Towards a Dialogue of Civilizations:
Restoring Trust and Understanding between the Muslim, Christian and Judaic Worlds

Under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI
Fes, Morocco
April 30 - May 2, 2004
Towards a Dialogue of Civilizations

In the context of deepening distrust and suspicion between the Muslim world and the West, in particular the United States, Initiatives of Change felt it important to affirm the shared values of the Abrahamic faith traditions and to show concretely that these provide a moral framework for collaborative actions to enhance mutual understanding and reduce the mountain of distrust.

Working in partnership with the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution (CRDC) at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, and the Washington-based Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), Initiatives of Change (IC) brought together twenty-seven diplomats, government officials, scholars and religious leaders for two and a half days in Morocco, under the above heading.

Eleven of the participants were Muslim, eleven Christian and four Jewish. They included Andrew Natsios, Administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), The Emir of Kano from Northern Nigeria, and Ambassador Hussein Hassouna, representative of the Arab League in Washington. A catalyst for this gathering and its main facilitator was a Hindu, the author Rajmohan Gandhi, a grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and currently visiting professor at the University of Illinois.

The Dialogue built on an earlier meeting convened by Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, Cornelio Sommaruga, President of IC-International and former President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Mr. Gandhi. That dialogue was held at the IC international conference center in Caux, Switzerland, in 2002, and focused on the necessity for better dialogue and understanding within the Muslim world.

The Fes Dialogue was made possible by the gifts of many individuals, including participants, the generous involvement of the Moroccan Government, and a grant from USAID.

O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the noblest among you in the sight of God are the ones who fear God the most.

The Qur’an (49:13)
Executive Summary

Global challenges demonstrate that without trust, key actors fail to think out of the box, leaders resist bold and creative actions, and solutions to conflicts prove elusive. The Fes Dialogue was designed to build trust, even friendship. There were neither speeches nor formal papers. As one participant noted, “No playing to the gallery; no postures; yet all marked by candor and civility.” The emphasis was on deep listening and reflection about the steps that each could take individually or that could be taken by one’s own group.

A senior American summarized the feelings of all: “The expansion of relationships formed here is critical. Friendships will be invaluable.”

The dialogue focused on four sets of questions:

1. Is global partnership a necessity? What are the challenges to it and what resources do we have to overcome them? (p. 6)
2. How can we work towards common approaches to matters of inter-cultural conflict, humiliation and honor? (p. 8)
3. What steps could build trust between the Muslim world and the West? How can each take responsibility for their civilization’s development and relations to others? (p. 14)
4. What meaningful gestures do we need to receive from each other to build respect and trust, and even find forgiveness? What specific actions? What in particular can we promote in our community? (p. 16)

The highpoint of the Dialogue was a reflection on the memory and meaning of Muslim, Christian, Jewish cooperation in Andalusian Spain. It was held in a mosque within the ancient walled city that symbolized the unique spirit of tolerance in Fes. (p.10)

Some Key Thoughts Expressed:

- Self-styled moderates should outdo religious extremists in care for those in all religious traditions who feel deprived, marginalized or tired of “modernity;”
- The wall of separation in the West between secular intellectuals and people of faith filters out religious values from public discourse and should be lowered;
- Religious leaders should speak out boldly for values that unite, and clarify texts that, if misunderstood, can promote prejudice and hatred;
- Political elites should find appropriate ways to acknowledge publicly historic wrongs done by their nations that have been sources of resentment and distrust;
- Gestures of welcome, contrition and respect are powerful tools for healing history and restoring trust;
- Values are critical to effective strategies for political reform and social and economic development;
- Priority should be given to education formation within each religion. There is a special need to translate into Arabic books that document common values.

