



EXPLORING
THE HORIZONS OF
CULTURE

ARTICLES ON FAITH AND LIFE

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CAIRO: 1437 AH/2016 CE

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Introduction

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all worlds. May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdullah—the last of all prophets and apostles, and upon his family, Companions and those who follow his guidance to the Last Day!

This is a selection of contemporary varied religious, cultural, intellectual, social and national articles. I preferred to entitle it “EXPLORING THE HORIZONS OF CULTURE” to assert the elimination of the false mental image about the contrast usually made between religion and culture. Indeed, the fact proves the converse is true; a religious scholar, jurist or speaker must have a rich various culture. The judgment of anything is a mere translation of its imagination. The good speech must meet the needs of readers and situations as an essential quality for eloquence and rhetoric. As such, a scholar should inseparably and uninterruptedly keep abreast with his world, society and surrounding events and challenges.

Over long times, the Arab and Muslim worlds suffered because many proved culturally narrow-minded and provincial and sometimes isolated and close-minded. This cultural unilateralism has become a phenomenon worthy of discussion in which the researcher pays attention to a certain area of specialization as a special intellectual or academic area to which s/he is restricted. Consequently, we have a generation of uncultured scholars, who may fail to adopt participatory cooperation in teamwork or communicate flexibly with the community due to unawareness of the contemporary cultural

and epistemological instruments and trends.

A speaker or writer may mistakenly address some issues or slip to clashes with their audience, be they viewers, listeners or readers. I did my best to present readers with a varied intellectual selection of articles in this book.

May Allah grant it good acceptance and be an intellectual contribution to the Islamic culture. If I did it successfully, it is but a divine grace; otherwise, it is enough excuse for me that I have endeavored and did my best.

To Allah I sincerely devote this work...

He alone is the Source of Success.

He alone is the Source of Help

MUHAMMAD, THE PROPHET OF MERCY
Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mokhtar Jum'ah
Minister of Awqaf

Allah, the Almighty, sent our Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) as a mercy to the worlds. Allah, the Almighty, says, "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds" (the Qur'ān, 21: 107). Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) introduced himself saying, "O People! Verily, I am a gifted mercy." The Qur'ān asserts this meaning declaring, "There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful" (The Qur'ān, 9: 128).

The Book sent with Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) is a Book of Mercy; Allah, the Almighty, says, "And We send down of the Qur'ān that which is healing and mercy for the believers" (the Qur'ān, 17: 82). His religion is the religion of mercy, security, safety and peace for all human beings. It is a religion that lays firm foundations of peaceful coexistence among all people in a way that saves the lives of all people and protects the property of all people on pure human bases without discrimination among people on the basis of religion, color, race or ethnicity.

All lives are safeguarded; the honor and property of all people are protected; and all trusts are to be rendered to whom

they are due without exception. This is our Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) entrusting his cousin Ali when he migrated to Medina to return the trusts to those who harmed him, drove him out and stripped many among his Companions of their wealth and property.

On the day when Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) went to Ta'if to invite people to Islam, they denied his mission and bestirred their slaves and street boys to throw stones at him until his feet bled. Thereupon, the angel of mountains came to him and said, "O Muhammad, Allah listened to what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mountains, and Allah has sent me to you so that you may give me your orders. If you wish I will bring together the two mountains that stand opposite to each other at the extremities of Mecca to crush them in between." To all surprise, Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "No, but I would say, O Allah, guide my people for they have no knowledge. I rather hope that Allah will raise from among their descendants people as will worship Allah alone and testify that there is no god except Allah." When asked to pray against the disbelievers, Prophet Muhammad said "I was not sent as a curser, I was sent as Mercy."

Islam is the religion of mercy and peace for the whole world. Islam does not sanction killing any person for his beliefs. When Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) saw a woman who has been killed in the battlefield,

he said: “Who killed her? Female is not the one with whom fighting should have taken place.”

This asserts the fact that disbelievers are not to be killed just for their disbelief and that fighting has been sanctioned to repel aggression, because there is no compulsion in religion. Moreover, rudeness in speech should be shunned as Allah, the Almighty, says to our Prophet Muhammad, “And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely [upon Him]” (the Qur‘ān, 3: 159).

The Qur‘ān addresses the disbelievers at the tongue of our Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) and the tongue of his Companions saying, “And indeed, we or you are either upon guidance or in clear error” (the Qur‘ān, 34: 24). The Qur‘ān does not say, we are upon guidance and you are in clear error even though their misguidance is clear. This is known among the rhetoricians as the style of fairness and this is our culture that treats the other with fairness even in speech.

Islam ordered us to speak to people good words as He says, “And speak to people good [words]” (the Qur‘ān, 2: 83), i.e. to all people. Indeed, we have been ordered to say that which is best, “And tell My servants to say that which is best”

(the Qur'ān, 17: 53) and do that which is best, "And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend. But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good]." (the Qur'ān, 41: 34-35). This is our Prophet and these are the manners of our Prophet who said, "I was sent to perfect good character."

If our religion is the religion of mercy and our Book is the Book of mercy and our Prophet is the Prophet of mercy, then what is the problem with us and what has befallen us? How did some of those who are counted as Muslims reach this degree of harshness? And what is the way out?

There is no doubt that many factors lie behind this phenomenon including the domination of unqualified and unspecialized persons over the Da'wah discourse and their hijacking of it for long periods and the wrong belief that is common among some of them that going to the extreme bolsters

one's religion. There is a pressing need to correct all these misconceptions while asserting that Islam is the religion of mercy, tolerance and ease. Learned jurists have agreed that jurisprudence implies ease. No jurist ever said that it implies extremism; Allah, the Almighty, says,

- “Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship” (the Qur‘ān, 2: 185).
- He, the Almighty, also says, “And He has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty. [It is] the religion of your father, Abraham. Allah named you “Muslims” before [in former scriptures] and in this [revelation] that the Messenger may be a witness over you and you may be witnesses over the people” (the Qur‘ān, 22: 78)
- He, the Almighty, also says, “And know that among you is the Messenger of Allah. If he were to obey you in much of the matter, you would be in difficulty, but Allah has endeared to you the faith and has made it pleasing in your hearts and has made hateful to you disbelief, defiance and disobedience. Those are the [rightly] guided. [It is] as bounty from Allah and favor. And Allah is Knowing and Wise” (the Qur‘ān, 49: 7-8).
- Whenever our Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) was given an option between two things, he used to choose the easier of the two as long as it did not involve any sin or severing ties of kinship. However, if it involved sin or severing ties of kinship, he was the farthest from it.

TOGETHER TOWARDS A CLEAN AND CIVILIZED SOCIETY

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mokhtar Jum‘ah
Minister of Awqaf

Cleanliness is a civilized behavior. Indeed, it is the mark of civilization. It is not appropriate for a people, with two of the greatest civilizations that the human history has ever known, to neglect this civilized behavior. We are the grandchildren of a deep-rooted civilization that goes back to more than seven thousand years in antiquity and another civilization which is our lofty Islamic civilization. They both mixed together to produce a unique blend which distinguishes the Egyptian personality.

Islam is a lofty civilization calling for elegance and beauty, and urging adherents to keep away from anything that is harmful and repulsive, or goes against common sense. Allah, the Exalted, praises the people of the Mosque of Qubā’, because they are keen on cleanliness and purification. Allah, the Almighty, says, “Within it are men who love to purify themselves; and Allah loves those who purify themselves” (the Qur‘ān, 9: 108).

Allah also commands us to take your adornment at every Mosque as He said, “O children of Adam, take your adornment [i.e., wear your clothing] at every masjid” (the Qur‘ān, 7: 31). He also commands us to purify our bodies and clothes as He said, “O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of janabah, then purify yourselves” (the Qur‘ān, 6: 6).

Addressing our Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him), Allah also says, "O you who covers himself [with a garment], Arise and warn. And your Lord glorify. And your clothing purify" (the Qur'ān, 74: 1-4). Prophet Muhammad points out that cleanliness is half of faith, i.e. half of religion. Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Purity is half of faith."

Indeed, Islam makes the complete cleanliness and purification of the body, clothes and place a condition for accepting the most important act of worship in Muslim life and the first practical pillar of Islam after the attestation of faith; namely, the daily prayers. Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Allah does not accept a prayer without purification, nor does He accept a charity from defrauded spoils."

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) stressed in his authentic tradition that lack of cleanliness from urine is a cause for grave punishment. When the Prophet passed by two graves, he said, "They suffer torment and this is not because an enormous burden; for one of them used to walk about spreading malicious gossip and the other used to refrain from cleaning himself after urinating."

Islam prohibits us from doing any act that pollutes water or land, or troubles people's life or harms them. It is prohibited to urinate in water, shade, people's way or public places. Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Be on your guard against two things which provoke cursing. They (the companions present there) said: O Messenger of Allah, what are those things which provoke cursing? He said:

Easing on the thoroughfares or under the shades (where people take shelter and rest).”

Islam also prohibits man from urinating in the place where he takes a bath, be it a river, a sea or a swimming pool. One should not also urinate in the direction of winds. Islam laid down great etiquettes, which have been detailed by the books of Islamic Jurisprudence in the chapters of purification. Men and women are required to take a ritual bath in several occasions such the end of menstruation, menstrual bleeding, postnatal bleeding, after sexual intercourse and after discharging semen. There are also other occasions where a ritual bath is recommended such as the ritual bath of Friday according to the opinion of jurists who maintained that it is Sunna and this is the opinion of the majority of jurists while some jurists maintained that it is obligatory.

Other occasions where a ritual bath is recommended include the two feasts, the person who participates in bathing a dead person, entering Mecca, etc. These directives reflect Islam’s keen interest in cleanliness. Islam urges Muslims to look beautiful, as in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him), “He who has in his heart the weight of a mustard seed of pride shall not enter Paradise.” A man said: Verily a person loves that his dress should be fine, and his shoes should be fine. Prophet Muhammad remarked: “Verily, Allah is Beautiful and loves beauty. Pride is disdaining the truth (out of self-conceit) and contempt for the people.”

Islam calls adherents to use *siwak* to clean teeth and to clean the inside of fingers of hands and feet every time they

make ablution. Perfect ablution in difficult situations is a cause of erasing misdeeds and doubling good deeds, as in the saying of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him), "Should I not suggest to you that by which Allah obliterates the sins and elevates the ranks (of a man). They said: Yes, Messenger of Allah. He said: Performing the ablution thoroughly despite odds, traversing more paces towards the mosque, and waiting for the next prayer after observing a prayer, and that is mindfulness."

For Islam, the cleanliness of streets and removal of harmful things from them is a branch of faith; Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Faith has over seventy branches or over sixty branches, the most excellent of which is the declaration that there is no god but Allah, and the humblest of which is the removal of what is injurious from the path." This tradition indicates the great reward of removing harmful things from streets as it is included and explicitly mentioned among the branches of faith. Another tradition tells that a man asked Prophet Muhammad about an action that admits him into the Garden. The Prophet replied, "Remove harmful things from the road." According to another tradition, Prophet Muhammad said, "Removing something harmful from the road is charity."

These prophetic statements indicate that our civilization calls for all manifestations of cleanliness, purity and beauty and forbids all forms of uncleanness, ugliness and harm, the matter which calls upon us to give more attention to the importance of cleanliness in our lives so that we do not do harm to ourselves or others. If we did not contribute to the cleanliness of our Nile,

environment and society, we should not at least do harm to people and ourselves whether by throwing garbage or waste in the roads and public places or by discharging our waste water of sewage or industrial waste water in the Nile or to pollute it by throwing garbage and waste in it or to distort its beauty by throwing garbage on its banks.

Therefore, every one of us has to clean his body, clothes, place of residence, school and place of work and to contribute to the cleanliness of his society by removing harmful things from the roads and to do his best so that our society becomes a clean and a civilized society. Civilized nations are now able to turn garbage into a valuable resource by organizing its collection and recycling. Are we serious in this regard and able to do that? Of course yes. We need to stop theorizing and begin implementing this project. Everyone should begin with himself and let our slogan be, "Towards a clean and civilized society."

RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE APPROACHES: MISTAKES AND FAULTS

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There is no doubt that any change or renewal in addressing the religious discourse throughout the history of humanity cannot get approval before being tested for a particular period, be it long or short in accordance with the satisfaction, perseverance and opinion of the reformers as well as their abilities to convince others with new viewpoints. As well, it should not be taken for granted that traditionalists and conservatives who make use of the current situations would not accept the new viewpoints easily and quickly as the reformers expect. Society's readiness to accept new ideas of reformers depends on their rationality and moderation. As such, they will completely block the way for narrow minded people. However, the moderation that we all seek and which is claimed by all people became confused between the two opposite extremes.

Here, we will discuss this topic through three general aspects as follows: the concept of the sacred; the danger of converting what is objective to what is personal; and the freedom of religion and the limitations of free speech. As to the first aspect, some people view the old as something utterly sacred just because it is old and, thus, consider the opinions of some jurists, including opinions befitting their own times, places and ages. However, they may not be suitable for our present time and thus require a new *Ijtihad* that befits our time and its requirements, as sacred as sacred texts. In the same vein, some people give a sacred status to the opinions of some exegetes and historians as well as the contents of books of genealogy and biographies, irrespective of their accidental mistakes.

At the other extreme, there are some people who use the slogan of renewal to fiercely attack the fundamentals of religion and sometimes to undermine these fundamentals. These people may be motivated by narrow-mindedness or opportunism and ill-intention which we can neither affirm nor negate that because hearts are in the hands of Allah (may He be exalted) and He Alone is the One who knows their true intentions.

