

**The Religions for Peace 9th World Assembly**  
**Welcoming the other through citizenship for**  
**Just and Harmonious Societies**  
**(Islamic Prospective)**

***Place: Vienna, Republic of Austria***

***Date: 21st November 2013***

To celebrate and welcome the other is the theme of the 9th World Assembly of Religions for Peace. People are beginning to realize that diversity is not enough, we have to celebrate the diversity and welcome the others who are different from us. Dignity of diversity is something people of Myanmar are proud of throughout the history. However, due to some people with false nationalism, other i.e. people who are different from them are viewed as a danger to their national custom and tradition. Evil minded people with sinister plans are using these ultra nationalist to create religious conflict and caused instability in the country to serve their hidden agenda and vested interest:

RfP Myanmar has been trying its best to defuse the tension by adhering to the principles of RfP. From its beginning, RfP has labored to discern and express elements of a shared positive vision of peace. This is done by discerning and expressing consensus through shared values, rather than in terms of differing doctrine that are unique to each religious tradition.

Muslims have been living peacefully and harmoniously for more than 1000 years, with the people of diverse faith and race in Myanmar. It was the Sufis that won the hearts and minds of the Myanmar people and forge unity and harmony in a multi racial and multi religious society. Each of our religions has its own way of calling a spirit of sacrifice, humility and self restraint essential for building peace.

According to the true higher dimension of Islam known as Sufism which is based on the Holy Quran and the sayings of the Holy Prophet, the heart of all Sufi endeavors is the attempt to control and reform the individual. Each and every human person is endowed with a spiritual core, but that spiritual core is normally covered over by the petty, everyday concerns of human life and it lies dormant, sleeping. The human individual thus tends to be self-centered and selfish in everyday social life, yet the spiritual heart can be awakened by divine signs that exist within and around us. Once awakened, the spiritual heart can grow, and gradually replace the petty, lower self that suppressed it in the first place. This process of controlling and eventually replacing the lower self with the spiritual heart is often seen as a long and arduous journey during which the heart needs to be nurtured with care and patience. On this journey, the Sufi tries to dismantle the social, everyday self, to peel it off, layer by layer in order to uncover the heart. This journey, from selfishness to selflessness, from the lower self to the higher, reformed spiritual personhood.

This embeddedness of the Sufi society, this communal instinct, this socially engaged face marks the completion of the Sufi journey. The Sufi has conquered and tamed the petty lower self, replaced it with a higher, spiritual sense of personhood and turned the springs of love and compassion the flow forth from that spiritual person to selfless service to all beings.<sup>1</sup>

Such kinds of hearts are needed for conflict resolution. RfP believes that war and violent conflict are preventable. Their prevention requires both practical and spiritual efforts. In practical realm, we advocate for justice and we recognize the ideal of non-violent means of conflict resolution. In the spiritual realm, we need to advance reconciliation which requires a willingness to repent to ask and grant forgiveness and to acknowledge that the purpose of historical remembrance is not to sow the seeds of the future conflict, but to ensure that the evils of the past are never repeated.

Now, allow me to present how Islam welcome other and thus prevent conflict, by quoting some verses from the holy Quran and the sayings of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him):

God has created human beings with certain dignity, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and has elevated their status above much of His creation. God says in the Quran:

“We have honored the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our creation.” (Quran 17:70)

As a token of honor and to elevate his status, God commanded the angels to prostrate out of humility before Adam, the father of humanity. God informs us in the Quran:

“When We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves to Adam,’ they prostrated themselves, but not Satan; he refused.” (Quran 20:116)

God bestowed many favors on humanity, some of which are obvious, while others are hidden. For instance, He subjected the heavens and earth to human beings to honor them. He says:

“It is God who created the heavens and earth and sends down rain from the sky, and with it brings out fruits therewith to feed you; it is He Who has made the ships subject to you, that they may sail through the sea by His command; and the rivers (also) He has made subject to you. And He gives you of all that you ask for, but if you count the favors of God, never will you be able to count them. Surely, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude.” (Quran 14:32-34)

The God-given status of humanity forms the basis of the principle of human dignity in Islam, whether the person is Muslim or non-Muslim. Islam emphasizes the origin of all humanity is one; therefore all human beings have certain rights over one another. God says:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (and not hate one another). Surely, the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who) is the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” (Quran 49:13)

The Messenger of God declared in his farewell sermon, addressing the largest gathering in Arab history till that point:

“People, hear that your Lord is One, and that your father is one. You must know that no Arab has superiority over a non-Arab, no non-Arab has superiority over an Arab, or a white man over a black man, or a black man over a white, except in terms of what each person has of piety. Have I delivered the message?”

