
Pope Francis' Words Testament to His Wisdom

Interfaith Dialogue as Instrument of Peace

MWL Launches Initiative at UN Headquarters

East and West: Bridges of Understanding and Peace



Pope Francis and Sheikh Al-Issa hold talks at the Vatican

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MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE



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Pope Francis' Words Testament to His Wisdom

By Adel Al-Harbi

Pope Francis, the Vatican's spiritual leader, is a man of wisdom who courageously stood against identifying the Islamic faith with violence because of the actions of a few extremists that exist in all religions and cultures.

Following the tragic murder of an elderly priest in a church in France in 2016, Pope Francis stated, "If I speak of Islamic violence, I have to speak of Catholic violence. Not all Muslims are violent." He said, "I

think that in nearly all religions there is always a small fundamentalist group," adding "We have them," referring to Catholicism.

This message had a significant impact at that time. The wisdom of it effectively blocked advocates of revenge, hatred, and counter-hatred. Indeed, there are extremists on both sides, but there should not be influential leaders and figures among them. Their influence on followers can be



catastrophic and may lead to an endless clash of civilizations.

In May, the Pope met with the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, at his office in Saint Martha House in the Vatican. The press statement that followed the historic meeting stated, "Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa expressed the Islamic world's appreciation for Pope Francis' fair and just stances regarding baseless and isolated allegations that link extremism and violence to Islam." This well-deserved commendation reflects the MWL's perception of a man with whom partnerships can be forged to counter extremism, especially Islamophobia. This embodies the MWL's new vision, which transcends the barriers of extremism and terrorism and its minute intricacies and aims to lead change, influence, and participate in shaping the future of humanity and achieve intercultural communication

between nations. This vision asserts that fragmentation, in itself, is a triumph for extremism that seeks to divide the world into opposing camps and establish itself as the righteous force, brand its opponents as evil and justify its existence. Extremists on each side would be much weaker without the existence of their counterparts on the other sides, who provide them with the false pretext under which they justify instigating and perpetrating violence.

Pope Francis' reception and words were testament to his wisdom. He emphasized the commonalities, rejected extremism from both sides, and opposed generalization. Such a voice of reason is what we need to counter the calls for clashes of civilizations and advocate for coexistence and understanding among civilizations based on shared human values and the principle of "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion." (Quran 109:6)





Dr. Al-Issa and Pope Francis discussed shared values and stressed the need to promote communication between cultures and renounce hatred and racism.

Interfaith Dialogue as an Instrument of Peace

BY AFTAB HUSAIN KOLA

The meeting of Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, and Pope Francis at Saint Martha House at the Vatican in the last week of May

2023 was the second interaction between the two. The first meeting took place in 2017.

Both sides exchanged cordial and frank con-

versations on shared values and stressed the need to promote communication between cultures, renounce hatred and racism, and debunk myths.

The two leaders touched upon various aspects of achieving peace and agreed that religious leaders have the power to end violence and hate in the world. They agreed to continue cooperation between the Muslim World League and the Vatican.

The meeting demonstrates the Muslim World League's competence in undertaking a global initiative to promote the bonds of effective dialogue, transparent and optimal understanding, and positive cooperation between the followers of religions and cultures.

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh, a Harvard-educated Iranian-American political scientist, stated in a recent media interview: "Dialogue among individuals and groups of whatever backgrounds, cultures, religions or beliefs is essential for enabling peaceful existence and fostering respect for human dignity and mutual understanding."

Interreligious (also called interfaith) dialogue takes place between people of different religious backgrounds who seek to learn more about one another.

It may be recalled that late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia met Pope Benedict XVI in 2007, ushering in a new beginning in interfaith dialogues. He believed inter-faith dialogue had an immense role to play in minimizing differences.

That gesture resulted in the establish-



The meeting demonstrates the Muslim World League's competence in undertaking a global initiative to promote the bonds of effective dialogue

ment of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).

The Riyadh-based KAICIID is an intergovernmental organization that promotes peace and understanding through interreligious and intercultural dialogue by strengthening capacity at the local, national, and regional level through education on dialogue practices; increasing understanding of religious and cultural diversity through leadership for dialogue training, and promoting dialogue and social cohesion through conflict prevention, peace building, and development policies.

Last June, Dr. Zuhair Alharthi, the Secretary General of KAICIID, met Pope Francis in Vatican City. He expressed gratitude for the Vatican's historical role in helping establish and support the International Dialogue Centre's interreligious and intercultural dialogue globally.

The meeting between Pope Francis and Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa was to take forward the work done on promoting peaceful coexistence and harmony among different religions and making the world a better place to live.



Part of the international guests attending the launch of the MWL initiative at the United Nations Headquarters.

Building Bridges Between East and West: MWL Launches Initiative at UN Headquarters

MWL - New York

The Muslim World League initiative: "Building Bridges between East and West" was launched

at the United Nations headquarters in New York by His Excellency the MWL Secretary General Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa, with the participation of the President



Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa at the launch of the MWL initiative of “Building Bridges between East and West”.

of the United Nations General Assembly Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Mrs. Amina Mohammed, the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations Mr. Miguel Moratinos, and the Special Adviser on Multiculturalism and Religions at the United Nations Mr. Arthur Wilson. Senior United Nations leaders, representatives of the permanent missions of the UN member states, religious leaders from different sects, civil society organizations, and academia also attended the launch.

