



مركز القدس للدراسات السياسية
AL - QUDS CENTER For Political Studies

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
TOWARDS A CIVIC DEMOCRATIC ISLAMIC
DISCOURSE"

The Final Communiqué

Towards a Joint Vision for "A Civil, Democratic Islamic Discourse"

27 – 29 MAY 2006

InterContinental Hotel
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Towards a Joint Vision for "A Civil, Democratic Islamic Discourse"

Upon the invitation of Al-Quds Center for Political Studies and Konrad Adenauer Foundation, an international conference on "Towards a Civil, Democratic, and Islamic Discourse" was convened in Amman in the period from 27-29 of May, 2006.

The participants, who came from 21 Muslim and Arab countries, highly appreciate this qualitative initiative that brings together independent and experienced intellectuals, activists and representatives of different Islamic trends and parties. This geographic and intellectual diversity has enriched the deliberation, expanded our vision, and helped us arrive at common convictions vis-à-vis several themes.

The conference was convened amid a cultural and political atmosphere whereby the call for reform was given impetus and in which democracy and respect for human rights have become two crucial demands for all political currents, despite differences in their ideological and intellectual orientations. The need has increased for common ground and reconciliation among all to secure peaceful and constructive democratic transformations that are independent in their objectives and motives.

A close look at the Islamic and Arab arena reveals that there is a heated debate, which appears every now and then, on key issues that are still awaiting a solution. However, in order to reach premature and illusive agreements, emotions often prevail, people get preoccupied in trivial and partial matters or dragged behind slogans to avoid differences, and concepts becomes simplistic. Alternatively, the gap between opinions widens, ways becomes different, and parties practice mutual exclusion.

Therefore, the participants believe that the critical questions proposed by Islamists and others require decisive and accurate responses. These answers should be the outcome of patience, deep appreciation of controversy over constancy and change, and involve different opponents and concerned institutions that are interested in the renewal of the religion discourse. This should happen away from exclusion and custodianship on behalf of others. Indeed, reality is relative, difference is the norm and one of the laws of human progress, and the past is not an accomplished project.

Over three days, the participants have addressed vital issues along certain themes. The discussions, which were conducted in a democratic atmosphere, focused on a set of convictions as follow:

Why a civil, democratic, and Islamic discourse?

The question over the civil, democratic, and Islamic discourse is legitimate as Islamic literature and some of the practical manifestations still deal differently with the question of democracy. Given that many of the Islamic movements have decided to adopt this question, it is worthy to clarify the motives that make the civil, democratic, and Islamic discourse a strategic issue in our Islamic and Arab world.

The need for this discourse is neither governed by the international context and the resultant pressures imposed by influential western powers on political forces to modify them in the direction of predominant culture nor a result of the regimes' mandates to integrate the Islamic movement within the political system. Nonetheless, the need for such discourse is justified by the practical Islamic presence, the conditions for its continuity, and its capacity to interact and engage with new political, cultural, and intellectual developments. There is a need for these Islamic movements to revise a lot of their literature which is governed by their historical conditions that was adopted regarding some important matters. These matters pertain to political action, political system, pluralism, democracy, woman, public liberties, citizenship, and minorities' rights. Such revision will promote the movements' public standing. On the other hand, it will dissuade fears and misgivings on the part of others about their Islamic and political project. Either way, these movements will be able to realize the conditions for communicating with people, political forces, regimes, and international powers.

The necessity for such discourse falls within the framework of building a new political culture which different political players agree on. This will help put an end to the gloomy atmosphere of political frustration that characterizes the political environment in some of our Islamic and Arab countries.