Along with our strong and repeated emphasis that we are in need of renewal and making use of intellect and that we are against intellectual

rigidity, lack of thinking in the old, closing the door to *Ijtihad*, narrow-mindedness and excommunication of intellectuals or accusing them of disloyalty to their nation unless there is a final judicial judgment, I hereby remind myself and others that all people of different faiths do not accept discrediting or attacking their constants even if they are clearly false in the sight of others.

One of the biggest mistakes and faults committed while addressing religious discourse is converting what is objective to what is personal and using foul language between interlocutors or debaters. As a matter of fact, when a thinker objectively discusses a particular issue taking into account the etiquette of speech and dialogue as well as the bases and principles of objective scientific criticism, this is viewed as an expression of opinion that needs to be countered and discussed with evidence, opinion, intellect and logic. However, when this thinker, researcher or critic departs from the objective discussion of the issue and abuses other persons; be they contemporary or among the classical scholars of our religious, scholarly or cultural heritage, this is not accepted and one may no longer keep silent or patient about it. It may even provoke those people who firmly believe in those people's thought and some of those who believe that defending those great scholars is a legal, or an intellectual or even a humanistic obligation, may defend them. Hence, a new or an old controversial battle or debate may take place to distract the scholars from more important and vital issues in this crucial stage of our national history.

The third aspect is related to the right understanding and misunderstanding of the freedom of speech. We should differentiate between freedom of belief and freedom of speech. Likewise, we should differentiate between the responsible freedom restrained by the limits of Sharia, intellect or law, and the uncontrolled chaos. Our upright religion never compels anyone to a Muslim; however, it has clearly laid down the principles of freedom of religion in such a way that stresses its tolerance and open-mindedness.

- In this regard, Allah, the Almighty, says, "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion," (the Qur'ān, 2: 256).
- Allah, the Almighty, also says, "And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ," (the Qur'ān, 11: 118).

- He, the Almighty, also says, “Indeed, [O Muhammad], you do not guide whom you like, but Allah guides whom He wills. And He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided,” (The Qur‘ān, 28: 56).
- He, the Almighty, also says, “Upon you is only [the duty of] notification,” (the Qur‘ān, 42: 48).
- Allah, the Almighty, also says, “Perhaps, [O Muhammad], you would kill yourself with grief that they will not be believers. If We willed, We could send down to them from the sky a sign for which their necks would remain humbled” (the Qur‘ān, 26: 3-4).

There is a big difference between this and the concept of the freedom of speech, which should not turn into chaos, discrediting constants, scared things and people in the name of free speech. In the same regard, we are in a dire need to work and not to engage in controversies, and to cooperate in issues of agreement and excuse each other in controversial issues. We should never use foul language in our discussions and debates in order to maintain the society's code of ethics with that language that is alien to our original and lofty Arab and Islamic values and civilization.

Fake Practice of Religion for the sake of Political Interests

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Undoubtedly, the superficial practice of religion and the merchandise of religion for political interests are most dangerous challenges facing the Arab and Muslim communities. Some focus on form and appearance at the expense of content and essence giving form and appearance the absolute priority even if they fail to meet the human and moral standards that make them models and examples to follow. Actually, those persons, who are keenly interested in their external appearance at the expense of their behavior against the teachings of Islam, are among fatal elements conducive to destruction and repulsion. Assuming the appearance of devout people while exercising mistreatment, telling lies, cheating, deceiving, or devouring the wealth of people with falsehood is very dangerous. Indeed, those who do that are among the hypocrites. Our Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said: "The signs of a hypocrite are three: Whenever he speaks, he tells a lie; and whenever he promises, he breaks his promise; and whenever he is entrusted, he betrays" (Recorded by al-Bukhari in his Sahih).

Likewise, those who confine devoutness and practice of religion to acts of worship and diligent performance of rites while they misunderstand religion and exceed the proper bounds in excommunication (*takfir*), carry arms and revolt against the community are similar to the *Khawarij* who were the most practicing Muslims in their prayer, fasting and night prayer. However, they did not acquire the sufficient religious knowledge that would prevent them from shedding the blood of innocent people and thus they violently revolted against the community with their swords. If they sought knowledge first, as stated by Imam al-Shafi'i (may Allah shower him with mercy), it would prevent them from that because Islam is a religion of mercy before anything else and hence everything that keeps you away from mercy drives you away from Islam. What matters most is the acceptable behavior and not the empty words as said: "Actions speak louder than words."

Nonetheless, the acts of worship only bear fruit when they refine the human behavior and manners. He whose prayer does not prevent him from

indecent and wrongdoing, his prayer is not acceptable. Allah, the Exalted, says: "Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do" (al-Ankabut: 45). He whose fasting does not prevent him from perjury, Allah will not accept his fasting. Our Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said: "Whoever does not give up perjury and evil actions, Allah is not in need of his abstention from food and drink" (Recorded by al-Bukhari in his Sahih). When it comes to Zakah and charity, Allah accepts only what is good and wholesome. Our Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said: "Allah the Almighty is Good and accepts only that which is good" (Recorded by Muslim in his Sahih).

Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said: "Allah does not accept a prayer without ablution, nor does he accept a charity from defrauded spoils" (Recorded by Muslim in his Sahih). The acceptance of pilgrimage is contingent upon licit provision and good conduct. The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said: "Whoever performs Hajj and does not have sexual relations with his wife, and does not do evil or sins then he will return (after Hajj free from all sins) as if he were born anew." He also mentioned a person who travels widely with his hair disheveled and his body covered with dust lifting his hand towards the sky (to make supplication): O Lord, O Lord, whereas his diet is unlawful, his drink is unlawful, and his clothes are unlawful and his nourishment is unlawful. How can then his supplication be accepted?" (Recorded by Muslim in his Sahih).

More dangerous than the superficial practice of religion is the merchandise of religion for political interests whereby reference is made to those who take religion as a means to seize power abusing the religious sentiments and exploiting people's love of their religion, especially the laymen. They give false impression that the goal for which they seek power is to serve the religion of Allah and support and empower it. We do not judge the intentions of people; only Allah can judge them. However, the experience we had with the terrorist group and other Islamist political groups and allies confirmed two things:

First, their cause was not religion at all; it was a bitter conflict over power and marginalization of others with arrogance and insolence in a way

that made people averse to them and their behavior, which became a heavy burden to religion. We are now in need of strenuous efforts to remove this negative stereotype from minds of many people who linked between the behavior of those people and religion.

Second, they wronged their religion, distorted its purity and tolerant civilization and proved that they are not a people of religion or competence. Does religion call a man to betray his homeland, reveal its secrets, sell its documents and act as a spy against it? Does religion call a man to incite violence, killing and corruption and form what is called the qualitative committees that sow corruption on earth in an unprecedented treason against the homeland in service of the interests of its enemies? I have asserted and is still asserting that this terrorist group, which employed religion to deceive people and serve its interests to rise to power, is ready to collaborate with Satan to achieve its goals and ambitions for powers at the expense of religion, homeland or nation.

The Necessity of Collective *Ijtihad*

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Our communities have suffered from odd *fatawa* and opinions and from the yearning of some unqualified and unspecialized persons looking for fame, prestige or ostentation for odd and strange opinions just to attract attention or serve the interests of their groups or organizations.

Collective *ijtihad* increasingly becomes more urgent by day when considering the large number of modern issues and developments, the related details, interrelationships and sensitivity as well as the apparently conflicting views and opinions of some early scholars and jurists, who issued *fatawa* befitting their life, time and place. More to the point, some unqualified and unspecialized persons, who are unaware of ascertaining the effective cause of rulings, extend some rulings to new cases entirely different from the original cases due to their ignorance of realities and the conditions of sound analogy.

It is in this context that the invitation of his Excellency the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Prof. Dr. Ahmad al-Tayyib appeared in his speech in the opening of the general conference of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs held in Luxor under the title: “*Imams and Preachers Vision of the Renewal of Religious Discourse and the Decomposition of Extremist Ideology.*” He called for adopting the collective *ijtihad* to which senior scholars from all over the world, who are noted for their concern for the nation and its problems, shall be invited. They shall bravely address the controversial and undecided issues, especially those related to:

- Terrorism
- Determination of the meaning of *Dar al-Islam*

- Joining the armed violent organizations
- Rebellion against and hate of society, making it lawful to violate the blood of citizens by murder and explosion
- Human rights issues
- Freedom
- Social and societal issues such as:
- Women issues
- Determination of the beginning of Islamic lunar months by astronomical calculations
- Issues of Hajj, especially assuming the clothes of *Ihram* in Jeddah for air and sea travelers and throwing pebbles at all times among many other exigent issues they find it their national duty to study and sort out.

The Muslim leadings *muftis* shall be motivated and encouraged to issue *fatawa* that impose hard work and forbid laziness and failure to do one's duties provided that such *fatawa* shall be precisely written apart from ambiguous terms and general legal texts that are impractical and fail to change the reality.

It is no doubt that this collective *ijtihad* would greatly and constructively contribute to the elimination of odd opinions and the elimination of the causes of extremism summarized by the last general conference of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs as follows:

- 1- Intellectual isolation, rigidity, blind imitation, misunderstanding, strict adoption of literalistic interpretations of texts, shifting away from the objectives and ultimate ends of *fiqh*-related texts, misconceiving the universal rules of legislation and

allowing unqualified and unspecialized persons to lead the Da‘wah missionary activities.

- 2- Some groups and organizations abuse the religion taking it a means to achieve some political and partisan interests giving precedence to their interests over the high national and religious interests. Meanwhile, the spiritless practices in religion and religious politics dominate over the sincere devotional practices sincerely intended to Allah alone.
- 3- Some colonial powers succeeded to recruit agents in many Arab and Muslim countries by means of reciprocated interests, vicious promises to some groups, or even bribery and purchase of their conscience.

Nevertheless, this collective *ijtihad* could lead to a great extent of ecumenism among scholars and eliminate many of the causes of division and disagreement which would undoubtedly contribute to the unity of the nation, especially in the face of the odd, deviant and extreme ideas.

Political Pluralism and Parallel Authorities

This title purposefully gathers almost two contraries in terms of acceptance and denial. One is essential for the democratic process whereas the other seriously endangers the entity of states and could ruin them or lead them to weakness or disintegration. Political pluralism is a necessary just democratic demand; the unipolar world and the single-party nations mostly turn out to form some kinds of dictatorships, weakness or sluggishness.

The dictatorships lack the actual motivating competition to do the utmost in exploiting all possible abilities for the fulfillment of duties and missions entrusted. The existence of parallel authorities or special-interest pressure groups of any form inside any state can endanger the structure of states and their national coherence, especially the powers masquerading as religious groups drawing their strength and influence from trading in religion.

The only scale with which states or communities can measure the existence of parallel authorities is their ability to enforce the law equally to all without discriminations or exceptions and without vacillation or apprehension. No group or person should use followers to manipulate with or thwart the law by force as was the case during the black year of nepotism and favoritism.

All citizens shall adopt the legal ways in expression of their demands. They shall abide by the established laws and regulations in each field in assertion of the impressibility of abusing the law. Indeed, “the end justifies the means” as a tenet adopted by the political Islam groups was about to lead society to deviation and dangerous slips but it for the Grace and Bounty of Allah as well as the heedfulness and conscience of President Abdel Fattah El Sisi and the armed forces backed by all honorable nationals. The ghost of restoring the terroristic thinking of the Brotherhood and establishing parallel entities to the state's entities forms a source of great distress

that should be resisted by all possible force to safeguard the prestige of the nation state.

In assertion of our belief that no compulsion whatever is permissible in religion and that scholars' role is only restricted to the clear conveyance of the message, as they are callers and guides, not rulers and judges, it is necessary to explain the relationship between Da'wah and authority. However, the parallel authorities, which some entities attempt to create – may be religious, intellectual, cultural or economic and social through the activities of charitable associations or under other labels.

In conclusion, any entity that considers itself above law and accountability, especially when calling it into accountability is feared or restricted, is a dangerous parallel authority or a pressure group that may affect laws and their enforcement. The comprehensive justice must be applicable for all without exceptions. This is the optimal solution to activate the state of law. Giving the ideal example, the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "The people before you were ruined because when a noble person amongst them committed theft, they would leave him/her, but if a weak person amongst them committed theft, they would execute the legal punishment on him/her. By Allah, were Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, to commit the theft, I would have cut off her hand."

Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "I have been given the authority over you, and I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do wrong, set me right. Sincere regard for truth is loyalty and disregard for truth is treachery. The weak amongst you shall be strong with me until I secure his rights, if Allah wills; and the strong amongst you shall be weak with me until I take from him the rights of others, if Allah wills. Obey me so long as I obey Allah and His Messenger. But if I disobey Allah and His Messenger, you owe me no obedience."

‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭab (may Allah be pleased with him) sent a historical message to Abu Musa al-Ash‘ari in which he asserted duties of the judiciary saying, “The law is an impermeable duty and a practiced tradition. Deeply understand any case brought to you as the truth is useless unless it is effective put into effect. Give people equal attention, session and justice; so that the weak do not lose hope in your justice and the noble do not look for unfair favoritism.”

‘Umar asked Abu Musa, his governor over Kufa, to grant people equal session and attention in the judicial court; he should not receive some generously and gently while receiving others differently. Likewise, a judge should not call some persons by their names and others by their honorary nicknames or surnames. As such, the powerful people will have no unfair aspirations for favoritism or compliment and the weak people will not lose hopes of getting their rights and justice.

The comprehensive impartial and effective justice that dominates and judges all in full respect of the law is the guaranty of psychological security and societal stability. Scholars used to say, Allah (may He be Exalted) would support the just state, be it a Muslim or non-Muslim state, but would not support the unjust state even if it is a Muslim state.