In his opening speech, Dr. Al-Issa stressed the importance of strengthening civilizational alli-



Dr. Al-Issa: Communication
for acquaintance and
cooperation between nations
and peoples is a divine call in
all heavenly laws

ance, recognizing that each civilization has its own identity, which we must understand its



President of the United Nations General Assembly Mr. Csaba Kőrösi.



Mr. Kőrösi: Faith brings people together within their own communities and across them and religious organizations have a major capacity to affect human behavior

right to exist, regardless of our disagreement with it. "Without this understanding, we will call on everyone to adopt the theory of the

inevitability of the civilizational clash and conflict, and then coexistence among the different nations will be impossible.



The Grand Mufti of Egypt addresses the conference.



Mrs. Amina Mohammed:
A dialogue based on diversity,
inclusivity and respect stands
out as a beacon of hope where
everyone is welcome and
empowered to contribute

Dr. Al-Issa said that a civilization is the set of beliefs, ideas, and behaviors that constitute the conviction and behaviors of the public and not those of specific individuals, groups or private blocs.

He said communication for acquaintance and cooperation between nations and peoples is a divine call in all heavenly laws, and in Islam in particular, God Almighty says: "and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another."

He added that each civilization has its own specificity, and it is not possible to call for the fusion of civilizations into one. "We have no choice but to respect the divine wisdom in the diversity and inevitable differences in this life."

Dr. Al-Issa called on the world to realize the importance of promoting understanding, cooperation, and peace among nations and peoples and to recall the lessons of history



**Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations
Mrs. Amina Mohammed.**

that confirm the seriousness of the clash of civilizations and the danger of the attempts to impose a certain culture on the others.

He also called on everyone to scrutinize human history, read it correctly, and pay attention to the falsifications, exaggerations, or wrong or extremist analysis in parts of it.

"The way of the wise is the effective and fruitful dialogue, and grasping the nature of this life that we share with all its troubles; and the closest example of this is the Corona pandemic, which affected everyone without exception."

His Excellency stressed that the MWL was keen, through the Charter of Makkah, to highlight the stance of Islam towards the followers of religions and civilizations.

Dr. Al-Issa said that an alliance between nations and peoples that understands the speci-



The initiative can serve as a platform for cooperation in the economic, cultural, social, religious and educational fields for the benefit of all peoples of the world.



Dr. Al-Issa: The world must realize the importance of promoting understanding, cooperation, and peace among nations and peoples and learn from the lessons of history

ficity of each civilization and does not interfere in their affairs or offend their followers is an urgent necessity for the peace of our

world and the harmony of its national societies. "It is not an option that we accept or reject, but rather a necessity to determine a path and a destiny."

He called on the member states of the United Nations to adopt a proposal to the General Assembly to dedicate an international day to the alliance of civilizations between East and West, in order to motivate the nations and peoples of the East and West towards more mutual trust, understanding, and effective cooperation in the face of the pessimistic ideas of a civilizational clash and the generalization of judgments and impressions based on the acts of an individual, or extremist groups.



Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth Ephraim Mirvis addresses the conference.

President of the United Nations General Assembly Mr. Csaba Kőrösi thanked the Muslim World League and the UN Alliance of Civilizations for the initiative and commended the MWL for its humanitarian work in helping people affected by natural disasters. He said faith brings people together within their own communities and across them, adding that religious organizations have a major capacity to affect human behavior at a time when the patterns of social interaction, consumption and pollution need to fundamentally change. "Over two billion people live in conflict zones. With lives disrupted, jobs unavailable and schools not functioning, anger is boiling up. Anger which can easily be turned against people who are not and should not be



Dr. Al-Issa: We call on Member States to promote the values of peace and harmony among nations and peoples in their educational curricula

the enemy," he said in his speech. "We witness increasing tendencies across the world to move hateful discussions online.



**High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations
Mr. Miguel Moratinos**



Mr. Moratinos: It must be stated bluntly: there is no clash of civilizations. There is a clash of ignorance and a clash of interests.

This is particularly prevalent on social media platforms, and this extremism can lead to deadly real-life consequences,” he added.

Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, Mrs. Amina Mohammed, said: “the world is facing a number of complex and interlocking crises, from conflicts to climate chaos to crises in food, energy and finance, to a rising tide of inequalities that threaten to shred the social contract.”

She said these crises are providing fertile ground for an alarming rise in hate speech and discrimination against individuals and communities based on their religion, beliefs, race, ethnicity, language or gender, and concomitant acts of violence and intimidation.

“It is dialogue that stands out as a beacon of hope; dialogue based on diversity, inclusivity, listening to others and respecting our differences; a dialogue where everyone is welcome and empowered to contribute. Such dialogue requires a transformed approach to education; one that nurtures a culture of peace,” she said in her speech.

Mr. Miguel Moratinos, High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, said building bridges of understanding between diverse cultures, religions and civilizations is the *raison d’être* of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

“It is truly heartwarming to see that state and non-state actors are increasingly recognizing the power of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a viable tool for creating cohesive, homogeneous, peaceful and inclusive societies,” he said, asserting that a peaceful society is one that is rich in its diversity, strong in its inclusivity and respect for each and every individual, regardless of their religion, faith, color, ethnicity or gender, and just in its protection of all its citizens’ rights, equally and without discrimination.

