essential human attribute and a basic life instinct which gives order to all living things. My personal understanding of mercy stems from my own Muslim faith, where the Merciful is one of the ninety-nine attributes of God, mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. I am reminded of God's mercy each time I pray by reciting the name "the Merciful" during my prayers.

My extensive work in interreligious dialogue, my many encounters with men and women of all faiths and traditions, have been testament to the fact that mercy is alive and is a driving factor for those who seek to help the many in our world that have been lost to mistrust, hatred and violence, and to rediscover mercy.

The absence of mercy in our world today does not mean that mercy is non-existent between human beings. However mercy is often depicted by the media, advertisements and common stereotypes as a useless life-principle and fruitless in promoting communication between people. The motive behind this over-simplistic generalisation about mercy is to deliberately negate its power of influencing morals in the modern world context.

The question I ask is this: Why has mercy become so absent in our world? I would say that the answer lies in the fact that the modern world, in its legal, moral and international relations, has abandoned adherence to the guiding values of religion, and has denied them any part that they could play in the enforcement and application of international pacts.

As a direct result of the path taken by mankind of distancing itself from the value of mercy as a core prerequisite for our humanity, we witness a world today full of misery for millions.

HE Faisal Bin Muaammar with Austrian Ambassador, HE Dr. Alfons Kloss and Spanish Minister Counselor, HE Luis Fernando de Segovia



After coming out of the two world wars of the last century, with tens of millions of casualties, humanity is still suffering from the war of hatred, ignorance and terrorism. As a result, the international balance of power for the most powerful countries has created indifference to the casualties and innocent victims around the world who die in their thousands on a daily basis, especially in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere.

The wise men, authors and writers who represent the conscience of humanity, recognised the reality and importance of mercy as a humanitarian condition for enhancing human life and promoting it as a superior human value. They described the meaning of mercy by expressing its deep human significance.

The American novelist, Mark Twain, realised this deep, humanitarian meaning of mercy in his quotation:



HE Faisal Bin Muaammar with Bibi Kiranjot Kaur (left) and Sadhvi Saraswati (centre)

“Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can read.”

The English playwright and poet, William Shakespeare, said: “Mercy is the essence of law.”

The Russian writer and novelist, Leo Tolstoy, said: “Man should be merciful since mercy brings people together.”

Today, the duty of religions and the responsibility of all religious leaders is to build a strong belief, through all means possible, that once again establishes a sound human understanding and appreciation of mercy as a humanitarian value, of which mankind will always be in constant need.

The KAICIID Dialogue Centre believes that dialogue is an expression of mercy. Mercy is needed whenever dialogue is needed. HH Pope Francis said that dialogue helps us to increase the acts of mercy in the world. It allows us to understand the needs of others, to extend a helping hand and to build bridges of trust at a time when many are building walls of mistrust and fear.

His Excellency Faisal Bin Muaammar

Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar was appointed Secretary General of the Vienna-based King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) in October 2012. Prior to this appointment, he held a number of senior positions in the Saudi Arabian administration and various nonprofit organizations.

Among the highlights of a distinguished career which has encompassed major roles in state government and international organizations, Faisal Bin Muaammar served as Vice Minister of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Advisor to the Royal Court of the, then, Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and Deputy of the National Guard for Cultural and Educational Affairs. He was instrumental in the foundation of the King Abdulaziz Public Library in 1987 and the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue in Riyadh (KACND) in 2003. He continues to work as Supervisor General of both these organizations, as well as Advisor to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.



Welcome and Opening Remarks

His Excellency Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, mccj, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Board Member of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)

Dear Friends. Rome welcomes here today at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the representatives of different religious traditions from all over the world for a time of multireligious sharing and witnessing on “Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation”.

As Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, on behalf of Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, who is our President, I am happy to welcome all of you, and let me mention in particular HE Faisal Bin Muammar, Secretary General of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID).

As you know, the Holy See is a Founding Observer of the International Dialogue Centre that organized this meeting on the occasion of the Holy Year of Mercy.

In *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee of Mercy, HH Pope Francis expressed the wish that celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with other religious traditions and open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better, eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination (cfr. *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 23).

Religions are the living expression of the soul of peoples and each religion testifies to the fact that the human person has been in search of God for thousands of years.

The Catholic Church has been involved in dialogue with religious traditions in every part of the world, at varying levels and with different degrees of intensity. As Catholics, we are urged by Jesus to be the “yeast and ferment” in the midst of the world. Therefore, with the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy, our task is then to proclaim the merciful God made Man who turns His gaze

towards all men and women, excluding none. We are to be witnesses, as HH Pope Francis urges us, of a Church that goes out untiringly to proclaim a merciful God reviving, in a world tired of violence and pain, a profound desire for mercy. Saint John Paul II also reminds us that “Modern man often anxiously wonders about the solution to the terrible tensions which have built up in the world and which entangle humanity. And if at times man lacks the courage to utter the word “mercy”, or if in his conscience, empty of religious content, he does not find the equivalent, so much



HE Bishop Ayuso (right) with Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh



His Excellency Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, mccc

HE Bishop Ayuso is Titular Bishop of Luperciana and Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. He has always been active in interreligious dialogue, teaching in both Cairo and Rome as well as writing several important publications on issues related to Christian-Muslim dialogue. As a priest he worked in the local Church in Egypt and Sudan from 1982 to 2002.

Career summary

- ❖ Ordained Bishop, Titular See of Luperciana by Pope Francis, 2016
- ❖ Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2012–present
- ❖ President of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI), 2005–2012
- ❖ Awarded a PhD in Theology by the Faculty of Theology of Granada, Spain, 2000
- ❖ Served as parish priest in Sacred Heart Parish in Abbassiyah/Cairo as well as director of the Pastoral, Liturgical and Catechetical Centre of El Obeid Diocese/Sudan, 1982–2002
- ❖ Member of the Comboni Missionaries.



greater is the need for the Church to utter this word, not only in her own name but also in the name of all the men and women of our time” (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, y. 1980, n. 15).

Last year we celebrated in this University the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1965). This document, still timely and inspiring, is a milestone in the evolution of interreligious dialogue, reminding us that: “In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1).

It is sincerely desired that interreligious dialogue be based on mutual respect and thus establish bonds of true friendship between men and women belonging to different religious traditions.

In order to be good believers, there needs to be an open and respectful attitude towards our neighbours, irrespective of the religious tradition to which they belong.

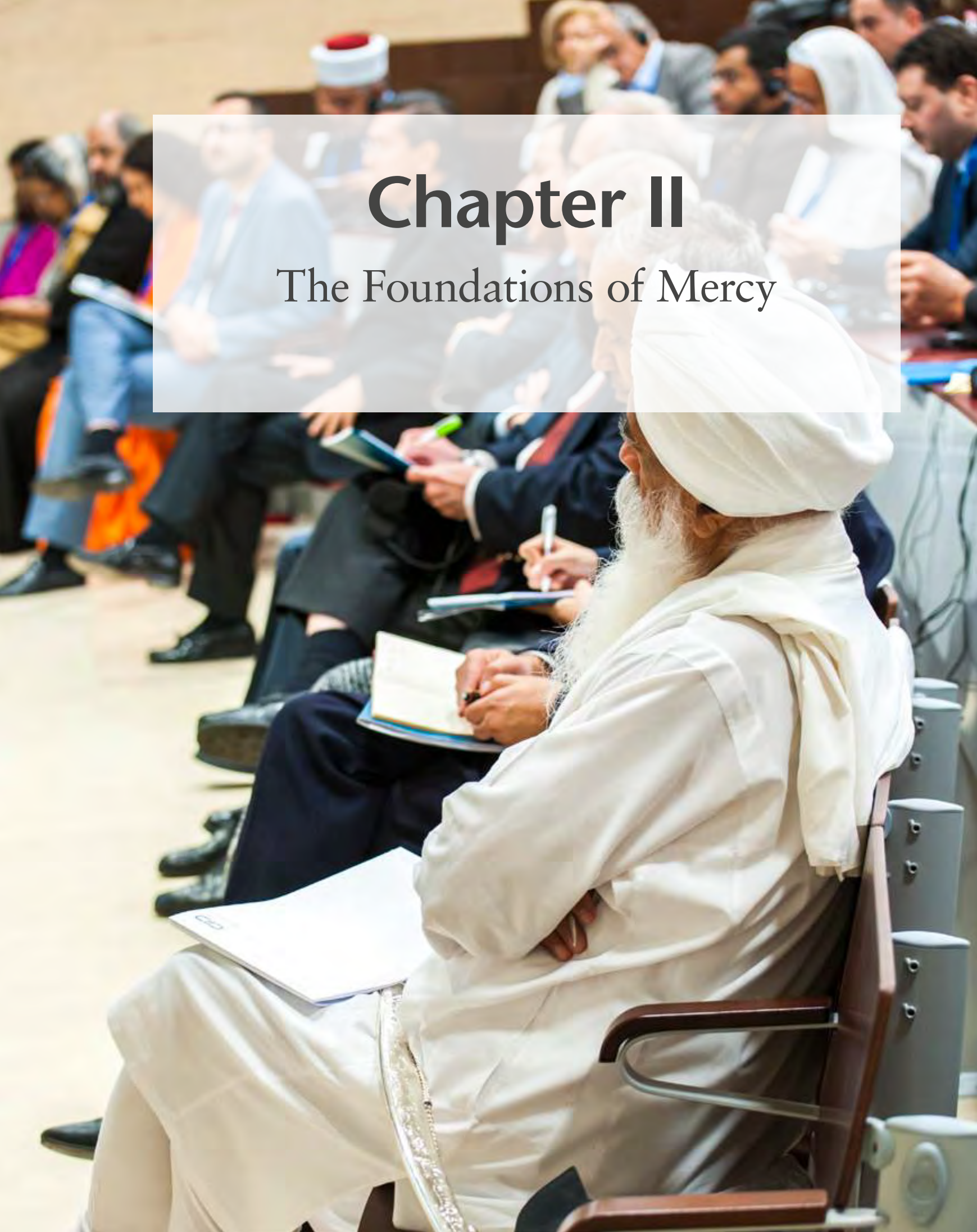
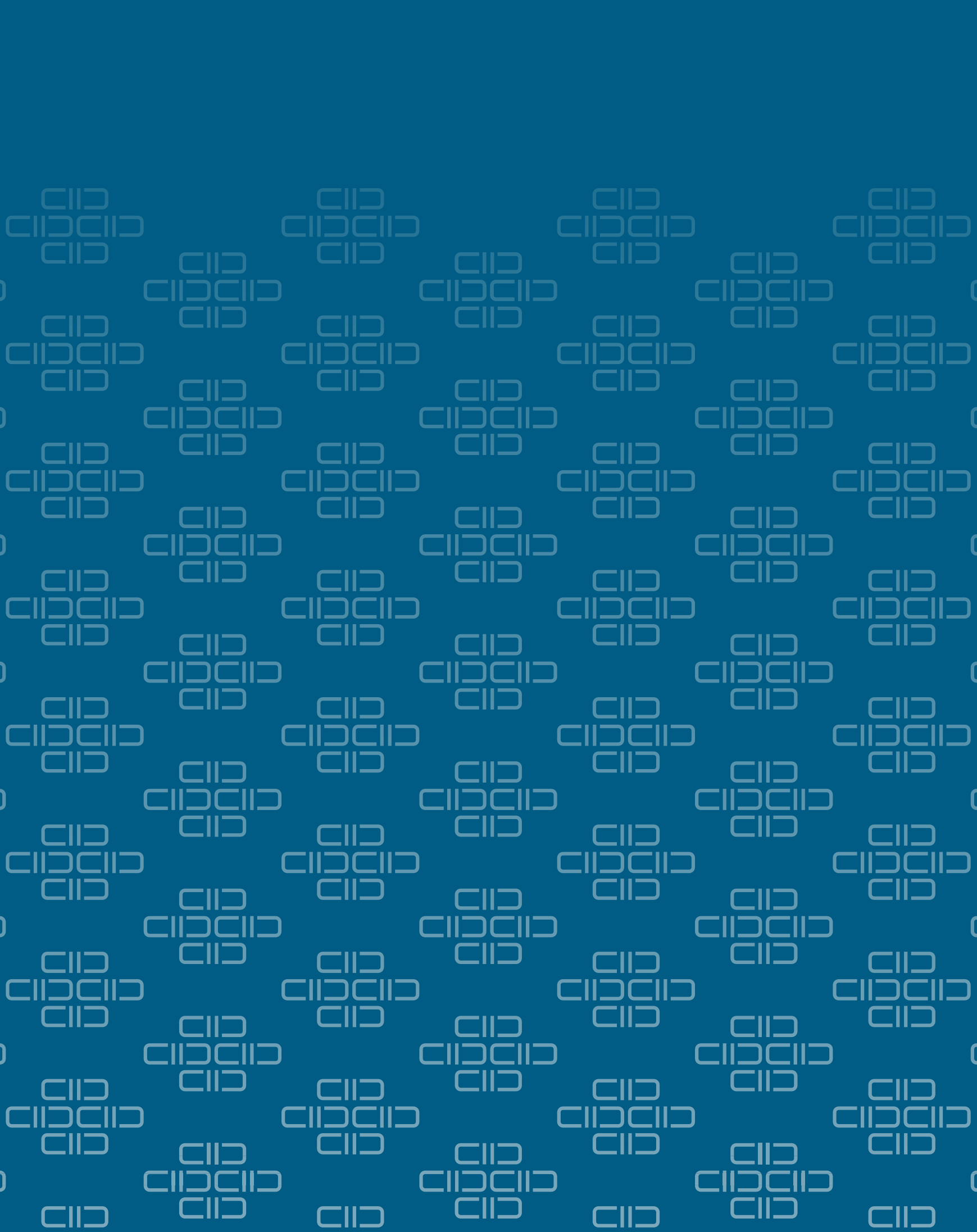
This morning many of us were present at the Interreligious Audience in the Vatican Sala Clementina, where HH Pope Francis urged us again to build bridges of friendship and dialogue and to go out and walk along the path of mercy together with our neighbours of different faiths.

This symposium should be lived precisely in this spirit: that is, a call to look at what we share together with believers of other religions learning from one another what we can do to live together our common destiny.

This is going to be a time of dialogue and sharing of the most authentic and intimate desire of the human person: peace and reconciliation and how to achieve them through mercy.

Once again, I want to convey to each and every one of you the best wishes of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, whose vocation is to welcome different cultures and faiths, and to foster dialogue in order to generate fruits of peace for a better future for all.

Pictured opposite: HE Bishop Ayuso addressing the symposium during his opening speech



Chapter II

The Foundations of Mercy

“All religions are religions of mercy”

Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, KAICIID Senior Adviser

U sing its own unique discourse, each religion shares the value of mercy. The speakers on this panel, representatives of five different world religions, have each given examples of mercy in theological and religious teaching.



Each panellist has shared thoughts on mercy from their religion’s perspective using their own unique language of faith, while also looking at the challenges to mercy. Mercy as an earthly concept transcends boundaries of class, race, religion and nationality. While it can be expressed through simple actions such as charity, a show of kindness, prayer, the inclusion of others or helping someone in need as exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan, it can also be incorporated into religious, societal or state institutions. Examples are the *waqf* in Islam, the requirement to give to charity in Sikhism, and the Church’s commitment to run hospitals or orphanages in Christianity.

Mercy consists of positive traits that encompass humanity, such as compassion, non-violence, love, selflessness, and respect for life. It is represented through various symbols in the different religions, sometimes in objects surprising to those outside of a specific religion, such as the sword in Sikhism.

All religions are religions of mercy, and while the mercy of God or the gods is not disputed, here we discuss the mercy of human beings and the many challenges that mercy faces. Whether it be fear of consumerism, colonialism, imperialism, globalisation, of losing one’s identity or the added shocks of economic, environmental and political crises, terrorism or the loss of family and friends in crises, it may seem hard to think about showing mercy to others especially when it is also something that everyone desires for oneself – the removal of suffering.

While it may seem natural to turn inward, towards both oneself and loved ones in times of duress, it is during these times that if one takes the opportunity to look towards his/her values, values shared within faiths

Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer facilitating one of the sessions held on the second day to discuss case studies of mercy for peace and reconciliation

more innumerable than those represented on this panel, it is by first looking to our own hearts as individuals that we can then move to bring mercy to other people. Mercy can grow to alleviate the suffering of the many only when it is shared – beginning with one’s own actions and self.

In all faith traditions, the practice of mercy is expected to start from the self. Only then will the person be able to spread it to others around him or her. Most if not all faith groups have not limited mercy to their own followers, but mercy can be and is expected to be applied in relation to others beyond one’s own faith group. In several traditions, mercy is extended to animals, plants, and all creatures.

Mercy implies a feeling of humanity – it is a human concept and practice. This is yet another challenge in conflict areas; if the Other is not seen as human, how can we access mercy? Today, with violent conflicts in many parts of the world, mercy is needed more than ever. Many people are dehumanised, making it difficult to persuade those living in such a context to employ mercy. We need to see each other as human beings and creatures of the same God in order to help one another and to be alleviated from suffering.

This is a particularly difficult challenge in regions recovering from years of sectarian or ethnic conflict, where each party has experienced deep losses. It is important to humanise the Other to be able to rebuild an integrated society.

Reaching out to the Other and extending a merciful hand to those who are perceived as our enemies requires risk taking and courage. The experiences that have been shared in this panel illustrate the power of interreligious peacebuilding as when a religious leader steps out of the social and political safety zone and extends his/her hand to the Other.

Dialogue is one way to do this, providing a way of strengthening and adding a greater prospect of sustainability for peace and reconciliation processes. Dialogue helps make mercy possible again between individuals and groups who have suffered at the hands of each other. The following pages feature stories of mercy told by religious representatives of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sarnaism and Sikhism, each in their own language, displaying how each of these faith traditions is full of theological teachings and stories that support the practice of mercy.

Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Prof. Abu-Nimer is a Senior Adviser to KAICIID and a professor at the School of International Service at American University. At the International Peace and Conflict Resolution program he served as Director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute, 1999–2013.

Prof. Abu-Nimer has conducted interreligious conflict resolution training and interfaith dialogue workshops in conflict areas around the world, including Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Chad, Niger, Iraq (Kurdistan), the Philippines (Mindanao), and Sri Lanka. He also founded the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, an organization that focuses on capacity building, civic education, and intra-faith and interfaith dialogue.

In addition to his numerous articles and books, Dr. Abu-Nimer is the co-founder and co-editor of the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*.



“The challenge facing us all cannot be dealt with alone”

His Excellency Grand Mufti Sheikh Dr. Shawki Ibrahim Allam

The Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) said that those who are merciful will receive God’s mercy. Mercy is a word we use frequently in our everyday lives, for instance when we begin eating we begin in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. When we finish eating we use the same words, and when we start any activity we always

remember God and use the word mercy. “Mercy” is used 268 times in the Qur’an, whereas “punishment” is used only 117 times. There are 234 occasions where tolerance is mentioned, implying understanding and also mercy. The Prophet (PBUH) was merciful in all of his words and deeds, of which we have many examples of his behaviour towards people, animals and plants.



His Excellency Grand Mufti Sheikh Dr. Shawki Ibrahim Allam

HE Grand Mufti Shawki Allam, was born in the Nile Delta Governorate of Beheira. He received a PhD in Jurisprudence and Sharia Law from Al-Azhar University in 1996. Prior to his appointment as Grand Mufti, he served as chairman of the department of jurisprudence at the School of Sharia at Al-Azhar University’s Tanta branch.

In 2013, he was elected to the post of Grand Mufti by Al-Azhar’s Council of Senior Scholars headed by Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayeb, an unprecedented act since the Grand Mufti had previously been chosen by the President of Egypt. He has written over 25 works, many of which address issues pertaining to women.



We have a very important saying when reading the Qur’an and listening to the lives of the prophets – it is that there are 100 different ways of practicing mercy. So, human beings may behave mercifully in 100 different ways and all of those different ways are put together after humans reach paradise and their deeds await them. My question is: “Are we able to turn this theoretical text into practical behaviour?” I affirm that we can, because, according to the Qur’an, the theoretical ideas of behaviour were learned from the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH).

We have learnt from the Qur’an because we have been able to translate it into everyday life, into practical life. The *waqf* institutions were able to translate mercy into everyday life and this system has not only been used for ages in Islamic countries but is also found today in the United States of America. I read that there are Waqf institutions in the US for ownerless dogs, and these institutions receive donations in order to take care of the dogs, so I think that this is just one minor example of how mercy is implemented, not only with human beings, but also with animals. We do need to look at those examples from our practical world and not just hold the examples in theory. In spite of Islam’s very holistic approach, we still see that some groups have abandoned this understanding altogether and now act aggressively, so this is the big challenge that all of us face. How can it happen that a group of people misuses their religion in a way which differs altogether from our understanding of mercy? I think that those terrorists, who raid, murder and displace people have an understanding of Islam very far from its true values which are humanitarian and place mercy at their heart.

I reiterate that the challenge facing us all cannot be dealt with alone. We must unite and stand side by side internationally, institutionally, and regionally. The actions of religious leaders are central to this solidarity because all of us, all religions, speak up for peace. Islam is a religion of peace, a religion of mercy. We greet people saying: “May peace be upon you,” but nevertheless we shall not succeed in dealing with all of these challenges unless we stand together and find stability and security.

Pictured left: The first day of the symposium with HE Grand Mufti Shawki Allam (left), HG The Rt. Rev. Bishop Elias Toumeh (centre) and Bibi Kiranjot Kaur (right)

“Mercy is the most important attribute of God”

Bibi Kiranjot Kaur

Good afternoon. I would like to thank Pope Francis for this initiative of convening an interreligious dialogue on the occasion of the Jubilee of Mercy, because mercy is one quality that we don't really reflect upon. So, this is an opportunity for us to go back into our tradition and reflect on what it really means to us. Sometimes it happens that communities have projected a certain image which they then live up to. If that image is of a martial community it's not easy to think about values such as mercy and forgiveness if the alternative belief is more mainstream.

When I was reading my daily prayers it suddenly struck me that, in Hindu mythology, there's a story that the world is held on the horn of a bull and, when the bull gets tired, it moves the earth from one horn to the other, creating an earthquake. The Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, reinterpreted the story and he said: “It is not the bull which is holding the world, it is *dharma*. *Dharma* means discipline, the basic principles of the cosmos, and this *dharma* is the son of mercy, which in Punjabi we call *Daya*. *Dharma* also means religion. So, religion emerges out of mercy. Mercy is a very visible characteristic of a religious person. It gives birth to both love and selfless service. In the Sikh community, it's very important to offer selfless service that reaches out to others, irrespective of their ethnicity or religion, and recognises a human being as a human being. Mercy is also closely related to forgiveness. It is not a symbol of weakness, but the quality of the brave. The Sikh religion is a way of life that is lived every day. One can learn to have mercy and compassion when living in a society, when living among other people, learning to live in harmony with others and increasing mutual understanding. Unlike some other eastern traditions, Sikhs acquire their spirituality while living in a family. The most quoted example is of the lotus, a beautiful flower that blooms in muddy waters, unblemished by its dirty roots.