As far as the parallel authorities are concerned, the denominational, racial or sectarian groups and factions are most dangerous. They attempt to empower themselves and gather elements of influence by taking support from other states as seen in the Shiite groups backed by the Persian powers. Their full loyalty is for the Persian authorities; they work in their favors and draw their strength from them. It is surprising that when the Kingdom of Saudi Arab enforced the law on a Saudi citizen, the Iran-affiliated groups became aflame everywhere with objections. They allowed themselves interference with the domestic affairs of the kingdom. The Safavid Persian absurdities reached unprecedented degree

violating all international norms and laws that guarantee protection for diplomatic missions. What would be the case if the citizen sentenced to capital punishment was an Iranian? Had any one interfered with the Iranian violations and absurdities committed against the Sunni Arabs of Ahwaz and other places? It is nothing but a parade of power that Iran exercises in complementation of the Iranian suspicious plans to conflagrate the region for the benefit of only two entities: the Zionist enemy and the presumed Persian Empire.

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mokhtar Jum'ah

Minister of Awqaf

There is no doubt that the stability of any country is closely associated with protecting the national security and the extent to which each citizen is concerned about the level of security and protection, especially of those close to the circles of decision-making in issues related to international relationships and their mechanisms.

If the national security of an independent and a sovereign country is a red line that cannot be crossed or whose crossing cannot be tolerated, the preservation of this line requires an ongoing, scholarly and methodical awareness, culture and education about the concept of national security. I can say that holding intensive courses about this concept for persons expected to occupy leading positions has become an urgent necessity, because the technical, technological and administrative skills may not be sufficient in forming a comprehensive vision that leads to the correct direction and course as long as persons have no farsighted and comprehensive vision of the effect of any decision they take on the national security.

It may not occur to some people that the decisions or the actions that they take or the relationships that they establish may have a negative effect on the national security. This might not be intentional, but it might be the result of lack of knowledge or insufficient knowledge of national security. However, the current stage and the circumstances that the country, the region and the whole world undergo necessitate that ordinary citizens, let alone those in charge or the decision-

makers, be thoroughly familiar with the national security of their country whether in taking the decisions or in establishing relations or in concluding agreements and protocols.

If the level of awareness of the importance and danger of everything related to national security varies from one person to another for many considerations including: culture, keenness on the national interests, showing concern for the homeland and giving the national interests priority above any other considerations, then the following procedures are necessary:

- A- More education and awareness of the concept of national security through holding intensive courses for all those who are going to occupy leading positions.
- B- Raising awareness of the concept of national security and the necessity of preserving it on the part of politicians, thinkers, writers, intellectuals and the media, especially those who have a penetrating vision and mature awareness of the concept of national security. This should be considered one of the most important elements of the country's stability.
- C- The necessity of advance coordination with the concerned bodies before concluding any agreements or protocols with any foreign institutions to avoid any penetration or negative effects on our national interests even if not on purpose.

Before any important decision, the concept of national security requires familiarity with the internal and foreign political conditions as well as the regional and international

political conditions along with the consideration of our Arab and African depth and Muslim world dimensions. The positive and negative effects of important and vital decisions on each of these relations as well as the priorities, the significance positions and the margins of movement in all directions must be studied.

There is no doubt that the political, military, economic, cultural, technical and media relations affect one another because it is no longer possible to separate them completely so that each institution can act as if it lives in a world that is specific to it. However, each institution should take into consideration the effect of their procedures on other national institutions. There is no doubt that this consideration requires a deep national sense and a considerable practice and experience. It also requires that we all work as a team. All people in charge must shoulder full responsibility for the tasks assigned to them with a high level of understanding and awareness of the work of their team and the requirements of taking decisions in the institutions to which they belong.

It is a truism that nations cannot achieve stability only with good intentions without awareness, planning and watchfulness in a world where the strong devour the weak. The Second Caliph, Umar Ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) used to say, "I am not to deceive, nor do I allow someone to deceive me!"

Al-Mughira Ibn Shu'ba said, "Were it not for Islam, I would use cunning that the Arabian Peninsula would not tolerate." There must be good work with good intentions. Allah, the Almighty, says, "Say, [O Muhammad], Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that

they are doing well in work” (the Quran, 18: 103-104). That is why the Quran stresses the conditions of trustworthiness and competence, because none of them alone is sufficient. Allah says at the tongue of the daughter of Prophet Shu‘ayb, “O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy” (the Quran, 28: 26). Allah also says at the tongue of Prophet Yūsuf (Joseph) (peace be upon him), “Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian” (the Quran, 12: 55).

CAPITALS, BORDERS AND STATES' BUILDING

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The relationship of countries' capitals with national borders is that of integration, and not conflict, and it should not be of conflict. Simply, any country cannot do without a capital as heart and center, or borders which represent the wings by means of which the country proceed. However, the center of any country in many of the world countries captures full attention. Precedents and realities confirm that the centers of countries capture the highest levels of attention throughout history. However, the level of this attention differs from developed countries to underdeveloped ones. In fact, the developed countries can in no way neglect a part of its borders; be it land or people, disregard it, leave it liable to loss and attack, or even think of creating chaos or separatism. A poet once entered upon 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (may Allah be pleased with him) and said:

*In case you safeguard the capital of the state where you live,
be noted that your governors in the different towns are like wolves.
They will not react to what you call for,
unless you hit their necks with swords.*

Yet, the development of border areas of a country is not the responsibility of the government or political leadership alone. The development of these areas is the joint responsibility of all national institutions including the governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, businessmen, Ministries of Investment, Education, Health, Housing, Culture, Awqaf, Monuments, and all other ministries and authorities as well as the social service associations and patriotic businessmen.

They all should devote special attention to all peripheral areas in general, and the border areas in particular as their first priority and a national security issue and developmental issue. In this regard, we should turn all national borders' areas into population-attracting areas, and population-losing areas. This is because in case a country did not pay attention to its border areas, the citizens of these areas would be obliged to move to the center and settle therein, the matter which puts tremendous

pressure on the center and its suburbs and creates in many cases slums around it. It also contributes to creating a class system that produces by the passage of time social diseases and problems that need unconventional solutions.

On the contrary, the country's keen interest in making investments in its border areas, providing their citizens with the necessary services, including housing, health, education, culture, and all services required for having a stable life in their homeland, as well as providing opportunities for work and production, all of these things would give the people of these areas a sense of belonging to their land and, therefore, they would do their best to protect it motivated by their absolute national loyalty and belonging.

If the elements of attraction, work incentives and significant investment are afforded in these areas, as the case of the state's current interest in the areas of Sinai, Matrouh, New Ismailia, Halayeb and Shalatin, New Valley and desert areas in general, these areas will turn into attractive areas creating an appropriate balance in the geographical and demographical distribution, providing a decent life for the citizens of these areas and alleviating the pressure placed on the center and the services provided to its citizens. In addition, the nature of capitals and political and economic centers in the whole world requires a level of progress which makes them tourist attractions and symbols of the peoples' civilization, greatness and progress.

SINAI IN THE GLORIOUS QUR'ĀN
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The Noble Qur'ān speaks about Sinai in a way that calls for reflection. It stresses its importance and religious and historical position and makes us think times and times about the necessity of devoting considerable efforts to Sinai development and promote investment in Sinai resources and tourist attractions for religious, natural and medical tourism. Allah, the Almighty, swears in His Book by mount Sinai in His saying, "By the mount. And [by] a Book inscribed. In parchment spread open. And [by] the frequented House. And [by] the heaven raised high. And [by] the sea filled [with fire]" (the Qur'ān, 52: 1-6).

In this *surah*, Allah first swears by mount Sinai, giving it precedence over the other objects of oath in the same *surah* even though they have a high standing and holiness. Moreover, Allah named the whole *surah*: "the *Surah of the Mount*."

In a more explicit and specific oath, Allah swears by Mount Sinai in the *surah of al-Tin* as Allah, the Almighty, says, "By the fig and the olive. And [by] Mount Sinai. And [by] this secure city [Makkah], We have certainly created man in the best of stature." (The Qur'ān, 95: 1-4). Again, Mount Sinai is given precedence over the secure city that enjoys a high standing and holiness.

In addition, the Qur'ān refers to some of the blessings of Sinai in the saying of Allah, the Almighty, "And [We brought forth] a tree issuing from Mount Sinai which produces oil and food for those who eat" (the Qur'ān, 23: 20). Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said about this blessed tree, "Eat of its oil and use it, for indeed it is from a blessed tree." (Reported by al-Tirmidhi in his *Sunan*).

Sinai hosts the blessed spot mentioned in the Qur'ān in the story of Prophet Moses (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) , "But when he came to it, he was called from the right side of the valley in a blessed spot – from the tree, O Moses, indeed I am Allah, Lord of the worlds" (the Qur'ān, 28: 30) and the sacred valley of Tuwa mentioned in the divine address to Moses (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon

him), “And when he came to it, he was called, O Moses, Indeed, I am your Lord, so remove your sandals. Indeed, you are in the sacred valley of Tuwā” (the Qur‘ān, 20: 11-12). This high standing that Allah, the Almighty, confers upon Sinai encourages us all to put it in our hearts and to protect it and to ransom it with everything we have.

No doubt, our armed forces shoulder this responsibility with exceptional bravery; they pay the ultimate sacrifices of for the sake of the homeland in general and for the sake of protecting Sinai and freeing it from terrorist and criminal elements in particular, the matter which deserves appreciation on one hand as well as siding with the armed forces and providing them with all the necessary support, be it financial or moral support, on the other hand.

In an attempt to shed light on the religious, tourist, natural, cultural and historical attractions in North and South Sinai, we, in the Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf, decided to hold the International Competition of the Holy Qur‘ān in the city of Sharm al-Sheikh in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, South Sinai Governorate and al-Gomhuria Newspaper, which is one of the most important partners in the competition. Moreover, tours will be organized to visit the religious, tourist, natural and cultural attractions in Sinai as the guests of Egypt from all over the world will visit the city of al-Tur, ‘Uyun Musa, Saint Catherine and other attractions and will be briefed about the religious and historical significance of these places.

The Qur‘ān competition includes this year two new levels: the memorization of the Qur‘ān for young children less than twelve years old and the memorization of three Juz’ of the Qur‘ān at least for those with special needs. Sinai was chosen to host this competition on affirmation of our belief that Sinai is the city of peace and shall remain so, God willing. It affirms that Sinai occupies an important position in the heart and mind of all faithful Egyptians. Futile attempts perpetuated by enemies of humanity shall never dissuade us from building, developing and protecting Sinai. In addition, the competition stresses that the Egyptian people are strong and, that, hardships only increase their strength, stamina, determination and insistence on protecting their land and honor with unrivalled desire to confront and uproot terrorism.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Imams who submitted numerous requests to move their work to Sinai in order to confront the forces of extremism. I would like also to thank those who are in charge of the Da'wah convoys including the internal convoys by the scholars and Imams of the North and South Sinai governorates and the semi-periodic public convoys sent by the Ministry to Sinai.

Constructive and Destructive Criticism

To begin with, we have to differentiate between the word *naqd* "criticism" which means separating what is good from what is bad and the word *naqd* which means destruction. The first word is derived from *naqd al-dhahab wa al-fiḍḍah* i.e. to separate or pick out the fake gold and silver coins from the genuine. The second word "*naqd*" means destruction as it is said that someone died under *al-anqaḍ*, meaning under the debris.

Linguistically speaking, the word *naqd* "criticism" has two meanings. The first is finding fault with people and disparaging them as in the saying of Abu al-Darda' (may Allah be pleased them), "If you find fault (*naqadta*) with people, they will find fault with you, and if you leave them alone they will leave you alone."

The second meaning the word *naqd* "criticism" is separating and distinguishing the good from the bad. So it may include praise and approval or dispraise and disapproval and a critic may combine the merits and demerits.

Criticism may also be subjective or impressionistic and it may be methodical or objective as grounded on scientific facts. The first is based on the first impression as when you read an article or listen to a speech or watch a painting and admire or criticize it before coming to know its technical details and the reasons behind its quality of lack of quality. On the contrary, methodical and objective criticism is the one based on scientific, objective and technical foundations and it requires three basic components:

First: The tools related to the industry or the art. For example, the literary critic needs to be familiar with the sciences of language, such as grammar, morphology, prosody, rhetoric, criticism and literature and with a part of the general culture of other human, social and psychological sciences as well as the arts of history, civilization, ekistics, etc. The sports, economic, political, literary and artistic critic must be familiar with the fundamentals of his/her profession; otherwise, his/her criticism will be superficial and in need of criticism and refutation and it might be discussed by another critic to show its shortcoming.

Second, the critic must have experience and talent. You may listen to two excellent reciters of the Quran or public speakers or read two excellent articles for two eminent writers or analyze a technical process that is extremely sophisticated and innovative and distinguish between them with something that you realize but cannot describe in words as in the saying of Al-Amidi, "One may find two magnificent horses sharing signs of noble descent and strength and find it difficult to distinguish between them. However, horses' experts prefer one of them to the other."

The same applies to paintings and the works of artists as well as other fields and affairs of life and industries, the matter which stresses the importance of experience and practice in addition to the tools of any profession or industry for critics. If the field of criticism was dominated by persons who lack experience in the industry or art and its tools as well as the qualifications of criticism, this would lead to the destructive criticism that is useless and harmful.

The third and most important component is sincerity and fairness. Critics must keep away from personal inclinations and settlement of accounts because they have negative

consequences that must be avoided. Some people have sick hearts that know nothing except destruction as stated by Imam ‘Ali Ibn Abd Al-Aziz Al-Jurjani in his introduction to his book “*al-Wasaṭa bayna al-Mutanabbi wa Khuṣūmih* (Mediation between al-Mutanabbi and his Opponents), “He mentioned that incompetent people are divided into two groups. The first group is working to remedy their shortcoming and this is a positive approach because they are preoccupied by their own affairs and are working hard to rectify them. The second group is unable to remedy their shortcoming because of their weakness or laziness and find nothing to cover their shortcoming except disparaging and envying virtuous people thinking that such acts would derogate them to their inferior level.