He said: “Around the world, the surge of hate speech, xenophobia and religious intolerance have created mistrust between people and alienated entire communities. Bigotry, racism and stigmatization based on religion, belief, ethnicity, race or gender thrive in chaotic societies. Where toxic hate thrives, radical groups and terrorists find a fertile ground to divide people and recruit the vulnerable and marginalized.”

He added: "During the pandemic and to date there has been an unprecedented increase in online activity and proliferation of digital platforms which was a multiplier factor enabling hate mongers and broadening their outreach and their influence across the digital platforms."

He said the UN's Alliance of Civilizations "was created in a way to refute the theory [of a clash of civilizations.] We are convinced that religion, culture or civilizations are not the only root causes of conflicts. It must be stated bluntly: there is no clash of civilizations. There is a clash of ignorance and a clash of interests."

He concluded his speech by saying, "Violent extremism and hate cannot be linked to religion; religion must be a positive force in our societies and lives, and religious leaders must play an important role in mobilizing communities to increase mutual respect and understanding."

Special Adviser on Multiculturalism and Religions at the United Nations, Mr. Arthur Wilson said: "We are aware that we have differences in this room and assembly, but we must confess that even within our own religious affiliations there are differences. This event has given us an opportunity to lay aside our differences and focus on the critical issues that we all must agree we have in common. Discrimination, intolerance and violence are critical issues we all agree must change."

He said efforts must be made to internationally incorporate various educational and training formats and create a dialogue between the nations and peoples of the East and West through designated, joint events and initiatives aimed at combating discrimination, peer pressure and violence. He called for designing curricula "that can be available in the educational systems and even in the home; that can



Special Adviser on Multiculturalism and Religions at the United Nations Mr. Arthur Wilson.



Mr. Wilson: Faith does not just reach the mind, faith also reaches the heart. We can help increase positive change in this world

be imparted to the next generation because they are the leaders of tomorrow."

He added, "Faith does not just reach the mind, faith also reaches the heart. We can help increase positive change in this world. Your Excellency Dr. Mohammed Al-Issa, thank you; this initiative is a great opportunity to truly build bridges between the East and the West. I believe this is possible."



From left: Special Adviser on Multiculturalism and Religions at the United Nations Mr. Arthur Wilson, President of the United Nations General Assembly Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Mrs. Amina Mo-hammed and High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations Mr. Miguel Moratinos at the main podium in the United Nations Hall during the launch of the MWL initiative of Building Bridges between East and West.

East and West: Bridges of Understanding and Peace

Dr. Osman Mohamed Osman

The Building Bridges between East and West initiative was based on Islamic teach-

ings that urge Muslims to dialogue with others who are culturally different. Allah

Almighty says (O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware) Quran: 49: 13. The initiative launched by Dr Mohammed Abdul Karim Al-Essa from the United Nations Headquarters focused on several issues, which are summarized as follows:

Cooperation, not conflict, is the basis of relations between civilizations

The initiative coinciding with Dr. Al-Issa's visit to the Vatican confirms the will for dialogue and cooperation to enhance understanding and civilized sharing. It is worth noting that the initiative reinforces the United Nations' declaration of 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The initiative also promotes and supports the Charter of Makkah; a document signed by more than one thousand two hundred muftis and scholars of all Islamic sects, which highlights the true vision of Islam towards followers of other religions and civilizations.

The initiative is a complementary step to many global efforts in the context of communication between civilizations, including the "Alliance of Civilizations", which was established in 2005 in New York, as an international organization that encourages intercultural dialogue to combat negative ideas and attitudes towards peoples, as well as to encourage understanding among civilizations based on the values of tolerance and joint action.

The initiative can serve as a platform for

cooperation in the economic, cultural, social, religious and educational fields for the benefit of all peoples of the world. His Excellency Dr Al-Issa stressed that the alternative to civilizational cooperation and understanding is a civilizational conflict, which paves the way for the repetition of painful historical incidents in the history of humanity.

Civilizational understanding while preserving identity

Civilizational understanding does not mean the supremacy of one civilization over another, but rather the strengthening of the common, and the respect of the different. The history of Islamic civilization has shown that it did not adopt cultural isolation. Rather, it interacted with different civilizations and exchanged knowledge and culture with them. Throughout history, it has contributed to enriching human cultures based on the values of mutual respect and the preservation of human dignity. It also attached utmost importance to promoting cultural diversity as a basis for cooperation rather than conflict.

The Islamic civilization has promoted the values of brotherhood, love, justice and tolerance among peoples as common universal principles that promote civilized dialogue for the sake of sustainable peace and development. Wise leaders, religious figures and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are primarily responsible for promoting civilized understanding among peoples of the world to ensure global peace and security

Initiative proposals

The Building Bridges between East and



The Building Bridges Between East and West initiative is a complementary step to many global efforts in the context of communication between civilizations.

West initiative presented proposals to enhance civilized understanding and cooperation. In this regard, it called on the member states of the UN to adopt a proposal in the General Assembly to allocate a global day for the civilizational alliance between East and West. The second proposal is to promote the values of peace and harmony among the peoples of the world in their educational curricula.

Cooperation through the initiative provides a common platform for utilizing

diversity and differences to promote dialogue and civilized understanding between peoples. The initiative also enhances cooperation between the MWL and the UN to intensify efforts aimed at establishing the values of understanding and global civilized dialogue, especially between East and West. The UN and the MWL agree on the importance of promoting true and comprehensive peace between all nations through bridges of understanding, educational programs, and social initiatives.



