

This is Not the Path to Paradise

Response to ISIS

INTRODUCTION Counsel for the Youth

All praise belongs to the Lord of the worlds. May peace and blessings be upon our Master Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy and Messenger of Wisdom, his benevolent family, and his noble companions, perpetually until the end of time.

This is addressed to the young men who bear arms against their own nations and destroy both country and countrymen. You have abandoned all values and made enemies of the world. We call on you to pause, reflect, and heed this counsel for the sake of all who want good for our community.

As an introduction to the statement, we present these four quotations for serious consideration.

1. A verse from the Qur'an follows:

“When he is empowered, he sets out to do violence in the land, destroying crops and livestock. But God does not love violence” (Qur'an, 2:205).

Have not crops and livestock, as well as the elderly and women and children, been destroyed? Is this not violence and corruption in the land, which God abhors?

2. A statement from the Prophet, God's peace and blessings upon him, from his last sermon given on the Farewell Pilgrimage follows:

“Beware (or Woe unto you)! Listen! Do not revert back to disbelief after I have gone— [that is by] some of you killing others.”

Note the use of the phrase “beware” or “woe unto you” that signifies a stern warning. The Prophet, God's peace and blessings upon him, rarely used such phrases. Furthermore, the scholars of Islam say that this hadith indicates that some will excommunicate others in order to justify killing them. Is this not the excommunication and killing that the Prophet, God's peace and blessings upon him, forbade?

3. A statement of the Caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, may God be pleased with him, from his last sermon follows:

“Whoever pledges allegiance to someone not appointed by the consultative process of the believers, neither he nor the one to whom he pledged allegiance are to be followed, out of fear of foolishly exposing themselves to being killed with them.”

Has the one who claims to be the caliph of the Muslims consulted the Muslim world, or is he placing himself and those who pledge allegiance to him at risk of being killed? Is this not the disregard of the people which the Caliph ‘Umar warned of?

4. A statement from the great Sunni Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, may God have mercy on him, made to the people of Baghdad [during his time] follows:

“Do not shed your own blood nor the blood of other Muslims along with you. Consider the eventual effects of your actions.”

He spoke these words to those who wanted to overthrow the Abbasid Caliph al-Wathiq after he proclaimed [the heresy] that the Qur’an was created. Is this not just like the bloodshed that Imam Ahmad warned the people of Baghdad against?

We ask you, out of concern, to reflect on these enlightening statements and to re-evaluate your positions, for turning to truth is better than persisting in falsehood.

We are not ignorant of the injustices that exist, and we earnestly call for them to cease; yet we believe that the chances for justice are better when there is peace, not war. Everywhere the widespread wars must stop, and the mindless civil strife must halt so that we may gain life and not lose both this world and the hereafter.

We ask God, most high, to guide everyone. Amen.

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A Statement to the Muslim World and its Leaders

Remember and Consider the Question *Why?*

In March 2014, more than 250 Islamic scholars and thinkers from around the world attended the *Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies* in Abu Dhabi. One of the goals of the *Forum* was for these leaders to establish a unified position in response to the gravest threats facing the Muslim world today during this critical phase of its history.

The gravity of the situation is manifested in the following ways:

- The uncommon nature of the threat is evidenced by unprecedented levels of violence utilizing every type of warfare. This even includes weapons of mass destruction, which citizens of the same country are using against one another.
- This violence has a broader reach, as evidenced by the expanding geography that covers a large region of the Muslim and Arab nations. Conflicts are on the verge of spreading to other regions as well.
- This conflict is different in its duration. Perpetual conflicts, with no end in sight, are becoming the norm.
- The ideas and psychology associated with this violence are distinct. This dimension augments the three dimensions above since these conflicts have produced the most extreme ideas, the most bizarre *fatwas* (legal edicts), and the most fanatical and inciting opinions. The discourse has been filled with appalling *fatwas* rendering judgments on excommunication, deviance, immorality, and heresy. These *fatwas* have justified bloodshed while disregarding Islamic law's mandates of civil obedience, respect for life, and to refrain from divisiveness, irrespective of how morally degraded a society becomes. Instead, there are inappropriate claims of engaging in jihad and addressing the ills of society without fulfilling the conditions of doing so, which has led to even more suffering.
- This conflict has international implications and tarnishes the image of Islam worldwide. Some might even describe our faith as “a religion of terrorism” and work to try Islam and its adherents under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter.