Some people, even in old times, used to earn their living from praising and disparaging other people. Making a living from praising other people was widely known among poets including the poets of pre-Islamic era, such as Zuhayr Ibn Abi Sulma, al-Nabigha al-Zubayni and others. However, there were some other poets who used to earn their living from lampooning other people even in the early days of Islam such as al-Ḥutay’ah who used to blackmail people with his satire. Caliph ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭab (may Allah be pleased with him) threatened him with a severe punishment if he did not keep away from disparaging other people. Al-Ḥutay’ah replied that his children would die if he did that. The Caliph paid him forty thousand dirham on the condition that he would never disparage anyone with his poetry. He abided by that condition throughout the caliphate of ‘Umar and then returned to his old habit after the death of ‘Umar.

Destructive criticism will never create a real civilization and will not bring to the fore competent people among the

community who really deserve praise and appreciation. On the contrary, it will contribute to the destruction of the community. Fair and objective criticism based on scientific foundations and experience, talent and practice is the kind of criticism which praises those who excel in doing their job and politely criticizes those who do their job badly. In this case, critics identify the shortcoming and the ways of reforming it. This is the purposeful criticism which is not destructive but constructive, fair and encouraging. At the same time, it identifies the shortcoming and turn people's attention to it.

If leadership places a great responsibility on those who assume it, the practice of criticism and analysis also places responsibility on critics and analysts and all of us shall be held accountable before Allah, the Almighty, for the responsibility with which Allah entrusted us. We are also responsible for building the homeland and working hard for its progress, construction and reform and for preclusion of destruction, demolition or opportunism and vainglory. Fortunately, the vast majority of people in Egypt are able to separate the wheat from the chaff. Allah, the Almighty, says, "As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth" (the Quran, 13: 17).

CONSTRUCTIVE MEDIA
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Media all over the world undoubtedly plays an important, vital and essential role that cannot be neglected or overlooked. Purposeful media refer to the constructive, and not the destructive, media. No one can deny that contemporary international media adopt several approaches; some are nationalistic and serve the national causes, whereas others are politically biased or against the regime, balanced or controlled. Other media are either commercial, social or personal.

The value of each media institution or means is measured by its ability to serve the nationalistic causes; its adherence to the professional code of ethics, media values and the balance, depth and vision of its leading personalities, writers, thinkers and reporters, as well as how professional its employees are. Each media or any other institution should have a professional control unit which measures how professional each of its departments and employees is in such a way that contributes to developing it and its ability to compete at the national and international levels. In other words, it conducts a self-monitoring process which stems from its nationalistic feeling and professional conscious.

Undoubtedly, the national press institutions contributed and is still contributing significantly to correcting the course of media and its participation in serving the nationalistic causes as well as making these organizations earn more respect and appreciation among citizens in general and intellectuals and thinkers in particular.

The economic and intellectual conferences held by large newspapers are fruitful events and worthy of praise and appreciation. Likewise, focusing on the issues of thought, opinion and deep analysis contribute to creating a clear image and a strong vision and even out-of-the-box ideas before the decision-makers in such a way that stresses the clear difference between destructive criticism and objective criticism, which is a valuable addition to the intellectual, cultural, administrative and economic fields. It is the kind of criticism, which we all welcome, encourage, benefit from

and view as an addition, and not a defect, as long as it takes into account the professional principles and the national interests, and has the political common sense sufficient to manage affairs which should be the focus of professional training courses and consecutive generations should bequeath to the subsequent generations.

Moreover, the leading figures of media should instill these notions among the youth, emphasizing the importance of continuous communication and dialogue between officials and media men. They must have integral relationship guided by the national interests to ensure accuracy. A senior journalist puts it saying, “I learnt from my teachers that to lose one hundred scoops is better and more beloved to me than losing my credibility by publishing a single false piece of news.”

THE DANGER OF NEGLIGENCE
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Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Surely! Everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges" (Reported by al-Bukhari). Man is the guardian of his family (household) and is responsible for his subjects; a teacher is the guardian of his students and is responsible for them and the headmaster is the guardian of his school and is responsible for his subjects. Likewise, the directors of departments, directorates and sectors are guardians and are responsible for their subjects in the fields of education, health, cleanliness, environment, agriculture, and other walks of life. If we applied this principle, we would turn negligence into an achievement.

Just as we demand concerted efforts of all national institutions and enactment deterrent laws necessary to confront terrorism, we demand the same strong determination to confront negligence and deter the negligent. If we have paid due respect to the sacredness of the human soul and understood what this sacredness entails, we would never shed the blood of a human being neither by negligence nor by terrorism. Likewise, if we came to know that wealth belongs to Allah, that public and private funds must be preserved and maintained, that the public funds are a trust in the hands of those who manage, use or invest them, that we are responsible for these funds, and that the feet of the servants shall not pass the bridge on the Day of

Resurrection until they are asked about them, we would preserve them whether they belong to us or to someone else.

If the Sharī‘ah rules prohibit us from excessiveness and wastefulness, as Allah describes the wasteful as the brothers of devils: “Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful” (the Qur‘ān, 17: 27), we should keep a great distance away from negligence and carelessness because the punishment associated with them is severe. Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) forbade talking too much about others and wasting wealth, i.e. to waste it in other than its due channels by means of excessiveness, wastefulness, carelessness or negligence.

We need to change the culture of indifference, whether by raising the awareness of people and wakening the religious deterrent and the national sense or by enacting deterrent laws and imposing harsh punishments that deter all corrupters in the earth. Negligence is a form of corruption and “Allah does not like corruptors” (the Qur‘ān, 2: 205).

There are certain things we may see insignificant while they are in fact serious and may cause considerable dangers or terrible troubles. Leaving lamp-posts turned on daytime is an act of negligence and waste of energy and funds that the society badly needs.

Likewise, excessive use of water and not clearing watercourses waste water resources. The same applies to things left without maintenance and whose maintenance is easy while the danger that results from the lack of maintenance is terribly grave, such as unprotected electrical wires, leaving the drains uncovered or not carrying out regular maintenance of the tires and brakes of cars, the sideview mirrors or the driving mirror or

leaving the car glass cracked or not taking the necessary safety measures in equipment and industries. All of these things may cause a terrible danger that can be easily avoided if we got rid of negligence and indifference.

The most dangerous forms of negligence are to evade the responsibility with which Allah entrusted human beings. Leading and administrative positions are no longer easy in a country that does not afford the luxury of time or funds. These positions are a trust and they will be a cause of disgrace and remorse on the Day of Resurrection except for the one who takes them up with a full sense of responsibility and fulfills what is entrusted to him.

The bad consequences of negligence are exacerbated by the effects of drugs and intoxicants, which veil minds, exhaust bodies and cause a state of weakness, delirium and indifference. Drugs are the mother of evils, because if one's mind has been veiled and he became a drug addict, he would try by all means to get money to buy these drugs even if he assaulted his near relatives and in some cases it reached the crime of murder. Some newspapers and websites published the story of that human wolf who tried to rape his old mother because his mind was veiled.

This grave danger requires the whole society to seriously confront negligence and the negligent as well as drug dealers from the youngest distributor to the largest importer who risks the minds of our people and the future of our country. The religious, cultural, educational and media institutions should efficiently play their role in this regard side by side with the security, inspection and judicial institutions. We should be aware that the person who loses his mind poses danger to people's lives, honor and property and that the physician

sometimes has to amputate a part or a limb of the body to save the life of the whole body. Moreover, man may deal harshly with some of his children whom he loves to bring them up in a correct manner as in the saying of the Arab poet:

*And he was harsh to deter them and whoever is
resolute,
let him sometimes deal harshly with whom he cares
for.*

The right of country and society to feel safe and secure is given priority over any other consideration. However, the security that we seek to achieve shall not be partly provided to the exclusion of others; it shall be provided for the whole society. If everybody does the best to provide security for the society, he will find thousands and millions providing him with security and if he works hard to the benefit of society, millions of people will work hard for his benefit.

On the contrary, if a person neglects duties and others neglect theirs, negligence will turn into a prevailing attitude, destructive to the whole society. The old proverb says, "Deal with people as you like them deal with you." Another proverb advises, "Do whatever you like, as you treat others, so you will be treated." Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the society to reform those who act against their own interests as Allah restrains and prevents through authority what He does not through the Qur'ān.

The Story of Statues and the Destruction of Civilizations

To begin with, there is no single Muslim on earth who worships a statue, believes in it, preaches it or thinks about it. Rather, no single person from among the followers of heavenly religions believes in these statues at all.

It is true that Islam prohibited the making of statues in the early days of Islam. However, this prohibition was based on two grounds. First, people were recent converts to Islam who were recently worshipping idols thinking that they bring them nearer to Allah, the Almighty. The Holy Quran expressed this belief of theirs in the statement of Allah, the Exalted, "We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position." (The Quran, 39: 3). Second, these statues were made to be worshipped or they were made in order to match the creation of Allah, the Almighty. This is confirmed by the fact that apart from the purification of the Ka'bah from idols that were worshipped, the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) have not demolished a temple, a statue or a monument in anyone of the provinces they opened.

This is because they were the best generation who correctly understood the objectives and purposes and were not satisfied with the apparent meanings of texts. On the contrary, they deeply and consciously reflected on their purposes and objectives. This profound understanding of texts is confirmed by the decision of the Second Caliph, Umar Ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), when he denied the new

converts whose hearts were to be inclined to Islam their stated share of Zakah even though it was established by an explicit text as Allah, the Exalted, says, "Zakah expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed for it and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveler." (The Quran, 9: 60). When he was asked, "How do you stop a share that Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) used to give?" He replied, "We used to give them when Islam was weak to incline their hearts to faith. Now that Allah has strengthened Islam with His bounty, there is no need to give out this share."

Furthermore, Umar suspended the penalty of theft during the year of famine. He wrote to one of his governors and asked him about what he would do if people brought him a thief. The governor replied that he would cut his hand. Umar said to him, "But, if a hungry person came to me, I would cut your hand."

Unfortunately, our nation has been plagued by some narrow-minded people who began to issue edicts that this is lawful and that is unlawful without knowledge, understanding or study. They have taken themselves, students, followers and elements into the affairs of *fatwa* for which they are unqualified and thus they went astray and misled other people. Moreover, they opened a wide door before international colonial and imperial powers that work hard to suppress our cultural monuments including the Arab, Islamic, Christian, Pharaohic, Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, Roman or otherwise in order to blot out the Arab memory and the monuments of the Arab, Islamic and Christian civilizations. This is because they are foolish people who have no morals, religion, values or principles. For them, the end justifies the means regardless of the enormity and

seriousness of this means even it led to the destruction of human beings, statues, offspring and the monuments of human civilizations.

The worst thing in this regard is that this destruction is perpetrated in the name of Islam and from people who falsely attribute themselves to it. In fact, Islam and its tenets have nothing to do at all with their acts even if they lied to themselves and deceived their victims from among the youth who joined them that they are on the truth. They have been rightfully described by Allah, the Exalted, in His statement, "And a group deserved [to be in] error. Indeed, they had taken the devils as allies instead of Allah while they thought that they were guided." (The Quran, 7: 30). Allah, the Almighty, says, "Say, [O Muhammad], Shall we inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work." (The Quran, 18: 103-104) and He also says, "And of the people is he whose speech pleases you in worldly life, and he calls Allah to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents. And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy crops and animals. And Allah does not like corruption." (The Quran, 2: 204-205).

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Prof. Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayyib, the Ministry of Awqaf and the Egyptian Dar al-Iftaa stressed that it is unconscionable to assail these cultural monuments in any way, either by demolishing, distorting, selling, looting or destroying and that assailing them is tantamount to an act of aggression against civilization and human heritage.

The reaction of the western world and international institutions to these crimes and their complete silence concerning them are

remarkable and surprising and raise many questions. Had these crimes been committed anywhere else other than our Arab region, the whole world would strongly and differently react. This is a natural reaction from our enemies who are waging unjust wars against us. However, the thing that adds more fuel to the fire is these *fatwas* that support and nourish this crooked thinking, the matter which stresses what we have repeatedly called for that there is an urgent need to issue a law to regulate the affairs of *fatwa* and restrict it to qualified scholars alone.

Competence and Loyalty

If competence coincides with loyalty to homeland, work, profession and place where man works, these elements combined make that man perfectly ideal. On the contrary, if man's loyalty is to a particular person, group or party and this loyalty becomes the basis for which s/he is selected for a particular job at the expense of integrity and competence; this is very dangerous and has serious consequences according to the Shari'ah standards and the national standards which are inseparable.

Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, "He who appoints a man as a group leader while there is among them one who is more competent, he has betrayed Allah, His Messenger and the believers."

Responsibility requires integrity and competence together, as Allah says at the tongue of Prophet Yūsuf (Joseph, may Allah's Peace be upon him), "He said, "Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian" (the Quran, 12: 55). Allah, the Almighty, also says at the tongue of the daughter of Prophet Shu'ayb, "O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy" (the Quran, 28: 26). Integrity alone is not sufficient and knowledge alone is of no avail.

It is narrated that Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) asked Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) to appoint him to a public office. In reply, the Prophet said, "Abu Dharr, you are weak and authority is a trust and on the Day of judgment it is a cause of humiliation

and repentance except for one who fulfils its obligations and (properly) discharges the duties attendant thereon.”

Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) appointed Khalid Ibn al-Walīd, ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Aṣ and others the commanders of the army even though they were new converts to Islam and the army included some senior Companions, who accepted Islam very early, because of their competence and experience in the tactics of war and fighting.