Learning to love creation helps the acquisition of spiritual love. Mercy is the most important attribute



of God and the most important quality for humans to acquire. Without mercy, a person can become a cruel tyrant. Mercy does not arise from so-called peace or non-violence in certain circumstances, for instance, the use of brute strength to contain a cruel tyrant could also be a face of mercy. Sometimes toppling one tyrant could spell relief for hundreds of thousands of people. This morning Bhai Mohinder Singh presented a Sikh *kirpan* to Pope Francis. In ordinary language, a *kirpan* would be understood to be a sword, but this is not a good translation because it is a weapon of mercy. It is never, ever to be used in offence; it is to be used only in acts of mercy.

Our scripture motivates us to have mercy on living beings. The Sikh belief is that of *Jeean ka jee ahaar*, which means that living beings eat other living beings in order to survive. If a lion shows mercy to the animals she hunts, she will die of hunger. The laws of nature to survive do not comprise mercy.

I was asked as to what, in our tradition in particular, promotes peace and reconciliation and, to answer this, I refer to our history. The Sikhs have ten Gurus. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, had to sacrifice his life to uphold the spiritual principles that he stood for. The emperor at that time, Jahangir, ordered the Guru's torture and pronounced a death sentence. Now, this was an act of mercy in which, to show us a way of life, the Guru gave up his own life and stood by his preaching as well as that of his predecessors.

The next most beautiful example is that of the ninth Guru who stood up to uphold the right to religious freedom, not for our community but for others. The story takes place in Jammu and Kashmir, a province in the North of India. The Kashmiri pandits – Hindu Brahmins – were being forced to convert to Islam by emperor Aurangzeb, so they sought the help of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. The Guru asked the pandits to tell Aurangzeb that if he, the emperor, could make Guru Tegh Bahadur change his religion then they, the pandits, would change theirs too. When Aurangzeb summoned the Guru, he asked Aurangzeb to promise that he would not force the Kashmiri pandits to change their religion if he, the Guru, could not be persuaded to convert to Islam. Aurangzeb agreed and used various methods to force the Guru to accept Islam. He was tortured, his companions were killed before his eyes but he remained impervious to all hardships. As a last resort, Aurangzeb ordered the Guru's execution and he was beheaded. True to his promise, Aurangzeb did not try to force the Kashmiri pandits to change their religion and their tradition lived on. This is a beautiful example of sacrifice for another's right to live their life with their beliefs. This story is relevant today and needs to be repeated everywhere when we discuss peace and reconciliation. Everywhere, religion presents a common thread and we have to take its positive attributes.

Regarding exemplars of mercy in our tradition, every individual has the duty to be one, in that we have to donate one tenth of our earnings to help others. There is the tradition of Sikh temples having community kitchens. I would not call them free kitchens because that would diminish the spirituality of the food served there. Not only is the food blessed, but there is food for the homeless, for the hungry, and for the poor. So, in a small and individual way, every Sikh reaches out as an exemplar of mercy, each creating everyday stories which make society more beautiful and more harmonious.

Bibi Kiranjot Kaur

Bibi Kiranjot Kaur is actively involved in the religious, social and political affairs of Sikhs. She is the first Sikh woman to hold the position of General Secretary of the most influential Sikh religious organization, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in its 96 year history. The SGPC Trust, also called the Sikh Parliament, is the product of the Sikh religious reform movement in the late 19th century. She is a member of the advisory committee to the head of the highest Sikh religious seat, Akal Takht. She is invited as a speaker on gender issues in schools and colleges run by Sikhs.

A founding member of Guru Granth Sahib World University, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab, she is regularly invited to departments of religion in various Punjab universities as a speaker and participant in seminars. She is director of a training college for Sikh preachers, Bhai Vir Singh Gurmat Vidya in Amritsar, India. She is also director of the Central Khalsa Orphanage and High School in Amritsar.





*From left to right: Bishop Kukah,
Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Dr. William Vendley*

“Christians are called upon to reconcile with all peoples of the world”

His Grace The Right Reverend Bishop Elias Toumeh

Firstly, I would like to thank KAICIID for this generous invitation to talk about the concept of mercy in the Holy Bible. In both the Old and New Testaments, the concept of mercy is there for everybody who searches for it and is evident in four principle concepts.

The first is mercy present in the liturgy and in church prayer. Every time the preacher says a prayer in church, the people say: “Oh God have mercy,” because, in Christian belief, the liturgy and the prayer are a source of divine mercy. In the Orthodox Church, there is a special prayer about this which is called The Prayer of Jesus or The Heart’s Prayer, where the believer is so absorbed by the prayer that he is unified with God. The words of the prayer are: “Oh my God, Jesus Christ, please forgive me, I am the sinner.” This is also a place for the mercy of God, accompanied by the act of kneeling, which itself is

an act of prayer. HH Pope Francis has reminded us that the act of kneeling is a gesture that echoes the foetus position in the mother’s womb, the idea of being reborn in the noble and divine mercy of God.

So, this new mercy is a return of the people to the image that God has wanted for us since creation. Divine mercy versus human mercy. Divine mercy in the Christian tradition stems from the principle that God shows mercy to all people through Jesus Christ. When Paul says that Jesus has reconciled humanity with God it is because God has sent Jesus Christ among humankind. But when we talk about the relationship between God and people, we use the word love instead of the word mercy because, in mercy, there is one that offers mercy and one who receives the act of mercy, but with love we are unique.

God has elevated us in love and made us His children, so the message of Christianity prevails by the message



His Grace The Right Reverend Bishop Elias Toumeh

Bishop Elias Toumeh is the Greek Orthodox Bishop of Wadi al Nasara, Syria. He holds a degree in civil engineering from the University of Tishreen in Latakia, a degree in theology from Balamand University, as well as higher qualifications in dialogue between the religions and in Islamic and Arabic Studies from the Jesuit and Pontifical Universities in Rome, respectively. He wrote a doctorate in comparative religions at the University of Thessalonica and is currently professor at the University of Balamand. He has also published nine books in several languages, including English, Italian and Greek.

Bishop Elias has participated in more than 25 international conferences since 2010, often as part of cooperative ecumenical endeavours to win support for Syrian Christians and to campaign for peace in Syria. He has spoken about the importance of sacrificial ministry, the increasingly diverse responsibilities of the clergy in war zones (his own church has become a relief centre) and the urgent need for diplomacy and dialogue, followed by humanitarian aid to sooth the region’s wounds. His church’s Peace Centre for Children encourages children of all faiths to care for one another.



of love. When we talk about the love of God we mean that He gave the people the most mercy, He elevated them from slaves to children by the reconciliation that happened through Jesus Christ. And when we talk about human mercy, it is incorporated in an example that Jesus gives us, the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, Jesus tells us about good acts and about three types of people. At the end of the parable He asks which of the three was the most kindred, the answer to which was the one who showed mercy.

So, human mercy is not a theological concept but shows itself in the act of mercy. If you examine and analyse everything that the ancient fathers of the Church have written about mercy, you find that this concept becomes one of performing good deeds, as if divine mercy becomes flesh in acts that are done towards others as good deeds. So, when the ancient fathers of the Church talk about mercy they are immediately talking about good deeds.

Saint John says that the second shirt in your wardrobe should not be yours, it is not yours, it is for your brother who has no clothes. The ancient fathers of the Church adopted this idea, as did Saint Vasilios who said that poor people do good because they offer us the chance to do good deeds. The poor are therefore the most noble people.

From Christian theology, we can understand why the Church has created organizations and grand institutions that work through mercy and provide relief and aid for all people without discrimination because it stems from a direct response to the divine command to be merciful as our God in heaven is merciful.

Because Jesus reconciled us with God, we are called upon to reconcile ourselves with all peoples and therefore Christians have no enemies at all. Christians are called upon to reconcile with all peoples of the world.

To conclude, I want to mention a personal experience of mercy. I come from a region in Syria that has taken in many displaced families. We saw that people were taking others – Christians and Muslims, without discrimination – in to their homes and sharing their food and shelter. The Church itself has performed many acts of mercy without discrimination of the differences of religions or creeds. Conversely, in my region I know Muslim people who were faster than Christians in showing mercy and demonstrating that everybody is united as one during this time of crisis that is wreaking destruction and war in our home country, Syria.

“The time has come in which we should ask for mercy on behalf of Mother Earth”

His Holiness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

Respected Eminences, Excellencies, distinguished scholars, sisters and brothers. It's so wonderful to be here today. Let us give a huge round of applause to the KAICIID team for giving us this great opportunity, a dream of so many. I was listening to proceedings in the Vatican in the holy presence of our very dynamic, dedicated and new-age Pope and I give you my congratulations, my thanks on behalf of all of us for whom you have created this opportunity.

Regarding mercy for peace and reconciliation, I think that there is no shopping centre in the world where you can go and buy mercy. You are the source. Your religion is the source. We have to understand that we are all divine. We are part and parcel of the divine, we have come here from the divine, we are one because we are coming from Him. As the honourable Bishop said, we are His children. He is divine, He is merciful, so we're all divine and we have mercy in us too. The question is how should we use that mercy in practice in daily life? In Hinduism, the giving of mercy is of great importance and there are thousands of mantras, teachings and voices that have been given to us about mercy.

One of our famous poets is Saint Tulsidas. He has written one of the most fundamental and beautiful of Hindu scriptures: *“Daya Dharam ka mool hai, paap mool abhiman. Tulsi daya n chandiye, jab lag ghat me praan.”* I won't relate the entire story but I will point out that the bottom line is the fundamental lesson of mercy. No mercy, no peace. No mercy, no reconciliation. No mercy, no humanity. Today, if we want to live together and be together, the lesson teaches us to have mercy. We say: “Oh Lord, have mercy upon me.” But Tulsidas reminds us that we should only pray to receive mercy for oneself. The time has come that we should pray together, and in those prayers there are many mantras such as: “May all be happy, may all be healthy, may all attain peace and perfection, may no one suffer.” He never said:



“May only I be happy, may my family be happy, may my friends be happy.” He said: “Let all be happy.” The crucial word is “all”.

This allness, this oneness, this togetherness is being forgotten. We have created the barriers and boundaries for ourselves. I think that the time has come to become one family, and this is a challenge that we must face today, together. The key is oneness and togetherness. When we are one family we share, we give, we care, we forgive and we always come together and take the burden off each other. The time has come today to share this value of allness and oneness.

There's a beautiful story that tells of a very beautiful king. God appeared in front of the king asking what he most desired. The king said: “Oh Lord, I don't want possessions, I don't want palaces, I don't want mansions, I want one thing only, that you give me a merciful heart so that I can remove the suffering of my fellow beings and be in service to them. To me that is the greatest blessing you can give me, Lord.” God was happy and said: “So be it.”

There is a beautiful Indian song which became the favourite of Mahatma Gandhi. He asked: “Who is the real devotee, who is the true devotee, what is the true devotion?” The true devotee is one who can feel the pain of others, who can feel others as his own. When you feel the pain and suffering of others, these are not American, Asian, African or Australian pains and sufferings. Pain is pain, suffering is suffering and these are what we have in common and therefore the means by which we can connect to each other. If we can remove each other's pain and suffering then we attain a feeling of oneness and “familiness”.

I want to share my personal story with you. I spent almost ten years in the forest, in fasting, deep meditation and solitude. I practiced intense yoga and endured many things. When I returned, it occurred to me that it was time that I should ask my Guru for the advanced course, so I went to him and said: “Now the beginner's course is over, let me take the advanced course.” I'll not sing the beautiful poem with which he replied because time is very short here, but he said: “The greatest prayer you can make is to remove the suffering of all. Be ready and go out into the world.” The first step is to remove the suffering and to have a merciful heart. When you have mercy, you don't have to look for anything else.

As you have the Ten Commandments in Judeo-Christian society, there are three things in India that create the divine recipe for mercy – non-violence, forgiveness and compassion. If you don't have compassion your heart cannot be merciful. If you don't have forgiveness to forgive yourself, you cannot forgive others. We pray to the divine, we pray to God: “Oh God forgive me”, but when it comes to others we become unsure. When we consider ourselves, we become the advocate, when we consider others we become the judge. Whereas when we forgive ourselves we should forgive others.

When I met the honourable Pope today I could see that he gives us hope. I request that we, all religions, ask for mercy to be shown to us all. I also think that the time has come in which we should ask for mercy on behalf of Mother Earth. How we are using and abusing the Earth. How the rivers, lakes, ponds, trees and all of nature are being abused. The time has come in our churches, in our synagogues, in our temples, in our gurdwaras, to educate our everyday congregations with the idea that we have worshipped The Creator for so long that it is now time to preserve, protect and serve The Creation itself.

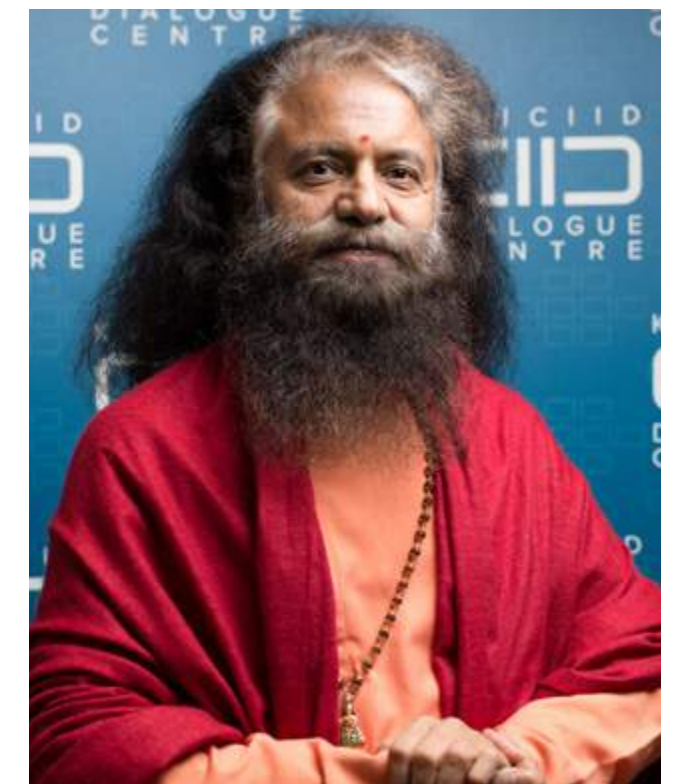
His Holiness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

His Holiness Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji left his home for the Himalayan jungles in early childhood to live a life devoted to God and the service of humanity. He spent his youth in silence and meditation, practicing yoga and living in austerity.

He is now president of Parmarth Niketan, based in Rishikesh, one of the largest interfaith spiritual institutions in India. He is also co-founder and co-chairman of the Global Interfaith Wash Alliance (GIWA), an international group of interfaith leaders working for water, sanitation and hygiene, launched by UNICEF.

Pujya Swamiji is founder of Ganga Action Parivar, leading the Clean Ganga Movement, and is founder of the Divine Shakti Foundation and India Heritage Research Foundation (IHRF), both nonprofit organizations dedicated to education, women's empowerment, healthcare, rural development and other projects including the production of an 11-volume *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*.

His religion is unity and he has been a leading voice at numerous international, interfaith summits including United Nations, Parliament of Religions, World Bank, World Economic Forum, Religions for Peace, and more.





Participants applauding the insights delivered on the first day of the symposium in the Aula Magna of the Pontifical Gregorian University

“The ways of peace expounded in the Talmud are the ways of mercy, compassion and forgiveness”

Chief Rabbi David Rosen

Thank you very much Your Excellency Faisal Bin Muaammar. I would like to open with a reflection (in keeping with the opening words we heard from HH Pope Francis this morning and the comments made now by Professor Abu-Nimer) regarding the meaning of the word we translate into English as “mercy”.

The common use of the word tends to reflect a mentality which I think is more Greek than Semitic. The word *miser cordia* essentially means pity from the heart and pity is not a relationship of mutual respect, but to some extent reflects, if you like, a power imbalance. The Hebrew word, the Arabic word, and indeed the Aramaic word, all come from the root *rachem*, *rahama*. Whether it be *rachma* in Arabic, or *rachamim* – the plural of the word in Hebrew, or *rachmana* in Aramaic – they all derive from the root word meaning “womb”, and in the womb life is nurtured. The concept is not just one of manifesting maternal compassion, but of nurturing, the giving of life’s positive energy. Thus what we translate inadequately in the English language and other Western languages as “mercy”, has its root in this Semitic idea. And perhaps there are similar parallels in other religious cultures and languages, reflecting the notion that there is a far more powerful force and imperative in life than simply that of pity of the heart.

In the Hebrew Bible there are two main names for God which are seen as reflecting His two essential divine attributes. The one name is viewed as denoting God’s transcendence, and that name is *Elohim* – which has its obvious parallels within the other Semitic languages. God as Creator of the Universe is the Source of its absolute natural laws which we disregard at our peril. In this regard, He is the transcendent Judge of All and thus the name *Elohim* is understood as denoting the attribute of divine justice. But in addition to God being transcendent, the Semitic religious mind, which again may be paralleled elsewhere in the world, brilliantly understood

the divine power of mercy and its immanence in our universe. God is to be found in our lives; and the word that is used to describe this immanent presence of the divine in our lives is the Tetragrammaton, the name made up of the four letters Y, H, W, H. According to Jewish tradition this name was only pronounced in the Temple on the holiest day of the year, and since the Temple was destroyed two thousand years ago, observant Jews do not try to pronounce the name and instead use the word *Adonai*, which actually means “my Lord”.

However while the literal meaning of the Tetragrammaton has to do with existence itself, it is understood in Jewish tradition as reflecting the divine attribute of mercy. It reflects the nurturing life force, the divine presence in our lives.

God is the creator of the universe, its physical and moral laws – its commandments – and there are inevitable consequences to their disregard, as the Bible describes so graphically. Indeed because, as stated in Ecclesiastes: “There is not a man on earth who does only good and does not sin,” we would all be condemned by our failures. But Judaism teaches that the divine attribute of mercy is greater and overwhelms the divine attribute of justice, reflecting God’s bounteous love and grace.

There’s another beautiful word in the Hebrew language, *chesed*, which can’t be translated adequately into English. Arguably the best meaning we can render in English is “gratuitous love”. Overwhelmingly, it is referred to in the Hebrew Bible together with mercy – *chesed verahamim* – reflecting God’s unlimited grace that is the expression of His mercy that cleanses us from our sins when our contrition is sincere.

A related wonderful concept in Judaism, derived from the Hebrew Bible, is that of *teshuvah*, inadequately translated as “repentance”. However it comes from the Hebrew root, *shuv*, meaning to return. The idea is founded on the perception of the human person as created inherently goodly and godly and that fundamentally, deep down,

we all really want to be with God and with the good. But inevitably, because we are human and therefore endowed with the divine gift of free will, we make mistakes and are invariably corrupted. However, Judaism teaches that all a person has to do to be able to return to God is to be sincerely contrite. Then God in His unlimited mercy accepts the sinner and erases his or her guilt as stated in Ezekiel who describes God as saying: “I do not desire the death of the wicked, but that the wicked returns from his evil ways and lives.” So, when we are sincerely penitent, Judaism teaches, God in His unlimited mercy (*rahamim*) and love (*chesed*) receives us back fully to Him. In the words of our sages two thousand years ago, “no matter how vile the sinner is, the gates of repentance are always open to him”.

Furthermore God’s mercy expresses a divine imperative for humanity, which is what the Bible describes as the commandments to love God and to cleave to Him. This is the concept of *Imitatio Dei*, emulating the divine attributes. In the words of the Talmudic sage Abba Shaul: “Just as God is compassionate and merciful, so you should be compassionate and merciful.”

Accordingly, the name for God found extensively in the Talmud and used abundantly in our liturgy is *rahmana* or *harahaman*, which of course is virtually identical with the attributive name that every Muslim knows for Allah.

It therefore reflects this shared perception in keeping with the words that we heard from His Eminence the Mufti, which our sages declared two thousand years ago that: “He who has compassion on his fellow human beings, God has compassion on him.” In other words, in seeking to emulate the divine, our actions elicit, as it were, divine pathos accordingly.

A fundamental principle that is seen as such a divine imperative of following in God’s ways, is the pursuit of peace; or more precisely, pursuing the ways of peace (*darkey shalom*). These ways of peace are therefore precisely the ways of mercy, of compassion and of forgiveness. Indeed, the Talmud declares that the whole purpose of the Torah, God’s revelation, is the pursuit of peace, that we should live in a peaceful world.

Our sages point out that it states in Psalms 34:14 that one should “seek peace and pursue it”. They observe that there is no other instance in the Bible where we are commanded to both seek something and pursue it. There are commandments that refer to certain situations, certain



imperatives. But peace is something that one must seek out and pursue everywhere. Thus peace is an imperative that flows precisely from the compassionate nature of the divine that has to be reflected in human conduct.

With regard to models, there are many within our different traditions, but you will recall the story of Moses as it is told in the book of Exodus which precisely describes the stages of compassion that mark the moral evolution of the individual portrayed as the agent of divine redemption.

The first story we hear of Moses is when he leaves Pharaoh’s court and sees a task master striking one of the Hebrew slaves and he immediately comes to his defence. Here, his compassion is for the one obvious victim. Then we are told of how Moses goes out on another day and sees two members of his own community fighting with each other and intervenes to prevent further violence, reflecting his compassion for both combatants.

Pharaoh learns of his actions, and Moses is forced to flee. He arrives at the well in Midian and finds Jethro’s daughters who are not able to draw water from the well because of the presence of the other shepherds, so he comes to their assistance. Here, his compassion is elicited for the vulnerable beyond his own community.

And then we read of how Moses came to Horeb in the wilderness, where he has the vision of the burning bush and receives his divine mission.

The *Midrash* (the Jewish equivalent of a Hadith) seeks to explain what Moses was doing so far away from Midian, and tells us that Moses noticed that there was a lamb missing from his father-in-law’s flocks that he was tending. He went looking for it and found the little lamb far away in Horeb at an oasis lapping water; and he said: “Ah, you were thirsty – I didn’t know, and that was why

you ran away,” and he put the lamb on his shoulders and carried it back all the way to the rest of the flock. At this point a divine voice declared: “One who cares for the smallest of the lambs is the one to care for my children,” and Moses is thus designated for the leadership of the Children of Israel and the Exodus from Egypt.”

This idea of compassion being the defining quality of the ideal leader recurs throughout Scripture.

To conclude, the real challenge for all of us is one which Swamiji referred to. The problem is that we all feel that somebody should be merciful to us, especially when we bear a sense of injury – a common occurrence, especially where I live, in the Middle East. Perhaps it is particularly relevant to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. For what is often surprising for people to hear is that everybody in our part of the world thinks that they are the victim. Everybody thinks they are the ones that should be the recipients of mercy. Nobody thinks that they are responsible for the other’s suffering, because we see ourselves in different contexts and paradigms. Palestinians see themselves as vulnerable in the face of what they see as Israeli power; Israelis see themselves as surrounded by hostility and even threatened within by a world that denies their historical attachments; and of course, the Arab Muslim world as a whole sees itself as threatened by Western Imperialism, consumerism, globalization, colonialism, or whatever it may be.

It’s very difficult if you really feel that you are a victim or in pain, to be persuaded otherwise; let alone to be compassionate towards those seen as the responsible party. This then is the challenge: how do we overcome our own sense of injury?

More often than not, we are the victims of our own distress and as a result cannot get beyond our own pain. But if we cannot be merciful to one another, then alienation is reinforced and our suffering becomes compounded. Echoing the Secretary General’s words, this is why dialogue is so necessary.