The MWL co-chaired the G20 Religion Forum, or R20, which was held in 2020 in Indonesia as part of the G20 Summit. The R20 aimed to curtail the spread of communal hatred, promote solidarity and respect among the diverse peoples, cultures and nations of the world, and foster the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.

MWL Initiatives Promote Cultural Dialogue

Dr. Ahmed Abd Rab Al-Nabi

Intellectual arenas are platforms for exchanging ideas and addressing contemporary issues, but they can also lead to mistakes with

disastrous consequences. The Clash of Civilizations theory by Samuel Huntington has generated varying perspectives and opinions.



The Secretary General of the MWL addresses the G20 Religious Forum, R20, which took place in 2020 in Indonesia.

The Muslim World League (MWL) has refuted the theory, emphasizing commonalities for peaceful coexistence.

The MWL is a global Islamic organization dedicated to promoting true Islamic principles and rejecting extremism. It fosters religious and civilizational dialogue and cooperation with all. It aims to dispel misconceptions about Islam, promote a positive image of Muslims, and create a world of peace and justice.

Through humanitarian and civilizational programs, the MWL seeks to strengthen peace and harmony, confront extremism, and uphold moral values that preserve human commonalities.

It initiates efforts to promote peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance, and resolution of conflicts through mechanisms that uphold human brotherhood and dignity. It embraces intercultural dialogue, both within the Islamic community and on a global scale. Its moderate Islamic approach and humanitarian concepts aim to foster harmony and peace among all people, recognizing the honor of all human beings as descendants of Adam.

The words of His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, during his international tours and meetings with leaders and officials around the world, have

highlighted the MWL's role in promoting the message of the "Dialogue of Civilizations." The MWL has signed partnerships and agreements of understanding and collaboration with different international bodies, including the UN and UNESCO, and organized numerous conferences and symposiums.

One of the most significant achievements in relation to civilizational dialogue is the issuance of the historic Charter of Makkah. This global document emphasizes that Muslims, as an integral part of the world, seek to interact with all its components for the betterment of humanity. It aims to promote noble values, build bridges of love and harmony, and counteract injustice, clash of civilizations, and hatred. It also asserts that religious and cultural diversity in human societies should not lead to conflict and confrontation, but rather calls for the establishment of positive partnerships between different civilizations and cultures.

The document has achieved a unique Islamic consensus, uniting Muslims from different sects and schools of thought around noble Islamic values and rejecting exclusionary and violent practices. It envisions a promising human future and the revival of the historical and civilizational role of the Muslim nation. It aims to foster love, dialogue, and understanding with all nations, leading to the betterment of humanity and the happiness of all people.

The world has warmly embraced this groundbreaking document, endorsing its effective solutions and enlightening perspectives on longstanding issues. It has received praise from international conferences and institutions and is celebrated for promoting peace and solidarity. All Islamic

countries officially adopted it during a meeting of foreign ministers in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's 47th session in Niamey, Niger, in November 2020.

A careful examination of the MWL's approach to civilizational dialogue reveals an important aspect: its recognition of the global scale of civilizational dialogue. This is evident through numerous conferences, seminars, and international forums the MWL organizes both inside and outside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and through the Secretary-General's visits and official meetings with representatives from various countries around the world.

Dr. Al-Issa has always emphasized the MWL's objective of reminding the world of the rich civilization of Islam and its historical legacy of openness to other civilizations. This legacy underlines the significance of cultural and intellectual exchange and reinforces the Islamic values of righteousness, justice, benevolence, progressive interactions, and positive exchange that form the basis of human brotherhood in Islam.

The MWL actively envisions a future of shared human identity. This vision promotes harmonious coexistence among diverse cultures, religions, and races, fostering integration and collaboration for a more peaceful and inclusive world. The focus is on embracing unifying elements among peoples and upholding major civilizational values that connect all human beings. The goal is to have a world where the values of mutual respect, acceptance of diversity, and equality for all are dominant; a world where no culture, civilization, or race dominates another and freedom is respected.



Pilgrims perform Tawaf at the Ka'aba during Hajj.

Hajj Caravans of the Bygone Era

Dr Fatima Taneem

'And proclaim to the people the Hajj [pilgrimage]; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass.' (Quran 22:27)

From the first Hajj in 10 AH (632 CE,) with thousands of pilgrims accompanying the Prophet (PBUH) on foot, camels and horses, to the present day Hajj in 2023 when 2.5 million

pilgrims arrived in Makkah from all corners of the world, mostly by airplanes, the journey of Hajj has evolved significantly and dramatically. Since the last century, rapid technological advances and newer modes of transport have transformed Hajj from a months-long arduous journey into a comfortable, safe and fairly direct voyage to Makkah. Historically, pilgrims traveling by sea reached Makkah through the

port of Jeddah, but their numbers were insignificant before the advent of steamships. Till then, the majority of the pilgrims traveled on overland routes.