Giving loyalty precedence over competence brings us to the black year when loyalty to the Guidance Bureau was given precedence over competence and brings us back to decades in which administrative corruption was the order of the day.

We still suffer the consequences of this corruption as opportunists and hypocrites were given precedence over competent people. Bribery, nepotism and favoritism became the basis of appointment and as a result competent people were excluded to give way to others, who are incompetent, which was unjust and frustrating. Incompetent people became preoccupied with covering their shortcomings by driving those who are competent away from their way in a systematic way and with working hard to regain what they have paid to obtain these positions. It is in this context that the President of Egypt fights corruption and corruptors and is very keen on rooting out corruption.

There is no doubt that opportunists who reached their positions of authority through illegitimate and illegal means will only be interested in flattering their superiors even at the expense of their religion or conscience or even at the expense of their work's or national interest.

In addition, these opportunists will undoubtedly achieve no progress for their homeland, institutions or positions because

they were not qualified for them and they will not be keen on promoting competent employees to hold leading positions. On the contrary, they will be envious of competent employees and will only be interested in promoting incompetent subordinates who are entirely loyal to them and who will never be able to object to criticize their actions and practices.

Perhaps, the biggest mistake of the political Islam groups was their deception by formalities and appearance; they restricted religion to some external appearances and considered the practice of some rituals as the most important qualifications, conditions and requirements for leadership. According to them, people who are most loyal to the group are the most qualified for holding senior positions. As a result, they may choose inexperienced members to hold very influential positions in which they have no knowledge or experience. The Ministry of Awqaf during the period in which the Muslim Brotherhood assumed power stands as a perfect example for that practice.

They brought some people from work places that have nothing to do with work, administration or technical affairs of the Ministry of Awqaf to hold the senior executive positions of the Ministry just because of their loyalty to the group. This was not restricted to the Ministry of Awqaf as it was repeated in many other authorities of the state. They went to the extreme in appointing people who are loyal to the group and alienating all the competent and sincere people from the various national affiliations who do not belong to the group, the matter which precipitated their downfall in a way that was unparalleled in our modern history.

We can safely state that this downfall marked the end of this group, which employed religion to achieve political interests and deceived people therewith for a long time until

Allah exposed their bad intentions and actions. No one remained loyal to them except a group of opportunists and stubborn followers.

It is our duty to benefit from this experience by keeping away from false, illegitimate and non-national loyalties. We also have to choose the best qualified and competent people to hold senior positions because this stage requires men who are strong, trustworthy, constantly-persevering, knowledgeable, nationalist and sincere.

IN PURSUIT OF BETTER INVESTMENT OF ZAKAH REVENUES

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mokhtar Jum'ah
Minister of Awqaf

Zakah revenues meets a wide gap in the needs of the poor, the indigent and the public interests of the state if they are invested in a proper way. If the rich people generously donate charities and do their best to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give medicine to the patient, support the needy and significantly contribute to fulfill the needs of their country of reform, weapons and equipment, life will be much better in this country with no needy or beggar in the community.

Imam 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) said, "Allah has apportioned the provisions of the poor in the wealth of the rich. So no poor man becomes hungry except as a result of the miserliness of a rich man and if you found a hungry poor man, know that there is an unjust rich man who did not pay the right of Allah in his wealth and did not fulfill his duty towards his society."

In addition, if the endowments are invested in a proper way beside the Zakah and charities for the interests of the country, they would lead to a real renaissance in our country. We may have surplus for impoverished countries that we need to help, such as the Nile Basin countries with which we need to communicate and collaborate scientifically, culturally, charitably and humanely at the governmental and peoples' levels with their strong civil institutions. These institutions are well placed to carry out large and huge projects in these countries and other African poor countries as a strategic

dimension and as a part of our national security. There are numerous successful examples in this field for civil society institutions.

Zakah is a fundamental right in the wealth of the rich: I would first state some certain facts: First, Zakah is a fundamental right in the wealth of the rich and one of the main pillars of Islam such as prayer and fasting alike. Ibn ‘Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said, “Three things have been revealed in the Qur‘ān associated with three others. They are not accepted separately: the first verse is, “Obey Allah and obey the Messenger.” If a Muslim obeys Allah's commands and ignores the Messenger's commands, his effort will not be accepted. The second verse is, “perform the prayer and give Zakah.” Those who perform the prayer and do not give Zakah will have prayer unaccepted. The third verse is, “give thanks to Me and to your parents. Unto Me is the final destination.” Whoever gives thanks to Allah but does not give thanks to his parents, his work will not be accepted.”

Allah, the Almighty, says about those who hoard their wealth and do not give Zakah: “And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah – give them tidings of a painful punishment. The Day when it will be heated in the fire of Hell and seared therewith will be their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs, [it will be said], This is what you hoarded for yourselves, so taste what you used to hoard” (the Qur‘ān, 9: 34-35).

Second, Islam invites Muslims to generously donate charities. Allah, the Almighty, says, “The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains.

And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing” (the Qur‘ān, 2: 261).

Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "The wealth of a man is never diminished by charity." He also said, "The best charity is the one that you give while you are healthy, niggardly and afraid of poverty and wish to become wealthy. Do not delay it to the time of approaching death and then say, 'Give so much to such and such, and so much to such and such.'"

The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also said, “Every day two angels come down from Heaven and one of them says, 'O Allah! Compensate every person who spends in Your Cause,' and the other (angel) says, 'O Allah! Destroy every miser.'”

Allah, the Almighty, says, “Here you are – those invited to spend in the cause of Allah – but among you are those who withhold [out of greed]. And whoever withholds only withholds [benefit] from himself; and Allah is the Free of need, while you are the needy. And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people; then they will not be the likes of you” (the Qur‘ān, 47: 38).

Reasons Behind Defects and Means to Correction:

In this regard, the reasons behind the defect are either associated with zakah payer, zakah recipients or intermediaries between the two, a person, an organization or an institution. The reasons associated with the payers are either failure to pay or resorting to trickery or paying the Zakah without consideration of the organization to which they give the Zakah. The religious discourse should focus on the obligation of paying the Zakah and the major sin committed by those who withheld the right of

Allah in their wealth in assertion that the rich do not escape blame by merely paying the Zakah in any way.

Rather, some jurists maintain that if a rich man mistakenly pays Zakah to a rich person thinking he is a poor, he still has to pay the Zakah. The rich people have to make sure that they pay the Zakah to the rightful recipients honestly and accurately in order to absolve themselves of all blame and contribute with their Zakah to the desired fruit for which Zakah has been ordained.

The reasons behind the shortcoming associated with the recipient revolve around the weak religious deterrent of some people, who make it lawful for themselves to obtain money from any means even if it entails loss of respect. We should remind those people of the Islamic approach and common sense, which discourage those who are able to work from begging or face-losing. Our Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, "Begging is allowed only for one who is in grinding poverty, one who is seriously in debt, or one who is responsible for compensation and finds it difficult to pay." Our Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also says, "Acts of begging are lacerations with which a man disfigures his face, so he who wishes may preserve his self-respect, and he who wishes may abandon it." Imam Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

Carrying stones from mountains tops is better to me than accepting favors of men.

Some say some works are shameful, to me real shame lies in humiliation of begging.

Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, "One of the sayings of the early Prophets which

the people have got is: If you don't feel ashamed, do whatever you like."

Islam strictly prohibits begging when no real need is there and prohibits humiliation of begging. Free men never expose themselves to situations that do not befit them. The upper hand, which gives, is better than the lower hand, which takes. The importance and value of work in Islam should also be stressed and that Islam encourages work. It should also be pointed out that one who strives to help the widows and the poor is like the one who fights in the way of Allah and that the best people are the ones who earn their living from their manual work and are not dependent upon others. The Pre-Islamic poet al-Shanfara al-Azdi said:

I eat the earth's dust dry, lest any benefactor thinks me indebted to his favor.

Mahmud Sami al-Barudi said:

I was created as a dignified person receiving no favor from a child of a free woman that I remember for him when he gets angry.

As for the third defect, it is the mechanism of collecting and distributing the Zakah revenues. With our belief in and appreciation of the role of some civil societies in alleviating the suffering of the poor and the indigent whether by providing expenses or by establishing service and medical projects, these institutions need the following:

A- They must be under the complete control of the state apparatuses, which should follow and control them in the best way. There must be a clear transparency in announcing their budgets, expenses and remunerations

while rationalizing their administrative expenses to the greatest possible degree.

- B- There must be a clear map for the presence of these institutions, their geographical scope and activities in order not to have them all work in the same field or in limited fields while ignoring other fields that might be more important and vital for the society.
- C- A public body, such as the Ministry of Social Solidarity, must be responsible for an electronic network to connect and coordinate the work of these institutions and link beneficiaries with donors and civil society institutions in their geographical or service scope in order to put an end to the phenomenon of the beneficiaries who have their names registered in the records of several charitable institutions while the Zakah revenues and charities do not reach those who really deserve them.
- D- It is necessary to set clear goals and purposes to which all people might donate their charities or to allocate each institution for a particular purpose, such as feeding the hungry, providing medicine for the patient and paying the debts of those who are heavily indebted which is the goal of the campaign started by the Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf.

AIM HIGH IN HOPE AND WORK

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar Jumu'ah

The Minister of Awqaf

Life is filled with hopes. Never lose hope in life, since the loss of hope deprives life of its very meaning. A wise person finds good solutions for all problems or at least tries his best to overcome impediments whereas a fool sees no way out as each solution seems a baffling puzzle replete with intricate obstacles. Since the authentic Sharia never contradicts the sound reason; since all Sharia laws aim to secure the welfare of humankind, the scholars considered despair and dispiriting people of God's mercy as grave major sins. Ibn 'Abbas (may God be pleased with him) reported that a man asked God's Messenger about the major sins. In response, the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Associating anyone with God (in Lordship or Worship), losing hopes' of God's Spirit and feeling despair of God's Mercy. I guarantee her/him paradise s/he whom God saves from these imperfections"

E- Relating the account of Ibrahim (Abraham, may God's peace be upon him) and his talks with the angels when

they gave him the good news of Ishaq (Isaac, may God's peace be upon him), God (may He be Exalted and Glorified) says, “He said, “Do you give me glad tidings, though being great (with years) has touched me? (i.e., I am an old man) Of what do you give me glad tidings?” They said, “We have given you glad tidings with the truth, so do not be of the ones who are despondent.” He said, “And who is despondent of the mercy of his Lord excepting the erring?” (the Quran, 16: 54-56).

F- Similarly, Ya‘qub (Jacob, may God's peace be upon him), after long years of losing his son Yusuf (Joseph, Peace be upon him) addresses his children saying, “O my sons, go and inquire about Yusuf and his brother, and do not despair of God's relief; surely none despairs of God's relief except the disbelieving people”, (the Quran, 12:87).

G- God also says, (may He be Exalted and Glorified), “Say, (This is addressed to the Prophet) “O My bondmen who have been extravagant against themselves, (i.e., who have committed sins) do not feel despondent of God's mercy! Surely God forgives guilty (deeds) all together; surely He, Ever He, is The Ever-Forgiving, The Ever-Merciful”, (the Quran, 39: 53).

H- A sinner should not lose hope of God's forgiveness, for God opens wide ways for repentance; according to the Qudsi Hadith, the Prophet (may God's Peace and

Blessings be upon him) related that God said, “O child of Adam, as long as you invoke Me and ask of Me, I shall forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind... O child of Adam, were you to come to Me with sins nearly as great as the Earth, and were you then to face Me, ascribing no partner to Me, I would bring you forgiveness nearly as great as it [too]” (Related by Al-Tirmidhi).

- I- No patient should lose hope of recovery no matter how serious her/his disease may be; s/he should rather seek the good means to cure and place all hopes in God. In this regard, Job (God's peace be upon him) is exemplary as God (may He be Exalted) says, “And remember when Job called out to his Lord, (saying), "Adversity has touched me and You are The Most Merciful of the merciful". Then, We responded to him; We lifted off the adversity that was upon him and brought him his family and the like of them with them, a mercy from Our Providence and a Reminding to the worshipers”, (the Quran, 22: 83-84).
- J- Suffering the plight of sterility should not lead to hopelessness of God's mercy and gracious bounties. For instance, the wife of Abraham (God's Peace be upon her) receiving the good news that the angels related to her, she was very old and thus, “She said, 'O woe to me! Will I give birth and I am an old woman and this my husband is

an aged man? Surely, this is indeed a wonderful thing. They said, 'Do you wonder at the Command of God? The Mercy of God and His blessings be upon you, O People of the Home! Surely He is Ever-Praiseworthy, Ever-Glorious', (the Quran, 11: 72-73).

K- Likewise, Zakariyyah (Zachariah, God's Peace be upon him) invoked His Lord saying, "He said, 'Lord! Surely the bones within me have become feeble, and my head is turned white with hoary hair and I have not been wretched in invoking you, Lord! And surely, I fear my patronized (relatives) beyond me and my wife is barren. So bestow upon me from very close to You a constant successor", (the Quran, 19: 4-5). Soon, the divine response came: "O Zachariah, surely We give you good tidings of a youth whose name is John. No namesake have We given him earlier", (the Quran, 19: 7). When Zachariah said, "O Lord, will I have a youth, and age has already reached me and my wife is barren?" He (i.e. the angel) said, "Thus, God performs whatever He decides", (the Quran, 3:40). The response came again, "He said , 'Thus (it will be) your Lord has said. Simple is it for Me, and I already created you, earlier, and you were nothing", (the Quran, 19: 9).

L- If you are short of money, be aware that the today's poor may be the tomorrow's rich and vice versa. Whenever God wills a thing for a servant, it comes true: "Surely His

Command, if He wills a thing, is only to say to it, "Be!" and it is", (the Quran, 36: 82). God also says, "Whatever mercy God opens for mankind, then none can be holding it back; and whatever He holds back, then none can be sending it forth after Him; And He is The Ever-Mighty, The Ever-Wise", (the Quran, 35: 2).