This is why it’s so important for us to encounter one another, because when we do so and recognise our fundamental humanity, we can be so much more compassionate towards one another. This is why inter-faith relations are so critical because, when we learn to respect the traditions of each person, we can also give the Other a sense of assurance that s/he is welcome and respected; and then through our own compassion, we can evoke compassion in the Other.

Chief Rabbi David Rosen

Rabbi David Rosen is International Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). He was Chief Rabbi of Ireland and Senior Rabbi of the largest Orthodox Jewish Congregation in South Africa. Today he is one of the most prominent Jewish leaders in the field of interreligious affairs.

Career summary

- ❖ International Director of Interreligious Affairs at AJC and its Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding
- ❖ Past Chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC)
- ❖ Honorary Adviser on Interfaith Relations to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel
- ❖ International President of Religions for Peace
- ❖ Honorary President of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ)
- ❖ Knighted by the Vatican in 2005 as Commander of the Order of Gregory the Great
- ❖ Decorated Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in 2010 by HM Queen Elizabeth II.



“It is the duty of every Muslim to work towards peace between all peoples”

His Excellency Grand Mufti of Lebanon Abdelateef Deriane

In the name of Allah the compassionate, the merciful. Esteemed ladies and gentlemen, Islam is a religion of mercy which is in itself the fulfilment of natural disposition. It is the beauty of creation and the statement of the conscience and the pureness of emotion. It breathes fresh air into times of crisis, refreshing life, invigorating and lightening hearts as in His saying: “My mercy encompasses all things.” The Prophet of Islam (Peace be Upon Him) said that all prayers and blessings of Allah showed mercy for humanity and for the world. The Prophet (PBUH) taught his companions and all Muslims that God, The Most Merciful, shows mercy to those who show mercy to others. “Show mercy on earth so that the one above in heaven will show you mercy.”

He maintained this highest moral standard even in the darkest and hardest of times where his leniency and mercy prevailed toward his opponents whilst enduring their harm and praying for their repentance, as in his supplication: “Oh God forgive my people as they do not know.” Islam is also the religion of good for all humankind, for believers in Islam and non-believers alike. It rejuvenates and becomes more elegant with time, more elevated with the advance of science and more steadfast, regardless of the tone of times. Humankind seeks it in all aspects of life, be it political, social or economic. The Islamic faith is a universal religion and I think it is a message to all humanity. This message commands justice and forbids injustice. It calls for a real coexistence between all people in an atmosphere of brotherliness and tolerance, regardless of race, colour and beliefs. These differences in people, be it through race, language or beliefs, ought never be a justification for conflict and division between nations and peoples.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, humans are social and are naturally inclined to communicate with fellow humans and with the environment. So, Islam is also an inclusive, universal message and, with its noble Prophet (PBUH) and



laws, has elevated humans from individualism to collectivism, from closed to open-mindedness, from intolerance to tolerance, from adversity to facility, from severity to simplicity, from moving backwards to moving forwards, and from isolating oneself to openness towards the Other.

Moderation is one of the most prominent characteristics of Islam. It’s not just a beautiful description and general term for justice, goodness and righteousness; moderation stands between two perversions which are exaggeration and negligence. It stands as the right



HE Grand Mufti Abdelateef Deriane in conversation with Sheikh Dr. Abdalrahman Allowaihiq

between two wrongs, the justice between injustices and so we see that Islam offers the moderate approach in all life's affairs. It also warns of the two perversions, exaggeration and negligence, and in the noble Hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) forbids exaggerations and extremism or negligence and tells all people to beware of these things before destruction occurs.

The term mercy is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an 268 times. The first verse begins with: "In the name of Allah the Compassionate, the Merciful," and there are many collections of verses of mercy in the Qur'an, for instance: "Mercy to the world," "My mercy encompasses all things," "Say to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth, say to God, He has decreed upon himself mercy." These Qur'anic verses and many others affirm that the mercy of God encompasses everything. It encompasses even those who are sinful and have strayed from the right path who should feel themselves called upon not to despair of the mercy of God the Almighty.

Additionally, Islam requires humans to be compassionate to each other in order to be availed the mercy of God, for the Prophet (PBUH) said that the compassionate ones have mercy on those who are merciful. If you show mercy to those on earth, He who is in the heaven

will show mercy to you. Hence mercy in Islam is not merely a characteristic of God, but builds a bridge in human relations between the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the abled and those in need. God the Almighty has laid down the law of Almsgiving as a tool for being merciful towards the poor and the stranger in need. Here I would like to refer to the fact that one of God's names is peace, so believing in peace and working to achieve it is one of the main pillars of the Islamic creed. It is also the duty of every Muslim to work for peace between all peoples. Peace is but a noble expression of mercy because a society devoid of mercy cannot be a society of peace, nor can it believe in peace since peace and mercy are two faces of the same coin.

The Islamic tradition is rich in many examples of mercy among which are the commands of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), directed to the Muslim soldiers, not to harm any old person or woman or child during fighting and to respect the sanctity of churches and monasteries where the name of God is worshipped and to respect the clergymen and monks and provide them with aid even during war and conflict. The commands of the Prophet (PBUH) go as far as forbidding the destruction of churches and forbidding forced conversion to Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) thus demonstrated the main aim of his noble prophethood when saying: "I am but a gift of mercy," and "I was sent to perfect good manners." Observing the words and deeds of the Prophet (PBUH) in warfare, it becomes very evident that at the core of his message is the need for good manners.

The Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and his Companions, the Rightly Guided Caliphs, have advised not to kill or even to harm women or children or an aged or an infirm person, not to cut down fruit bearing trees, not to destroy inhabited places, not to slaughter sheep except for food, not to burn bees and not scatter them. The Prophet (PBUH) adhered to his life of good manners and ethics in war and peace until he met his creator. He was truthful, loyal and generous, he was austere, courageous, humble, merciful, reverent, wise, trustworthy, loyal and a worshipper. Above all this, his ethics were unwavering despite the hardships and changes during his life. He was able to hold steady to ethical conduct in all of his crucial, historical moments. Thus, he is an exemplar of his conduct which arises from a clear approach and not from a reaction imposed by circumstance or pressure.

Following the supreme instructions of the Prophet (PBUH) can enhance peace and reconciliation between Muslims and Christians, especially between Muslims themselves and between Muslims and all people in the world in general. But the sacred and the mighty has said: "All mankind, we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you." He also said: "All of you who have believed enter into Islam completely and perfectly and do not follow the footsteps of Satan, indeed he is to you a clear enemy."

Dear ladies and gentlemen, our world faces many challenges and I would like to mention some of them. People of different religions and creeds are intermingling more and more, not only on account of globalisation with its phenomena and advanced tools, but also due to migration patterns in the world. For example, Christianity is spreading in the developing world, especially in Asia and Africa where Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions prevail, and Islam is spreading in the industrialised countries especially in Europe, the USA, Russia and China where traditionally other religions such as Christianity dominate. This intermingling can lead to one of two things: either to a clash, which means violence and fighting, or to mutual understanding and peaceful and loving coexistence.

Islamic history, from China to Spain, is a testimony to tolerance and the acknowledgment of the right of others to be different. This acknowledgement is based on Islamic principles which confirm peace and mercy between all humans and assure the honouring of humans by God regardless of faith or ethnicity. It is an honouring for all the human race as stated in the Holy Qur'an if we have honoured the children of Adam, which means all people are dignified regardless of their faiths and ethnicities. Civilised coexistence between Muslims, Christians and Jews is an example to be followed in our modern times. It was made possible because it was founded on mutual respect as the basis for living, preaching, practicing mercy and establishing a bastion of peace and coexistence. Furthermore, coexistence in the Middle East between Muslims and Christians especially in my country, Lebanon, is a living example of the fact that a difference in religion does not pose a problem in itself and does not cause conflict if it is kept in the frame of mercifulness, understanding amongst others and the belief in one God.

His Excellency Grand Mufti Abdelateef Deriane

HE Grand Mufti Abdelateef Deriane was born in Beirut in 1953. He obtained a Licentiate in Theology and Islamic Law from the Islamic University of Medina, and continued his postgraduate studies at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. He completed higher studies at the Ain Shams University, Cairo, and received multiple licenses in various Islamic sciences.

Since 2014, he has been president of the Supreme Islamic Sharia Council, president of the Sharia Judges Council, and honorary president of various Islamic social and cultural institutes and centres in Lebanon. In 2015, he was one of the founding members of the General Secretariat for Fatwa Authorities Worldwide, based in Egypt. He is the author of many books on Islam and Islamic affairs and jurisprudence.

He was elected Grand Mufti of Lebanon in 2014.





From left to right: Dr. Al-Zaid, Dr. Hussein Al-Samerai, Bishop Kukah, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Dr. William Vendley

“God has given land for us to take care of, not to occupy or take ownership of it”

Kaushalya Munda

Johar and good evening to everyone. I would like to thank KAICIID as well as Board Member, Swami Agnivesh, who is responsible for my presence here and for the opportunity to speak about our religion.

I belong to an indigenous people of India, the Munda community. Firstly, I will talk about my religion – many of you might not know much about the Sarna religion. I will share my religion through stories of practices because God’s mercy is there. There is no conflict in it, and mercy within human beings comes through practices. So, what are those practices?

To whom do we pray? We pray to Almighty God, who we call *Singh Bungha*, *Singh* meaning lion and *Bungha* meaning spirit. Together, the words mean King of Spirit.

It could be good spirit or it could be bad spirit, but only this one name signifies supernatural power, one God who is invisible and who shows mercy to us whenever we pray to Him. We say that God has given land for us to take care of, not to occupy or take ownership of it. This land has been given in trust to the community in which each individual family has their own part for agriculture and for housing.

We have a tradition in which each family group is responsible for its own territory, which includes a place of worship, and this operates within a kind of community land tenure system. We worship nature but with a

Kaushalya Munda (right) with Bibi Kiranjot Kaur



Kaushalya Munda

Kaushalya Munda, mother of one boy child, is a freelance social worker from Steel City, Jamshedpur, in the State of Jharkhand, India. She belongs to the Munda people, the third largest indigenous community in India. She is a master trainer for women’s empowerment; adolescent reproductive and sexual health education; customary indigenous laws; human rights of indigenous peoples; and advocacy for acknowledgement of Sarnaism as a code in all government forms.

She has personally sponsored two students from the primitive and vulnerable Birhor tribe in Jharkhand, to achieve a technical education. These students were then employed by the government in permanent service. Kaushalya Munda’s passion is to help indigenous men and women, both professionals and involuntarily displaced peoples. She is committed to saving the land title of the Munda community which is enshrined in the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act. Her association with the organization, Adibasi Budhijivi Manch, is part of an endeavour to obligate the state government to implement the customary system of administration (PESA) in indigenous habitation areas.



preference for the sal tree (*Shorea Robusta*). Where there are large numbers of these trees, we mark the place as sacred, designated as a *Jaher* or, if within a small forest, a *Sarna*. Here, only the male priest and other males from the community are allowed to worship. It is forbidden for branches to be cut from the sal trees and this is how we preserve the environment.

Females pray to *Singh Bungha* at home in a space we call *Adin Bungha* which is usually a small dark room separated from the rest of the house. If the house lacks adequate space, the *Adin Bungha* would be found in the kitchen as this is a very sacred place.

Our land tenure system enables the land to be kept for common use. We have chiefs who sit together and discuss, for instance, what to do with a family from outside of the community that wants to settle in the village. The chiefs will typically assent to allowing the family to settle and cultivate the land as tenants without taking ownership of it. So, in this way we are merciful to all people outside of the community as well as to those within.

Some other rituals we have are for the purpose of business. After a barter exchange we have a habit of giving a little extra and this is a gift of love.

We also believe in reincarnation, that is the rebirth of the soul. For that reason, after the death of a person we have a ritual of calling the deceased soul back to the family. Through this we believe that these souls will help us when there is a problem or calamity within the family. Part of the ritual is to pray to *Singh Bungha* that the family should not face any kind of future problem.

Our religion has great belief in the act of speech, with an oral tradition in which rituals have been handed down from generation to generation. We have now begun to make written records so that our religion is available to everyone, especially to the next generation, although nothing has yet been recorded as to what prayers are said by the priest.

We believe in one saying: “*Sen gay shushun, kazi gay durung.*” This means that walking is dancing and talking is singing. In these lines the whole concept of mercy (*mossi*) revolves. The words are the fruit of love, and actions are demonstrated as a mercy in my religion and community.

Thank you very much. Perhaps next time I will have all of the written manuscripts for my religion through which I could help you navigate it better.

“It’s the homeland of us all, not of one ethnic group or one religious confession”

His Highness Prince Breen Tahseen

Thank you very much, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. I’d like to speak about two parts of a story. The first is the religious part, the second is the situation of the Yazidi people.

Of course, we have the belief in Yazidi that says that if we are conveying mercy to anyone, it should be done regardless of their religion. But we have another very important point of belief which states that we should be merciful to others before being merciful to ourselves.

Now, love and peace constitute a message, one affirmed by all religions but we also have people who have corrupted and falsified this message, turning it into hatred, against the nature of God or Yahuda or Allah who is the source of purity, love, peace and mercy. He, the

HH Prince Breen Tahseen (centre) with Sadhvi Saraswati (left) and HH Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati (right)



His Highness Prince Breen Tahseen

His Highness Prince Breen Tahseen is the official representative of his father, Prince Tahseen Said, the leader of the Yazidi community in Iraq. He has spoken on behalf of Yazidis in several conferences throughout Europe and the Middle East, addressing human rights concerns, genocide, and the refugee crisis.

Previously, Breen worked in the Iraqi consulate in Manchester, UK, and was a diplomat at the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Breen received his BA from the University of Salahaddin, Erbil, in 2007, and graduated from the Diplomatic Institute, Baghdad, in 2009 and the Berlitz English language centre, Manchester, in 2012.



Compassionate, the Merciful, reaffirmed this in many of His religious texts.

Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer said that, after having lectured about peace and mercy for 20 years he posed the question: “How is the message of peace and mercy turned into practice?” We have 6,413 Yazidi women, who suffered because of their religion. Today we have 3,659 women and children who are still in the hands of so-called Islamic State.

For two years, I travelled to more than 30 countries meeting ministers, heads of state and religious personalities including those from our Muslim brothers and sisters. In 2003, after the fall of Saddam Hussein, we opened our houses to all Muslims and in 2014 we opened our houses to all of our Shia brothers and sisters. This, then, is the reality of how to implement mercy and I really wish that religious and political personalities would also implement mercy in the same way. There are scenarios within which, in the name of both religion and political parties, there is agreement but in the end things are not implemented.

In this very critical situation in Iraq, the entire country knew what Yazidi people had to suffer from ISIS. This is the 74th genocide to strike Yazidi people. Many were displaced and many are still suffering from this serial terrorism. We still need to know the destiny of thousands of people who were displaced and who are still missing for the reason that they are Yazidis. They were forced to leave the country which changed the situation on the ground, but many of them stayed in Iraq to fight ISIS. But we need the whole international community to stand together.

The Muftis and Eminences, may they be Christian or Muslim must ask the world to stand together and demand that the captured Yazidi women are freed. The international community needs to stand together because many of the personalities of these so-called Islamic State talks that are convened to free those captured by ISIS, report that ISIS believes in a righteous Islam. But from other Muslim religious leaders we hear that this is not the righteous Islam.

Now to the future of the region of Ninawa and the situation there. There are American, European Turkish and Kurdish scenarios implemented there and, of course, we are there on the ground too. We wish that you would help us to distribute mercy in order to make sure that this minority, our minority is allowed to stay in the villages because Iraq is our homeland. It’s the homeland of us all, not of one ethnic group or one religious confession.

“Mercy can make a contribution to the solution of global issues”

Rev. Kosho Niwano

Thank you very much Patrice, Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen and dear friends. Firstly, I would like to express my deep appreciation for giving me this opportunity. I would like to share with you both from a Buddhist perspective and from my personal experience.

The most collectivist teachings of Buddha are the intransience of all things and interrelatedness of all things. It means that every existence and phenomenon is never permanent because it is under a never-ending change. The Buddhist teaching of co-dependent origination is essentially a teaching of relativity. Nothing in the world is absolute, everything is conditioned, relative and interdependent. This perspective coincides with the recent encyclical letter of HH Pope Francis saying that all of us are linked by unseen bonds and, together, form a kind of universal family, a communion, which fills us with a secret, affectionate and humble respect. For example, a banana I ate at breakfast might have been harvested by poor children in a plantation in the Philippines. If that is the case, my existence is being sustained by those children. Furthermore, from the perspective of co-dependent origination, we can say that these children live within myself. The notion of co-dependent origination makes it clear that we could exist only with the existence of others, with the self and the Other being mutually inseparable.

The *Lotus Sutra* is an early scripture of the Mahayana tradition, and one in which I have faith and which I practice. It was developed and composed on the basis of these fundamental Buddhist teachings. The three essences of the *Lotus Sutra* are Buddha Nature (*Dharma*) Eternal Buddha and the Bodhisattva practice. The first, Buddha Nature is an ultimate perspective on human dignity, which means that all beings possess potential to become Buddha. The second, Eternal Buddha, shows that the Buddha became awakened aeons ago and that His



lifetime is forever existing and immortal. It presents the Buddha as the ultimately real, eternal and changing pure self who knows of no beginning or end. This is the symbolised existence of universal Dharma, an eternal good that can be set to be a humanisation of itself, a universal life force and source of existence of all beings. The third, Bodhisattva practice, is to save people from sufferings in real life. To follow the Bodhisattva way is a core pursuit for lay Buddhists. The Bodhisattva is an ideal stage of fulfilling the true self. At its core, the notion of fulfilling the true self through benefiting others or self-emptying could be compared to Kenosis in Christianity. Self-emptying encourages self-donation and expresses the very true meaning of love or compassion.

The *Lotus Sutra* affirms the supreme completeness of six perfections (*paramitas*) which lead us to become Bodhisattva and finally Buddha. These six *paramitas* are: giving or donation; observing the precepts; exercising patience; religions; mindful concentration; wisdom. Of the six *paramitas*, giving, donation is most related to the theme of this meeting, so I would like to share with

you some examples and illustrations. Donation is in general an offer of clothes or food or money to the poor but it does not mean just to support or to give. Rather it is a virtue of Bodhisattva's. To practice offering is valuable in itself to nurture our mind and hearts. As a concrete practice of donation, we, the Buddhist movement Rissho Kosei Kai, have been engaged in a meal campaign by which we skip meals several times a month and contribute money to different humanitarian activities.

We have also been carrying out a Dream Bag campaign for more than 20 years. Children in my country put small toys, stationery and messages into handmade bags and present them to children living in conflict situations around the world such as the ex-Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Mindanao and Lebanon. The essence of these campaigns or activities exist in their attempts to share sadness and suffering as well as joys with others. The harmonious practice of donation benefiting both oneself and others is a Bodhisattva practice.

This year I attended a conference held in Marrakesh, Morocco under the theme of full citizenship of minorities in Muslim majority countries and communities. The conference was convened in the spirit of the historical Medina Charter and Islamic primary source, which was developed in 622 AD before the division between Sunni and Shia Islam. The Charter assured equal citizenship for all minorities. At that conference, I emphasised that my role is to praise and prove the value of others based on Buddhist teachings that nothing in the world is absolute, everything is conditioned, relative and interdependent. This approach also lives in the teaching of “self and Other in oneness”.

This summer I had a chance to visit several Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon guided by Dr. Sammak who is a member of the KAICIID Board of Directors. I also met the Grand Mufti. When I went to Nigeria last month I visited a hospital for HIV Aids patients and a camp of internally displaced people from the Boko Haram affected area. In the face of these severe realities I felt powerless in myself and wondered what I could do. This experience made me realise again from the bottom of my heart the very importance of practicing mercy – mercy can make a contribution to the solution of global issues. However, from the opposite point of view, we're given a chance to nurture mercy in ourselves through challenging the current global issues. So, I try to continue my humble efforts.

Rev. Kosho Niwano

Rev. Kosho Niwano is president designate of Rissho Kosei-kai.

Granddaughter of founder, Nikkyo Niwano, and first daughter of President Nichiko Niwano, Rev. Niwano devotes herself to sharing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra with leaders both in Japan and overseas as well as with members who visit the Great Sacred Hall for worship services and special events from all parts of Japan.

Career summary

- ❖ President designate of Rissho Kosei-kai
- ❖ Participated at several interfaith congresses including Religions for Peace World Assembly, and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace
- ❖ Studied at Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin seminary
- ❖ Graduated from Gakushuin University, Tokyo.



Opposite page: Rev. Kosho Niwano (left) with Dr. Seyyed Ata'ollah Mohajerani

Chapter III

Witnessing Mercy
for Peace and Reconciliation



Introduction from Dr. Nayla Tabbara and Rev. Prof. Fadi Daou

The first day's presentations on mercy by religious leaders from diverse traditions showed that mercy is common between all these religions, yet that one concept is rich in the nuances of its explanation and of its practice. For all pointed out that mercy is not abstract.

In this chapter, through the witnesses of mercy for peace and reconciliation coming from seven countries, we will be able to see mercy manifested in reality, and sometimes in the harshest reality. It is in those harsh realities where mercy is most needed, that it is most powerful. Thus, each person presenting on the second day of this symposium is an exemplar of mercy.

These witnesses, from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, have had their actions and positions rooted in their own faith. They show us, though, that they are not only beacons of hope for people of their own religious backgrounds but an inspiration to any person who opens up to the religious and life experience of people of strong faith and strong will, whatever their background may be.

In this chapter, reflecting the discussions that followed the presentations, each participant will share what of these stories resonates in our lives, our experience, our quest and our mission. These thoughts will be gathered into learnings from each panel.



Dr. Nayla Tabbara

Dr. Nayla Tabbara is director of the Institute of Citizenship and Diversity Management at the Adyan Foundation. She holds a PhD in Science of Religions from École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris-Sorbonne and Saint Joseph University, Beirut and is a university professor in religious and Islamic studies.

She has published works in the fields of Islamic theology of other religions, education on interreligious and intercultural diversity, Qur'anic exegesis and Sufism.

She works on curricula development (formal and non-formal) for multifaith education and inclusive citizenship.

Among her publications are: *Divine Hospitality: Christian and Muslim Theologies of the Other*, (co-authored with Rev. Prof. Fadi Daou – Beirut, 2011); *What About the Other: A Question for Intercultural Education in the 21st Century* (Beirut, 2012); and *Islamic Studies in the Contemporary World: A Cross Cultural Challenge* (Beirut, 2016).



Rev. Prof. Fadi Daou

Rev. Prof. Fadi Daou is a Maronite priest and chairperson of the Adyan foundation, senior expert in geopolitics of religions, Christian-Muslim relations and Middle-Eastern issues, and director of the Lebanese public policy reform: National Strategy for Education on Citizenship and Coexistence.

He is professor of the theology of pluralism and interreligious dialogue at the Holy Spirit University, Lebanon. He is also a member of, or consultant to many academic and international organizations.

He is the author and editor of a number of books and articles, and co-author with Dr. Nayla Tabbara of *Divine Hospitality: Christian and Muslim Theologies of the Other* which is published in Arabic, English, French, and German.



Martin Temres

My brothers and sisters present today, may peace be upon you, and grace upon grace, and may the Lord God give you His mercy that endures forever and ever, Amen.

With utmost respect, I would like to thank all of you who invited me to attend this conference and meet with HH Pope Francis. I would also like to thank the Adyan Foundation that trusted us and were responsible for our invitation to this meeting.