Much of what transpired outside the meetings cannot be reported. One conversation on the current Israeli-Palestinian impasse yielded fresh ideas that are now finding their way to the highest levels. Another conversation shed light on one of Iraq’s most influential religious leaders. A senior Arab shared an experience he had told no other soul for 35 years; subsequent action could impact one of the central personalities of the Middle East conflict.
Next Steps

Many ideas emerged regarding next steps. An invitation from Prince El Hassan bin Talal (see below) to meet in Jordan is receiving serious attention; several participants will take part in an Israeli-Palestinian workshop in Caux, Switzerland, in August, and a wider dialogue between immigrant Muslims and their European hosts is conceived for Caux in 2005; and the Moroccan government has already indicated a desire for a follow-on meeting in Morocco. Participants are writing articles for a range of outlets, and more concerted efforts are being made to reach wider publics through contacts with media personalities. Conferees also plan to support one another’s individual initiatives.

A message received from Prince El Hassan of Jordan on the eve of the dialogue helped set its tone:

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Morocco has a long history of religious cooperation and shared culture which I hope will inspire you to new ways forward for a peaceful future. All the more so, thanks to the enlightened leadership of His Majesty Mohammed VI.

Allow me to point out the importance of mutual respect between the children of Abraham, which I feel goes somewhat further than simply trust and understanding. Mutual respect signifies an acceptance of others’ values, an ethic of tolerance, and a concept of reciprocal duties and responsibilities.

Building trust and understanding is a daunting prospect today, with over forty low-level conflicts plaguing the world. In this climate of uncertainty and fear, it is the most important and urgent act we can undertake.

When trust is at a low ebb, it is necessary to demonstrate that we are working for mutual respect within and between our various communities. Economic, political and social objectives do not meet the whole human need for security. Cultural security, a sense of dignity and the assurance of mutual respect are vital.

We have come to recognize over the past few decades how many similarities abound among the three major monotheistic religions. A sense of hostile difference is by no means inherent in our interpretations of our sacred texts; it is a matter of politics. The challenge, therefore, is less to assert our similarities, though we must continue to do so, but to understand and acknowledge our differences in the secure knowledge that difference is not the same as wrong.

Such understanding can perhaps only be achieved through personal experience and so I would invite the distinguished participants to consider the means by which systems of governance and government can promote personal experience of others in a positive way, and by which individuals themselves can come to understand difference as a fact which can be accepted rather than resisted.

I look forward to being able to host you in Amman.

Prince El Hassan
Participants

Gen. (Rtd.) Mansour Abu Rashid, Amman Center for Peace and Development; headed Jordanian side of peace negotiations with Israel.

Scott Appleby, Author, Professor of History, Notre Dame University, Indiana; Fellow of Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies; co-directed fundamentalism project yielding five-volume study of global religious resurgence.

Hassan Azzouzi, College of Islamic Jurisprudence, Kairaouine University, Fes.

Alhaji Ado Bayero, Emir of Kano, Nigeria.

Sanusi Bayero, Chiroma of Kano, Nigeria.

Patrice Brodeur, Canada. Dean, Religious and Spiritual Life, Connecticut College, CT.

Charles Dahan, Vice-President, World Federation of Moroccan Jews, Washington, DC.

Robert Eisen, Professor Jewish Philosophy, George Washington University, Washington, DC.

Rajmohan Gandhi, Author; former Indian Senator; grandson of Mahatma Gandhi; Professor at University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

Marc Gopin, Orthodox Rabbi; Author of Holy War, Holy Peace and other books; Director, Center for World Religions, Diplomacy & Conflict Resolution, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA; from Cambridge, MA.

Donald Hagner, Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary; an ordained Presbyterian Minister; Pasadena, CA.

Ambassador Hussein Hassouna, League of Arab States, Washington DC; former Egyptian Ambassador to Morocco.


Ahmed Kostas, Director of the Ministry of Waqf and Islamic Affairs, Rabat.

Philip Lewis, Lecturer in Peace Studies, University of Bradford, UK.

Lawrence Lowenthal, Director, American Jewish Committee, Boston.

Radwan Masmoudi, Founder and President, Center for the Study of Islam & Democracy, Washington, DC; originally from Tunisia.

Joseph Montville, Arabist; Author, originator of Track II concept; former US Foreign Service Officer, Washington, DC.

Ambassador Gunther Mulack, former German Ambassador in Kuwait, Bahrain and Syria; Commissioner for the Dialogue with Islam in the German Foreign Office, Berlin.

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, Theologian; Author of The Art of Forgiveness (1997); Bremen, Germany.