An example of the preservation of the human dignity of non-Muslims is the right that their feelings be respected, for example, that they are shown good manners in speech and debate in obedience to the divine command:

“And dispute you not with the People of the Scripture, except in the best way, unless it be with those who do wrong, but say, ‘We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we submit (in Islam).’” (Quran 21:46)

Non-Muslims have the right not to have their religious beliefs mocked.

“Say, ‘Who gives you sustenance from the heavens and the earth?’ Say, ‘It is God; and it is certain that either we or you are on the right guidance or in manifest error.’” (Quran 34:24)

The verse ends with what Arabs linguists call a rhetorical question whose answer is common knowledge to the intended audience. The verse blends certainty with doubt: Muslims following guidance and the error of the unbelievers is presented as something doubtful. In doing so, God emphasizes the truth by allowing the reader to draw his own conclusion. God does not state in this verse who is following guidance and who is not. The verse treats the fictitious “opponent” with justice by presenting the argument and allowing the listener to judge. Az-Zamakhshiri, a classical linguist and exegete of the Quran, elaborates this point:

‘This is equitable speech: whoever hears it, supporter or opponent, will tell the person to whom the speech is directed that the speaker has treated him justly. It draws the listener to the inevitable conclusion, after the argument has been presented, that there is no doubt about who is following guidance and who is in error. Suggestion of the facts, as if the question were a conundrum, provides a more cogent proof of the truth, the opponent being gently disarmed, without resort to heated quarrelling.’

An example of the style employed by the Quran would be someone saying in a debate, 'God knows who is telling the truth and who is a liar.'

God has also forbidden Muslims from speaking ill of the gods and deities worshipped by non-Muslims so that they do not speak ill of the One, True God. If the polytheists were to hear Muslims speak ill of their gods, it might lead them to speak ill of Allah (the personal and proper Name of God). Also, if Muslims were to speak ill of pagan gods, it might instigate the polytheists to soothe their wounded feelings by hurting the feelings of Muslims. Such a scenario is against human dignity of both sides and would lead to mutual rejection and hatred. God says in the Quran:

“Do not revile those whom they call upon besides God, lest they revile God out of spite in their ignorance. Thus, We have made alluring to each people its own doings. In the end will they return to their Lord and He shall then tell them the truth of what they did.” (Quran 6:108)<sup>ii</sup>

RfP shared commitment to peace is made full of hope, despite the heavy legacy of past violence, grave peril of the present and anxious uncertainty of the future. RfP believe that love, compassion, selflessness and inner truthfulness are more powerful than hate. A Christian friend in Myanmar has advised the Myanmar Muslims to counter the hate speeches with love speeches.

Holy Prophet had said:

"Shall I not inform you of a better act than fasting, alms and prayers? Making peace with one another, enmity and malice tear up rewards by the root."

Allah says:

If you wish to receive graciousness from me, show graciousness to those whom I have created.

Treat kindly to the dwellers of the earth and Allah will treat you kindly.

Allah is specially kind to those who are kindly in disposition and feel for the others. O ye who dwell on earth, be kind to the creatures of Allah subsisting on earth, Allah will be then kind to you.

Allah says:

If you are anxious to receive kindness from me, offer kindness to my creatures.

The core elements of RfP mission provokes, inspires and energizes wisdoms that are mentioned above. With that goal in mind, RfP Myanmar would exert its utmost efforts to welcome the others through conflict transformation and peace building.

Presented by :

**Al Haj U Aye Lwin**

**Chief Convener, The Islamic Centre of Myanmar.**

**Founding member, Religions for Peace/Inter-religious Council, Myanmar**

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<sup>i</sup> Karamustafa, A. A meeting of Two Oceans : Dialogue on Sufism and Buddhism

<sup>ii</sup> Al-Aayed, S. Islam and Non-Muslims.