Required from the Islamic Movements

Undoubtedly, Islamic currents, within their social dynamics, have achieved several intellectual revisions. They produced innovative literature at several levels regarding democracy, political pluralism, minorities' rights, or women's issue. However, the social and political conditions that have pushed these movements to assume a leading role in more than one Arab and Islamic country require that these movements take the initiative to formulate their national discourse, to define their alternatives clearly, and to avoid ambiguity in thought and duality in discourse. Their starting point should be the contemporary reality with all of its complexities. They should also formulate their innovative vision regarding women's issues in terms of participation and empowerment, the concept of citizenship, and the source of rights and duties for individuals and minorities. They should also announce that they do not monopolize religion or speak on its behalf, and announce that they do not see those who disagree with them as ideological opponents who lack fitness and legitimacy. They should deal with their opponents as partners in the fate of the country.

Islamic movements with democratic and reformist leanings are required to reinforce their efforts intellectually, scientifically and politically to renounce violence and terrorism. They should distinguish themselves from militant groups who conflate legitimate Jihad, designed to defend countries, with terrorism which targets civilians and judges groups and people as infidel, and which wants to take the nation back to the stage of religious wars.

Furthermore, they are required to produce a balanced and benign discourse that does not antagonize the West. Simultaneously, this discourse should seek to cooperate and come to an agreement with personalities and institutions that defend the just causes of the nation. Knowing the distinctions among different levels and different components in the West can contribute in producing practical and effective Islamic discourse. It could also besiege the policies of hegemony and build a wider coalition against these policies within the West and without.

Islamic movements that have assumed power through democracy are required to respect the rules of democracy in its interaction with other social and political forces in order to create trust and to secure the democratic track from any stalemate. This would also contribute to erasing their stereotypical image embraced by others. Establishing such discourse is not possible without bypassing the superficial theorizing that deals with the West as though it is monolithic in its forces and components as well as in its views, politicians, and societies.

Required from Regimes

Any intellectual revision by the Islamic movements should not be seen by regimes as political gain obtained in their management of the conflict with active forces. Regimes' aspirations should not be based on this narrow vision. On the contrary, these brave revisions should be the impetus for the regimes to reconsider their political conduct and their method in dealing with Islamic movements.

Surely, the current system can no longer carry on without proper and genuine participation of these key forces in the society. Moreover, the conditions for an authentic democratic transition entail a contract or agreements among politicians representing big forces and regimes. This contract delineates the necessary principles for a sustainable democratic process and peaceful transfer of power.

There is a need for a comprehensive revision of all tools of control and exploitation of political and social differences by regimes to justify their presence. Additionally, revising the utility and effectiveness of political choices is a must should we aspire to the institutionalization of politics on new rules. These rules are based upon acknowledging the other and their capabilities, through their programs and convictions, to realize the interest of the country in question.

Such revision will put an end to the monopoly of the regimes and governments over the honor to defend the interest of their countries. Stopping their monopoly over power, contributing to building a national atmosphere away from frustration, creating a real background for defeating the phenomenon of terrorism in our Islamic and Arab societies, bringing about a qualitative leap in our political scene, and laying the ground for cultural, social, and economic development should be top priorities for all regimes.

There is a consensus among many political forces that the political approach to development is the proper one. This approach requires an initiative by the political regimes to embark on reconciliation with their people and active political forces.

Certainly, the security approach, exclusion, seeking the best means to undermine the organizational and the intellectual structure of the Islamic movement, or the recurrent cautious inclusion of some of the Islamic movement's circles has outlived its usefulness. Instead, their reverse effect is a threat to the societal fabric and the political system. Therefore, there is a crucial need for political regimes to engage in a revision of their policy vis-à-vis the Islamic movement, to deal with all political forces with one political approach, and to involve them according to their political power according to democratic methodology.

These revisions should be seen as a strategic and existential need that would immunize countries against all aspects that pose a threat to the social fabric, security, and stability.

Required from other Political Current and Forces

An objective glimpse at the political action assumes that political forces should be a representation of the dynamics within the Islamic and Arab street. It should also assume that clear relationships among them, based on coexistence and democratic differences, prevail. This view entails that there is a mutual acknowledgment among the constituents of the political spectrum that requires a belief in diversity and differences at many levels.