Chandra Muzaffar, Author of Muslims, Dialogue, Terror (2003), and other books; President of International Movement for a Just World (JUST), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Andrew Natsios, Administrator, US Agency for International Development, Washington, DC; various government positions in Massachusetts; former Vice-President of World Vision.

Dick Ruffin, Executive VP, Initiatives of Change-International, Washington, DC.

Ambassador Mohammed Shaker, former Egyptian Ambassador to the UK; Vice Chairman of The Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, Cairo.

Faouzi Skali, Director, Fes Festival and Colloquium, Fes.

Ambassador Sadeq Sulaiman, Writer; former Omani Ambassador to the US.


Dialogue Secretariat - Charles Aquilina, Kathy Aquilina, Usha Gandhi, Catherine Linton

Special thanks to Dr. Hamid Mernissi and his staff at Sarah Tours
Is Global Partnership a 21st Century necessity? What challenges to this are rooted in our histories and religious texts, and what resources do we have to overcome them?

Conclusions

A global partnership based exclusively on the rights of individuals and states without a corresponding emphasis on personal and social responsibility will lose out to extremism.

It is vital that religious leaders clarify texts that are subject to misuse and refuse to turn over to religious extremists the interpretation of sacred texts.

Values, including those derived from different religious traditions, are essential components of effective development strategies designed to address the injustices that foment extremism.

Following World War II, European statesmen recognized a necessity to bind their nations together through the Coal and Steel Community in order to avoid future wars. Chandra Muzaffar of Malaysia noted that a similar vision was enshrined in the UN Charter, which calls the peoples of the world to work together for peace and justice. Yet the reality today is far different. “We have not even started in global partnership,” said Sanusi Bayero of Nigeria. What can be done to change this reality?

A starting point, according to Hussein Hassouna, is to recognize that “we live in a global village, where threats to one region affect the whole world. No country in the world, however powerful and resourceful, can deal alone with today’s world. We need global approaches and partnership.” An equally compelling case for partnership, according to German theologian Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, is the increasingly undisputed reality of climate change, which he said could create 180 million climate refugees by 2080.

The main challenges to global partnership, according to Sadeq Sulaiman from Oman, were extreme nationalism and religious extremism, which offer no valid frameworks for cooperation and are averse to the self-understanding required for effective partnership.

Understanding “the other” is equally important, according to Moroccans Faouzi Skali, who said that the rich diversity of people must be accepted and integrated into our institutions, and Hassan Azzouzi, who emphasized that the Qur’an put the importance of knowledge of the other even before dialogue.
A central problem in realizing partnerships, according to Marc Gopin, has been the evolving notion of individual rights, somewhat at the expense of obligations, which had previously been used to justify oppression of minorities. But a global partnership based exclusively on rights without a corresponding emphasis on personal responsibility, said Gopin, “will lose out to extremism.” “Global partnership is in deep trouble because it is not drawing on the strengths of religious values. There needs to be a competition with extremists over the care for people.”

Secular politicians in Europe are trying to tell the Muslim world to separate religion and politics, which is not possible for Islam. Instead we need to raise their understanding of the spiritual. Gunther Mulack

The reality of evil must be acknowledged and faced squarely. Kent Hill

This is fine in theory, noted German diplomat Gunther Mulack, but in Europe “our politicians are being raised in secularism, when our need is to bring the good principles of religion into actual policies.” Joseph Montville, a former US diplomat, underscored this point, saying “secular intellectuals simply have a filter in dealing with religious values.”

In the Muslim world, according to Mulack, “faith is growing as a base for the identity of people out of desperation because their leaders are not leading by the rules of Islam.” This gives urgency to the right interpretation of religious texts, which Montville said are being manipulated to justify violence and killing. “If we allow the extremists to interpret religion for the rest of us, we are doomed,” said Radwan Masmoudi. While agreeing with this, Muzaffar noted that misinterpretations are not new. What is important is to ask why distortions have an appeal now that they did not have in the past.