M- Regardless of the hard moments you may suffer, hold fast to the way of God (may He be Exalted). When the conditions of life went very dark, Mary (may God's Peace be upon her) found no shelter from God except in Him saying, "Oh, would I had died before this and become a thing forgotten, completely forgotten", (the Quran, 19: 23). Relief and mercy soon came in God's Statement: "Then (one) called out to her from beneath her, "Do not grieve; Your Lord has already made beneath you a rivulet. And shake to you the trunk of the palm-tree (and) it will let fall ripe dates down on you, readily reaped. So eat and drink and comfort your eye, yet in case you ever definitely see any mortal, (Literally: any of the mortals) then say, "Surely I have vowed fasting to The All-Merciful, so I will never speak today to any human being", (the Quran, 19: 24-26).

N- During Al-Ahzab (the Confederates) Battle, the polytheists blockaded the Muslims from all sides and to the Muslims' surprise, God's victory came from where they did not expect. Relating this account, the Quran tells:

"O you who believe! Remember God's Favor to you, when there came against you hosts and We sent against them a wind and forces that you saw not. And God is Ever-Beholding of what you do. When they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached to the throats, and you were harboring doubts about God. (10) There, the believers were tried and shaken with a mighty shaking (11)", (the Quran, 33: 9-11).

O- Likewise, when the unbelievers cast Abraham (peace be upon him) to fire, it was God who saved him saying, "O fire, be coolness and peace upon Abraham!" And they would (devise) a plot against him; yet We made them the greatest losers", (the Quran, 21: 69-70). And, when the whale gobbled Jonah (peace be upon him), he besought God for help, so God's Providence and Mercy were on the spot. God (may He be exalted) says, "And Thun-Nûn, (Jonah) as he went away angered. So he surmised that We should never have mastery over him. Then he called out in the darkness (saying), "There is no god except You. All Extolment be to You! Surely, I have been of the unjust." So We responded to him and safely delivered him from suffering; and thus do We deliver the believers", (the Quran, 21: 87-88).

P- It is an aspect of God's Mercy that He only questions us about the physical means we can, not about the results we

cannot, as results lie only with Him (all Glory be His). If we do our jobs as best as we could and put our trust in God, He opens horizons of mercy wide for us in this life and in the Afterlife.

Q- 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him) narrated that he heard God's Messenger (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) saying, "If you were to rely upon God as should be, then He would provide for you just as a bird is provided for, it goes out in the morning empty and returns full" (Reported by Ahmad). He (may He be Exalted) also says, "And whoever is pious to Allah, He will make for him a way of going out and will provide for him from where he does not (expectedly) reckon" (the Quran, 65: 2-3). He also says, "And whoever puts his trust in God, then He will be (enough) Reckoner for him. Surely, God is consummating His Command; God has already made determined estimate for everything" (the Quran, 65: 3). He (may He be Exalted) also says, "And whoever is pious to God, He will make for him, of His Command, easiness", (the Quran, 65: 4). He also says, "Will not God suffice His bondman? And they frighten you with the ones apart from Him, and whomever Allah leads into error, then in no way will he have any guide", (the Quran, 39: 36).

R- However, it is vain to harbor empty hopes without serious work, as they will just be false hopes. Our master 'Umar

ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him) used to say, "You are not permitted to stay idle, doing nothing to make a living while praying God for sustenance; you should know the sky never rains gold or silver". The mere work even is not enough, for the work must be accurate and perfect. 'Aishah (may God be pleased with her) reported that the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Surely, God loves that when anyone of you does a job, s/he should perfect it" (Reported by Abu Ya'la in his Musnad (Hadith Collection)). God also says, "Surely the ones who have believed and done deeds of righteousness, surely We do not waste the reward of him who does fair deeds" (the Quran, 18: 30).

S- Islam not only calls for work but ardently encourages perfect and qualitative work. 'Aishah (may God be pleased with her) reported that the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Surely, God (may He be Exalted and Glorified) loves that when anyone of you does a job, s/he should perfect it" (Reported by al-Bayhaqi in Shu'ab al-Iman). It is necessary to watch for God in open and hidden actions. Actually, it is difficult or even infeasible or impossible to assign a guard per person to observe or attentively watch their behavior and even if we can, the guards will be in need of other observers and so on. It is easier to bring up a principled human being with a living conscience

pulsing with truth and defense of what is good. Such human being will watch for the One, Who neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him".

T- Stressing the value and credit of work and production in the life of individuals and nations, Islam emphatically invites us to work until the last of our life's moments even if we do not expect to enjoy the good results of our work. It is reported on the authority of Anas ibn Malik (may God be pleased with him) that the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "If the Last Hour comes while you have a palm-cutting in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it" (Reported by al-Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad).

U- The Quran also calls for work and declares it an act of worship. In God's encouragement to observe the great act of Friday Prayers, He issued two equal commands: one to hasten to prayers and another to expedite for work after prayers. He (may He be Glorified) says, "O you who have believed, when it is called out for prayer on Friday, (the Day of Congregation), then endeavor (to hasten) to the Remembrance of Allah and leave out (your) sale. That is most charitable (i.e. best) for you, in case you know. So, when the prayer is accomplished, then spread abroad in the land, and seek of the Grace of Allah, and remember Allah much, that possibly you would prosper" (the Quran, 62: 9-10). When 'Irak ibn Malik (may God be pleased

with him) finished the Friday Prayers, he used to stand at the door of the mosque and say: "O God, I have responded to Your Call, did your obligatory prayers and dispersed as You commanded me, so grant me sustenance out of Your Grace, for You are the best Provider" (Reported by Ibn Khatheer).

V- It is admittedly true that Islam encourages work and production, but Islam also condemns idleness, indolence and beggary. Evidently, they are vices that cause countries to decline and nations to fall. The Prophet used to seek refuge in God from helplessness and indolence. It is reported on the authority of Anas ibn Malik (may God be pleased with him) that the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "O God, I seek refuge in You from helplessness (to do good), indolence, cowardice, senility and miserliness. And I seek Your Protection against the torment of the grave and the trials of life and death", (Reported by Muslim).

W-He (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also urges hard work and dishearten from indolence and unemployment. Abu Hurayrah (may God be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "It is better for anyone of you to carry a bundle of wood on his back and sell it than to beg of someone whether he gives him or refuses", (Reported by al-Bukhari). Ibn 'Umar (may God be

pleased with him and his father) said, "The Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) was asked about the best earning. In response, he said, "man's own work and every perfect sale contract (free from sins)" (Reported by Ahmad in Musnad and by al-Tabarani in al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer).

X- Al-Miqdam (may God be pleased with him) said, "The Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Nobody has ever eaten a better meal than that which one has earned by working with one's own hands. The Prophet of God, David used to eat from the earnings of his manual labor", (Reported by al-Bukhari).

Y- Abu Hurayrah (may God be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Some sins are not atoned for by prayers, fasting, major pilgrimage (hajj) or minor pilgrimage ('Umrah). They said, what will atone for them proper, O Messenger of God? He said, "Concerns and sorrows in pursuit of one's living" (reported by al-Tabarani).

Z- Furthermore, Abu Hurayrah (may God be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may God's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "One who works hard to provide for a widow and the poor is like a striver in the cause of God, and I think he also said, 'He is like one who constantly stands for prayer and observes fast without

breaking it", (Agreed upon: Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim).

AA- All of these texts came to stress the importance of work and production. Only when all citizens work hard for sake of progress and renaissance producing food, drink, clothing, medicine, weapons, and other constituents of life can nations have actual freedom, self-determination and independence. The only way to this achievement goes through knowledge, work and good planning, which will be in focus next Friday oration, God willing.

BEAUTY, DELIGHT AND COMMON SENSE

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mokhtar Jum'ah
Minister of Awqaf

Islam is the religion of civilization and progress, perfection and beauty, and delight and happiness. All Islamic texts, directives and ways lead to this end. The Qur'ān and the Sunnah affirm these meanings. For example, Allah, the Almighty, says in His Book:

- "And the grazing livestock He has created for you; in them is warmth and [numerous] benefits, and from them you eat. And for you in them is [the enjoyment of] beauty when you bring them in [for the evening] and when you send them out [to pasture]" (the Quran, 16: 5-6).
- He also says, "[It is He] who has made for you the earth as a bed [spread out] and inserted therein for you roadways and sent down from the sky, rain and produced thereby categories of various plants" (the Quran, 20: 53).
- He also says, "And made grow therein [something] of every beautiful kind" (the Quran, 50: 7)
- He also says, "And He sent down for you rain from the sky, causing to grow thereby gardens of joyful beauty which you could not [otherwise] have grown the trees thereof? Is there a deity with Allah? [No], but they are a people who ascribe equals [to Him]" (the Quran, 27: 60)
- He also says, "Then do they not look at the camels – how they are created? And at the sky – how it is raised? And at the mountains – how they are erected? And at the earth – how it is spread out?" (the Quran, 88: 17-20)
- He also says, "You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency" (The Quran, 67: 3).
- Allah also says about the highest heavens, "And We have beautified it for the observers" (The Quran, 15: 16)
- He also says, "And We adorned the nearest heaven with lamps [i.e., stars, for beauty]." (The Quran, 41: 12).

- The Noble Qur'ān commands us to assume the best beautiful appearance and take adornment at every Mosque as He said, "O children of Adam, take your adornment [i.e., wear your clothing] at every mosque and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess. Say, Who has forbidden the adornment of [i.e., from] Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision? Say, They are for those who believe during worldly life [but] exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection. Thus do We detail the verses for a people who know" (the Quran, 7: 31-32).

Prophet Muhammad (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "He who has in his heart the weight of a mustard seed of pride shall not enter Paradise. A man said: Verily a person loves that his dress should be fine, and his shoes should be fine. Prophet Muhammad remarked: Verily, Allah is Beautiful and loves beauty. Pride is disdaining the truth (out of self-conceit) and contempt for the people" (Reported by Muslim). When al-Mughirah Ibn Shu'bah (may Allah be pleased with him) told the Prophet that he proposed to a woman, the Prophet said to him: "Look at her, for indeed that is more likely to create love between you" (Reported by al-Tirmidhi).

Prophet Muhammad (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) used to love perfume and called people to receive other people with cheerful faces and smiles. He said, "Do not consider anything insignificant out of good things even if it is that you meet your brother with a cheerful countenance" (Reported by Muslim). For him, making people happy is one of the best deeds in the sight of Allah, the Almighty. Prophet Muhammad (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "No one brings joy to the heart of a Muslim, except that Allah will please him on the day of Resurrection."

The Prophet (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also said, "The most beloved deed to Allah is to make a Muslim happy." He (May Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) urged his Companions to wear the best clothes on Fridays, feasts and public occasions. However, the true beauty is not restricted to physical appearance, but it goes beyond it to the beauty of one's nature, manners and character. Mustafā Sadiq al-Rafī'i (may Allah rest his soul in peace) said, "The best of women is the one

whose manners and mind are as beautiful as her face. If this woman was married to a suitable man, she would make his life much easier and comfortable." The poet said:

*When a man's honor is not defiled by baseness,
Then every cloak he wears is comely.
She upbraided us that we are few in number,
but I said to her, 'noble men are few'.
It is of no consequence that we are few, seeing that our
kinsman is protected,
whereas the kinsman of the many is abased.*

All of us have to beautify ourselves with the beauty of Islam in our nature, appearance, environment, schools, institutes, gardens, parks and public places. We should never distort the beautiful and delightful places with what is repulsive to common sense.

One of the most important signs of common sense, beauty and progress is the choice of good and sweet words. Umar Ibn al-Khattab passed by some people who were kindling a fire. He disliked to say to them, Peace be upon you, O people of the fire, and instead said, Peace be upon you, O people of the light.

Islam encourages us to choose the best names with lofty meanings and to keep away from repulsive names and from everything that is repulsive to nature and common sense. The Holy Qur'ān commands us to do what is best and to say what is good, rather what is best. Allah, the Almighty, says, "And speak to people good [words]" (The Quran, 2: 83). Allah also says, "And tell My servants to say that which is best." (The Quran, 17: ٥٣). Let our slogan be, "Common sense, progress and beauty" because we need common sense to enjoy this beauty and disseminate it in the society.

*When a man's honor is not defiled by baseness,
Then every cloak he wears is comely.
She upbraided us that we are few in number,
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ASPIRED FRIENDS

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mokhtar Jum'ah
Minister of Awqaf

The friend we look for is the one described by Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i (may Allah rest his soul in peace) in his saying:

"He is the one that you feel, when absent, that you miss a part of you, because he is of you and he is not to deceive you like a snake or a fox or to hide himself from you like a hedgehog. Fake friends only appear after hard times end, because they are like flies that only fall on honey." The aspired friend is the one described by Imam al-Shafi'i (may Allah rest his soul in peace) in the following lines of poetry:

A true friend will always stand by you,

Yet, he is willing to face troubles because of helping you.