Today is a special day for me because the Lord has granted me a second chance to live and to share with you a small part of what happened to me and my small family – my wife, three children, and my father who is 90 years old.

On 23 February 2015, my tragedy began after I received a phone call from my children informing me that the terrorist organization ISIS had entered our village. This was the last sentence that I heard from them. All I wanted to do was head off to where my children were so that I could be close to them, even though I didn't know if they were dead or alive. ISIS had entered my village that then became a ghost town; no one wandered its streets which before had witnessed a history of coexistence shared between its peoples of diverse religious and ideological affiliations.

When I surrendered myself to ISIS I realised that I had put myself before an ideology that suppresses the Other, that I am the one who believes that the Other is my other half who shares and enriches my life, that the values of humanity are the common denominator between us, and that our God is one but we worship Him in different ways. The first thing I proceeded to do was ask the member of ISIS about my children. His answer was cruel and shocking: "We have killed them all on the banks of the Khabur and you will soon die with them." All I could say was: "May God's will be done." After that, they moved me to the detention camp where I saw my children and the people of my village alive. I then realised that I had been assigned a task that I must fulfil.

When the proselytizer began to visit us to guide us and invite us to embrace Islam, I deemed this to be the only chance to open the door of dialogue between us, because I am convinced that dialogue is able to work



Martin Temres at one of the second day case study sessions

miracles in the most difficult situations and achieve positive results. And this is what actually happened. After a discussion session about divine mercy, I spontaneously asked the member of ISIS to put this value into practice by informing us of the status of our women, daughters, and sons, for they hadn't received any news about us for four months. The next day we were surprised when someone came in carrying letters from our women and girls saying: "Glory be to Allah who has counted what you have done for good and rewarded you." I began to say with confidence that our God is a god of mercy.

This member of ISIS, who considers the Gospel to

be corrupted, came to me one day asking me to write a letter to my wife to send a number of Holy Bibles as well as the Practical Interpretation Book. At this point I truly felt the power of the Word and of dialogue and that God can do all things.

However, despite all these sessions, mercy did not reign in the hearts of the members of ISIS, and on 23 September 2015 they imprisoned us in individual cells that smelled of nothing but death. When they asked us to wear the orange suits, we realised that our fate was death because we were accused of being Christians and infidels. At 8:00am on Eid Al-Adha, we were taken to the desert and three of us were executed before our eyes, because they wanted to put pressure on the Church to give in to their demands. This was the most difficult time we had gone through, but the only thing that consoled me was the fact that these three victims, after their martyrdom, had become a ransom for us and a bridge to our freedom. We must remember them forever as martyrs for Christ and they are:

Martyr Ashour Beidour Araham

Martyr Bessam Mishal Issa

Martyr Dr. Abdul Maseeh Azriya Anouya.

In conclusion, the main thing I want to say is that, after my release, I was filled with a desire for revenge and to take up arms and fight these people. But I returned to my core beliefs and kept myself from becoming the person I wanted to become because doing so would have made me equal to those that kidnapped me; there would have been no difference between us. I now realise that they are people who have lost their way and are truly in need of our prayers for divine mercy to return to them, their thoughts, and their actions. I am resolved to do all I can and take every opportunity to build bridges of communication and dialogue between all the customs and religions that surround us until we find in this dialogue a common language that all peoples and nations can share. After all, human beings are the model and image of God on Earth.

In your view towards the Other, it is wise to always bear in mind that he is your brother in humanity and to accept him despite differences in faith and doctrine. We must know that we are all blessed with gifts from God and that we must use these gifts so that we can truly live in His model and His image.

Martin Temres

Martin Temres is the former aid team coordinator for the Syria Trust for Development.

He attended the Private United School, then obtained a preparatory certificate from Buhturi School and worked as a carpenter while continuing education at both private and public schools.

With the aim of combining local development and humanitarian work to find a language for interreligious dialogue, Martin worked with the Red Crescent in projects to achieve self-sufficiency for the poorest and neediest areas and to distribute food essentials.

He worked for the Syria Trust for Development from 2011 to the beginning of 2015 when he was taken prisoner by Da'esh.

He has been married to Caroline Hazcour since 1991 and has three children.



Caroline Hazcour

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, loving, peaceful, merciful, forever and ever, Amen.

I would first like to thank everyone who invited me to be here with you today and to share a small part of the 365-day experience that I lived through which I will summarise as follows.

On the morning of 23 February 2015, the divine test began when all of my family members were taken captive. It was tragic for me and I was initially consumed with fear and panic. Thoughts started swimming around in my head about their fate. I then realised that this heavy burden was also a supreme directive for me to show faith, hope and love, not only as the qualities necessary for my own endurance, but also those from which others could take strength and inspiration. Thus, I went back to work and did not allow my tribulation to affect my reactions or behaviour. In fact, it forced me to remain close to Muslims and prevent any sectarian divide from forming between us. I considered it a true test in accepting the Other and interacting with him in love, in a way in which I can cling to the human values that bring us together. Through the experience, I felt the love of God and the love of people towards me; they caused me to grow in strength and resolve. When I was asked about my circumstances, I would answer with a smile: “Today I present a dissertation in faith and perseverance. I must be a diligent student in order to pass this test.”

Then, a member of ISIS contacted me and began a dialogue about religious affairs, describing me as an infidel and idol worshipper, and urging that I must embrace Islam to gain everlasting life in paradise. I responded by saying that we are all brothers and sisters in the human race, and that this fact should be the basis of the dialogue between us. I said: “I respect your faith and you should respect my faith. We both worship the one God and I request that you be conscious of the Other’s religion so that you can communicate with her.”

On the day that I asked him about his family, he informed me that he was married and he had three children. They had just had a baby, but the baby was sick. He wanted me to speak with the doctors in our area in order



to understand why the baby was sick and how to deal with it. After that I informed him of what the doctors said about his child’s situation. At this point I remember very well what he said to me: “You are already a good and virtuous person and if you embrace Islam, you would be an even better person because you will have gained everlasting life in paradise.” I answered: “You see me that way because I interact with you based on my religious convictions, and I see in your heart much room for goodness and humanity, and I ask that you do not destroy that kindness. Do you know that I will not pray for my family, because I have complete faith that the Lord is watching over and protecting them. But I will pray for you all, that God may increase the mercy in your hearts. You are a father and you know very well my feelings, and despite you being a member of ISIS and the inhumanity that you display, you will always be a human in whose heart God has sown seeds of mercy. I want you to consider those who are kidnapped as your brothers, sisters, and daughters. They are in your custody, you are accountable to God, so protect them from all harm, and put yourself in their shoes and operate with them on that basis.”

When I found out about the three young men from our area who were executed, and when I saw my husband Martin wear the orange suit, it was a big shock. I wasn’t able to think and I felt like I was swimming in a never-ending cycle of despair, hopelessness, weakness,

and defeat. I began to pray and entreat the Lord, asking for mercy for the martyrs, sustained patience for the mothers, protection for my husband and children and all of those kidnapped. I also asked God to put mercy in the hearts of those who give the command to kill.

The big surprise came when I received a letter from Martin asking for five copies of the Holy Bible – the New Testament – as well as the Practical Interpretation Book. It was at that point that I realised that it must have been that dialogue that left a positive effect, even if it was a while later. Again, I asked the member of ISIS about his son’s situation, who had become worse and was bed-ridden in the hospital. I sent him some Saint Charbel holy oil and asked him to rub it on his son and pray for his recovery. He then asked me about what prayer he must say when he puts on the oil. I said: God knows what’s in our hearts, and all you need to do is pray to God however you want, but with the conviction that God will answer your prayers by healing your son.

Amongst the letters that Martin sent to those who had been released, one was titled *The Joy of Christmas and Christmas Time*. He asked me to prepare for Christmas as if we were going to gather as a family, and put up the tree and the manger with the nativity scene, so that Christ will be our pillar of hope yesterday, today, and forever, and to have confidence in His mercy that will bring us together again soon, because He is a loving God and the Saviour of all humankind.

I am very lucky that God has chosen me to walk with Him on the road to Calvary and to see the Resurrection and new life through carrying dialogue, perseverance, and acceptance of the Other.

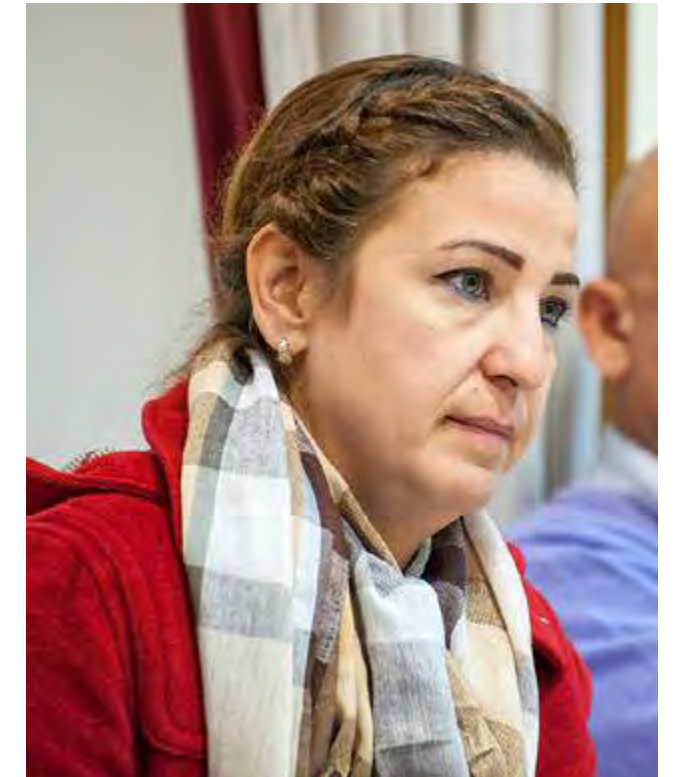
In conclusion, I wouldn’t describe the members of ISIS as doves of peace, but people who bear a culture of intimidation, murder, and expiation. But there will always remain a small space for humanity, mercy, and open dialogue through which we can remove the ashes from the embers. This is what I achieved with love, faith, and accepting the Other which, at the end of the day, yielded fruit as a grain of wheat that landed on the good soil and yielded fruit with the return of all of those who were kidnapped, one full year after the kidnapping.

I would like to note that I intentionally left out the name of the member of ISIS with whom I communicated, not in fear of him but in preservation of God’s mercy that has spread in his heart to accept the Other and help all of the other kidnapped people.

Caroline Hazcour

Caroline Hazcour lives in the Al-Hasakah Governorate of the Syrian Arab Republic and teaches project management at the faculty of economics at Al-Furat University. After volunteering for Caritas in 2004, she became a director of the Al-Hasakah Caritas Centre in 2007. She has also worked for the Syria Trust for Development since 2011 as coordinator of the Al-Hasakah team.

Caroline married Martin Temres in 1991 and has three children.



Opposite page: Caroline Hazcour with Martin Temres (left) at the Aula Magna of the Pontifical Gregorian University during a plenary session



*From left to right: Alexa von Künsberg,
HE Luis Fernando de Segovia,
Prof. Michael Driessen*

Dr. Hamad Al-Majid

José “Chencho” Alas

On 4 November 2016, at the symposium on Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation in Rome, I faced this powerful question: “What has been your personal experience of living up to the highest challenges of mercy from your religious perspective?”

I come from El Salvador, the smallest country of the American continent and one of the most socially divided in terms of wealth. Eight per cent of the elite own fertile agricultural land, while the peasants subsist on and cultivate arid land. This situation has been the basis of two wars, the first in 1932 called The Massacre (*Matanza*), and the second from 1980 to 1992. In the first, 30,000 were killed and in the second, 80,000.

In 1959, I was ordained a Catholic priest in Rome after finishing my theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University. I went back to my country and after pastoring the very rich, my archbishop sent me to Suchitoto, a rural parish in the north of the country, in 1968. There I discovered the peasants’ way of life and decided to devote myself to their well-being. The peasants lacked the means to acquire life’s necessities, such as land, food, education, sanitary conditions, and housing. In Quito, Ecuador, I learned about land reform that, if it is integral, meets all those needs.

I started organizing the peasants to struggle for land, teaching them their human rights based on Genesis 1. God created man and woman, blessed them and gave them the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the seed-bearing plants everywhere on the earth. God said: “That will be your food.” And in chapter 2:15, God commanded humans to cultivate and care for the garden, the earth. According to God’s plan, the land is for all people, not for a few.

The very rich, together with the army, reacted by repressing the peasants and accusing me of being communist. My answer was that the stomach is not communist; the children are starving because there is no food on their parents’ table. There was no mercy. The army started killing peasants as well as everyone who supported their struggle, students, teachers, workers, 16 catholic priests and my friend the Archbishop of San Salvador, blessed Oscar Romero, among others.

In January 1970, the National Assembly convoked a land reform congress with the country’s various

José “Chencho” Alas (centre) with, from left to right: Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, Mirna Abi Saab, Dima Tarabeine, and group facilitator Prof. Abu-Nimer



José “Chencho” Alas

Chencho is president and executive director of the Foundation for Sustainability and Peacemaking in Mesoamerica. He is also a member of the Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Network.

Following his study of theology and philosophy in El Salvador, Canada, Rome, and Belgium, Chencho began working as a priest in 1961. While working in the Mejicanos slum of San Salvador, he founded the Cursillos de Cristiandad movement. In 1968, he founded the first Christian-based communities, rooted in liberation theology and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

During the 1980s, Chencho continued working on behalf of the poor of Central America through a variety of institutions including the Inter-American Development Bank and Capp Street Foundation. After the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, Chencho returned to El Salvador to help found the Institute of Technology, Environment, and Self-Sufficiency.

He has been given many awards, including the Peace Abbey Courage of Conscience Award in 1990, and was voted one of Catholic Digest’s Twelve Catholic Heroes for America and the World in 2007.



institutions including the Catholic Church. The Archbishop of San Salvador named me to represent him. Due to the ideological convictions that I shared during the congress, I was kidnapped and tortured on 8 January. I was saved due to massive demonstrations in the rural areas to protect my life and in San Salvador on the part of university students, the clergy and members of the National Assembly.

When I was studying theology to become a priest at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, one of the classes that was vital to me was liturgy. With Teilhard de Chardin and Romano Guardini I learned the beauty of the mystery of the resurrection. Our life on earth is only a passage. What we do here at the present time has the power to give birth to the other life or the resurrection. The kidnappers were torturing me but I was not anxious; I was very sure that after my death I would resurrect in Jesus. I was telling God that that was beautiful because I would not die in my bed, but in donating my life for the peasants. Well, God didn’t want me in heaven. God wanted me to continue my pilgrimage. I prayed for my kidnappers and especially for those in the government who gave the order to arrest me.

This experience taught me something profound and important: the meaning of death and resurrection in illuminating the spirit to understand the importance of mercy and forgiveness in any circumstance of life.

At the symposium, listening carefully to the reflections, full of genuine spirit by participants of many different religions, I developed a simple image to describe mercy and reconciliation. As I’ve loved trees since childhood, it struck me that mercy is the sap that through the roots nourishes the tree’s trunk, its branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit. In religion, mercy is that sap, that living material and spiritual element that provides unity in our diversity, just as in the tree we see that the roots are not the trunk or the branches or the fruit but, nevertheless all the elements enjoy the same life. We can be Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Catholic, and so on, but if we share mercy we live the unity that the human family needs in order to exist in peace.

Reconciliation goes one step further. It is the language of the tree’s varied sounds when it is moved by the spirit of the air. It is like a beautiful symphony that inspires us to live in love and forget about differences, to have a common language that unites us. The role of religions is to be the divine sap.

Venerable Sein Di Ta

My experiences and learning in Myanmar have freed me of my superior ego. I now work in conflict intervention and the Asia Light Monastery that I founded offers a safe place to all. My foundation, the Asia Light Foundation, is currently in the process of building an interreligious dialogue college and I am also working with youth to achieve coexistence between religions including Muslims,

Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Bahá'ís.

I attended a social transformation course in 2008, carrying with me feelings of superiority. I belong to the Myanmar majorities, meaning that I am Buddhist, male, and I speak the most common language. This course and others that followed, compelled me to address my prejudices and, as a result, I now have complete respect for all races, religions, men and women.



Venerable Sein Di Ta

Venerable Sein Di Ta is Abbot of the Asia Light Monastery and founder of the Asia Light Foundation, consisting of orphanages for boys and girls, a free-of-charge clinic, a school for monastic education, and a pre-school facility. He is one of the leading monks negotiating with Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar and his foundation works especially closely with Muslims.

Although Myanmar society sees monkhood as occupying a higher plane of existence than that of an otherwise ordinary human being, Venerable Sein Di Ta is pioneering the idea of a monk as an ordinary person. His self-liberation is being realised in working for the people and, with this new perspective, he is helping society to find peace the way he found it, by making changes in his life to help bring change to others. Today he is a monk for people of every religion, every ethnic group and every rank.



Having opened a new chapter in my life, I engage with any religion, age, background or gender. Despite the challenges in my community, I have opened the doors of my monastery as a home to anyone, offering space for interreligious dialogue with the support of local and international organizations that have showed love and acceptance to the work of the monastery.

I travel to places of conflict in Myanmar to practice conflict intervention. What I see in people is that their suffering and pain is a shared commonality. When I go to those places of conflict, I keep in mind that I am there to serve, not to be superior and give help, but to serve. Through my training, I truly and deeply felt what Buddhism was about and this in turn gave me the courage to work in the field. Feeling suffering and pain led to a connection that reinforced my courage and devotion.

In 2013, I travelled to the middle of Myanmar into a Buddhist/Muslim conflict zone where I encountered an 80-year-old woman who had been living in the town for her entire life. We engaged in conversation very often and, when one day she came and embraced me, it was almost a feeling of shock. This was a moment when I felt a connection beyond religion; I was experiencing the living kindness as in the teachings of Buddha. The old lady became my mentor and teacher, showing me that, regardless of religion, you can practice kindness and compassion.

I now witness how the practice of mercy is an equalising act, to genuinely serve others places one in a different dimension; through kindness, the pain and suffering caused by prejudice dissolves from the ego. If we genuinely practice true mercy, unconditionally and regardless of the reactions of others, then there is love and peace, not conflict.

I lead efforts to bring awareness to communities, engaging help for Muslims to whom injustices are done. In 2015 I realised that the majority of Burmese and Buddhists desire peace and reconciliation, but the issue is how to mobilise that group, particularly in the face of fear for the currently powerful radical groups.

Recognise the fear within yourself.

Pictured opposite: Ven. Sein Di Ta (right) with Bishop Kukah (left) and Dr. Ahmad Turkistani (centre)

Al Haj U Aye Lwin

Although I am not worthy to be called an exemplar, I will try to share my experience with you regarding my humble action in the peacebuilding process.

Myanmar is a multiracial and multireligious, plural society. We have been living together in peace and harmony for hundreds of years. I do not mean that we have had no disputes throughout our history. Yes, diverse groups quarrel about anything under the sun but the quarrels have never been branded as religious conflict.

No religions originate from our country but Theravada Buddhism is professed by the majority of the people living in Myanmar. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism are also constitutionally recognised as religions followed by people of Myanmar. Our forefathers, Myanmar Muslims serve the country loyally, faithfully and dutifully. However, since the military coup in 1962, religion has been manipulated as a political tool.

The hijacking of religion became more prominent after the 1988 democratic uprising when people from different religions joined to transform the country from a dictatorship to a democratic state.

Since the early 1970s, I have been involved in interfaith movements. The attempt by the dictators to portray Islam as a threat to Burmese Buddhist nationalism was initiated when I was just 12 years old. My father, a practicing Muslim, served as a vice-principle of the health assistance training school. He was very broad-minded and had friends from different faiths. After the coup, he would discuss the political situation with his friends. Since then I came to learn that the military despots were intoxicating the pious, simple but closed-minded Buddhist majority with Islamophobia.

I matriculated from the Methodist English high school which was run as a missionary school until it was nationalised by the military junta. I therefore had the chance to study the Bible and Christianity and was obliged to attend Church regularly. During my university days, I attended talks and sermons delivered by Buddhist lay preachers and monks. I was also fascinated by Hindu *Dharma* when a like-minded friend of mine from another religion started to study *Vedanta*. I visited the Rama Krishna mission, especially during the birthday ceremonies of Sri

Ramakrishna where the multifaith leaders spoke about their religions in a special programme known as the “Parliament of Religions”. I became a member of the Theosophical Society after my graduation from the university. The golden opportunities to learn about the different dimensions of Buddhism came when I learnt about the Zen Buddhist study group. I became an ardent observer and was occasionally asked by the group members to present Islamic views during discussions on different aspects of Buddhist doctrine. The study group invited speakers from all of the differing sects of Buddhism, ranging from moderates to Orthodox scholars.

I am recounting these experiences to show how much the negative impact of Islamophobia has been instilled in the mind of the Buddhists in Myanmar by the junta. Since then, I have been trying to counter the narrative propagated by those with a hidden agenda. I do not consider myself a defender of Islamic faith, although I try my best to refute misconceptions regarding Islam. My main effort has been to revive the spirit of tolerance that has existed in Myanmar throughout its history. By “tolerance” I do not mean anything high-handed or arrogant. Generally speaking, you tolerate something that is undesirable and wrong, with the presumption that you refuse to stoop to deal with somebody inferior. According to my understanding, though, tolerance means trying to understand a view different to yours, building a bridge to narrow the gap of difference, attempting to acknowledge that a coin has a side other than the one we see.

Celebrating diversity is nothing new to Myanmar. The sinister plan of the hijackers of religion has been to posit diversity as a threat rather than a strength. Dignity of difference has been welcome in our country for hundreds of years, until those with vested interests intoxicated the minds of the pious Buddhist majority. I have been deeply involved in detoxifying these poisoned minds with the assistance of my brothers and sisters from Myanmar interfaith movements. Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT) launched its interfaith wing, the Judson Research Centre, a decade ago. I have been a humble but regular participant in all of its activities since its inception. In fact, the core members of Religions for Peace Myanmar, an interfaith organization founded in 2012, met during the

programmes held at JRC. Eventually I served as a faculty member at MIT, teaching Islamic studies to the various courses, especially the master course in interfaith studies.

In 2012, at the instigation of evil-minded people, the so-called religious conflict between Muslims and Buddhists began in Rakhine State. Simple but closed-minded nationalist Buddhist were dragged into the conflict wittingly or unwittingly. They sincerely believed that their race and religion needed to be protected from the onslaught of Islamisation. The violence spilled over to the centre of Myanmar, where Muslims had been living harmoniously with their fellow Buddhist countrymen since the time of Myanmar kings. The conflicts spread to other parts of the country. Religions for Peace along with the other organizations acted rapidly to defuse the tension.

I would like to conclude by sharing my efforts to halt the violence, transform hate speeches into love speeches and strive for peaceful coexistence again in Rakhine. I was a panellist at a seminar on peace, tolerance and human dignity jointly organized by a prominent but highly controversial senior Myanmar monk and the International Interfaith Organization. While I was presenting my paper, I received reports that in some villages around Thandwe, a southern town in Rakhine State, Muslim houses were being burned down, shops looted and elderly men and women killed. I halted my presentation and told the senior monk who was presiding over the programme that here we were talking about peace, love, tolerance and human dignity but in Rakhine State people were being butchered by radical extremists. I told him that we should go there and do something to establish peace. The monk had influence over the then ruling party elite and he agreed immediately, while we were still on the stage, to visit the conflict area with me.