Andrew Natsios cited evidence indicating a close connection between values, religion and development, a fact often overlooked in the international community. When resources flow into dysfunctional societies, harm may well result. For this reason, he said, US developmental assistance is increasingly being directed towards countries that are addressing governance issues effectively.
Session II

How can we work towards common approaches to matters of inter-cultural conflict, humiliation and honor?

Conclusions

Questions of honor and humiliation are not limited to one part of the world; nor can they be separated from questions of justice.

A commitment to know the beliefs, values and aspirations of “the other” is a prerequisite for effective dialogue.

Intra-religious dialogues are critical for discovering and healing sources of humiliation that lie within different religious traditions.

Hussein Hassouna opened the discussion by saying that common approaches would be more attainable if we acknowledged and celebrated the rich diversity of cultures. Yet the reality is that there is a tremendous clash in the world, with a good part of the Western world regarding the Muslim world as some kind of danger and many in the so-called Islamic world seeing the West as an enemy. Questions of honor and humiliation, which arise from injustice, asymmetries of power and perceptions of insensitivity and disrespect, can be addressed through acts of statesmanship and courage. President Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem was one such act. Public acknowledgements, such as by Japanese leaders of wrongs done towards Koreans, and Madeleine Albright’s admission of wrong approaches to Iran, can also do much to dissolve mistrust.

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz observed that a legacy of humiliation, of shaming, can strangle people. Drawing on German experience, he said, “It is necessary in the realm of interpersonal and political affairs to acknowledge the massive impact of historic guilt, trauma and humiliation as contaminating factors of present-day political life.” “Denial,” he said, “will just prolong the dangers implied in not coming to terms with guilt, humiliation, hurt…”

Gandhi noted that humiliation and honor are impulses everywhere, including in the US. But the original meanings of honor and humiliation have been turned on their heads. Some seem to think that honor is gained by the destruction of innocence, whereas it was once found in its protection. Some feel shame when forced to submit to another’s will, though in many cultures shame lies not in submitting to brute force but in imposing it without adequate justification. Sulaiman, quoting Eleanor Roosevelt saying, “No one can make us feel inferior without our consent,” reminded us that no one can be humiliated or dishonored if he or she maintains integrity of thought, word and deed.

Another critical factor, according to Gandhi, is the injection of hate into the bloodstream of family and national life. What resources exist within our cultures to remove this toxin? And what role have our cultures and countries played in inviting this hate? Ahmed Kostas, who faces this reality as a practical matter in Morocco’s Ministry of Waqf and Islamic Affairs, underlined that values of love, respect, justice are common to all religions and have been acknowledged in such international forums as the UN Social Summit of 1995. Don Hagner, of Fuller Seminary in California, eloquently summarized the prophetic radicalism of the teachings of Jesus - love of God and neighbor; love your enemies; forgive 70 times 7; the one who is great will be your servant; he who would save his life must lose it; - and read Paul’s hymn on the greatness of love (1 Corinthians 13). Such values of love, compassion and generosity are enshrined in all our traditions, noted Skali. But, said Kostas, “we have too often allowed religious teachings to be hijacked by extremists, whose numbers are growing.” This calls for a common, pro-active response.
It is necessary in the realm of interpersonal and political affairs to acknowledge the massive impact of historic guilt, trauma and humiliation as contaminating factors of present-day political life.

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz

I believe personally that we have one common world civilization, though different cultures. Diversity of culture is enriching; an acknowledgement of different backgrounds, identities, religious heritage; all this has to be respected.

Hussein Hassouna

Some noted significant obstacles to achieving such a common response. The underlying subtext of debates about the root causes of terrorism, for example, is a lack of personal responsibility. “It is somebody else’s fault,” is the indirect message, said Gopin. So we must each ask what we can do to take responsibility within our own cultures to operationalize our best values. The best way to do this, according to Canadian academic Patrice Brodeur, is through personal transformation, a capacity to be self-critical. King Hussein exemplified this dramatically, Gopin said, when he apologized personally to the families of seven Jewish girls killed by a Jordanian soldier. Sadly, that ‘Mitzvah’ (visiting of mourners) has not been reciprocated by an Israeli Prime Minister.