And if you get into troubles, he is perfectly willing to sacrifice everything for your benefits. This is unlike the friend described by the Omani poet and Judge Abu Surur in the following lines:

Why, though you were my friend, do you forsake me in open ingratitude

I thought you would be my help at hard times and trouble

When revealing to you the afflictions I suffer but you availed me but little

However, when you are assured that I got a high state,

You would come to congratulate..

strange indeed is your way in content and ingratitude

Love lies in hearts but its facts appeared at hard times

A man was asked, "Who are your friends?" He replied, "I do not know." It was said to him, "Why?" He replied, "Because I am not living in hardship and if I suffered hardships, I would recognize my enemy from my friend, because it is hardships

that distinguish true friends from others and this is why it was said that a friend in need is a friend indeed. The poet said:

*May Allah reward hardship with all good
because it enabled me to recognize my friend from my enemy.*

Another poet said:

*People, I see, are inclined to the one who owns gold
But he who has no gold, people are disinclined to him
People, I see, are in hurry to the one who owns silver
But he who has no silver, people are disinclined to him
People, I see, are inclined to the one who owns money
But he who has no money, people are disinclined to him*

A third poet said:

*The rich man of a people is greeted with salutation, while they
rarely greet the poor.
Shall not they be equal in terms of death, when they die and
buried in graves.*

The Arabic word *sadīq* "friend" is derived from a root rich with the meaning of truthfulness. Your friend is the one who tells you the truth publicly and secretly at all times and loves for you what he loves for himself and dislikes for you what he dislikes for himself. Our Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "None of you will have faith till he wishes for his brother what he likes for himself" (Reported by al-Bukhari). He also says, "Whoever possesses the following three qualities will have the sweetness (delight) of faith: a) the one to whom Allah and His Messenger becomes dearer than anything else; b) who loves a person and he loves him only for Allah's sake; c) who hates to revert to disbelief as he hates to be thrown into the fire" (Reported by al-Bukhari).

He (may Allah's peace and Blessings be upon him) also says, "Seven people will be shaded by Allah under His shade on the day when there will be no shade except His. They are:

- A Just ruler
- A young man who has been brought up in the worship of Allah, (i.e. worship Allah (Alone) sincerely from his childhood)
- A man whose heart is attached to the mosque (who offers the five compulsory congregational prayers in the mosque)
- Two persons who love each other only for Allah's sake and they meet and part in Allah's cause only
- A man who refuses the call of a charming woman of noble birth for an illegal sexual intercourse with her and says: I am afraid of Allah
- A person who practices charity so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given (i.e. nobody knows how much he has given in charity)
- A person who remembers Allah in seclusion and his eyes get flooded with tears." (This tradition is agreed upon).

It is narrated that "a person visited his brother in another town and Allah deputed an Angel to wait for him on his way and when he came to him he said: Where do you intend to go? He said: I intend to go to my brother in this town. He said: Have you done any favor to him (the repayment of which you intend to get)? He said: No, excepting this that I love him for the sake of Allah, the Exalted and Glorious. Thereupon he said: I am a Messenger to you from Allah (to inform you) that Allah loves you as you love him (for His sake)" (Reported by Muslim).

Allah says in the divine tradition, “My love is due to those who love one another for My sake, meet one another for My sake and visit one another for My sake.” (Reported by Ahmad in his Musnad). Our Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's peace and Blessings be upon him) said, “For those who love one another for the sake of My Glory, there will be seats of light on the Day of Resurrection, and they will be envied by the martyrs” (Reported by al-Hakim in his Mustadrak). The best relationships and friendships are the ones that are sincere for the sake of Allah and are based on love, amiability, humanity, altruism, magnanimity, values and good manners away from all kinds of detestable selfishness and opportunism.

WOMAN'S RIGHTS IN INHERITANCE AND DECENT LIFE

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The issue of inheritance is a substantial issue addressed by Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) in his comprehensive sermon in the Farewell pilgrimage. He said, "Allah, the Almighty, has given each person, who has a right, his right, but there is no bequest for an heir" (Reported by Ibn Majah in his Sunan).

Allah, the Almighty, Himself, has determined the shares of each heir and has not left this duty to any. Allah, the Almighty, says, "Allah instructs you concerning your children: for the male, what is equal to the share of two females. But if there are [only] daughters, two or more, for them is two thirds of one's estate. And if there is only one, for her is half. And for one's parents, to each one of them is a sixth of his estate if he left children. But if he had no children and the parents [alone] inherit from him, then for his mother is one third. And if he had brothers [or sisters], for his mother is a sixth, after any bequest he [may have] made or debt. Your parents or your children – you know not which of them are nearest to you in benefit. [These shares are] an obligation [imposed] by Allah. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Wise" (the Qur'ān, 4: 11).

The Qur'ān does not only determine the shares of heirs, but it also promises punishments to those who allow themselves to infringe on these rights. Allah, the Almighty, concludes verses on the shares of heirs by His saying, "These are the limits [set by] Allah, and whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger will be admitted by Him to gardens [in Paradise] under which rivers flow, abiding eternally therein; and that is the great attainment. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger and transgresses His limits – He will put him into the Fire to abide eternally therein, and he will have a humiliating punishment" (the Qur'ān, 4: 13-14).

The Qur'ān denounces the people of ignorance for devouring the rights of some heirs without right; He says, "No! But you do not honor the orphan. And you do not encourage one another to feed the poor. And you

consume inheritance, devouring [it] altogether, And you love wealth with immense love. No! When the earth has been leveled – pounded and crushed – And your Lord has come and the angels, rank upon rank, And brought [within view], that Day, is Hell – that Day, man will remember, but what good to him will be the remembrance? He will say, "Oh, I wish I had sent ahead [some good] for my life." So on that Day, none will punish [as severely] as His punishment, And none will bind [as severely] as His binding [of the evildoers]" (the Qur'ān, 89: 17-26). Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Whoever withholds the inheritance that Allah and His Messenger have decreed, Allah will deprive him of his inheritance in Paradise."

It is narrated that a man deprived his daughter of inheritance. She waited until he passed away and entered upon him when he was bathed after death. She looked at him and said, "O Allah, You know that he deprived me of some pleasures of this world and I ask You to deprive him of the delight of the hereafter."

Depriving women of their inheritance may take place on unreasonable grounds or old customs and traditions that have no foundation in the Islamic Sharī'ah. The man who denies someone their due rights and favors another is similar to a person who thinks himself more knowledgeable of worthy and deserved interests of people than the Lord of the worlds, the Most Just Judge, Who creates everything in this world. It implies that he is not pleased by the way with which Allah determines the shares and claims that he has a better way for distribution of inheritance shares, God forbid. If he believes that the shares that Allah has determined in His Mighty Book are the best, he will not interfere and favor a person and deprive another.

As for women generally, be they mothers, sisters, wives, daughters or otherwise, Islam prohibits us from preventing them from marriage, wronging them or devouring their rights. Allah enacts that justice, which men shall show to women, and indiscriminate between daughters and sons are the means to earn the Divine Pleasure and Paradise. Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Whoever has a female child, and does not bury her alive, or slight her, or prefer his children (i.e. the male ones) to her, Allah will bring him into Paradise." This tradition implies lofty meanings and eloquence as the

Prophet used the relative pronoun “whoever” which indicates generality and comprehensiveness. He also used the noun “female” and not the noun “daughter” because “female” is more general as it includes all females, such as daughters, sisters, granddaughters and others.

Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) advised us to take care of women, honor them and treat them well in several occasions. The Prophet says in the divine tradition, Allah says: “Obey me in protecting the rights of the two weak ones: Orphans and women.”

The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also said, “Whoever has three daughters and is patient towards them, and feeds them, gives them to drink, and clothes them from his wealth; they will be a shield for him from the Fire on the Day of Resurrection.”

The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also said in another narration: “Whoever has two daughters or sisters” and in a third narration: “If it were a single daughter that was educated and treated well by her guardian, she would be a shield for him from the Fire on the Day of Resurrection.” A man was sitting with the Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) when his son came to him. He held his son, kissed him and put him in his lap. His daughter then came. He held her and put her beside him. Prophet Muhammad, said to him, “You did not treat them equally” i.e. he should have put the girl on his lap just as he placed the son.

It is noticeable in our contemporary world that some kinds of nasty discrimination occur; some families prefer sons to daughters and give more attention to boys' education. In inheritance, girls are either totally deprived of their rights or they are given less than what is rightfully due to them, which is falsely called compensation. In fact, it has nothing to do with real compensation, but it is a kind of silencing, oppression and deception which you may call as you like except being a compensation or enforcing what is right or a fair implementation or distribution of shares in line with the divine Sharī'ah's truth, justice and laws.

TRANSGRESSION AND EVIL CONSEQUENCES

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Transgression and evil end are inseparable. Allah, the Almighty, says, “O mankind, your injustice is only against yourselves, [being merely] the enjoyment of worldly life. Then to Us is your return, and We will inform you of what you used to do” (the Qur‘ān, 10: 23). Allah also says, “As for ‘Aad, they were arrogant upon the earth without right and said, Who is greater than us in strength? Did they not consider that Allah who created them was greater than them in strength? But they were rejecting Our signs. So We sent upon them a screaming wind during days of misfortune to make them taste the punishment of disgrace in the worldly life; but the punishment of the Hereafter is more disgracing, and they will not be helped” (the Qur‘ān, 41: 15-16). Allah also says, “So when they were insolent about that which they had been forbidden, We said to them, Be apes, despised” (the Qur‘ān, 7: 166). Scholars are in agreement that Allah supports the just nation, even if it is non-Muslim, but Allah does not support the oppressive nation even if it is a believing nation.

Transgression may be committed by individuals or by groups who are called "transgressors" or by states. Whenever a person or a group transgresses and tyrannizes over people, Allah would seize them with a seizure of the one Exalted in Might and Perfect in Ability. Allah, the Almighty, says, “And thus is the seizure of your Lord when He seizes the cities while

they are committing wrong. Indeed, His seizure is painful and severe” (the Qur‘ān, 11: 102).

He, the Almighty, also says about Qārūn, “Indeed, Qārūn was from the people of Moses, but he tyrannized them. And We gave him of treasures whose keys would burden a band of strong men; thereupon his people said to him, “Do not exult. Indeed, Allah does not like the exultant. But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters.” He said, “I was only given it because of knowledge I have.” Did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him of generations those who were greater than him in power and greater in accumulation [of wealth]? But the criminals, about their sins, will not be asked. So he came out before his people in his adornment. Those who desired the worldly life said, “Oh, would that we had like what was given to Qārūn. Indeed, he is one of great fortune.” But those who had been given knowledge said, “Woe to you! The reward of Allah is better for he who believes and does righteousness. And none are granted it except the patient.” And We caused the earth to swallow him and his home. And there was for him no company to aid him other than Allah, nor was he of those who [could] defend themselves” (the Qur‘ān, 28: 76-81).

In the story of Salih (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) with his people, Allah, the Almighty, says, “So they hamstrung the she-camel and were insolent toward the command of their Lord and said, O Salih, bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the messengers. So the

earthquake seized them, and they became within their home [corpses] fallen prone” (the Qur‘ān, 7: 77-79).

In the story of Shu‘ayb (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) with his people, Allah, the Almighty, says, “And when Our command came, We saved Shu‘ayb and those who believed with him, by mercy from Us. And the shriek seized those who had wronged, and they became within their homes [corpses] fallen prone. As if they had never prospered therein. Then, away with Madyan as Thamūd was taken away” (the Qur‘ān, 11: 94-95).

Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, "Allah gives respite to the oppressor, but when He takes him over, He never releases him." Oppression will be darkness on the Day of Resurrection and the evil plot does not encompass anyone except its own people.

Therefore, I do affirm that the outcome of the oppressing states will be ruin. Hafiz Ibrahim, the Poet of the Nile, said in his magnificent poem, "Egypt Speaks about Herself":

How many countries have oppressed me, and then they are gone.

No one has attacked me and went unpunished, for long, God's care is my guard.

Oppressing and unjust states and civilizations carry the elements of their destruction and fall. This oppression precipitates their sudden and rapid fall. Groups that are based on haughtiness, exclusion, injustice, oppression and transgression, such as the groups that adopt suicide, bombing and destruction operations and legalize the slaying of man, setting him on fire and mutilating him as well as humiliating human beings, selling free women as slaves, destroying civilizations, devastating the populated areas, demolishing the buildings, burning the green

and the dry and destroying the crops and the offspring carry elements of their downfall and destruction because Allah, the Almighty, does not like corruption or corrupters.

Therefore, I expect the rapid destruction of ISIS and its sister groups, such as al-Qaeda, Anṣar Bayt al-Maqdis, Boko Haram and other terrorist and extreme organizations. “And Allah is predominant over His affair, but most of the people do not know” (the Qur‘ān, 12: 21).

Egypt's Great Ethics and Civilization

It is no doubt that Egypt is a great nation graced with great leaders, scholars, men, women, young men and women, history and civilization. Also, Egypt has a leading intellectual, scientific, cultural, military, civilizational and humanitarian role in the region. What matters most indeed is Egypt's open horizons and viability of pardon and tolerance. It is graciously capable of avoiding low and mean matters following the logic expressed in the following statement:

The fool face me with filthy stuffs
Yet, I feel repugnant to reply
The worse his absurdities grow,
The greater forbearance I show
Like agarwood increasingly burned
Only for sweet-smelling to be turned

However, there is a distinctive difference between the strong forbearance and the weakness and humility. Egypt is forbearing and not weak. Like an elder brother who yearns for the familial solid union and does his duty to the utmost of his ability to prevent family disintegration and disunity, Egypt is keen to keep the Arab union and will never disgrace wrongful brothers at times of urgency. Following the example of an elder brother in his family, the leading Egypt never overlooks the Arab issues.

Meanwhile, it is further above all fake attempts to tempt Egypt to conflicts, imposed or ordained by other parties who, contrary to the Egyptian political prudence and wisdom, lack the necessary prudence and evaluation of consequences. Over a long and morally rich history of Egypt, the Egyptians were not

known for dishonesty, betrayal, violation or aggression, unless it be for a just cause. At all times, Egypt powerfully stood by their sister and friendly states. Again, over history, Egypt is famous for good neighborhood and the Egyptians are noted for their tolerance, affability, gentle treatment and tender hearts. Extremism and fanaticism never had a place in Egypt. Temporary and accidental violence rarely occurred at some eras, which signified odd phenomena exogenous to the Egyptian community endowed with pure nature and substance. Like a summer cloud, such transient violence soon faded away.