So, we went to Thandwe. The army provided a helicopter and we managed to get to the hardest hit villages where the monk and I spoke to both communities. The monk promised a donation for the construction of a medical clinic in the Muslim village and to renovate the primary school. We also spoke to both communities in Thandwe town. Our visit considerably cooled the disturbances and the area has gradually returned to normal, with reconciliation and peaceful coexistence between the two communities resumed up to now. This is just one example of my contribution to peacebuilding. Hopefully, I will be given the opportunity to share my other encounters with you at a later date.

Al Haj U Aye Lwin

Al Haj U Aye Lwin serves as the chief convener for the Islamic Centre of Myanmar and is a founding member of Religions for Peace, Myanmar. He has an enduring interest in Sufi traditions and serves as a Kalifa, or spiritual guide in the Qadariya Aarliya Sufi order. He has authored and translated dozens of books on Islam and comparative religion and presented papers at seminars nationally and internationally. He is deeply involved in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in his native Myanmar. An educator by profession, Al Haj U Aye Lwin is currently serving as counsellor and member of the board of management at the Diplomatic School in Yangon.





Sara Saad and Wissam Nahas

I would first like to start by thanking all of those who contributed to and organized this inspiring symposium, including KAI-CIID, and the Adyan Foundation for giving us the opportunity. We are very proud to be sharing with you our experience with the Adyan Interfaith Families Network. I am a Lebanese Muslim, who was born and raised in Abu Dhabi, UAE. I lived there for around 12 years with my family during the civil war in Lebanon. Throughout that time, my family raised me on the principle that all Muslims are one and that we should respect all religions. In 1992, we moved to Lebanon when I was 12 years old. Until then, my only friends were Muslims and we all had the notion that we were all the same. Not until I moved to Lebanon did I learn that Islam has sects where the differences are emphasised by some people.

When I attended a Lebanese school, I encountered people of different religions and sects and faced ideas that I never had to deal with before that time. It started when people would ask for my full name or my village. At first I thought that they wanted to get to know me better but then I realised it was because they wanted to know my religion and sect. My name is somewhat confusing, because the family name, Saad, in Lebanon includes people who are Christian and Muslim. However, at the time, I was wearing a head veil so they knew I was a Muslim but still did not know if I was a Sunni or a Shiite. So, then people would start to ask me where I came from or, in other words, about my village. This was all in an attempt to know my sect while all that time I thought that it was their way of socialising. In time, I realised why people asked me such questions and I started asking my parents about the differences and why people were always eager to know. My parents were against such differences and always emphasised that all Muslims are one and that we are expected to respect all religions.

Though my parents tried not to emphasise the differences and to help us feel the same as everyone else, I still felt it with people, how they reacted and how they were eager to know. I guess it was all related to the aftermath of the civil war which was still fresh in everyone's mind. Later, when I attended university, I felt the differences



Sara Saad (second left) and Wissam Nahas (right) with Dalia Al-Mokdad (left), Mirna Abi Saab (centre), and Adel Mobarak (second right)

even more. I attended the American University of Beirut which is known for its diversity and for welcoming all students regardless of their religion or any other difference. Though at the university my class was diverse and I had friends from various religions, the closest friends were always those of the same religion. So, I felt that, although we did not speak about such differences or come to admit them, we lived and acted those differences in the sense that classmates of the same religion would stay together, do activities together and celebrate their holidays together. But this is not how I wanted to live or how I wanted to raise my children. I felt that something was missing, that I needed to change.

Mercy, as we all concluded on the previous day, is found and called for by all religions. In the Muslim religion, it is one of the Holy names of God and even the most common one mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. But as one of the panellists said yesterday, the full practice of being merciful is achieved only through its practice among all religions and not just among members of our religion. In other words, one must be merciful with those of the other religion as much as you would with those of your own, and this was exactly what I felt was missing. I believe it was by a wish of God that I was introduced

to the Adyan Foundation. My husband and I joined the Adyan Interfaith Families Network over two years ago, which we believe is a great blessing in our lives. And now I will leave the floor for my husband, Wissam Nahas, to expand more about our involvement with this network.
Sara Saad

I am Wissam Nahas and I currently work as an e-learning manager. I was born into a Muslim family and raised in a community that was all Muslim. All of my childhood friends at school were Muslims, as were all of my university friends. So, I only had the chance to practice my mercifulness with my Muslim family, friends and community. But when I became engaged with the Adyan Foundation, I came to practice the full value of mercy. Adyan truly gave us the chance to practice mercy with friends from different religions and sects. The Adyan Interfaith Families Network meets on a monthly basis and in each meeting we discuss a different value, share our experiences and debate common challenges. We even practice mercy with each other by celebrating our religious holidays together. We have had several Christmas gatherings where we cook our own food and meet together with our children. Moreover, during the holy month of Ramadan we also prepare the food together and break our fasting in a church. We even pray together on several occasions. Our children love the meetings and are always thrilled to attend.

The Interfaith Families Network provides an experience very different from my childhood. It is an opportunity to practice the mercy of Islam with non-Muslims. Sometimes out of fidelity to our own religion we are afraid to meet those of the other religion, but this is exactly why we need Adyan; in order to build virtual bridges between each other. Some people believe that if you meet and befriend those of other religions, their ideas might affect you or shake your own religion, but in fact Adyan's aim is totally the opposite. It is mainly to get couples of various religions and confessions closer together. Nowadays in Lebanon and after the civil war, we are still living geographically apart although within the same borders. The Adyan Family Network continues to help couples living geographically apart and those of different religions to unite, meet, gather, celebrate, understand each other's religions and respect our differences.

Wissam Nahas

Sara Saad and Wissam Nahas

Wissam Nahas is a board member of Adyan Foundation and an Interfaith Families Network coordinator. Sara Saad is a member of the Interfaith Families Network. They have been together since 2003, having come from diverse intellectual backgrounds and worked in different fields. Their common interest and passion is their work with the Adyan Foundation. Sara has a masters degree in public health and works in the medical field, while Wissam has a computer science background and works as an e-learning manager.

Wanting to overcome the sectarian divide in post-war Lebanese society, Sara and Wissam work diligently in helping the Adyan Interfaith Family Network to thrive. The network gathers couples and their children from different religious backgrounds to strengthen relations, build solidarity across communities and reflect on shared values for family life. Through sharing experience and debating common challenges, their ultimate goal is to communicate the values of Adyan through each family and into those families' communities, contributing to building a more peaceful and cohesive society.



Dr. Abdulaziz Saud Aldhowaihy

In the name of God, the Compassionate and Merciful. Throughout my experience of teaching the sciences of the Sharia, I find that the focus of Islam in the Qur'an and other prophetic texts is mercy. In a sense, it seems to be the entire message of Islam.

The texts of the Sharia call us to deliver goods and benefits to others, an exchange that creates mercy, so that it prevails throughout our lives.

Therefore, the Messenger for Humanity and God's mercy, blessings of God and His Peace be Upon Him, definitively assigned the exchange of mercy to pervade every aspect of life. As narrated by Abu Hurayrah: "He who does not show mercy (to others) will not be shown mercy (by Allah)."¹

However, the Sharia foretells human needs in terms of creating mercy, for it does not come except through misery. Thus says a prophetic tradition narrated by Abu Hurayrah that: "Mercy is taken away only from him who is in misery."²

In terms of Qur'anic consideration, we find confirmed therein the general mercy of the Lord and its comprehensiveness, including both the human and the non-human. We find that the Lord, Be He Exalted, said: "And My

mercy embraceth all things."³ The Qur'an also mentions: "Our Lord! Thou comprehendest all things in mercy and knowledge."⁴

Likewise, we find in the prophetic traditions a call urging us to mercy, calling us to exercise it. In this sense, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "When Allah completed the creation, He wrote in His book which is with Him on His throne, 'My mercy overpowers my anger'.⁵"

He (PBUH) said: "Allah divided mercy into one hundred parts. He kept ninety nine parts with Him and sent down one part to the earth, and because of that, it is one single part. His creations are merciful to each other, so that even the mare lifts its hoofs away from its foal, lest it should trample on it."⁶

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Allah created a hundred mercies, and He placed one mercy among His creation, they show mercy to one another by it, and there are ninety-nine mercies with Allah."⁷ He, (PBUH) also said: "When Allah created the creation He ordained for

Dr. Abdulaziz Saud Aldhowaihy (left) with Sheikh Dr. Abdalrahman Allowaihiq (centre) and Bishop Elias Toumeb (right)



Himself, this saying was with Him: 'Verily, My mercy predominates My wrath'.⁸

Among the demonstrations of mercy in Islam are the following:

God calls for the care of orphans and for good works performed for their benefit through showing acts of charity to help nurture them toward an ideal socialisation, and guiding them through the trials of their orphan years. "And (remember) when we made a covenant with the children of Israel, (saying): "Worship none save Allah (only), and be good to parents and to the kindred and to orphans and the needy, and speak kindly to mankind; and establish worship and pay the poor-due." Then, after that, ye slid back, save a few of you, being averse." So did God the exalted, command compassion, mercy and grace toward orphans and urged guardianship for them and protection of their wealth.

Among the demonstrations of mercy in Sharia concerning the care and supervision of animals, we have a prophetic tradition full of sayings concerning mercy and friendship toward animals, and forbidding harm done to them. The Prophet (PBUH) forbade striking an animal in the face or branding it there.⁷

A story from Sahih Muslim tells that "a woman was punished because she had kept a cat tied until it died, and (as a punishment of this offence) she was thrown into hell. She had not provided it with food or drink, and had not freed it so that it could eat the insects of the earth". In contrast, the Prophet (PBUH) tells of someone entering heaven because of compassion showed to an animal. "A prostitute saw a dog moving around a well on a hot day and hanging out its tongue because of thirst. She drew water for it in her shoe and she was pardoned (for this act of hers)."⁸

In closing, I would like to thank everyone present at this meeting. I invite us to praise God the lord of the universe and ask the blessings of God upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family and companions. Peace Be unto Them.

1 Sahih Al-Bukhari

2 Sunnah of Al-Trimidhi

3 Al-'Iraf: 156

4 Ghafir: 7

5 Al-Tirmidhi, which is said to be a valid tradition

6 Surah Baqarah: 83

7 Sahih Muslim

8 Muslim

Dr. Abdulaziz Saud Aldhowaihy

Dr. Aldhowaihy is associate professor, Department of Islamic Culture, College of Education, King Saud University. He holds a PhD and a masters degree from Imam Mohammed Bin Saud University on comparative Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic politics. In his position as professor at the King Saud University, he is key in the supervision and discussion of doctoral and master arbitration and scientific research. He has held executive positions at the King Saud University, and presides at other universities, participating in scientific conferences inside and outside of Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Al-Dhowaihy has authored many scientific papers on the Islamic judicial and political systems and has been invited to join a great number of academic committees. He has also been invited to speak at conferences such as the Third International Conference on Religion and Spirituality in Society held in the US in 2013 where he spoke on morals in Islam. He has also spoken on the determinates of prestigious values in Islam as a member of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations at its annual members' news and commentary event, Civiltas, in 2015.



Sheikh Dr. Abdalrahman Allowaihiq

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praises be to Allah, the Lord of heaven and earth, and peace and blessings be upon the messenger of Allah. I am truly happy to participate in this meeting which I hope contributes to the spread of peace and mercy throughout the world.

In the first verses of the Qur'an that are recited every time someone prostrates themselves in prayer, the words: "The Compassionate, the Merciful," are repeated four times in the first two lines. These are honourable names of God the Almighty that are indicative of mercy. The prophet Solomon (PBUH) mentioned the two names in the introduction of his letter to Balqis, the Queen of Sheba.

Every day, Muslims repeat these two names of God (may He be exalted) 68 times, which grant His servants a general mercy that covers everything and every place, because He (may He be exalted) said: "My mercy encompasses all things."¹

He is the Merciful who has mercy in His paradise for those who have faith in Him. Paradise is mercy from Allah (may He be exalted) and because the Lord is characterised by mercy, it opens the door to the servants of God for hope; although His mercy is not isolated from His other attributes and, indeed He (glory be to Him) punishes those who deserve punishment.

Mercy is mentioned in the Qur'an 268 times, many of them in the context of speaking to sinners whom He desires to return to Him under His forgiveness and mercy.

Allah (glory be to Him) also has mercy on all of creation. Surah 30 states that the servants of God must look to the traces of the mercy of Allah who vitalises the earth with rain as mercy to His servants. And in Surah 35 there is a passage that declares that the keys to mercy are in the hand of Allah and no one can block His mercy, for He sends His mercy by virtue of His wisdom. In Surah 30, Allah Almighty mentions that He created for the sons of Adam partners of their kind, and He connected male and female with the bond of affection and mercy.

Qur'anic discourse makes the connection between mercy and the prophets. Mercy corresponds to

prophethood, for all of the messengers were sent forth with mercy.

In Surah 6, Allah (may He be exalted) gave to His prophet Moses (PBUH) the Torah by virtue of His favour, grace, and mercy towards Moses and towards those of His people who believe. And in Surah 28, the Qur'an describes the Torah as a model and mercy towards Moses and those who follow him, just as it also describes the Torah as counsel and mercy.

Allah created His prophet Isa (Jesus) (PBUH) and sent Him as a sign of mercy, as in Surah 19 where Allah regarded Him from the high estate. He sent Him as a mercy to humanity when praise, glory, and great benefits happened to the people. He (PBUH) is a mercy to humanity because He came to guide them towards righteousness.

In Surah 57, the followers of Isa and His disciples have made Allah in their hearts pity and mercy. Thus, they learned the gospel and followed Isa who is characterised by mercy.

Also, Muhammad (PBUH) was mercy, for the Exalted One said: "And we have not sent you, except as a mercy to the worlds."² He was characterised by mercy and a companion of good behaviour. He connects the mercy of Allah with creation to show their mercifulness towards one another, for Muhammad (PBUH) said: "Allah will not be merciful to those who are not merciful to mankind"³ and this applies to all humankind.

From his mercy came Sharia law to prevent any discrimination against those who have a covenant with the Muslims and the Dhimmis. Muhammad (PBUH) said: "If anyone wrongs a person protected by a covenant, violates his rights, burdens him with more work than he is able to do, or takes something from him without his consent, then I will be his advocate on the Day of Resurrection."⁴

Muhammad (PBUH) emphasised the threat against those who dishonoured the prohibition against their bloody killing, saying: "Whoever kills a person protected by a treaty will never smell the fragrance of Paradise. Verily, its fragrance can be found a distance of forty years of travel."⁵

Even the greeting that he brought: "Peace be unto

you and the mercy of Allah and His blessings," connects religions with peace and mercy.

Perhaps his letter to the Christians of Najran testifies of such, in which he said: "None of His bishops will change, nor monks, nor priests, nor any of their rights or powers, nor their closeness to Allah and His Prophet forever; what they made right and recommended for them is not afflicted with injustice and wrong-doers."⁶

To those of you in attendance, mercy in my religion is connected to:

- ❖ Allah the Almighty the Gracious and Merciful
- ❖ The messengers (PBUH) who brought mercy
- ❖ The worshippers, for prayer begins with mention of mercy
- ❖ Behaviour that begins with greetings of peace and mercy.

Just as in any society, people draw closer towards principles and more separate according to those who abide by the principles, thus for some of them, their stance has been seen a deviation from mercy.

By virtue of interest and specialisation, my experience in dealing with terrorists and extremists is vast. In writing and in discussion, I have aimed to find a way to bring them to the way of Muhammad (PBUH) who has preserved rights for everyone who has them.

My country is one of those that has been most affected by the extremism of terrorists who view religion partially. They did not understand if they read what the Exalted One said, that: "Allah does not forbid you from befriending those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. Allah only forbids you from befriending those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion, and forbids that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers."⁷

I hope that my contributions in dealing with terrorism contribute to the spread of peace and mercy throughout the earth, such that groups and their countries are not subjected to plunder and violence. One of the greatest challenges to understanding mercy in Islam is the adoption of a partial view, similar to looking through a peephole, or relying on sunglasses to read a text. Thus, understanding becomes misunderstanding.

We have been plagued by terrorists and those who misunderstand our religion, both of whom have a partial view. Media studies and writings have been affected by individuals and groups that are members of Islam. Islam has been charged with the actions of those individuals or groups.

It is alleged that Islam has no mercy. Part of the effort in my studies, writings, and lectures is to discuss those who have an erroneous understanding of Islam, and to deal with this misunderstanding, and to show that it's not right to judge a religion itself by the actions of individuals that profess that religion. These discussions



have led many to understand the truth of Islam: “And He brought mercy when they hear the texts of the true religion.”

Yes, my religion has its balanced nature, for the value system of Islam is what determines the standards of peace and mercy, to place it in its proper framework. Just as we call for mercy, we know that the owner of favour has His favour, for our Prophet (PBUH) said to his companions, referring to Negus the king of Abyssinia: “If you were to go to Abyssinia it would be better for you to behave yourself, for the king will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country.”⁸ Negus accommodated the Prophet’s companions and had mercy on them such that he did not attack them.

In our history, the coexistence of Muslims and Christians is built on the values of Islam that embody justice, mercy, and the granting of rights. On the other hand: I carried out a behavioural experiment with a person who was negligent with his mother’s rights. I told him: the Qur’an has commanded us, if one or both of the parents have reached old age, to be kind to them and have mercy on them: “And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, ‘my Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small.’”⁹ The Merciful One has commanded you to have mercy on your elderly mother just as she had mercy on you when you were young, for it is mercy encompassed in mercies.

What distinguishes Islam regarding mercy is the extension of mercy such that it is connected to Allah, the prophets, thought, and behaviour, to this world and the one to come, to the child and the elderly, such that the invitation to Islam itself is mercy. Connecting these great values to other Islamic values forms a comprehensive value system.

1 Al-A’raf: 156

2 Al-Anbya: 107

3 As narrated by Albukhary: No. 7376 and Muslim: No. 2319

4 As narrated by Abu Dawood: No. 3052 and authenticated by Al-Albani

5 As narrated by Albukhary: No. 5997 and Muslim: No. 2318

6 Ibn Kathir: The opening and the closing: 5/55

7 Al-Mumtahanah: 8-9

8 Ibn Hisham: Al-Seerah Al-Nabawiyah: 280/1

9 Al-Isra:24

Sheikh Dr. Abdalrahman Allowaihiq

Sheikh Dr. Abdalrahman Allowaihiq is associate professor at the Faculty of Sharia at the University of Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University. He has a PhD in Islamic culture.

An Imam and preacher in the Al-Rajhi mosque in Riyadh, Dr. Allowaihiq is the author of several books and research, and has held positions in supervisory bodies and on boards of directors. He has received several prizes in science and is currently advisor to the King Abdulaziz National Dialogue Centre and a member of the Scientific Committee of the National Dialogue Centre.

He has participated in many important conferences and meetings highlighting the importance of dialogue, such as the International Islamic Conference for Dialogue, Makkah, and the International Conference for Dialogue, Madrid, both in 2008.

Dr. Allowaihiq has made the issue of extremism in Islam and its causal effects on the lives of Muslims a focal point of his literary research, publications and public addresses. This is an issue of deep interest and concern to him, particularly regarding the approach to counteracting extremism.



Hind Kabawat

Iwould like to tell you about my experience and mission in Syria.

I am an Orthodox Christian Syrian and I grew up in Syria. I have always been active in the field of interreligious dialogue and have worked closely with the Mufti of Syria before the revolution.

When the revolution started, I began mediating between the government and the opposition in an attempt to stop the bloodshed and the killing of civilians. I called for more freedom of speech and tried to build a bridge between the government and civil society, hoping until the very last minute that the fighting would not escalate. One evening, I contacted Asmaa Al Asaad, the wife of the president, directly and begged that the regime should strive to contain the matter.

After that, I decided that the most humane act would be to start working on the ground, visiting the camps of the displaced and homeless, and working directly with the people, especially women and youth. I organized workshops and activities to support those in need, and worked to alleviate and resolve conflicts arising between Christians and Muslims.

During my work in the camps, I would wear the veil, the *hijab*, to cover my Christian identity as this gesture was needed in order to be able to approach the people. Throughout my efforts, I conducted many dialogues with the militias. Unfortunately, the more I became engaged and the more I worked for the people, the more difficulties I faced. I am now on the wanted list of both Da’esh and the regime, but this fact does not keep me from my mission and I am, right now – December 2016 – working at the Syrian border to embrace and help the citizens of Aleppo who are fleeing for their lives.

Hind Kabawat

Hind Kabawat is director of interfaith peacebuilding at the George Mason University Centre for World Religions, Diplomacy & Conflict Resolution (CRDC), and a member of the Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Network.

Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution she has piloted numerous training programmes related to conflict resolution, women’s empowerment, and negotiation skills in Aleppo, Idlib, Atmeh IDP camp, Istanbul, and Amman.

Hind is the founder and director of the Syrian Centre for Dialogue, Peace, and Reconciliation in Toronto and has served as a consultant and advisory board member at the World Bank. She is also head of the interfaith committee for Tastakel, an organization that includes women from diverse groups who are working for peace and reconciliation through women’s empowerment and education.

She is presently a member of the High Negotiations Committee at the Syrian peace talks in Geneva, as well as founder of the Women’s Consulting Group for that committee. Hind is also on the board of the Syrian Economic Forum. She was given the Peacemakers in Action Award from the Tanenbaum Center of Interreligious Understanding in 2007.





*Rev. Dr. Michel Jalakh and Hind Kabawat
at one of the plenary sessions*

His Excellency Dr. Ibrahim Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Zaid

Mercy in Islam is a bountiful gift. Islam and mercy are two sides of the same coin. Islam came to implement social security and world peace with mercy and compassion at all times and places. Its message is definitely a requirement of psychological stability. We believe that Allah, May He be Exalted, has surrounded His religion with peace and mercy in all its aspects, for He Himself is peace (*As-salaam*). “He is Allah, other than whom there is no God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, peace...”

He has made “peace” the greeting of Adam’s creation, the peace and mercy for living beings as well as for the dead. He has also made “peace” the greeting of Muslims to His Messenger, and to all believers, within the closing part of each and every Muslim daily prayer. Allah, may He be exalted, has made “peace” His word to His servants on the day of judgment: “(on that day) the word from the merciful Lord is peace”. Also, peace is the believers’ greeting to their Lord in the afterlife. “Their salutation on the day when they shall meet Him will be: peace.” In this life, a Muslim greets others by saying: “Peace and Allah’s mercy be upon you” (*Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatu Allah*).

Whoever has been informed about the Holy Qur’an and the teachings of the Prophet of Muslims, Peace be

Upon Him, has found an incredible munificence and ease, the like of which is not found anywhere else.

There is a saying: “An enemy’s testimony (praising the opponent) is truthful.” As the American poet, Ronald Raquel, said after he declared his conversion to Islam: “I was really awed by the munificence that Islam treats its opponents with. A munificence in peace, as well as a munificence in war. The humanitarian aspect of Islam is clear in all its commandments and teachings. If Muslims and non-Muslims understood the life-giving message of Islam, safety would have been spread all over the world.”

Islam calls non-Muslims to abstain from judging Islam before understanding its principles and ethics. It calls non-Muslims to not judge Islam by the acts of Muslims, for there is a huge difference between Islam and the acts of many Muslims.