Past Hajj Travel

For the first 13 centuries of Islam, people from different parts of the world joined the Great Hajj Caravans set out annually from the main cities across the Islamic World. These caravans traveled along well-established trade routes and routes that were developed as the Muslim world expanded. For centuries, these Hajj caravans marched from hundreds of cities, villages and mosques, from the Atlantic shores of Africa and the Iberian Peninsula to the Pacific Coast of China, from Zanzibar in the south to the Caucasus and Central Asia in the north. Some of these overland routes gained prominence, and rulers and wealthy patrons established caravanserais (en route resting places) that supplied water and provided protection to the caravans. Besides pilgrims, these Hajj routes were also used for communication and trade. Notably, throughout history, these routes and itineraries regularly created new religious, political, social and cultural contact zones - influencing the social structure of the communities along them. There were many Hajj routes such as Iraqi, Shami, Egyptian, Yemeni and Omani pilgrim routes; but the majority of the caravans traveled through Damascus, Cairo and Baghdad.

Hajj Caravans

The Hajj Caravans were classically described as 'towns/cities on the move.'

They set out from the cities of Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo and were highly organized and sophisticated. An official Amir al-Hajj was the annually appointed leader who was in command and was responsible for the safety of the pilgrims; his word was absolute. He had a troop of soldiers under his command as well

as many officials, including a judge, two notaries, a secretary, and others responsible for the animals and provisions. Merchants, traders, craftsmen, cameleers, medics, water carriers, torch-bearers, cooks, scouts and guides also accompanied the caravans. Each caravan had usually 8000-10000 pilgrims and usually required 25000-30000 camels.

Until the 19th century, pilgrims left their homes and reached Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo from their hometowns to join the Hajj Caravans to Makkah. These were the Egyptian Caravan, the Syrian Caravan and the Iraqi Caravan. The Egyptian Caravan crossed the Sinai Peninsula and then followed the coastal plain of western Arabia to Makkah - a journey lasting 35-40 days. It included pilgrims from North Africa and Muslim Spain. The Syrian Caravan moved South via Madinah and reached Makkah in 30 days; however, since the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 CE, this caravan began in Istanbul, gathered pilgrims through Asia Minor along the way and then proceeded to Makkah from Damascus. The Iraqi Caravan departed initially from Kufa, then from Baghdad, the new capital of the Abbasid Caliphate as of 762 CE. It crossed Najd and reached Makkah via Madinah. Another smaller caravan, comprised of mostly Iranians, would set out from Basra and meet the main group at the Miqat of Dhat Irq.

However, the Iraqi route fell into disuse following the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258 CE. As a result, Iraqi, Iranian and other pilgrims traveled to Damascus instead.

From the 13th century onwards, the Egyptian and Syrian caravans were accompanied by Mahmal, a wooden litter, richly decorated that contained a copy of the Noble Quran. For centuries, the Egyptian caravans also bore with it the new Kiswa (draping for the Kaaba) each year.



Pilgrims on their way to the Holy Sites.

Hajj Travel Routes

Since the early days of Islam, rulers paid special attention to Hajj pilgrims and facilitated their passage to Makkah. Over the centuries, a series of Hajj routes developed and thrived in different areas. The most famous and most frequented among them were the Syrian Route, Iraqi Route and the Egyptian Route.

DARB-AL-HAJJ AL-SHAMI: The Syrian Route

Extending from Damascus to Makkah, this route was over 1300 km and took about 60 days to cover. It was the oldest that existed from the 7th century to the 15th century, succeeded by the Ottoman Route, on which the Hejaz Railway track was inaugurated in 1910. The route was under the Umayyads, then the

Mamluks and finally the Ottomans.

It started from Muzaryib, ran across Kerak to Maan, and entered the Arabian Desert from the north, through Dhat al-Hajj and Wadi Baldah to Tabuk, and then to al-Ukhaydir, Hijr, al-Ula and finally Madinah and Makkah.

Darb Zubaydah: The Iraqi Route

This route was the most important Hajj route during the Abbasid Caliphate (750-850 CE), connecting Makkah to the Iraqi cities of Kufa and Baghdad. Initially, the chief departure point was Kufa and then Baghdad. It extended over 1500 km. The route crossed Najd to Madinah via Fayd and Rabadha. The Abbasid rulers led the Hajj caravans and established milestones, fire signal towers, forts, caravanserais,



Cars were used to transport pilgrims in the 1940s.

wells and reservoirs along the route. They were also responsible for partially paving the route.

At its height, this route included 54 major way stations. As many of the charitable works on various stations along the route were sponsored by Zubaydah bint Jafer, wife of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, the route, henceforth was called Darb Zubaydah. This route fell into disuse following the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258 and the cities along the route were abandoned.

DARB AL MISRI: The Egyptian Route

This route was first established by the Fatimids, then Ayyubids and later the Mamluks. It extended from Cairo to Makkah over 1600 km and took around 35 to 40 days to cover.

It started from Ajrud, crossed the Sinai Peninsula through Qalaat-al-Nakhal to the port of Aqaba, followed the coast to Rabigh, and henceforth joined Darb Sultani connecting Madinah and Makkah.

However, during the Ayyubid's rule (1169-1260 CE), the Crusader's occupation of territories and their threat rendered this route risky. The route was diverted from Qus to the port of Aydhab, where pilgrims set sail to Jeddah. However, due to internal conflicts and the Crusades in the last years of Ayyubid's rule, no Hajj Caravans left Egypt or Syria for Makkah. Later, under the Mamluks (1252CE-1382 CE), the Egyptian route was re-started in 1266 after the victories of Sultan Baybars against the Crusaders.



Makkah Route Initiative allows to complete critical tasks such as fingerprint checks and passport control on a fast track basis.

Makkah Route Initiative Eases Entry Process for Pilgrims

BY AFTAB KOLA

Saudi Arabia continues to serve Hajj pilgrims through the expanded Makkah Route initiative, which streamlines the travel and entry process for visitors in partner countries.