The media are another obstacle. The Rwanda genocide was the first directed over radio. And the media played a critical role in promoting ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. But media can also be a force for cooperation and enlightened values, as when it drew attention to King Hussein’s gesture. Efforts must thus be made to bring to the attention of the media every noble gesture that honors the best in the other.

The lack of democracy in Muslim countries also gives advantage to fundamentalists who seek to hijack religion, said Tunisian American Radwan Masmoudi. “Democracy is a mechanism to resolve political conflicts.” If fundamentalists call for democracy for tactical reasons, that is still good and should be encouraged. Emphasis, said Skali, should be placed on developing a culture of democracy, which takes time. Hill noted that democracy, which includes minority rights, independent media, economic freedom, social responsibility and much else, as well as elections, should be affirmed by each of the Abrahamic faiths because it rests on the common value “that human beings are created in the image of God and have value because of that.”

Robert Eisen, of George Washington University, suggested that “a day of religious tolerance” should be set aside by each of the faith communities to celebrate our common humanity. And Philip Lewis, of the University of Bradford, added that efforts should be made to hold up creative thinkers and activists like Abdul Gaffar Khan, who exemplify our common humanity yet have been somehow airbrushed out of history.
Session III

Spirit of Fes

Probably the spiritual high point of the meeting in Fes, the visit to the medina-literally “city”, meaning the original town-brought our group of Muslims, Christians and Jews to experience the heart of Morocco’s legacy of welcome to the People of the Book. After an expansive lunch in the classical Moroccan tradition, the group made its way through the teeming, narrow streets of the town to a large public room in the Al Andalus mosque, which is separate from the famous Kairaouine mosque, both having been built in the ninth century CE. As we settled at long parallel tables, a group of six men started to sing songs of praise of God and the Prophet Mohammed, whose birthday was about to be celebrated throughout the Muslim world. The men were followers of the Sufi leader Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani. They sang for almost thirty minutes, and some of us, perhaps most, found ourselves transported to a place of serenity.

Ahmed Kostas was our host. He explained that the Sufi tradition is very strong in Fes. Sufis - the word comes from the Arabic for wool, meaning simple, coarse clothing as used, for example, in the Franciscan tradition - believe in the direct, unmediated connection between the believer and God. The mechanisms are varied - song, dance, poetry, repetition of verses - but the spiritual link is profound. There are similar practices among Jewish spiritual seekers, certain Christian sects and also Hindu practices.

Kostas noted that one of the most famous Muslim mystics, Ibn al-Arabi, a native of Al Andalus - Muslim Spain - had been in Fes, and had helped to create an environment of loving embrace of all of God’s children. He helped establish the tradition in Fes, which has become the signature philosophy of Morocco, of tolerance and a sense of special responsibility for the Jews of the country and also for Jews in general as they relate to Islam. The Kairaouine mosque was the largest in Africa until the $1.2 billion Hassan II Mosque was built in Casablanca a few years ago. The Kairaouine was built in the ninth century by refugees from Tunisia who fled political conflict among competing Muslim forces. Fes also became a refuge for Muslims from southern Spain beginning in the eighth century, and for large numbers of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic monarchs who conquered the remnants of Muslim Spain.

The theme of refuge and welcome in Fes for the large number of Jews and Muslims expelled from Al Andalus dominated our group’s sensibility. We discussed the fact that the great Sufi sage and poet, Ibn al-Arabi, had not only evoked the power of spiritual connection with God for Muslims, but also inspired the creation of secular Hebrew poetry among Andalusian Jews, and strongly affected the
I would also like to applaud your choice in holding this important and well-timed event in the historical city of Fes, a city that, throughout history, was the symbol of inter-faith dialogues, tolerance and knowledge.

Mohamed Benaïssa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco

By reviving the memory of Al Andalus, when Muslims, Christians and Jews were brilliant in making a community, you deal with the fear and pessimism that Arabs and Israelis can ever be a community together.

Joseph Montville

spiritual power of Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross.