However, an observer of the political scene and the nature of the prevailing political dynamics feels another methodology. This methodology is fed by the culture of exclusion and eradication. Additionally, this methodology make use of all contexts and sometimes make them up for the sake of eradication, to the extent that some of the secular extremists antagonize Islamists, thus demanding their removal.

It is time for these political forces to revise their positions and to meet with Islamists on a common ground. An approach to this common ground should be based on acknowledgment and acceptance of the other. This should be regarded as a self existential necessity before it is such for others. Pluralism and accepting the other should be a condition which enriches the debate and the whole democratic experience. Evidently, societal dynamics with different perspectives can cut a swathe through the gloomy atmosphere that characterizes, on the whole, the Arab arena. Additionally, accepting the democratic approach as a natural channel to solve and manage differences can establish a new culture whereby political forces will enjoy equal opportunity in terms of establishing roots in popular bases, expressing people's aspirations and expectations, and making people the judges of their political performance and their political and intellectual selection.

Unquestionably, a revision of this magnitude will organize the political life in our Islamic and Arab world and will reconsider the culture of division in our Islamic and Arab awareness. Concurrently, it will be a vital tool to instill a genuine political process whereby all political opponents can realize themselves.

Required from the West

Undoubtedly, producing such a civil, democratic, and Islamic discourse reflects not only an Islamic and Arab requisite, but also reflects a universal necessity to transcend the state of frustration, protect international stability, and avert civilization confrontation.

Achieving this discourse necessitates that the West shoulders partial yet important responsibility. The United States and the European countries are called upon to make their policies consistent with the principles of rights, freedom, justice, equality, and peoples' right to self-determination. These were the principles of the founding politicians and philosophers of the modern West.

However, breaching of the rights of Iraqi people committed by occupying troops and the double standards of the American administration and some European governments regarding the Palestinian problem (which is under occupation and aggression, subject to

starvation and besiegement as a punishment for its democratic choice) are but few examples of the wrong policies that feed extremism, push for violence, and give extremists the justification for imposing their outlooks and choices on all.

Moreover, the universal campaign run over the last years under the banner of "fighting terrorism" has practically fed enmity towards Islam and Muslims in an unprecedented way. This campaign has also emasculated moderates and made dual polarization the only option left for all.

To bypass this rather unnatural and risky situation, the West should realize that Islamists have the right to express and to have political participation as long as they are committed to the democratic choice and as long as they reject violence as a means of political change. Islamists should understand that their acceptance is conditioned upon their pledge not to deal with other political forces in undemocratic ways or in such a way that would marginalize these forces and push them to extremist-closed positions and policies. The common interest compels all to enter quiet and constructive dialogue to rectify the relationship and to protect diversity from any exclusive propensity. The West is neither an enemy by definition nor a monolithic body. Also the logic of dividing the world into evil forces and other forces that monopolize the good and want to assume a warden role is a kind of logic that would only expand that scope of confrontation, lead to war among civilizations, and to extend the Cold War in a new guise.

Muslims in some Western countries face many problems and challenges concerning their identity and integration. The West is required to adopt an approach that respects the citizenship of Muslims. Their rights should be respected and discrimination against them should come to an end. On the other hand, Muslims in these countries are required to hold on to their culture, heritage, and religion, and they should conduct themselves according to the rules of citizenship and the resultant duties.

Finally, we the participants would like to stress that we do not want to change our culture as much as we need to take part in producing the culture of change. The latter comes from within our cultural and intellectual heritage and on the basis of the spread an atmosphere of justice and freedom wherein secured social and political changes occur. We also call on some forces in the West to cease following a cosmetic-modernist track that will reproduce the West-oriented duality that would lay the ground for a new confrontation. On the other hand, we call on the Islamic movements to cease summarizing the title of reform in terms of conflict. They should change this into comprehensive developmental track that could help Muslims to reinforce their contribution to the human and enlightened endeavor.

Amman, May 29, 2006.