Where else on Earth can you find almost 2.5 million men and women at a time, young and old, from nearly every country in the world, speaking more than 125 languages, all united in faith and purpose,

acting with complete cooperation, goodwill, self-discipline and generosity? Without a doubt, it is the Hajj, one of the five foundational pillars of Islam.

It is incumbent upon adult Muslims to perform the Hajj once in their lifetimes if they are physically fit and financially able to do so.

Since the Islamic calendar works on the lunar system, Hajj runs in time through all seasons of the year. It falls in the second half of the first ten days of the month of Dhul Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Hijrah Year. This year, Hajj takes place during the hot summer months. During these months, pilgrims endure hardships, which, long ago, resulted in many fatalities. The provision of modern facilities has eased difficulties to a good extent. Excellent infrastructure, modern means of transportation including train services, and the efforts of the Saudi government in providing shelter,

sanitation and medical care, have vastly improved conditions.

Periodically, new initiatives, in tune with the times, are implemented to improve the physical infrastructure in Makkah and the Holy Sites and related services. Yet another initiative that has found favor with the pilgrims is the Makkah Route initiative.

Makkah Route initiative

Launched in 2019 in only two Muslim-majority countries as part of the 'Guests of God Service Program,' one of several initiatives within Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the scheme allows Hajj pilgrims to fulfill all visa, customs and health requirements in one place, at their airport of origin, thereby saving long hours of waiting before and upon arrival in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Interior implements



Saudi Arabia is continuing to serve pilgrims through the expanded Makkah Route initiative, which streamlines the travel and entry process for visitors in partner countries.

the Makkah Route initiative in cooperation with several agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, the General Authority of Civil Aviation, the Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority, the Saudi Data and AI Authority, the Pilgrim Experience Program and the General Directorate of Passports. This ensures a smooth process, with pilgrims going through hassle-less formalities.

The service was introduced in 2019 in Malaysia and Indonesia; the two countries with the largest proportion of Hajj pilgrims. The Ministry of Interior has since then implemented the initiative in five more countries including Pakistan, Morocco, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Cote d'Ivoire.

What does the service offer?

The process commences with the issuance of electronic visas (e-visa) and the gathering of vital information, followed by streamlined passport procedures, before departure for the Kingdom.

The initiative offers coding and sorting of Hajj pilgrims' luggage to ensure that it is delivered to their places of residence in Makkah and Madinah.

The procedure of coding the luggage, which is conducted in the initiative's hall at the airports of departure by a team supervised the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, starts with sorting the luggage and placing a label on each pilgrim's baggage. The label contains flight data and the pilgrim's residence information. In addition, a label is placed on the cover of passports and the pilgrims will be given a card containing the same information placed on their luggage.

On arrival, Hajj pilgrims are directly transferred to the buses that transport them to their place of accommodation in Makkah and Madinah through designated lanes. Teams at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah and Prince Mohammed bin Abdulaziz International Airport in Madinah receive the luggage, which is then delivered to the pilgrim's accommodation, ensuring a seamless and efficient transition.



The Makkah Route initiative ensures a smooth process and pilgrims go through hassle-less formalities including passport control.



There are many prophetic traditions that command a kind treatment of neighbors.

The Rights of Neighbors in Islam

By Salah Ghanaa

When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was divinely sent, he raised the value of being a good neighbor, giving the neighbor more

rights that helped secure the community and establish the rules of love, safety, and cooperation among people.

He declared that his message was not only a devotional message to reform the religion; but it was also a call to rectify all types of dealings between people, especially between neighbors.

The Quran came to confirm the rights of neighbors and commands Muslims to treat them justly. Allah the Almighty says: "Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful." (4: 36)

Commenting on this verse, Ibn Kathir said: "The word al-Jar dhi al-Qurba (the near neighbor) means the neighbor who is also a relative, and the words al-jar al-Junub (the neighbor farther away) means the neighbor who is not a relative." Some scholars are reported to have said that the words stand for the Muslim neighbor and the non-Muslim neighbor, respectively, and both opinions recommend the good treatment of neighbors.

There are many prophetic traditions

that command a kind treatment of neighbors. Because of the repeated recommendations by Angel Gabriel on neighbors, the Prophet thought that the neighbor would be given a share of one's inheritance and be considered a family member. Abd Allah ibn Umar reported that the Prophet said: "'Gabriel continued to instruct me to treat neighbors well until I thought he would make them my heirs."

The phrase "continued to instruct me" means that every time he met the Prophet he reminded him of neighbors' rights. He stressed on this point so much that the Prophet thought that Allah the Almighty would give the neighbor a share of one's inheritance.

Islam told mankind that the best Muslim is the one who is best to his neighbors. Abd Allah ibn Amr reported that the Prophet said: "The best of companions to Allah is the one who is best to his companions, and the best of neighbor to Him is the one who is best to his neighbors". The Prophet told us that the ugliest and worst sin is to betray the trust of one's neighbor.

The Prophet's wife Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, asked him



saying, "O Allah's Messenger! I have two neighbors and would like to know to which of them I should give presents." He replied, "To the one whose door is nearer to you." Also, he referred to the importance of a neighbor smiling to his neighbor, and sharing his food by saying, "Don't consider anything insignificant out of good things even if it is that you meet your brother with a cheerful countenance". The Prophet also said, "O Abu Dharr, if you cook soup, make a lot of it and give your neighbors".