There was a sense of spiritual confluence in the day that peaked for some of us in a statement by Marc Gopin, who had walked on the Sabbath with Robert Eisen, another Orthodox Jew, and Patrice Brodeur the ninety minutes from our hotel to the Al Andalous mosque. We noted the powerful symbolism of the moment in which Jews were welcomed to the embrace of Sufi love in a mosque, the way the Jews of Al Andalus, expelled by Christians, were welcomed to Fes in 1492.

Gopin, an intellectual and moral leader in the effort to promote Israeli and Palestinian and Abrahamic peace, told the group that his small walking party had come across a Muslim named Maimun - the same name of the Andalusian Jewish genius Maimonides - who welcomed them and showed them the cemetery where several of Maimonides’ relatives are buried. Gopin told us how he had studied, indeed wrestled with, Maimonides all of his professional life, but for the first time felt at home with him. By walking the streets that Maimonides had walked, he said with emotion that he finally felt at home. “Welcome to your home,” responded Kostas.

The day in the medina ended with another long concert of Sufi chanting in the home of the late Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani, the Sufi leader who has a great following in black Africa. This time the singers were devoted, Senegalese students of the Tijani order. They continued the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday, and imbued their Abrahamic guests with a sense of warm welcome and peace.
The beauty and powerful chanting of the young men from Senegal gives some prayerful, reflective moments to Chandra Muzzafar and others.

Going through the medina of Fes

Scott Appleby, Radwan Masmoudi and Lawrence Lowenthal

John Tsagronis (right) and other participants at the Al Andalus Mosque
Ambassadors Mohammed Shaker and Hussein Hassouna

The Emir of Kano and his son, Ujudud, look on as Chandra Muzzafar and his guide lead the participants to the Mosque through the streets of Fes.

Ambassador Hassouna and Ahmed Kostas

At Al Andalus Mosque, the Director of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Ahmed Kostas, gives an overview of religious history in Morocco.

Rabbi Marc Gopin and Professor Robert Eisen

The Sufi brotherhood fills the Mosque with holy song.
What steps can be envisioned that will build trust between the Muslim world and the West? How can each take responsibility for their civilization’s development and relations to others? What resources and traditions can each offer the other in terms of coexistence, civil society, respect and nonviolent approaches to conflict?

Notre Dame’s Scott Appleby related several anecdotes. One illustrated the need for great humility when interpreting stories from another culture; another illustrated how easily issues get framed in black and white in our post-9/11 world; and a third illustrated the puzzling reality that genuine revival in one tradition often sours relations between that faith and another. These led him to propose four conclusions:

• Give high priority to education formation within each religion.

• Recognize that spirituality is the most solid basis for building relationships because it means seeing the human in relationship to God.

• Focus on social justice and use non-religious language to make clear the common concern for justice shared by the Abrahamic faiths.

• Proliferate partnerships of all kinds. A wide range of skills, gifts and knowledge is needed in the “religious” task of contributing to social justice.

Eisen said it was important not to over-emphasize material aspects of justice. Dignity, he said, is often the critical need. Kostas agreed and warned against those whose efforts for the poor might cover hidden agendas. Sulaiman thought that morality and ethics, not spirituality, were the basis for building relationships, and made an important distinction between religion, which involves a philosophic and doctrinal scheme, and faith, which is an existential state common to all. To this Brodeur noted the changing meaning of spirituality, which formerly was a sub-set of religion, and now goes beyond any specific religion to refer to the fire within that gives meaning and purpose to life.

Hassouna stressed the importance of common affinities that unite Muslim and Western cultures. A big obstacle, however, is the negative attitude that Americans now have of Muslims. Fewer Muslims are going to the US for education, tourism, and medical treatment because of this. “All sides want peace and
Knowledge of one’s own tradition, including of its internal pluralism, is a prerequisite for effective dialogue with the ‘other.’  

Scott Appleby

We must focus on common affinities – faith, dignity, the importance of religion, spiritual and family values; also economic interests and joint ventures.

Hussein Hassouna

A priority is to explain the negative aspects of our various traditions and neutralize them; explore what we have in common and lift them up against our common enemy.

Don Hagner

“Inner spirituality,” noted Muzaffar, “is often a missing dimension in peace and civil society movements.” He suggested that Caux, the Initiatives of Change conference center in Switzerland, could provide this dimension in its dialogues between Islam and the West. Dick Ruffin from Washington suggested that open acknowledgement by America, and by each country, of its own needs could open the way to this missing dimension.