The Egyptian civilization assimilated many aspects of other civilizations and availed itself of what is useful and beneficial to the exclusion of what is harmful and evil. Over more than thousand years, AlAzhar's noted tolerance and balanced moderation acted as the main guaranty of the Egyptian tolerance and moderation inside and outside Egypt in the Arab world, the Muslim World and the world as a whole. I versified some lines in celebration of this meaning saying,

Egypt, the Quiver, is divinely saved and protected
As, in the Wise Remembrance, Guaranteed
t may transiently slip, But soon it stands up
As a strong bulwark of Islam
And a safe shelter for the noble Arabs
Seekers of its peace are granted
Yet, for war mongers its men challenged
Free from aggression and Humility
Here true manhood has the construction
Only Two ends are there with no Third
Absolute victory or martyrdom shared
Ask the history about her Heroes
To understand why the Prophet mentioned her hosts

The best of hosts are those of Egypt, so give
Egypt its due merit and Value
Behold Al-Azhar, filled with ritual and scholarly moves
Preserving and keeping sciences through centuries
Teaching people of all corners of the world
As tolerance is the title of our faith
Send prayers to the Chosen Ahmad
The Best and leader of all humankind

Stealing and Wasting Public Funds

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Minister of Awqaf

Islam strictly prohibits stealing as a hideous crime associated in the context with the crime of violating human lives. Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) in his comprehensive Farewell pilgrimage sermon said, "O people! Your blood and your properties are sacred to one another like the sanctity of this day of yours (day of Arafah), in this (sacred) town of yours (Mecca). O Allah! Have not I conveyed Your Message to them? O Allah, bear witness. It is incumbent upon those who are present to convey this information to those who are absent."

The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also said, "There is no flesh raised that sprouts from the unlawful except that the Fire is more appropriate for it." The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also said, "Some people misappropriate (acquire wrongfully) Allah's property. These people will be cast in Hell on the Day of Resurrection."

Allah, the Almighty, says, "O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is to you ever Merciful. And whoever does that in aggression and injustice – then We will drive him into a Fire. And that, for Allah, is [always] easy" (the Qur'ān, 4: 29-30).

There is no doubt that stealing public funds is more grievous than stealing private funds, because public funds are owned by the society with all of its members and all the members of the society have a share in it and shall claim their rights before Allah on the day of Resurrection from those who appropriate it. Allah says, "And whoever betrays, [taking unlawfully], will come with what he took on the Day of Resurrection. Then will every soul be [fully] compensated for what it earned, and they will not be wronged" (the Qur'ān, 3: 161).

When Abdullah Ibn Umar Ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with them both) entered upon ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amer al-Hadrami in his deathbed, Ibn ‘Amer al-Hadrami said to him, "O Ibn Umar, do not you pray for me." Ibn Umar said, "Allah does not accept a prayer without ablution, nor does he accept a charity from defrauded spoils and you have been responsible for Basra," [i.e. you was the governor of Basra and you might have wrongfully taken something of the public funds which prevents the acceptance of my prayers unless you are totally free of anything like that and away from it beyond suspicion].

This is why some scholars said that the *Muttaqin* (pious people) have been called so because they have kept away from things that other people do not keep away from. Some Companions, Successors and pious people who followed them used to keep away from some legal things lest they are suspicious. Our Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) said, "Both legal and illegal things are evident but in between them there are doubtful (suspicious) things and most of the people have no knowledge about them. So whoever saves himself from these suspicious things saves his religion and his honor. And whoever indulges in these suspicious things is like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) near the *Hima* (private pasture) of someone else and at any moment he is liable to get in it. (O people!) Beware! Every king has a *Hima* and the *Hima* of Allah on the earth is His illegal (forbidden) things. Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart." (Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim).

Some people may think that stealing public funds is restricted to some forms of theft and embezzlement. However, stealing public funds has many other forms, such as evading the payment of the funds due to Ministries and state-owned bodies and institutions which is considered a real and actual theft. In the Ministry of Awqaf, we issued a statement in which we showed that stealing services does not differ from stealing and appropriating funds because these services are provided in return for a price. Whoever steals electricity, water or evades payment of the price of train or metro tickets or other services is like the person who steals public funds.

Likewise, those who follow illegal means to obtain something undeservedly, like those who counterfeit some documents to get subsidies undeservedly are devouring unlawful gains. They take something they have no right to take. If the law has identified certain categories and a particular monthly income for people to deserve the subsidized goods, then all those who take these goods without satisfying these conditions are sinful, because they unjustly take things they do not deserve. What they take will negatively affect the level of real subsidy provided for those who really need these goods and those who are poorer and more needy. The same applies to those who follow illegal means to receive a residential unit or any other benefit without satisfying the applicable conditions. Equally sinful are those who help them achieve their ends or facilitate their mission by failing to apply the conditions or put things in their right order or collect the public funds he is responsible for.

Finally, we need to always remember the statement of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him), "Surely! Everyone of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges: The Imam (ruler) of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects; a man is the guardian of his family (household) and is responsible for his subjects; a woman is the guardian of her husband's home and of his children and is responsible for them; and the servant of a man is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it" (Reported by al-Bukhari in his *Sahih*). Allah, the Almighty, shall ask every guardian for his subjects whether he kept them well or neglected them.

Plagiarism Negatively Affects the Progress of Nations

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There is an equal and opposite reaction for every action. As such, encouraging scientific research, creativity, innovation and planning for a better future require quick and strong necessary measures to put an end to plagiarism, especially in the field of academic and scientific research. There must be a deterrent punishment for those who plagiarize the intellectual efforts of others. Plagiarism should be considered crimes against honor, which prevent plagiarists from assuming any leading position that requires honesty, integrity and high morals. Yet, training students on academic honesty should start from the early years of primary education and continue throughout all the educational stages.

Considering the real practice of some institutions, which grant complimentary certificates, such as educational qualification and some complimentary studies, as well as most of the technical certificates and high schools certificates, we come upon low standards in examination systems in a way unsuitable with the nature of necessary qualification. More efforts are necessary to revise the evaluation and follow-up systems.

It is admittedly true that some graduates of technical diplomas might be unable to read and write. We realize that we badly need to shift our cultural course in terms of evaluation and examination systems. It is necessary to point out that reforming the academic, educational and research systems, especially in terms of examination and evaluation, is a trust and that the failure to carry out this reform is a betrayal of this trust, the matter which will eventually lead to graduating unqualified graduates with certificates that do not reflect their educational reality and do not qualify them to the labor market. Moreover, the institutions granting these certificates lose their credibility, standing and classification at the local and the international levels and the holder of these certificates does not feel the value of the certificate he is awarded and the value of himself and becomes unable to cope with the practical reality.

In fact, cheating is a reprehensible vice, as our beloved Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, "He who cheats is not of us." In this prophetic statement, the object is not stated as a form of emphasis on the prohibition of all forms of cheating. Yet, cheating in academic and intellectual fields is more criminalized, prohibited and against one's honor.

There is, however, a dangerous form of cheating that many people may pass by it heedlessly. This is what I may call research begging, i.e. that a person asks one of his colleagues, friends or students to write his name on a research work in which the person did not participated. This urges me to call for

orally examining any researcher about the researches he submits in order to make sure that he fully understands and comprehends them.

All institutions working in intellectual and academic fields shall develop systems that prevent plagiarism and deprive unqualified persons from earning undeserved certificates. The law shall be strictly applied to those who dare to violate the educational or university values system. There should be continuous evaluation for teachers and others, provided that it should be a strict evaluation that rewards the successful and gives the unsuccessful the opportunity to develop his/her knowledge and performance or else s/he is moved to a work suitable for his real capacities. This should be applied with neutrality, fairness and transparency.

Belief in the value of knowledge as the only venue for security requires us to be serious enough in this endeavor, to exert our utmost effort, to support the talented and well-qualified people and provide a favorable environment for them and to make them role models. Every educational and research institution shall establish a unit or a department for fighting plagiarism so that we can achieve much progress in the fields of science and knowledge and develop our country and the Muslim nation in a world that is chiefly based on scientific and technological progress and space invasion. Wars of this world have become, to a great extent, intellectual and technological in

nature and, therefore, the party who fully possesses such tools is the party that can ensure victory.

In fact, Islam elevates the status of knowledge; Allah, the Most High, says, “Say, Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding” (the Qur‘ān, 39: 9). The Prophet (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) says, “Scholars are the heirs of Prophets, for the Prophets did not leave behind a Dinar or Dirham, rather they left behind knowledge, so whoever takes it has taken a great share.”

He (may Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon him) also, says, “Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him.” However, knowledge in this tradition refers to all sciences, religious and practical. The word ‘*science*’ in the tradition is an indefinite noun and indefinite nouns denote generality and comprehensiveness. Nevertheless, what is intended here is the outcome of the process of education, true scholars and true seekers of knowledge and it has nothing to do with those who obtain undeserved certificates using deception, lying and fake means against honor and integrity.

An Invitation to Optimism

Most beautiful indeed is hope. Most difficult, most wicked and most dangerous is despair. Despair destroys souls, discourages hopes and begets depression and frustration. That is why Islam forbids despair and promoters of despair and prohibits dejection and promoters of dejection. For some scholars, it is a grave sin. For example, Allah, the Almighty, relates the statement of Ya'qūb (Jacob, may Allah's Peace be upon him): "O my sons, go and find out about Joseph and his brother and despair not of relief from Allah. Indeed, no one despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people" (the Quran, 12: 87).

Likewise, Allah relates the statement of Ibrāhīm (Abraham, may Allah's Peace be upon him): "Have you given me good tidings although old age has come upon me? Then of what [wonder] do you inform? They said, "We have given you good tidings in truth, so do not be of the despairing." He said, "And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord except for those astray?" (the Quran, 15: 54-56). Ibn 'Abbad (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) narrated that a man said, "O Messenger of Allah, what are the grave sins?" He answered, "Associating others with Allah, despair of the Spirit of Allah or losing hope in the Mercy of Allah."

When we meet a chronic patient or others with lethal diseases, we say: Never lose hope in recovery and remember the Grace of Allah upon Ayyūb (Job, Peace be upon him): "(And [mention] Job, when he called to his Lord, "Indeed, adversity has touched me, and you are the Most Merciful of the merciful." So We responded to him and removed what afflicted him of adversity. And We gave him [back] his family and the like thereof with them as mercy from Us and a reminder for the worshippers [of Allah]" (the Quran, 21: 83-84). Just follow the example of Job and supplicate Allah for His Graces.

If you are a barren, never forget the Divine Grace that Allah conferred on Zakariyyah (Zechariah) after he was aged and his wife was old and barren. However, Allah responded to the prayers of Zechariah (Peace be upon him) when he said, “He said, "My Lord, indeed my bones have weakened, and my head has filled with white, and never have I been in my supplication to You, my Lord, unhappy [i.e., disappointed]. (4) And indeed, I fear the successors after me, and my wife has been barren, so give me from Yourself an heir (5) Who will inherit me and inherit from the family of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, pleasing [to You]” (the Quran, 19: 4-6). According to another context, Allah, the Almighty, says “And [mention] Zechariah, when he called to his Lord, “My Lord, do not leave me alone [with no heir], while you are the best of inheritors. So We responded to him, and We gave to him John, and amended for him his wife. Indeed, they used to hasten to good deeds and supplicate Us in hope and fear, and they were to Us humbly submissive” (the Quran, 21: 89-90).

Naturally, the barren woman is incapable of producing children and thus she needs cure at first before any possibility of pregnancy. However, the Quranic text does not follow this order or mode. Rather, Allah says, “And We gave to him John, and amended for him his wife.” He immediately gave him the good tidings of having a child before telling him about curing his wife. Allah just tells us of his Omnipotence; He is capable of giving children with or without causes through a fertile or barren wife: “His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, "Be," and it is” (the Quran, 36: 82).

The Quran relates the story of Ibrāhīm (Abraham, may Allah's Peace be upon him) when the angels gave him the glad tidings of having a child after being very aged. Allah, the Almighty, says, “And his wife was standing, and she smiled. Then We gave her good tidings of Isaac and after Isaac, Jacob. She said, "Woe to me! Shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old

man? Indeed, this is an amazing thing!" They said, "Are you amazed at the decree of Allah? May the mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, People of the House! Indeed, He is Praiseworthy and Honorable" (the Quran, 11: 71-73).

By the same token, a person suffering hardships or poverty shall know that Allah's treasures are full and are never exhausted. Days come with hardship and ease; the today rich man may be the tomorrow poor one and vice-versa:

See you not that the poor hope to get riches

Whereas the rich fear lest poverty comes

Allah, the Almighty, says, "And whoever fears Allah – He will make for him a way out and will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon Allah – then He is sufficient for him" (the Quran, 66: 2-3). Allah, the Almighty, also says, "And whoever fears Allah – He will make for him of his matter ease" (the Quran, 66: 4). Allah, the Almighty, also says, "Whatever Allah grants to people of mercy – none can withhold it; and whatever He withholds – none can release it thereafter. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise" (the Quran, 35: 2).

At this moment when we start the New Year, let us all have new hopes for better and brilliant future and a near support from Allah. Drive away all traces of despair and notions of anxiety or bad omens. Indeed, the enemies only want us to fall prey to despair and hopelessness and then yield and surrender in humility. Nevertheless, our faith and culture know no way to despair and we are full of hopes. A poet said,

He said "the Sky is gloomy," and frowned

I replied, "Smile", and enough frowns in the sky

He said, nights forced me to drink the bitter gall

I replied, "Smile" even if you drank the bitter gall to the fullest

Perhaps, others seeing you chanting

Get relieved from depression and start chanting