When we read the words of the Almighty: “We sent you not, but as a mercy for all creatures,” we realise the capacity of this esteemed Prophet (PBUH), and how he instilled mercy into his character, behaviour, manners and nature. When it was said to him: “Call upon the idolaters,” he (PBUH) said, “I do not seek to curse them, but rather I seek mercy.” Similarly, his mercy included his family, community and companions and he (PBUH) sought the best for the people, his family and community. With regard to Aisha, of whom God approves, she said: “God’s Prophet (PBUH) never beat a servant and never ever laid hands upon anyone.” At the same time the Qur’an states: “It was by the mercy of Allah that you were lenient with them (O Muhammad), for if you had been stern and fierce of heart they would have dispersed from round about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult with them upon the conduct of affairs. And when you are resolved, then put your trust in Allah. Lo! Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).” He taught mercy to the worshippers, to alleviate their burdens and shackles. On this matter the Prophet (PBUH) states: “Those who are merciful will be shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Be merciful to those on earth and the

One in the heavens will have mercy on you.” The mercy of God’s Prophet, (PBUH) was known to be greater than his anger – in war he fought with courage but also possessed great compassion. Whilst the idolaters were serious in their campaign to kill him, he was more merciful than them, calling on the Almighty who said: “O God, forgive my people, for they know not what they do.”

The creation of mercy in Islam represents the outstanding example of the moral aspect of the religion, whereas conventional creeds examine only human interactions on the whole, and tend towards self interest, evaluating human beings in terms of the worldly benefit they bring to others. Thus these creeds smooth away the moral aspect and degrade human values within their systems. They take advantage of humanity in the flesh and reject it in the bone. They value strength and crush weakness. They value wealth and ignore poverty. They value youth and reject the old. Islam, on the other hand, stands tall and great in its values. This is the decree of the Lord of Humankind, who does not consider life on earth as a purely material market, but rather as a life created for the dignity of humanity as it ought to be. Thus the prime aspect of religion is morality, which is of intrinsic and special importance as revealed in the various Qur’anic verses and Hadiths and the career of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his successors.

In this context we understand the creation of mercy in Islam to be within the system of the religion’s values which reveals the extent of its interest in all categories of society regardless of their material profitability to society. Such profitability has no value in terms of morality. Human beings deserve mercy as long as they are human. However unfortunate a human being is in terms of strength and wealth, he is the first in line for mercy. Religion does not hire out morality as do the conventional creeds which give humankind as much as they take from it – or more, when the expected return is considered a just reward and an essential aspect of the consideration of human beings. Islam’s view of mercy is distinct from that of other terrestrial creeds which consider a merciful person to be more cultured than other people and assume that such merciful people should benefit materially or otherwise morally from exercising mercy on such people. By contrast, in Islam such a person expects something from his Lord in the hereafter and not from such people in this world. Therefore it does not matter if the person is thanked or not, since the aim is to please the Lord God Almighty.

His Excellency Dr. Ibrahim Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Zaid

Dr. Al-Zaid is special adviser to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Daawah and Guidance, and a member of the KAICIID Advisory Forum. He obtained a PhD in Arabic studies from Riyadh, where he was appointed as dean of the Arabic College at the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University.

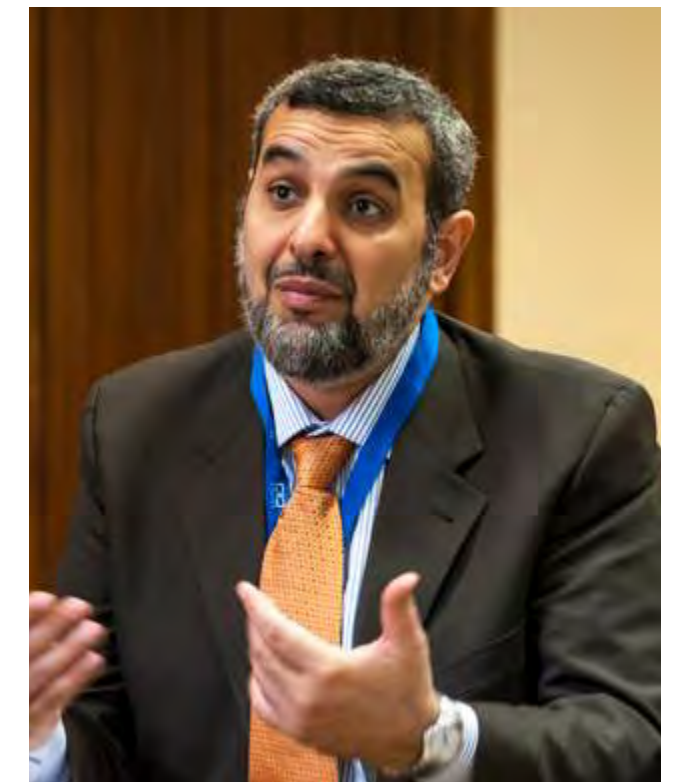
In 2001, he was appointed vice director of the Muslim World League’s Islamic Cultural Centre in Belgium, where he supported its mission to serve the Belgian Muslim community through open communication and thought exchange within a safe environment.

In 2002, Dr. Al-Zaid moved to Madrid, Spain, where he became director at the Islamic Cultural Centre. In 2012, he was appointed as Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Saudi Arabia.

Currently, in addition to his position in the Saudi government, he holds several positions, including professor of scientific authority and chair of the dialogue of civilizations at Paris-Sorbonne University, and UNESCO chair for intercultural and interreligious dialogue at the Imam University in Riyadh.



HE Dr. Al-Zaid (left) with Dr. Hussein Bin Ghazi Alsamerei at one of the plenary sessions



His Excellency Judge Sheikh Makarem

Excellencies, noble brothers and sisters. I am pleased to participate in this international conference with you all at the gracious invitation of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Vatican, and in cooperation with the Adyan Foundation, in order to exchange ideas and thoughts about the concept of mercy. Also to strengthen cooperation between the followers of various religions, and confirm the importance of the message of mercy for the purpose of coexistence and peace.

God the Almighty said in His holy book: “Your Lord hath prescribed for Himself mercy.” The noble Qur’an establishes the relationship of Muslims with others when it clearly states: “There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from the wrong.” Thus there is no obligation or coercion. Instead, there is conviction and choice. This was summarised in Al-Hadith Al-Sharif: “The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the people are safe.” In all of this, there is an invitation to rely on mercy as the basis for our interactions. This creates a source of mutual dialogue and we must thereby acknowledge that the goal of dialogue is primarily the

realisation of peace. In this sense we see a clear indication for the role of religion and divine prophecy in realising a peaceful community, which is what completes divine blessings for humanity. Humanity is, in fact, entrusted with peace, whereby peace is the means by which we realise our own humanity. We can do this only through a religious life of loyalty and sincerity, being respectful to the fraternity of humanity, living with love and mercy. Thus, if love is the message of Christianity: “Love one another,” then mercy is the message of Islam: “We sent thee not save as a mercy for the peoples.”

The message of the monotheistic Muslims called the Druze, who I am representing at this meeting, is one of awareness, wisdom and mercy, which is exactly what drives Islam to peace. The main pillar of this message is logic. This pillar rests upon the justice that forms the centre of all human virtues and from which all of its values are derived. Foremost among these values is mercy. For this reason, they seek, before anything else, to live this mercy and to promote this message throughout their nations. The Islamic monotheistic approach to which we belong is one of knowledge based upon honesty and fraternity. This is the point of common connection between every religion and all beliefs, including the teachings of wisdom. Thus, we believers in one God are creatures of dialogue and peace. Moreover, we believe that dialogue, in all of its shapes and forms, begins with a discussion of self and purification. This is the magic key that opens communities and people to the chambers of peace.

We are truly convinced that mercy is the road to peace and to pursuing Allah, and that true peacefulness is inner peacefulness with the self first and peacefulness with others who are different. Mercy is a way of interacting between the self and others. It leads to forgiveness, which is a human characteristic that conquers all other characteristics. It is the opposite of dispute and withdrawal. If “dispute leads to destruction,” then an exchange of forgiveness leads to a merciful life.

The important thing is how we understand mercy and how we proceed with the works of mercy. Do we understand mercy as an inclusive value or is it exclusive only towards those of us who belong to the same religion or

beliefs? Is mercy limited to a few courtesies and offering a little kindness and charity or does it include all of us cooperating in the name of humanity? In this we recall: “There are two kinds of people, either a brother to you in religion or your equal by creation.” Considering that the requirements for life and its problems are complicated and numerous, they must be addressed with strength in order to resolve them and to instil hope in our souls. While duty requires us to give prime importance to those closest to us, it is still incumbent upon us to go beyond the place where we find ourselves in order to reach out and connect with those around us in our societies and in our nations, thereafter to a wider environment and to the world. Then we will share ourselves with those who are different from us. Thus we will encompass a complete overview so that we can face common issues. This responsibility is religious, social and moral to such an extent that it is a responsibility of governments and states.

What our world is seeing in the Middle East is terrifying and tragic. Mercy has breathed its last breath before the crush of oppression, conquest and savagery. Religion has almost become the path to slaughter, violence and hatred instead of fulfilling its true mission of being the way to a humanity leading onto greatness. We are on the verge of knocking down our civilization and religions ourselves. There is some hope and goodwill from believers who confront violence with good words, radicalisation with love, and injustice with mercy. And there are calls for peace through the emotionally charged positions that are initiated by such gatherings to influence for the common good as we have at this meeting here. But unless we all ask God to have mercy on us and on you, to support people of spiritual breadth, to reach solutions and wisdom and to return to the essence of religion and what it commands of mercy and empathy – unless this comes to pass we will fall.

We collectively hope that this meeting – one that has brought together practitioners, opinion leaders and esteemed friends – will send a clear and strong message about our agreements on common values that all of our religions and creeds share. We wish to maintain this agreement regarding the idea of mercy, which His Holiness the Pope announced as the subject of a jubilee year and which is also a duty imposed on us by our faiths and our common values – a message to spread reconciliation, compassion, mercy and above all, peace. He is God, the essence of peace, The Most Merciful.

His Excellency Judge Sheikh Makarem

HE Judge Gandhi Makarem is the personal representative of His Eminence Sheikh Naim Hassan Sheikh Aql from the Druze community in Lebanon. He has a masters degree in law.



Pictured opposite: HE Judge Gandhi Makarem (left) in conversation with Rev. Dr. Michel Jalakh



Nang Loung Hom

Professor Patrice Brodeur's theory on nature, nurture and culture is much related to the Buddha's teaching on the four conditions of welfare and foundations of social unity and social cohesion. In Buddhism, we believe that there is both good and bad nature in human beings. It is important to associate with people of integrity and have the right upbringing to nurture and strengthen the goodness in us. This is where the first two foundations of social unity are focused, on generous acts that include the giving of material and financial support as well as giving time, service and solidarity, and communicating with empathy and compassion to heal, accept and rehumanise. Additionally, it is important to create a culture of peace and a structure of justice in society to enable and sustain the conditions for spiritual development. The last two foundations of social unity focus on creating a culture and structure of justice, spiritual energy and social equality.

Reflecting on my own case, I grew up in a prolonged and intense civil war within an isolated nation with deep-rooted structural injustice and a strong culture of hatred, fear, retaliation and historical prejudice. Our school textbooks are about partial truth and a one-sided history of war, celebrating winners, normalised retaliation and violence. The school teachers, education system and society were promoting hatred, victim mentality, strong division, dehumanisation, and a systematic dissemination of fear and prejudice.

However, I was fortunate to be brought up by powerful exemplars of mercy who planted the seeds of empathy, responsibility and compassion. My grandmothers and parents made sure that we understood their difficult lives' journey and adversity with a focus on understanding the complex causes and conditions, the untold true stories of reconciliation and beautiful acts of forgiveness and, most importantly, the nature of interdependency and interconnection.

My grandmother's night time stories at the fire pit during years of no electricity, became an invaluable school where I learnt much of viewing issues with different perspectives, understanding causes and conditions, the practice and power of unconditional compassion

and forgiveness for healing and reconciliation. I witnessed their unconditional mercy and commitment in saving many patients, regardless of their background, and saving many wounded soldiers from any of the combatant armies, while setting up a system for public health. Their most heart-breaking but life-affirming acts were their rehabilitation and empowerment works for the most vulnerable girls and women who survived rape during the war.

Nevertheless, the fear, anger and hatred toward soldiers was deeply rooted in me from the loss of my childhood friend and witness of many atrocities in war and injustice. Sometimes I fantasied about my own retaliation against the soldiers. When I was a teenager, our family moved from the war region to the capital city of Burma. There was a university student protest around the area in which we lived. The protest was violently constrained by the police and army and we lived under a strict curfew. Many protest leaders and suspected people were beaten and detained. Seeing such brutality and having soldiers deployed around our houses twenty-four hours a day for many days was very fearful.

We have a tradition of offering fresh fruits and cool water in a clay pot to pedestrians in front of our house. Washing the clay pot every morning, filling it with cool drinking water and watching the passers-by thankful for the water in such hot weather was always a joyful experience. But during the curfew period, I was ready to retaliate violently to whoever wore an army uniform. On one occasion, with deep anger and hatred, I crushed some medicine into a powder and dissolved it in the water with which I filled the clay pot kept at the front of our house. I prepared myself to enjoy watching a soldier drinking the poison.

At that moment, I saw a soldier walk toward the water pot to fill his water bottle. I was ready to watch him drink and suffer pain and death. While he was filling his water bottle, he looked up to the first floor balcony where I was watching him. What I expected was the look of a wicked and vicious soldier who was ready to attack me. Unexpectedly, I saw a boy soldier who looked pale, frightened and remorseful. With surprise and deep sadness, I started to realise that he was as

young as me, facing much more suffering due to the war. He should have been at high school like me, he should have been living with his parents, siblings, grandmothers and friends. But he was in a soldiers' uniform, holding a gun, born to kill, taught to kill, living away from his parents and siblings. All of a sudden, without another thought, I ran down to the front of the house, threw away the water pot and emptied his water bottle.

The fear of punishment for poisoning the water was far less than the fear of hurting another innocent human who is simply the product of the same system of injustice and deep structural violence in our nation. I became certain that, even if the soldiers who raped my friends and the girls I met at camp, and killed many innocent civilians whom I saw for decades at my mother's hospital, including my ancestor, drunk my poison water, I would react the same. Because they too, were suffering the same injustice and structural violence that we were all facing as a nation, including the regime and ruling elites who created and strengthened this injustice. From that moment, I came to believe that retaliation is not the correct response, or way of winning. Mercy and compassion to feel pain and fear in ourselves and in others, and deeply understand the interdependence of the whole system is the only true liberation because we beat the fear, anger and hatred in us with mercy and compassion. We empower and strengthen the goodness inside us with a wholesome attitude and actions.

Fifteen years after this incident, I began to learn peacebuilding and to work in Buddhist approaches to conflict transformation. I could then connect with some child soldier or veteran for rehabilitation and reconnection with society. I learnt to see the goodness in them, as well as more deeply understand their adversities through many conversations with them and their families. From there, I learnt that we need a higher level of mercy and compassion in order to liberate all of us, including the Other, to remove us from the circle of violence so that we can prevent multiplying the victims and perpetrators, and disempowering each other through hatred, fear and anger.

Nang Loung Hom

Nang Loung Hom is board director and secretary of the Walpola Rahula Institute and trainer in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. She is also a KAICIID International Fellow 2016.

She grew up witnessing the atrocities of civil war, oppression and violations of human rights. The experiences taught her to detest violence, to strive to understand the root causes of conflicts and to work towards social healing, dialogue and conflict transformation.

Hom coordinates content development for Mindfulness for Children and Mindfulness for Family programmes, as well as supporting Myanmar Buddhist monks and nuns from Sri Lanka in a personal capacity by providing training workshops and dialogue programmes on conflict and peace issues.

Hom also co-facilitates Buddhist approaches on conflict transformation programmes at Buddhist institutions in Myanmar. She conducts several peace education programmes for children, family and teachers in Myanmar. She works as programme trainer for peace education at the Institute for Political and Civic Education, Yangon, Myanmar.



Prof. Jayantha Seneviratne

The brutal war of three decades in Sri Lanka ended on 18th May 2009. The untold suffering of people who lived particularly in the north and the east of the country during those 30 tumultuous years are immeasurable. The fear and tension caused over that time is still preventing them from regaining normality.

The language spoken there is primarily Tamil and the people belong to Tamil and Muslim ethnicities, now being called “minority communities”. The war that began as a result of the struggle for securing equal rights enjoyed by the majority Sinhala community left behind a legacy of many tragedies. What I am about to share with you is a story of a brutal post-war experience faced by the Tamil people in the North.

During the war, many perished, some survived, many experienced the misfortune of witnessing their loved ones being killed in front of their eyes, some were arrested, others went missing. Yet they believed that some relief would come their way at the end of the war.

2011 was the year in which people affected by the war were attempting to rise from the ashes and rebuild their lives. The war destroyed their homes. It was the year in which they began to live in makeshift houses built in temporarily given lands. Many, mainly women were barely recuperating from the trauma caused by war. They knew that their men and children ran the risk of being taken by the armed forces at any moment despite the fact that the war had ended. They had to live in the surroundings of the army and naval camps and were constantly being checked by armed soldiers. The control of the armed forces was supreme with a conspicuous absence of civil administration.

Fear and mistrust within the communities living in those localities was spreading unchecked. There had been unbridled sexual violence against women. Hardly anyone dared to bring rape cases to court. Even when they were brought in, they were ignored or hidden. Criminals roamed with impunity and the women became powerless within this culture. Most of these women were eking out a living of daily labour to look after their children. Most of them were without their husbands who were either killed or went missing during the war.

Within this culture of impunity, another series of events was unfolding, bringing fear to the people in the north. It was the phenomenon called “grease devil” (*Krees Pootham* in Tamil; *Thel Yaka* in Sinhalese) – men who smeared grease onto their bodies and wore black masks, forcibly entering villagers’ houses in the night and scaring or harassing the women. When the women screamed out of fear, they ran away, but without being caught because of the grease on their bodies. In this melee, people began to find that the “grease devils” were running towards the army and navy camps in the vicinity. Many of these incidents began to emerge in the city of Jaffna in the north of Sri Lanka. The “grease devil” stories were soon spreading widely while women lived in mortal fear. The media were stifled by the armed forces in order to prevent people from knowing too much about this mysterious phenomenon. The armed forces claimed that these fearful acts were by unknown elements in society to bring disrepute to the armed forces. Although people tried to lodge complaints, they were not taken seriously by the police.

One of the incidents took place in the village of Nawanthurai, Jaffna district, on 22nd August 2011, where people ran after five “grease devils” who went to hide in the local army camp. The people began to protest in front of the camp but the army started shooting into the air, scaring people to run away. The following day, 23rd August 2011, the army raided the village and arrested 150 people and assaulted them. They were handed over to the police and 18 were admitted to hospital as they were in a bad condition. 95 were remanded in police custody.

We learnt about this incident by noon on 23 August. An organization working on human rights issues relayed this incident through social media and telephone messages. We at the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (CPBR) thought that we needed to act swiftly but cautiously. As a result, we initiated a dialogue with the human rights organization concerned.

We moved promptly to discuss the matter with several Buddhist monks who had been working in the CPBR interfaith dialogue initiative. The interfaith team decided to visit Nawanthurai to meet the affected people and share the empathy of the Buddhist community in the south. Eleven Buddhist monks were brave enough to join the

team and make the journey to the north. All logistical support was provided by CPBR.

On 25th August, they arrived in Nawanthurai. Several Christian and Catholic Fathers joined the team of Buddhist monks. Although some Hindu Kurukkals and Muslim Moulavis were keen to join, they were scared to do so. The team met with villagers of Nawanthurai and listened to their stories. It was a palpably agonising moment of making direct contact with the pain of those people. The villagers were taken by surprise as Buddhist monks had never been seen in the village. It was as if the flood gates had opened as they unloaded their sufferings to the interfaith team. Although armed forces arrived in the village as they heard about the presence of the interfaith team, the Buddhist monks intervened to make free and safe space for people to share their stories without constraint. As the soldiers were Buddhists themselves, they made no attempt to obstruct proceedings.

The team then visited the Nawanthurai hospital. They spoke to each of the 16 people warded there and listened to their stories. The religious leaders blessed them for a speedy recovery. The people who were hospitalised told the religious leaders that they retained no feelings of hatred or vengeance against those who harmed them.

A team of Buddhist monks arriving in Jaffna was a historical event. Once the interfaith team left the hospital, soldiers worshipped them and shared their perspective of the incidents in Jaffna. The team listened to them patiently. The soldiers claimed that the villages had retaliated against them. The Buddhist monks shared with them Buddhist teachings to highlight that engagement in a cycle of violence and hatred would be fruitless.

The monks pondered on the philosophy of causality. They said that each effect had a cause and that people needed to understand the interconnection between these. They said that the Buddhist tradition was about finding ways to douse fire and not to pour oil on it. They said that the soldiers might have felt and empathised with the pain and sufferings of the villagers. The interfaith team said that they visited Jaffna to share their compassion with all and not to be judgemental and take sides.

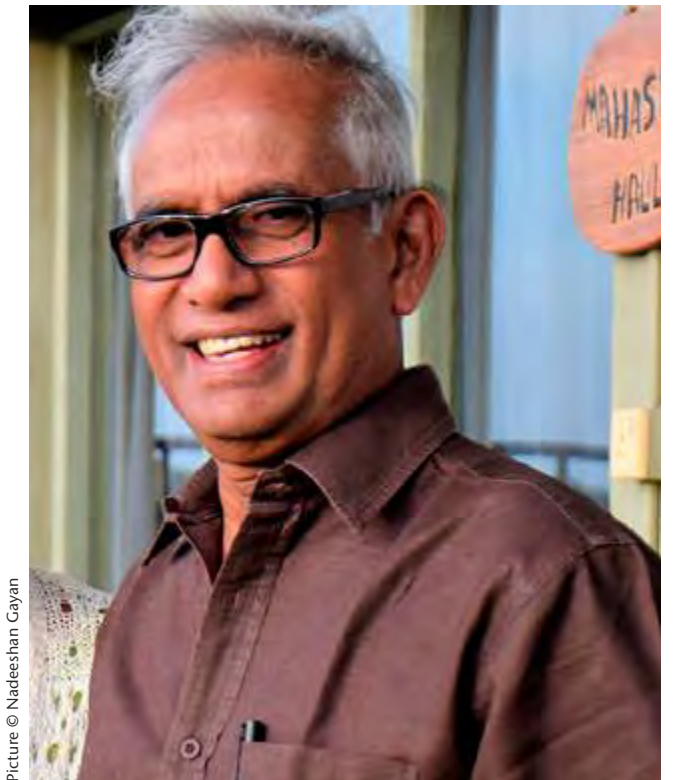
This was just one of the incidents that took place in post-war Sri Lanka but many similar instances have occurred since 2009. So much should have been done within the realm of transitional justice at the end of war. So little was done and there is so much to do, yet we need to move with resolve to heal the past and build the future.

Prof. Jayantha Seneviratne

Prof. Jayantha Seneviratne, PhD, is a civil society activist and peacebuilder. He is co-founder and chairperson of the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (CPBR).