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught that a neighbor has a right that his close neighbor should fulfill, i.e. sharing with him in good and bad times, and feeding him from what he eats even if it was only soup. In addition, being a good neighbor in Islam also includes keeping one's neighbor's family and children safe when the neighbor is absent, offering services to them, taking care of their needs, protecting them and ensuring that the elder ones do not violate the rights of the younger. The Prophet said, "Four things are part of happiness: a righteous wife, a spacious abode, a good neighbor and a comfortable mount. And four things are part of misery: a bad wife, a bad neighbor, a bad mount and a small abode".

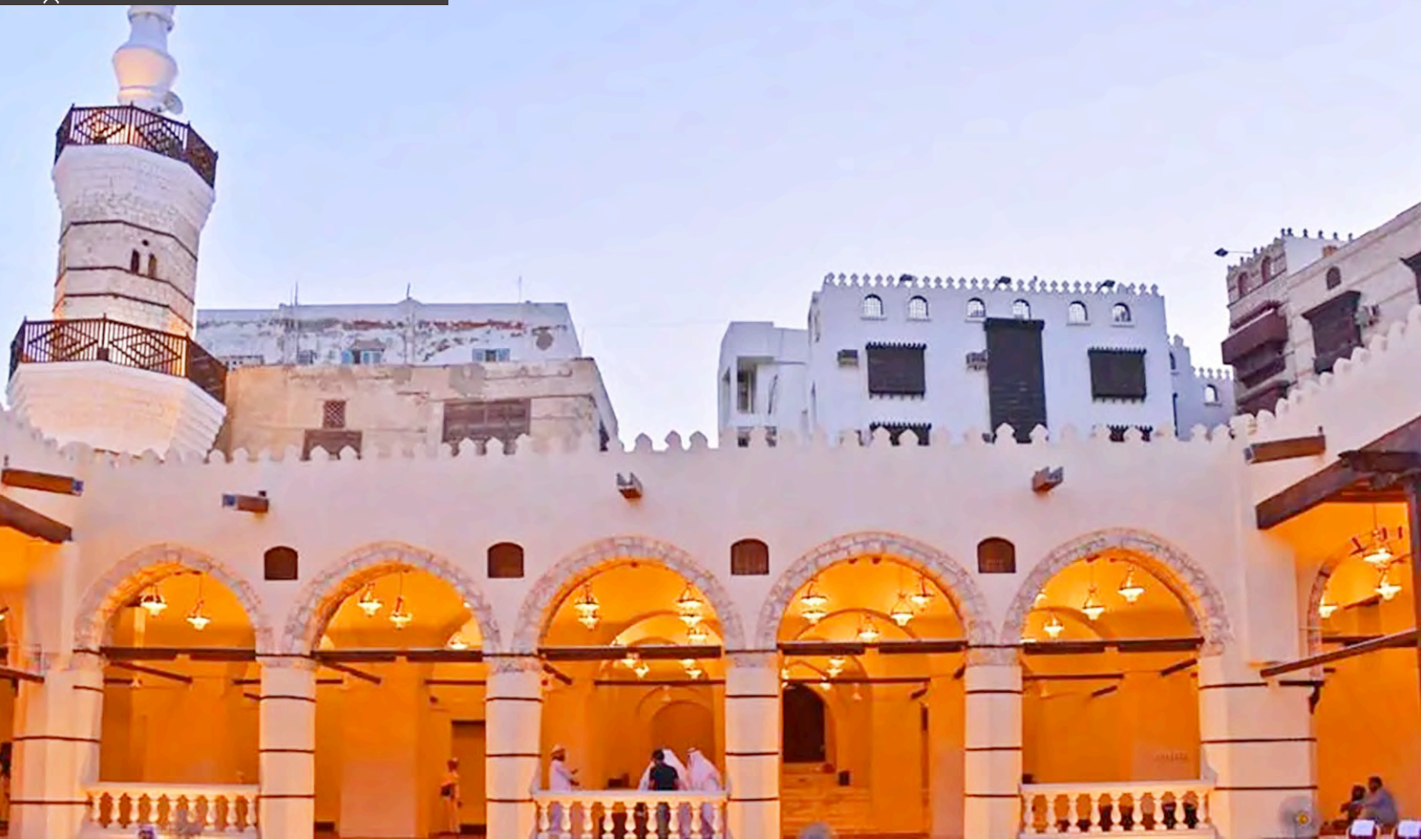
The Prophet (PBUH) linked the soundness of faith to refraining from harming one's neighbor. He said, "He who believes in Allah and

the Last Day should not cause harm to his neighbor," he also said: "He will not enter Paradise from whose harm his neighbor is not safe".

When it comes to neighbors giving to each other, they know one another more than anyone else. In terms of helping the poor, a poor neighbor has the priority. If one's neighbor asks for a loan and one is capable of giving, the Prophet teaches that one should do so. The Prophet said: "He has not believed in me who sleeps satisfied while his neighbor is hungry and he knows about it".

Thus, the greatest meanings of loyalty, cooperation, and taking care of others living with us are in Islam's teachings regarding one's neighbors. The Prophet implanted these meanings in his Companions, and he was the best and the greatest to his neighbors.





Jeddah's historic Al-Shafi'e Mosque.

Jeddah Mosques ...