Lewis urged that attention be paid to cities, where the relationship between Muslims and Christians is being worked out in practice. In Bradford, UK, 30% of the population is Muslim, largely from Pakistan. In response to serious riots five years ago, an inter-cultural leadership group developed four-day trainings that have done much to melt suspicions and build trust. Muzaffar reminded, however, that structural changes at the global level were urgently needed to complement the attitudinal changes brought through such programs and through dialogues.

These steps would all be valuable, said Egyptian diplomat Mohammed Shaker, but they will not take us far unless progress is made on the Israel-Palestine issue. “It is the crux of the whole matter.” While others agreed, Lawrence Lowenthal of Boston suggested that a part of the problem is that many in the Jewish community perceive that something in Islam inhibits the presence of Israel in the Middle East.

stability,” he said, citing the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002 as evidence.

Masmoudi predicted that the problem of terrorism will get much worse before it gets better. Oppression, lack of freedom and corruption in some Muslim countries accounts for a lot of the anger and frustration, and must be addressed, he said. Hassouna noted, however, that the Arab world faces other pressing needs, such as for basic food.

A number of practical proposals for restoring trust were mentioned, ranging from the translation into Arabic of books documenting common values to holding dialogues focusing on the interface between Islam and the West and between Jews and Muslims, from creating a multi-cultural media watch to establishing mutual review of school texts, and from expanding exchanges of scholars, clerics and others to building on the Spirit of Fes festival with its emphasis on spirituality and personal transformation.
What meaningful gestures do we need to receive from each other to build respect and trust, and even find forgiveness for the past? What specific actions? What in particular can we promote in our community?

Conclusions

Religious communities in conflict should seek to make peaceful gestures in terms of the religious culture of their opponents.

Gestures should come from both government leaders and lay people and should include expressions of contrition and acknowledgements of past wrongs.

Greater publicity is needed for those already engaging in gestures of this kind. While Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem and the Pope’s visit to the Western Wall received media attention, the gestures of many others have not.

Marc Gopin opened this session with the recommendation that religious communities in conflict need to find ways of communicating through religious gestures that are meaningful to their opponents. This means understanding the religious culture of the other and then tailoring peace gestures in terms which that culture understands. The Oslo Accords failed in part because they made no provision for gestures of this sort. They failed to appeal to the religious hearts of the opposing parties. A major problem is that even when there are meaningful gestures, they get little publicity, while acts of terror never fail to make the news. In addition, peacemaking gestures are needed within one’s own community.

Sulaiman said that often religion is itself the problem in world conflicts. Religious traditions need to live up to the imperatives of a universal humanistic ethics and they often don’t. Ethics should be the common ground upon which to build a world-community in which religious differences are recognized but also transcended.

In response, Gopin argued that universal humanistic values are not enough. Many people believe in those values but don’t act according to them. There are also fundamentalists who aren’t universalists but are incredibly generous and caring with respect to their enemies. We therefore have to acknowledge that religion can be part of the solution to conflict, not just its cause.

According to Eisen, Jews and Israelis are especially in need of meaningful gestures in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After 2000 years of persecution, they lash out like an abused child at any
provocation. When Muslims speak about Israel they speak about acceptance and tolerance, but seldom of love. Jews need somehow to hear that word in order to feel positively embraced as part of Middle East culture. Otherwise there will never be peace.

Robert Eisen

We must learn to think outside the conventional boxes of nationalism, religion and culture, and relate to one another as intelligent and moral beings.

Sadeq Sulaiman

Montville spoke of the need for gestures of contrition and acknowledgement of past wrong. The attitude in Washington is never explain, never apologize. The Abrahamic faiths must set a better example.

Illustrations of peace-making gestures were provided by retired General Mansour Abu Rashid of Jordan. He had been with King Hussein in ’96 when he visited and knelt before the grieving families in Israel whose children had been killed by a Jordanian soldier. That gesture had had a tremendous impact on Israelis. He also spoke of joint projects of the Israeli and Jordanian governments to review school texts, to publish handbooks about tolerance, coexistence and peace-building, and to share medical facilities.