Prof. Seneviratne has been an associate professor at the Department of Philosophy at University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, for which he designed the Peace and Conflict Resolution Degree Programme in 2004, the first such degree in Sri Lanka. He contributed to develop modules and approaches to bring the religious perspective to reconciliation, peacebuilding and justice. He co-designed, led and facilitated interfaith initiatives implemented by the CPBR from 2008 to the present day.

He has been professionally engaged in many national and international organizations and is a designer of study materials and modules on peacebuilding, conflict transformation, national integration, reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. He serves many governmental reconciliation efforts in the capacity of advisor and resource person. The CPBR was given the Niwano Peace Award in 2016.



Picture © Nadeeshan Gayan



Dishani Jayaweera

The 14th Dalai Lama said that “love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive”. Peace and reconciliation – are they political tasks or spiritual exercises? Or a combination of both?

This is a question stirring deeply inside me in the midst of a 15-year journey as a peacebuilder in an Asian context. In my search for peace, I came to an understanding that it is a combination of political, intellectual, emotional and spiritual disciplines and actions.

Then I wanted to understand that which emerges as the strongest base or the fertile foundation for promoting peace and reconciliation. Over an exploratory period of four years through experiential learning and understanding, I now realise that spiritual growth is the strongest base on which a true peacebuilder can stand. If there is no spiritual base, there is no peacebuilder. Of course, one could take a different path and become a political activist or analyst, freedom fighter or NGO worker.

What does it mean to be spiritual? Does it mean that if we are religious, we are spiritual? Not necessarily. It is far beyond being religious. It is partly our capacity to see others through our own eyes but, more importantly, to see ourselves through the eyes of others. This seeing, in the true sense of that word, connects with one’s own natural being and with that of the Other.

In peacebuilding we call it empathy. In the Abrahamic tradition, we call it mercy. In Buddhism we call it compassion or loving kindness.

As a person nurtured in the Buddhist tradition but living as a secular humanist, I have begun to see the connection between empathy, mercy, compassion, peace and reconciliation.

As a secular humanist, I see the world as a web of connections. The beauty of this web is that it is invisible and that it makes us whole, an entirety, a totality. The rule of interdependence is the core of our life, the core of our universe but, sadly, the world has been wedged between two ends: dependence and independence.

We are on an impossible mission without the support of the core of our being. Forgetting, or going against this very nature of interconnectedness, human beings have created a world which is about to explode.

But in our traditional wisdom, this interconnectedness exists and thrives beautifully and it has been the foundation of community living. For instance, there is a concept called *ubuntu* in the cultural traditions of Africa.

“I am what I am because of who we all are.” The Native American Indian, Chief Seattle says: “This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.”

What did we do to the web? This is the question hitting hard right between the eyes of human civilisation. Since we have been disconnected from our traditional wisdom we want to re-invent the wheel of life. As a result, we are increasingly becoming divided and disconnected from everything human.

In that pattern of thinking, we have forgotten the beautiful diversity within and around us. We have forgotten the very essence of fundamental values connecting us to this web of relationships – empathy, compassion and mercy. In the second half of the processes of our civilisation, religions spoke about these concepts. When religions became instruments of state power and key institutions of the system, they ended up promoting the words but not necessarily their meanings. Then we were trapped into an illusion giving us a false sense of intellectual knowledge of noble religious concepts. We thought that knowing the concepts was equal to practicing them.

The more we were getting connected to the head, our brains, the greater was the illusion in believing that thinking, knowing, understanding, realising, internalising and practicing are the same. We failed miserably to see the gap in between. The world abused these terms more than ever making us believe that preaching is more important than practicing.

It is in this confusing, cloudy and fragmented circumstances that we, at the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (CPBR), wanted to initiate this new discourse among religious leaders from the four traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity to understand the gap between preaching and practice.

It has been a journey in which we have tenaciously attempted to identify the role that religious leaders can play in initiating a process of self-transformation, community transformation and social transformation, to bring back and establish the real meaning of mercy, compassion and empathy.

Instead of restricting ourselves to being critics of the system, we explored how we could take the responsibility of capitalising on all noble teachings in the four religions to bring love, compassion, mercy and empathy to the world. It has been an exploration to develop the inner power of individuals for them to become empathetic, merciful and compassionate. How did we do that? We brought the religious leaders of four religious traditions together as intra-faith and interfaith groups to transform individuals, communities and situations to bring about social justice, equity and equality.

This has been a Herculean task. We were doing it within a context of a country which has gone through three decades of civil war. It has been a hard journey uphill to convince people that religion and religious leaders could play a critical role in reconciling and healing individuals, communities and the society at large.

Our interfaith groups adopted a religious approach to initiate discourse on reconciliation. The four wings of reconciliation were identified as compassion (in the Sri Lankan context, compassion is the word with which people could easily understand in preference to the word mercy), forgiveness, truth and justice.

Collectively, these interfaith groups conducted more than 1,000 awareness-raising intra-faith and interfaith dialogues using a specially designed poster.

The core content of the poster captures the essence of change, we were aspiring to. It clearly demonstrated the spheres of change: the spiritual and the political as represented by compassion, forgiveness, truth and justice respectively. However, these core areas do not exist exclusively. They are inextricably interwoven with each other with the thread of ultimate humanness. When there is a compassionate or merciful heart, there will be empathy and forgiveness. When there is empathy and forgiveness, then we will have the strength to seek truth and justice. Even though we have set up systems and

structures to address the needs of truth and justice, it is hard to make it a reality if the society is not ready to internalise and embrace it.

The embracing and internalisation will occur only when we succeed in touching that place in the heart of the people and society in which compassion/mercy is truly inculcated. In a country where people killed each other, spurred by differences relating to ethnicities, religions, languages and other differences, how can we move forward if we are not ready to forgive and empathise?

How do we inculcate these values in people through a discourse on religion? How do we create synergy through a discourse on compassion, forgiveness, truth and justice? There was a need for creating this safe



Dishani Jayaweera holding a conflict transformation training session for a clergy group

Picture © Jayanth Dhamawardana

space for interconnectedness, for religious and community leaders to come together. Initially, we worked with nearly 300 religious and community leaders to start the discourse through intra-faith and interfaith dialogue, sensitisation activities, advocacy and lobbying. It has been a process of bringing all of the religious traditions together, to be on the same page.

It is within this process that an organic model called the Interfaith Dialogue Centre was born, operating healing hubs and catalysts for reconciliation. This was created as a safe space for diverse faith groups to come together to recognise, accept, respect, nourish and celebrate diversity. We succeeded in creating a neutral and safe physical space for different faith groups to come together. It turned out to be a process that can contribute to develop trust and confidence, giving birth to collective decision-making mechanisms.

This process has been further expanded with the inclusion of female religious leaders as a separate entity in order to explore and establish their role in healing and reconciliation. This female religious leader group is expected to be maturing into the Interfaith Female Religious Leaders' Council by 2017.

Through interfaith dialogue centres and other mechanisms, the CPBR has been focusing on the above-mentioned central themes, supporting religious and community leaders to be connected with those qualities and values and to nourish them. We have accompanied them on the journey of cultivating loving kindness and compassion. In religious traditions, wisdom is associated with compassion. Compassion is the core and the starting point.

Compassion helps people find their inner peace, community peace, societal peace and global peace. Compassion is the starting point of healing and the opening path for revealing and achieving truth and justice. Compassion and empathy are not only for human beings but for the entire universe. How can we become compassionate towards all animate and inanimate beings on an equal footing? That is where all systems including ecological systems can come together to bring harmony, peace and reconciliation.

Compassion is a mind that is motivated by cherishing other living beings and wishes to release them from their suffering.

Dishani Jayaweera

Dishani Jayaweera is programme designer and strategist at the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (CPBR). She is also a member of the Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Network.

A former attorney from Colombo, Sri Lanka, Dishani left the legal profession in answer to a deeper calling – to work closely with people to create a peaceful and just society. She co-founded the CPBR in 2003 with her life partner, Prof. Jayantha Seneviratne. The organization operates on the belief that the peacebuilding process begins with individuals. CPBR targets young people, women, community and religious leaders, understanding them to be powerful shapers of social attitudes and behaviours in Sri Lanka, and key to bridging religious and ethnic divisions.

CPBR encourages personal transformations that will, in turn, empower communities to seek structural and political change. The organization's interfaith work promotes understanding among Sinhalese Buddhists, Tamil Hindus, Muslims, and Tamil and Sinhalese Christians through dialogue, training in conflict analysis and transformation, and supporting clergy as they mobilise communities to experience the joy of interdependence and coexistence.



Picture © Jayanth Dhrmawardana

Jamila Afghani

Islam is the predominant religion in Afghanistan, with Sunni Muslims forming approximately ninety percent of the population. Though it is a societal force for cohesion, Islam has played a complex role in the history of Afghanistan, some often described it as a cause of backwardness due to a low literacy rate and poor education among the Muslims. Afghanistan has relied heavily on the Muslim clerics (*ulema*), who fill ritual, juridical, medical and educational roles at village and tribal levels, while providing leadership to counter threats to the community's religious beliefs and practices.

Over the past four decades of Russian invasion and civil wars, the fate of women has varied with the political climate and has often been harsh and cruel. Rounds of political violence, a lack of law and order, religious extremism, and decades of warfare have exacerbated historic and traditional subordination to men. In short, the centrality of women's issues fluctuates with changing political tides; too often, they are not given priority.

I, like many other Afghan women, demonstrated courageously to challenge the violation of our rights. The success of my strategy was based on the patient teaching of Islamic ideals with the help of the most influential community members such as community and religious leaders. In late 1990s, I was a young woman growing up from the time of the Russian invasion and completing my education as the Taliban government was being torn down. I started my social work at the camps in Peshawar in early 2000 where I was living a refugee life with my family. Then I moved to Kabul in 2002 with the establishment of the new government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai. After two decades of war, the environment was hostile and every new change was considered as anti-Islamic and as propaganda.

I contracted polio, which permanently affected my left leg, but this disability proved to be a lucky turning point in my life as I was the only girl child of a family who was allowed to attend school. I continued my education until I got two masters degrees, one in International Relations and the other in Sharia Law. My view of Islam was influenced by modern scholars and professors from institutions such as Al-Azhar University

in Egypt. Discovering fundamental differences among modern and classical scholars, I determined to learn Arabic so that I could read the Qur'an and the Hadith unaided. These were transformative days for me and I finally became convinced that the Qur'an's true conception of women contrasted drastically with what I had been told all of my life. I found verses on women working, and stories of the Prophet Muhammad praising women for doing social work during his time.

With the light (*Noor*) of Qur'anic guidance, I established the Noor Educational and Capacity Development Organization (NECDO) with the intention of casting away the darkness of ignorance through education – the most important and sustainable solution for helping the Afghan people into the future. The ambition is to provide sites of education for women, particularly within densely populated areas. Thus NECDO, established in 1999, gave rise two years later to a smaller NGO called Noor Educational Center (NEC), which focused on capacity building for women through literacy and Qur'anic education classes, with a focus on teaching women about their rights as reflected in the Qur'an.

From my perspective, Afghan women not only need to be empowered socially and financially, but they also need to be empowered as peacekeepers in their families and communities, whether the issue is domestic violence or conflict with a husband. Through simple activities, NECDO peace education trainers help participants understand that, while they may not be able to change their situation, they can change their attitude to it. I know that, like their mothers, children are often victims and suffer psychological problems. That's why NECDO began a programme called Home Schools through which children are invited to special events in rooms rented in their neighbourhoods. Once there, they enjoy creative art projects, storytelling, puppet shows and music sessions, all designed to relay messages about peace and the management of conflict.

Peacebuilding is a cumulative process, not least in its goal of inspiring ever larger numbers of people and various segments of society to contribute to the work of relationship-building and constructive social change. Important among the tools of the peacebuilder is the



appeal of personal example, and the contagion of success, however modest. I have a metaphor for my peace work, which is a small tree growing, giving fruit to others, giving shade to others, and giving support to others. I recognise that inspiring others to follow in my footsteps is the only real hope for a sustainable effort toward long-term peace.

For me, religion is one of the most powerful social and cultural contexts of my life and work, and therefore an invaluable resource for unleashing the moral imagination and peacebuilding capacities of my fellow Afghans. My faith, and not least my struggles with many of my male co-religionists, is at the heart of my qualification as a culturally sophisticated peacebuilder. As a peace activist in Afghanistan, therefore, I view religion as a fundamental tool for NECDO to gain acceptance and build trust in communities. Indeed, I explain that religion is part of a methodology for reaching out to a tradition of peace. Personally, I draw strength and inspiration from my faith in Allah (SWT), but a fluent understanding of local and regional religion is also an essential part of my work. As such, my core personal beliefs and drivers are embedded in my work.

As a Muslim woman, I became inspired by the actual text of the Qur'an and what I considered to be its true

Jamila Afghani at the US embassy, Kabul, in 2016, speaking on women's rights from an Islamic perspective

interpretation, rather than the version of Islam that most local politico-religious actors endorse. Their version of Islam represses women and quickly imposes broad social restrictions during times of political instability. It was my firm belief in this understanding of Islam that strengthened my determination to teach women about their rights based on the Qur'an, and fortified my commitment to expand women's rights.

Both personally and professionally, then, I recognise religion as a necessary identity marker and a resource for my work in traditional communities saturated with religious sensibilities. I recognise that my own beliefs and sensibilities must be filtered through the lens of the larger religious society if I want to reach intended audiences. Afghan men and youths are the ones who should understand human rights and women's rights and therefore a project was initiated that would involve imams in changing community attitudes and behaviours relating to women.

Jamila Afghani

Jamila Afghani is founder of the Noor Educational Centre (NEC) and a member of the Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Network.

Raised during the Soviet invasion of her country, Jamila began her peacemaking career as a social worker in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. In addition to addressing basic camp needs, she taught Qur'anic education classes through which many of the women learnt to read and write. After the fall of the Taliban, Jamila moved back to Afghanistan and founded the NEC in Western Kabul, the most war-looted and structurally damaged part of the city.

NEC now provides hundreds of women, youths and children in Kabul, Ghazni and Jalalabad with classes in health, literacy, vocational activities, the internet, the English language and other specialised areas. This education has reached thousands of men and women through large-scale outreach projects around the country.

In collaboration with the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality, Jamila has created the first holistic gender-sensitive imam training program in Kabul and the surrounding areas.

Not surprisingly, in the initial stages, imams were extremely reluctant to join. We put the information booklet in front of them so that, when they read it, they found that it was faithful to the Qur'an and the Hadith. I assured them that I was not undermining their faith and so imams participated in a series of workshops that reviewed both the Islamic perspective and international standards on human and women's rights. Five information booklets were made available to the imams for free, and after several weeks of training, the imams promised to address women's rights and distribute the booklets during the weekly Friday prayers (*khutbas*).

I knew that this was progress, but I wanted to see what would happen next. I contacted the dormitory wing of Kabul University and asked students to volunteer to monitor the *khutbas*. Twenty-four students joined the effort and were briefly trained on monitoring and reporting.

The monitoring revealed some real changes. Almost all of the imams at the 20 mosques addressed issues of marriage. A majority of them also talked about inheritance issues and women's rights to property. Only a few mentioned the women's right to participate in political activities and processes. However, as time passed, more and more people at the *khutbas* began to engage. They wanted to discuss domestic violence, inheritance issues, a woman's right to education, and the duty of a husband to provide material support to his wife and children (*nafaqa*).

As time went on, things continued to change. After the successful implementation of the project, it was duplicated in 22 of the other 34 provinces and the work, starting with 20 imams, expanded to 6,000 imams across Afghanistan, achieving recognition inside and outside the country. I believe that those who are facing challenges can be pioneers of change in their society through commitment and continued struggle. I believe in mercy and love, which connect us to each other.

Whether religiously or faith-inspired, I strive to contribute to the long-term goal of transforming conflicts and building peace in violence-ridden communities by drawing upon sacred texts, spiritualities, rituals and other religious practices. Integrating Islam into my organization's peacebuilding initiatives is a central priority in my personal and professional life. With peacebuilding rooted in faith, I believe that we are capable of cultivating unexpected fruits, not least the inspiration to motivate local partners to follow in my footsteps.



Lessons learned, summarised by Dr. Nayla Tabbara and Rev. Prof. Fadi Daou

From the rich roundtables reflecting the strength of mercy, not only as a spiritual value, but also as a force for spiritual and social change towards peace and greater good, we are glad to share the following thoughts.

- ❖ We need to live with mercy for each other, including those belonging to different religious traditions. But more important and challenging is the ability to live with mercy for those whom we consider extremists and who can sometimes be a source of violence or threat towards us. The challenge is to keep seeing extremists as human beings and to keep faith that they are not outside God's mercy. Instead of demonising our enemies, we are challenged as believers to keep them in our love and prayer.
- ❖ We need to believe, as our participants have shared with us, that dialogue can perform miracles in the most extreme and difficult situations. When one of our participants and his children were kidnapped by Da'esh, he and his wife were able to maintain communication with the kidnappers on human and spiritual levels. Hence, mercy requires continued belief in dialogue even though our interlocutor doesn't adopt the same values and attitudes.
- ❖ It is crucial not to dissociate mercy from real life, but to consider mercy as wedded to political responsibility. Mercy cannot be an argument against accountability, especially for those in positions of responsibility in public life, nor can it be an argument for accepting injustice. On the contrary, mercy and compassion can be driving forces for engagement towards social change. The example of the resistance of an indigenous people in India in the preservation of their rights and the natural environment is significant in showing how being merciful requires the seeking of justice. In this framework, mercy calls for global and interfaith solidarity to face unfair and unjust situations.
- ❖ Small communities – in the interest of equal citizenship, we should avoid using the term

“minorities” – can play a crucial role of mediation and provide a safe place in time of conflict between larger communities. The example of the Muslim community of Rwanda shows how, by opening homes and mosques, Muslims were able to save lives and host people fleeing the conflict between Tutsi and Hutu. Therefore, mercy empowers small groups within society, and allows them to play an extremely important role, especially in time of conflict or violence.

- ❖ Mercy should also help us to accept our own weaknesses and prepares us to accept the weakness of the Other. We become merciful when we also acknowledge and recognise our own weakness and accept the mercy of others. Sharing our experiences of mercy leads us to talking about our beautiful teachings and deeds of being merciful towards others. Yet, it can be a more challenging and deep way of thinking about mercy, when we consider how we receive acts of mercy from others, and acknowledge that we have our own weaknesses as others have their own. So mercy also teaches us humility.
- ❖ We all believe that we need to understand our religion and its traditions very well, and to have a good understanding of other traditions too. This makes us able to understand and to promote the commonalities, and acknowledge them as concrete signs of mercy.
- ❖ In the context of tensions and conflicts – with significant gaps in the powers of political authorities to prevent opportunities for those who want to manipulate religious identities for their own causes and conflictual interests – religious leaders and communities must always be alert and engage together in preventive action before the vacuum is filled with chaotic and violent actions.

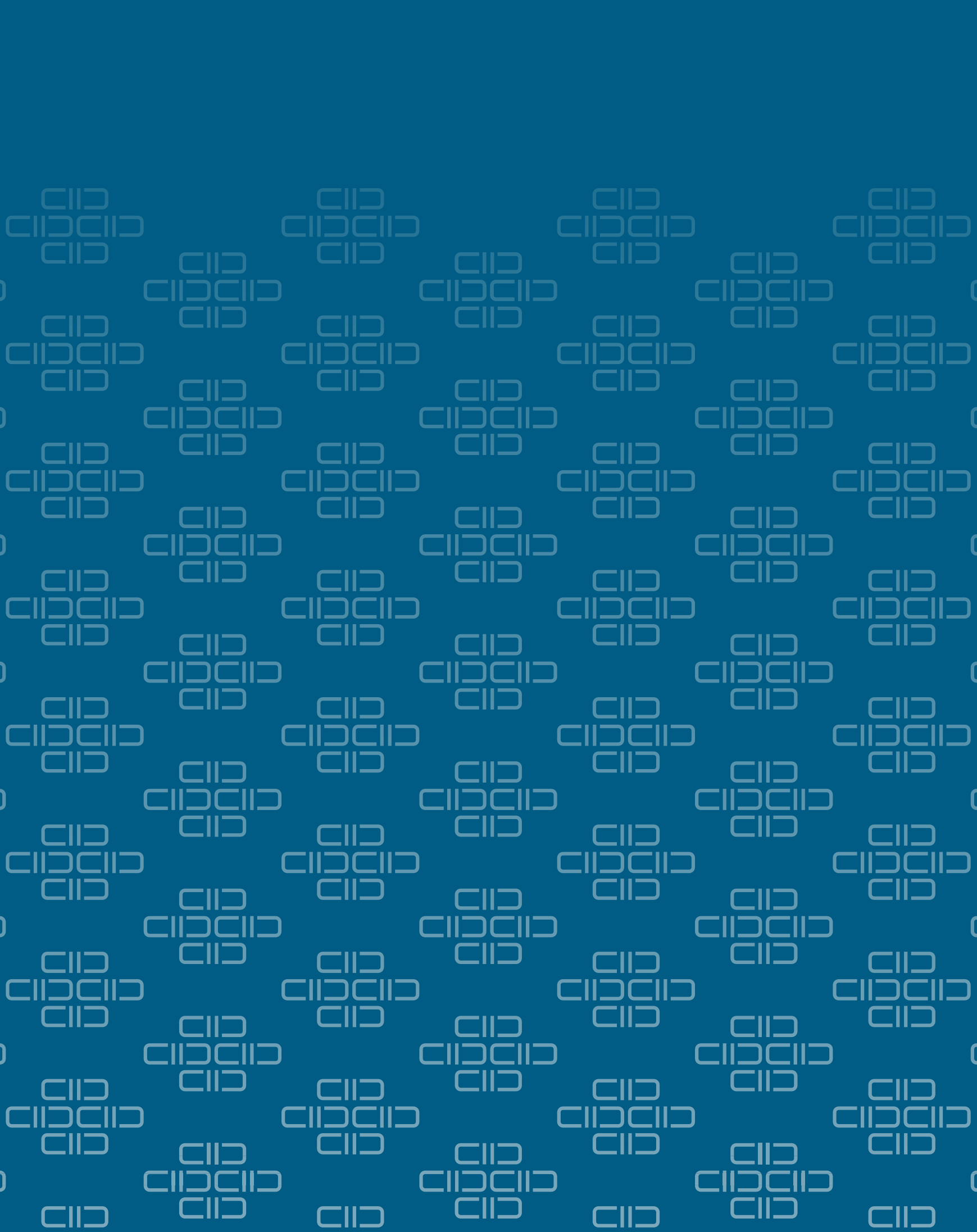
Some further, brief reflections on the presentations

The first three points below were well made by one of our speakers who exemplifies strength of faith, not only in God but also in humanity in the times of the harshest conflict.