Centuries-old Elegant Antiquities

SPA - Jeddah

The city of Jeddah is home to numerous mosques that have deep historical roots, with some dating back hundreds of years. These mosques embody the identity of the region and showcase exquisite Islamic architecture,

combining the essence of the venue's history with elegant design.

These treasures and artifacts are mostly located at the heart of Jeddah's Old City, known locally as Al-Balad. These structures proudly stand tall as witnesses to the rich history of the



Al-Basha Mosque in Jeddah.

place, some dating back as far as six centuries, including the renowned Al-Shafiei Mosque, located in the Harat al-Mazloun neighborhood. Constructed in the 13th century (7th Hijri century,) the mosque was ingeniously designed with an open-air patio to ensure excellent ventilation. It was built using quarry stones (limestone), marine muds, and supplemented with wood, providing a unique and healthy atmosphere.

Another notable mosque is the Usman bin Affan Mosque, affectionately known as the Ebony Mosque by the locals due to its two flag masts made of ebony. This splendid mosque was erected between the 15th and 16th centuries (9th and 10th Hijri centuries.)

Furthermore, there is the renowned Al-Basha Mosque, located in Harat al-Sham, which once boasted a landmark minaret until its removal during reconstruction in 1978.

The fourth mosque, Al-Miaamar, stands strong with over 340 years of history. As for Al-Akash, it was built in the 17th century (1200 AH) and stands on elevated ground, featuring a striking 5-door entrance made of ancient walnut tree wood, giving it a unique brown hue. This mosque serves as a central place for congregational prayers and Quran memorization circles. In addition, Al-Hanafi Mosque, located in Harat al-Sham, was built in 1320 H.

Notably, King Saud Mosque, positioned at the

heart of the city, is a perfect fusion of traditional Islamic architecture and modern touches. It stands as one of the largest mosques in the governorate, spanning an impressive 9,700 square meters and accommodating up to 5,000 worshippers. Al-Rahma Mosque is a twin to the previously mentioned mosque, sharing many similarities in its design and architecture.

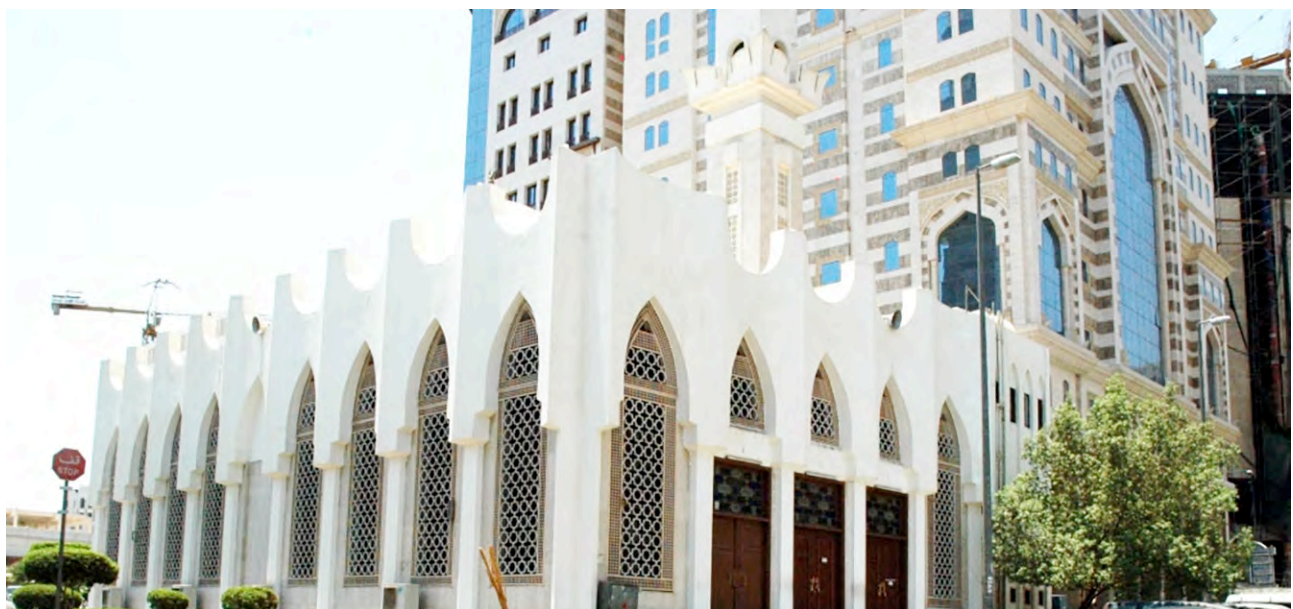
The city of Jeddah beautifully blends the old with the modern, creating captivating panoramic views. This characteristic is exemplified in several mosques, such as Al-Taqwa (Piety) Mosque, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosque King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Mosque, Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Mosque, Prince Majid bin Abdulaziz Mosque, Lami Mosque, Furqan Mosque, Sharbatly Mosque, and Ghazawi Mosque.

Another notable addition is Al-Anani Mosque, which draws its inspiration from the famous Islamic star known as the Baghdad Star. Internally, the mosque is adorned with white

and blue putties, complemented by colorful Moroccan mosaic artifacts known as Al-Zulaig, covering the entire walls of the mosque.



Al-Mimar Mosque.



Othman bin Affan Mosque.



رَابِطَةُ الْعَالَمِ الْإِسْلَامِيِّ

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