Hassouna pointed out that there are ways in which we can use religious occasions to make gestures and that these gestures need not be connected to official government bodies. It is customary, for example, for Muslims to invite members of other faiths to join in breaking the fast during the evenings of Ramadan, and Muslims are at times invited to Jewish and Christian religious celebrations.

Abu Rashid, however, noted that “we need to expand the circle of those in the Middle East who are willing to engage in peaceful gestures. At the moment, when there are meetings, it is often the same people that do so”.

In closing, Hamid Mernissi, the Moroccan American who had done much to create the right atmosphere for the meeting, gave a moving response to Eisen’s comments about the need for Jews to feel love from Muslims. Hamid spoke about his own background as a Berber, a Muslim, and a Sufi growing up in Morocco and related that among Moroccans there is great love for the Jews, particularly among the Sufis.

It need not be people at the top who offer disarming gestures, but people with access to the hearts of people.

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz

As long as we engage only in cold diplomatic language, we will never have peace.

Montville

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz

Robert Eisen

Hassouna

Abu Rashid

Hamid Mernissi

Robert Eisen

Müller-Fahrenholz

Sadeq Sulaiman

Müller-Fahrenholz supported this point by referring to the example of Chancellor Willy Brandt, who knelt at the memorial of the ghetto uprising in Warsaw. This gesture, from one who had himself been in exile, helped open a new chapter in relations between Germany and Poland. Perhaps teams of Jews, Christians and Muslims could be trained to go into hotspots in order to make gestures that have the potential to quell conflict.
Participants expressed insights on a range of topics touched on during the Dialogue. Below are a few of these, without attribution:

Transforming relationships is a new way of looking at peace-building.

We have had a powerful reminder of the great resource of friendship, partnership and coexistence between Jews, Christians and Muslims in Al Andalus that can be tapped for the future.

We have transformed our world from a far-flung planet of isolated societies to a global village of seamless humanity. Having changed the world so much, we must change our philosophy as well.

We dream about people mixing and integrating as the hope of the future, but that is the nightmare for some of my people. My worst horror is that my daughter will not marry a religious Jew. It is my sense of an indigenous people being lost; so the dream of peace is not that everybody is going to be together.

The place of Sufi Islam in this question of the relationship between the West and the Muslim world is a potential not even begun to be tapped.

I never felt as proud to be a Muslim as when I heard a Lebanese Christian priest lecturing on Muslim-Christian relations in the middle ages. The Khalida, at that time perhaps the most powerful person on earth, held monthly meetings between Muslim and Christian theologians and attended with his whole government.

It is the lack of education within our traditions that produces fertile ground of which the extremists take advantage.

When you focus on someone else’s problem, it is humiliating to them. We need bilateralism, especially of symbols and gestures, so that no one group is singled out.

Religious extremism in its Christian form is a widespread global phenomenon. What are we prepared to learn from these movements?... There is despair about the complexity of the world, despair about injustices and despair about decadence. Look at German TV with the eyes of the Muslim world. Is there no way in our liberal democracies to criticize this and regain a sense that change is possible?

If we become a truly united force, we can make a difference. I don’t see the secular forces offering an alternative. It has to come from within the womb of religion, culture and civilization. We must have the courage to say many things are wrong with the existing global system: individualism, consumerism, selfishness, greed.

Two years ago Egypt made the Coptic Christmas a national holiday. They are not a minority but part of the Egyptian fiber. It’s a responsibility of western communities to facilitate the integration of Muslims into their new societies.

Time is against us. We must fight on two fronts - in our societies against mutual fear of the other and with our politicians to help them realize that religion does play a role.
In the Sahrij Madrasa

Hamid Mernissi enjoys a moment with Ambassador Hassouna.

Marc Gopin, Kent Hill, and Robert Eisen

In the Sahrij Madrasa

Catherine Linton with Dr. and Mrs. Skali

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz and Ambassador Gunther Mulack

Rajmohan and Usha Gandhi with Ambassador Sadeq Sulaiman and Charles Aquilina