- ❖ Never despair and never lose faith in humanity
- ❖ Remember that the good exists, and that we need to spread it through stories of solidarity, especially in the media
- ❖ Always keep in mind that human life and values are a priority, especially in times of conflict
- ❖ Believe that social cohesion, not division, exists as a base and that it needs to be nurtured to face challenges of division in times of conflict
- ❖ Always be conscious of the existence of the Other, and include the Other in our narrative, our reflection, and our plans for the future, even the one on the other side
- ❖ Refuse to dehumanise the Other, even if he has dehumanised himself or others
- ❖ Remember, especially in times of conflict, that no one holds one hundred percent of the truth, and that everyone holds only part of it
- ❖ Keep in mind that blaming others does not serve. Instead, we need to share responsibility
- ❖ Keep in mind that people sometimes shelter themselves behind a dominant identity, exclusivist views and refusal of the Other, but that they are capable of opening up to otherness when touched by humanity
- ❖ Always remember that even a small action that we perform for mercy, peacebuilding and social cohesion is important
- ❖ Constantly work on building links between communities, especially in times of conflict
- ❖ Work on promoting critical thinking toward political and religious leaders that manipulate minds, religion and politics
- ❖ Aim for building the future based on equal participation of all faiths, on solidarity and on the principle of partnership in citizenship, inclusive of diversity
- ❖ There is no fear for our religion when we encounter others from other religions. Sometimes people fear that they would be less faithful if they encounter or hear about other religions, but experience shows that when we encounter people of other religions and learn about them, we learn more about ourselves, our own religion and we subsequently deepen our faith
- ❖ We should not be afraid of showing or expressing our religious identity, yet at the same time we

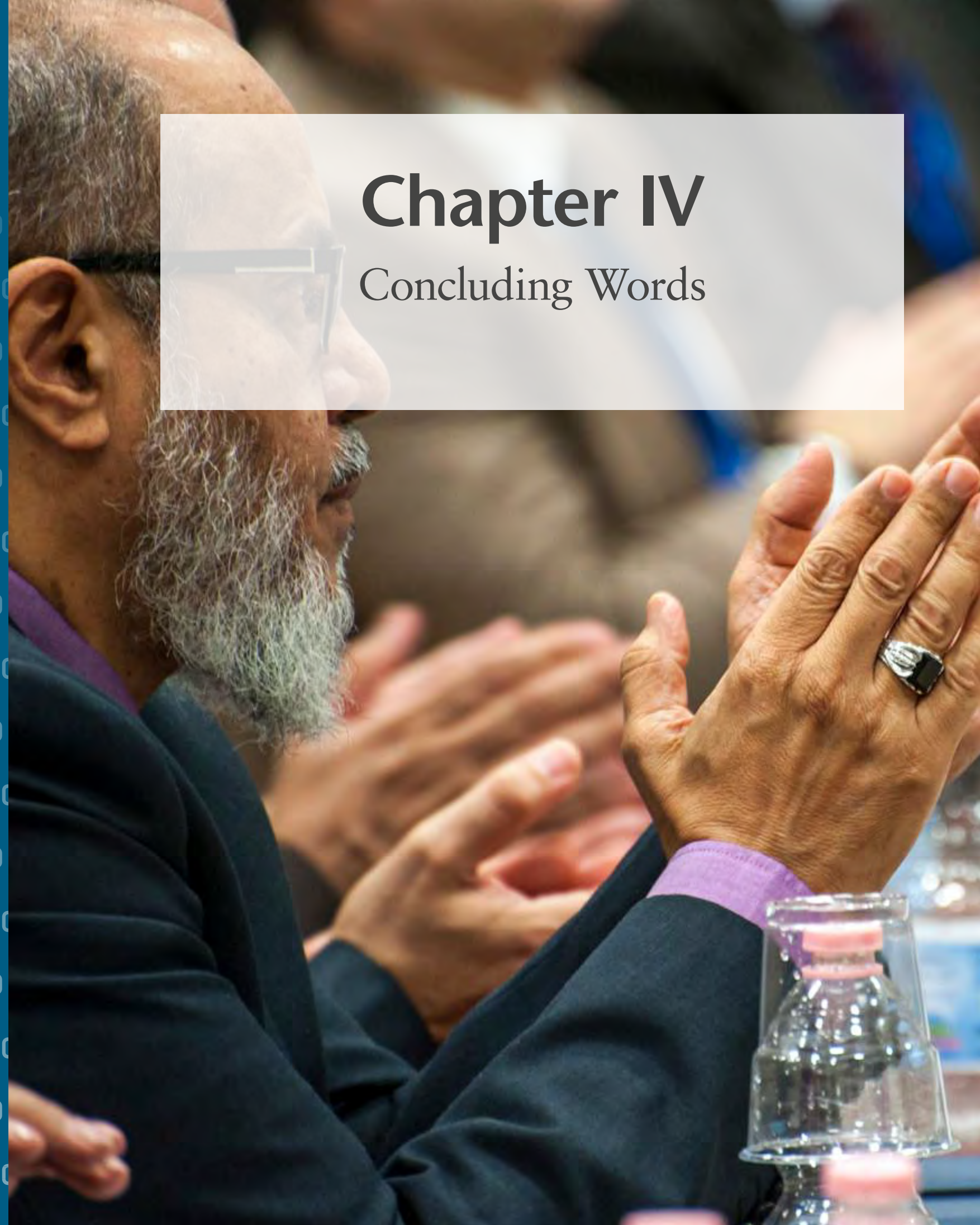
- should keep on refusing to be reduced and to reduce others to a religious identity only, as each human has many component to her identity
- ❖ It is important to have the Other present in our lives as well as in our children's lives to avoid fear of the Other, exclusion and demonisation of the Other, and future wars. These points were underlined by Lebanese participants who spoke about rebuilding ties between families from different religious backgrounds in post-war societies
- ❖ Work on removing virtual boundaries that separate us from other cultures, religions and sects
- ❖ Search for truth about each other rather than be satisfied with stereotypes and generalisations
- ❖ Hold on to authenticity and respect in interreligious encounters
- ❖ Achieve active solidarity with those from different religions or ethnic groups, defending each other's rights and dignity
- ❖ Work on shared values for post-conflict society building
- ❖ God/the Absolute gave mercy to heal an imperfect world. If we are to be instruments of God in spreading mercy we need to accept dealing with imperfections.





Chapter IV

Concluding Words



Closing Remarks

His Excellency Faisal Bin Muaammar, KAICIID Secretary General

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to express our deep gratitude to HH Pope Francis for receiving us yesterday. It was a special occasion to listen to him and to be granted the privilege to gain an understanding of his wisdom on the nature and value of mercy, which we are gathered here to take with us out into the world. I am sure we all wish that everyone could have had this experience.

I deeply appreciate HE Bishop Ayuso's suggestion of co-organizing this symposium in partnership with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue here in the Holy See. Today, is therefore a really special occasion.

We are very gratified that so many of you have been able to participate. You came from all over the world, carrying with you all of the wishes and the hopes of many people to see us achieve coexistence in a time when so many have lost hope for a peaceful world. Too many people believe in the inevitability of a clash between cultures; they believe that we are going to separate from our neighbours, that we are going to hate others. But, here we learnt that there are many, many good people among us, and they are exemplars of mercy. They perform miracles.

We are also grateful to this university for hosting us in this beautiful auditorium. We have met the university's delightful staff and enjoyed talking with them. We are also thankful to Rev. Prof. Fadi Daou and the Adyan Foundation's staff for joining us and sharing their experiences. We enjoyed working so closely together.

I believe that the experience we are gaining from our dialogue on the nature, meaning, purpose and value of mercy is very important. It is impossible to translate mercy into rules or law. If mercy is to be exercised it must first become part of our thinking. It is impossible to transfer mercy by law; it must become part of our lifestyle. We should think about mercy in the act of raising our children and consider how we can instil mercy in the daily practice of our lives and of their lives. We

can teach mercy because we know what it really means.

In the Middle East we are facing so many problems. We are facing injustice in many ways and in many places. In the past two days, we have been speaking about injustices around the world. We have had an intensive dialogue about the Middle East and discussed war in Afghanistan, the horrors of September 11th, the war in Iraq and now the conflict in Syria. And in every case, the results of these injustices and conflicts are devastating, especially for our coexistence. For hundreds of years we have lived at peace with our Christian brothers, and suddenly the Pandora's box of media manipulation has been opened and immediately we begin to reject each other. What is going wrong? We should invite the media and the politicians to wake up. It is unjust to accuse one and a half billion Muslims of a crime committed by terrorists who kidnap a religion. No one should reward these criminals by granting them the status of a state and according them right or legitimacy for their claims to connection to any religion. They are a gang of criminals and their recognition as anything else is a deadly mistake. I urge caution.

These mistakes destroy trust. I believe, in order to exercise mercy in our lives, that we have to build trust that the Other is also capable of mercy. European societies managed to dismantle the Berlin Wall, a huge, impenetrable concrete wall. It separated the continent for a generation. Today, we witness people building mountains of fear. These mountains are much more difficult to overcome and dismantle than any concrete wall. We must be both cautious and merciful. If we are to continue to accuse each other and search our histories for a black spot that we repeatedly use against each other, then we will be committing a deadly mistake.

To overcome the mountains of fear, all that we need is mercy and the building of trust. We need to witness the power of mercy evidenced by the stories we shared here. I am deeply grateful to each of you for your witnessing,

for your sharing of the power of mercy. Every one of you has the facility to reach thousands, if not millions of people in order to share these thoughts.

I just want to offer one example. In Japan, I witnessed the building of a great institution by our Board Member, Reverend Kosho Niwano and her community. Through this institution, millions of people in her community are practicing mercy and listening to its message. Around the world, there are so many similar examples, whether among our Buddhist friends, or among our Hindu, Sikh,

Druze, Yazidi, Christian, Jewish, Sarnaist/indigenous and Muslim friends. All of these friends of mercy and dialogue together move millions of people. So this message from Rome will be carried to a much wider world. And there, I hope and wish that we will talk and, most importantly, implement.

In implementation, we must affect lifestyles. Our message must reach a community's roots. We have a long way to go, and yet the stories of mercy that are the most moving are the ones that come from the world's





A delighted Martin Temres being presented with a birthday cake by HE Faisal Bin Muaammar at the closing ceremony

hardest places, the places where there is conflict, where people are suffering. We have seen mercy in Syria, Iraq, Myanmar, the Central African Republic and so many different parts of the world. If mercy can be exercised in those places, then we can do our part to reach the grass roots and to change lifestyles.

Please remember, if we allow accusations to influence us, we will not survive. I will never forget how we started this project. The Dialogue Centre was an idea agreed between the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the Pope Emeritus. Initially it was meant to build a bridge between Islam and Christianity and to open a new page. The idea was welcomed by so many that

the concept was expanded to include other religions and cultures, which is a fantastic development. That would never have occurred if we had given in to hopelessness and listened to the voices that said: “No, I want you to change before I accept you. I want you to change your skin colour before I accept you.” If we had made that deadly mistake, we would have gone nowhere. Today, we all stand by that decision although, sadly, anyone can be convinced to discard hope and to embrace violence and prejudice. But, this symposium is a living sign of hope that in all of our diversity we can come together and celebrate each other, celebrate all of those essential values we share, celebrate our common humanity, and celebrate the miracle of mercy. I believe that we should celebrate the success of this conference. For our part at KAICIID, we promise that we will continue and do whatever it takes to establish and build peace all over the world.

Allow me to thank our Council of Parties – Austria, Saudi Arabia, Spain, and our Founding Observer, the Holy See – for supporting KAICIID. I am grateful to the staff of this university and our KAICIID staff. We are grateful also to the attending media, and we ask them to help us, because they have the power to carry this message all over the world. It is a special honour to express our gratitude to Cardinal Tauran who offered us all such encouraging words. I especially wish to thank HE Bishop Ayuso and everyone within the Pontifical Council for their support.

Finally, it is a joy to offer a small surprise to our friends from Syria. Martin Temres celebrated his birthday yesterday and, with all of us gathered here, I would like to wish him once again a very happy birthday, as well as to his lovely wife, Caroline Hazcour.

We wish you both a good life together at last. After the trials you have both endured and the great mercy that you have shown to those criminals, the kidnapers, who had caused you such great pain and suffering, we wish to express to you our admiration and our greatest respect. And when we celebrate your birthday, we want you to know that Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters and that they can live together and help each other. We celebrate your safe return to your family, Martin, and wish that God blesses you and Caroline and all of your family.

Thank you all very much.

Concluding Remarks

His Excellency Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, mcccj, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Board Member of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)

Dear Friends. Our time of sharing and witnessing the event of Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation was a deep experience of mutual listening and enlightenment, of learning from one another and drawing from the wealth of the wisdom within our religious traditions.

As believers, and of particular necessity in our own times, we are called to be messengers of peace and builders of communion and to proclaim, in opposition to all those who sow conflict, division and intolerance, that ours is a time of fraternity. We at the KAICIID Dialogue Centre with the support of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, thought it good to create an event of significant sharing here in Rome during the Year of Mercy, with the aim of responding not only to today's challenges but, above all, to the call to love which is the core of all authentic religion.

We have learnt during the last two days that love does not leave us prey to evil or to our own frailty; it does not forget, but remembers and draws near to every human misery in order to relieve it. *Rahamim, rahmah*, mercy, pardon, forgiveness and all of the other nuances of mutual love resonated very often in our talks. And we were offered not only theories but living examples of peacemaking and the promotion of human dignity. We can agree with HH Pope Francis, that: “Forgiveness is surely the greatest gift we can give to others. Yet at the same time, it is what makes us most like God.”

HH Pope Francis also reminded us that it is: “Urgent to extend mercy to the world around us, to our common home, which we are called on to protect and preserve from unbridled and rapacious consumption,” because: “The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of



HE Bishop Ayuso at the closing ceremony



dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity.”¹

As this international symposium comes to an end, the time has come for each of us to return to our homeland. Before waving farewell, let us commit ourselves to do our best so that our religious traditions will be “wombs of life”, bearing the merciful love of God to a wounded and needy humanity, and “doors of hope”, open to overcome pride and fear of the Other.

As HH Pope Francis recalled yesterday in his allocution: “The mystery of mercy cannot be celebrated in words alone, but above all by deeds, by a truly merciful way of life marked by disinterested love, fraternal service and sincere sharing.” Let us change our hearts and open them to God so that we may all become true witnesses of mercy and love, “like a mother’s womb”.

Thank you for answering our invitation. Thank you for coming and for making our time so special. Thanks for your full commitment to share and bear witness to stories of mercy during these two days.

HE Bishop Ayuso (right) with HH Prince Breen Tahseen (left) and HE Grand Mufti Abdelateef Deriane (centre)

Thanks to the staff of the Pontifical Gregorian University for hosting our symposium and caring so much about the technical details and practical matters in order to make us feel truly at home. The KAICIID Dialogue Centre will go on fostering peaceful encounters between believers and will aim to spread genuine religious freedom everywhere on Earth. It will therefore, perhaps, be the first of many times that the KAICIID Dialogue Centre knocks at your door to ask for help in organizing similar events in the future. Thank you.

¹ Laudato Si’, 201





Participants at the International Symposium on Interreligious Sharing and Witnessing of Mercy for Peace and Reconciliation

High level participants, exemplars of mercy and/or speakers

Mirna Abi Saab
 Adel Moubarac – Abi Saab
 Dr. Abdulaziz Saud Aldhowaihy
 Dr. Elias Al-Halabi
 Dalia Al-Mokdad
 HE Dr. Al-Zaid
 José “Chencho” Alas
 HE Grand Mufti Shawki Allam
 Sheikh Dr. Abdalrahman Allowaihiq
 HE Mufti Omar Alrusan
 HE Grand Mufti Em. Mustapha Ceric
 HE Grand Mufti Abdelateef Deriane
 Dr. Michael Driessen
 Elias Harfouche
 Caroline Hazcour
 Dr. Michel Jalakh
 Hind Kabawat
 Sheikh Mohammed Khalayla
 Rabbi Moche Lewin
 Al Haj U Aye Lwin
 HE Judge Gandhi Makarem
 Rev. Dr. Thomas Michel, SJ
 Sara Saad
 Wissam Nahas
 Nang Loung Hom
 Dr. Ibrahim Negm
 Dr. Michel Nseir
 Ven. Sein Di Ta
 HH Prince Breen Tahseen
 Martin Temres
 HG The Rt Rev. Bishop Elias Toumeh
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Mercy across religions: a summary of key terms¹

An overview of the concept of mercy across many different religious traditions is offered by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in a document entitled *Celebrating Mercy with Believers of Other Religions*.² Below is a summary of these key terms, their meanings never being exactly the same as the word “mercy” in English. The “translations” presented here, in alphabetical order by religion, provide the closest equivalents.

Buddhism

Where mercy is spoken of, Buddhism advocates *karuna*, which may be rendered as compassion to those who are grieved. The idea of *karuna* culminates in the spreading of friendliness or love (*metta/maitri*) to all beings. Compassion is the heavy heart one feels when encountering the suffering of others. The enlightened beings – Buddhas, silent Buddhas and *arabants* – show compassion to all without discrimination.

Christianity

“The Christian tradition lists seven corporal works of mercy and seven spiritual works of mercy.” The first seven are: “To feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to harbour the harbourless, to visit the sick, to ransom the captive, to bury the dead...” The second seven include: “People suffer not only from material poverty, but from cultural poverty as well... There is also relational poverty, that is, the lack of communication for those who live alone. Not least is spiritual poverty, the empty and ever expanding inner desert, the lack or loss of direction in our lives.” There is also: “Educating the ignorant, giving advice to those who are in doubt, comforting the suffering, correcting sinners, forgiving those who have offended us, putting up with unpleasant people, praying for all... Without mercy, we run the risk of having our society become a wasteland.”³

Confucianism

Confucius’s ideal human virtue was *ren*, which has been translated as benevolence, love, or humanity. Confucius was merciful even towards animals. A century later, Mencius (approx. 389–304 BC) stated that: “The sense of mercy is found in all men”.⁴ The book of Mencius highlights how Confucius’s concept of *ren* includes mercy and compassion.

Hinduism

Mercy (compassion) is a core principle of Hinduism (the *Sanatana Dharma*). It is a noble virtue all followers must nurture. In Hindu classical literature, this virtue’s many shades are found in: *dayā*, *karunā* and *anukampā*. Compassion (mercy) is the basis for the Hindu understanding and practice of non-violence (*ahimsa*). Compassion is not feeling sorry for the sufferer as that is marred with condescension; compassion is feeling as one with the sufferer, leading to acts of kindness, mercy and charity in selfless service (*seva*) especially to those in need and in pain. Compassion also extends to animals and explains why most devout Hindus are vegetarians.

Islam

After professing God’s oneness, the most characteristic quality attributed to God is of His being merciful: “the Lord of Mercy” and “the Giver of Mercy” (*rahmân, rahîm*). Both terms refer to the mother’s womb (*rahm*), the place and symbol of the greatest mercy. Both terms are mentioned numerous times in the Qur’an. Except once, all chapters of the Qur’an begin with the word *basmala*: “In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.” Muslims always try to start an important activity with this *basmala*. Muslims are called to be merciful towards other Muslims⁵ and other groups that are seen as vulnerable such as orphans, widows, poor beggars and travellers.⁶ Muslim mercy also extends to the animal world, as well as to the inanimate world out of respect for the Creator (*al-Khâliq*) and other people.

Jainism

The Jain *Dharma* is a religion of compassion (*karunā*), universal love (*maitri*) and forgiveness (*ksamā*). The term most used to express the concept of mercy is *dayā* which also means compassion, empathy and charity. Jainism uses the word *jīva-dayā* to denote care for and sharing of the gift of knowledge and material well-being with all living beings, tending, protecting and serving them. It strongly advocates respect for life in every form and sharing goods with the needy and suffering. This is why a majority of Jains practice lacto-vegetarianism. Forgiveness (*ksamā*) is a strong component of mercy. The term most used to eloquently express the concept of mercy is non-violence (*ahimsā*).

Judaism

In Sacred Scriptures, God, often called “God, fullness of mercy” (*El male-rakhamim*), is known and loved as He who is always faithful in love, mercy and forgiveness.⁷ Merciful divine goodness (*Hèsed*) is infinite over time and space, towards every creature, plant and animal. It is reflected in the human person who is created “in the image and likeness” of God our Lord⁸ and is called to imitate and achieve divine perfection. Human mercy’s moral urgency flows from divine mercy. The wise men of Israel acknowledge that, thanks to works of justice and mercy, not only Jews but all righteous people (*Tzaddiqim*) shall inherit the future world. In common works of mercy for justice and charity, humanity’s cooperation in God’s plan is fulfilled in order to make it better (*tiqqun olam*).

Shintoism

In Shintoism, Amaterasu Oomikami is the Sun Goddess, who radiates energy and love equally to all beings and creatures on the earth. There was a time when she concealed herself in the Rocky Celestial Cave. Then, the universe turned into total darkness. When she came out, the universe became bright and full of life. Sunlight nurtures all living beings impartially without discrimination. This illustrates the love and mercy of God that fosters all sentient beings in the universe.⁵

Sikhism

Mercy has a pre-eminent place in the Sikh Faith (*Dharam*). God is the source of all virtues, including most importantly love (*prem*), mercy and compassion (*deya*) and forgiveness (*khema*). The Super Compassionate (*Mahadeyal*), Lord of Compassion (*Deyapati*), Merciful God (*Deyal Dev*), the Merciful One (*Karima Rahima*), bestows virtues for humans’ journey in this world. *Deya* is a divine quality and the highest virtue. The practice of mercy and compassion takes many forms, for instance sharing wealth with others (*wand chhakna*) and contributing to the provision of free vegetarian meals (*langar*) served to all, regardless of creed, in Sikh places of worship (*Gurudwaras*).

Taoism (daoism)

Daoism started as a Chinese philosophy with Lao-Tzu (604–517 BCE?), derived from his mystical and religious experience. It developed into religious Daoism with

Zhang Daol-ing (34–156 CE). For both philosophical and religious Daoism, the idea of merciful compassion is always a fundamental tenet and a basic value. The first principle of Daoism, oneness, is related to compassion. It is clear that both Daoist philosophy and religion cherish the virtue and the value of merciful compassion.

Traditional religions

The term “mercy” does not have a direct correlation in the languages of most of the societies associated with traditional religions, for example the primal religions of ethnic peoples or natives of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Yet, they have their own ways of expressing and practicing mercy. Traditional religions’ teachings on community life emphasises sharing and caring. The cultural meaning of mercy is apparent from people’s constant search to live in harmony with God, nature and with one another through community living as laid down by their ancestral traditions and customs.

Zoroastrianism

Compassion, mercy (*marzhdika*) is one of the most articulate values in Zoroastrianism. *Marzhdika* is more than having sympathy for someone in distress; it is the deep desire to alleviate the sufferings of others irrespective of who and what they are: “Ye, Zoroastrians! (...) Relieve those who have fallen in distress.”⁹ This compassion must go beyond relieving suffering. Mercy and compassion are great moral and spiritual obligations. *Marzhdika* includes two principles: non-violence (*nidhasnaitshem*) and self-sacrifice or service (*khaet-wadatham*). So the life of every creature is sacred and therefore non-violable. This attitude of non-violence is also extended to nature.

- 1 Summarised by Prof. Patrice Brodeur
- 2 *Celebrating Mercy with Believers of Other Religions*, published on 16 June 2016 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the occasion of the Roman Catholic Jubilee of Mercy, 5 December 2015 to 20 November 2016
- 3 *The Message of Mercy*, Cardinal Kasper, University of Milan, October 2014
- 4 Mengzi 6A6
- 5 Qur’an 48:29
- 6 Qur’an 93:9–10; 17:26
- 7 Exodus 20:6
- 8 Genesis 1:26–27
- 9 Visparad, XV. I



Our vision is a world in which there is respect, understanding and cooperation among people; justice, peace and reconciliation; and an end to the abuse of religion to justify repression, violence and conflict.



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