Some of the recommendations that came out of the *Forum for Promoting Peace* included the urgent and dire need to reorder the house of the Muslims and to restore its constituents on the individual, societal, and institutional levels. It also reinforced the pressing need to strengthen the “immune system” of the Muslim world against the extremism and violence that exists within it, regardless of where the violence is directed or how it began. The time is now for Muslim societies—individuals and political entities—to work together towards what is right and good and to place the higher interests of humanity and the world above personal interests. They must adopt dialogue and cooperation as the sole strategy to address their concerns.

In recent weeks and months, the incidences of violence have only accelerated and become more indiscriminate and destructive in nature, leaving no segment of society or religious community unaffected. These trends were predicted and forewarned about at the *Forum*, and we must quickly work to implement the suggestions and recommendations found in the papers and presentations of the participants.

Thus, for all who are troubled about the state of the Muslim world and long for its reformation, the *Forum for Promoting Peace* would like to remind you of and alert you to the following:

1. The responsibility of the scholars and religious authorities at this time in particular is to protect life. No sane person can remain indifferent to the loss of life and suffering in the Muslim world. What then of those who have pledged to God that they will do their part to set the world right? The reality is that much of what is happening today relies on religious justification as a pretext. The perpetrators use excommunication, allegations of treason, or claim to implement Islamic law in wartime. It appears as though these people have not heard of the tradition of Bishr bin Artah and other well-known traditions on this subject. They also accuse monotheists of polytheism, and they claim they are responding to injustices. Although the allegation of injustices is true, nevertheless their response is wrong, as it is being used for falsehood—for dressing up error in the clothing of truth. Because some of these “leaders” claim to be religious figures, they are causing even greater confusion. At the same time, the media spares no effort to further muddy the waters, and so people’s judgment is skewed, and they falter. For these reasons, there is no excuse for the scholars and leaders to not fulfill their obligation to clarify matters and advise the Muslim world in order to extinguish the fires of conflict and to stop the bloodshed by uniting in truth and cooperating in what is right and good: *“Help one another to do what is right and good; do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be mindful of God, for His punishment is severe”* (Qur’an, 5:2).

2. Much of what is happening in the Muslim world now can be traced back to misunderstandings about aspects of Islamic law that are not problematic for open-minded and peaceful societies. Some examples include applying Islamic penal laws, exercising jihad, establishment of the caliphate, practicing obedience to political leaders, and the moral duty to enjoin good and prevent evil. When properly understood, these concepts safeguard peace and protect the sanctity of life. They exemplify the divine mercy that Islam brought on the tongue of the Prophet of Mercy, Muhammad, may God’s peace and blessings be upon him. When these concepts are misunderstood and adulterated in both form and meaning, they morph into a contradiction of their original purpose, goal, and aim, and so the mercy is replaced by punishment for the community, suffered by the criminal and innocent alike, spreading to both the learned and the ignorant equally.

Some of the reasons for these misconceptions are as follows:

a. There is a disconnect between the Islamic dictates and their stipulations: The five rulings of Islamic law (obligation, recommendation, permissibility, discouragement, and prohibition) are regulated by the legal stipulations, which are legal causes, preconditions, and preventatives. It is only from combining both the dictates and their stipulations that a proper understanding develops; if we separate the commands and prohibitions from fulfilling the preconditions, establishing the presence of legal causes, and ensuring the lack of preventatives, then the rulings contravene and contradict Islamic law. To state it more simply, the relationship between applying the rulings and the implications of both time and place and the positive and negative consequences has been severed.

b. The relationship between means and end has been distorted: Any disconnection between the ends and goals as well as the means and tools leads to violating Islamic law. That is because the

means to evil ends are also evil, and noble ends can be reached only by noble means. So one cannot use genocide, murder, oppression, or vengeance to establish truth and justice.

c. The four values upon which Islamic law is built—wisdom, justice, mercy, and the common good—have been degraded.

3. Jihad is not synonymous with fighting. Hence, not all jihad is fighting, and not all fighting is jihad. A deeper reading of the primary sources of Islam makes clear that jihad includes all devotions. Filial piety is a form of jihad, as the Prophet, God's peace and blessings upon him, said, "Make your jihad serving them [your parents]." Obeying God is also a form of jihad, as the hadith states, "The real jihad is to strive against the ego in order to obey God." For this reason, we call on you to embark on a jihad that will undoubtedly get you into paradise and far away from hell: invoke God often, build mosques, be kind to people, and promote civilization. The great scholar Ibn Taymiyyah said that jihad includes all devotions and righteous acts, even those relating to commerce and manufacturing, as is noted in the *Ikhtiyarat* of al-Ba'li

Your community needs your hard work, intellects, and energies to be organized in pursuit of the common good where it intersects with communal development.

As for the jihad when it relates to fighting, that is in defense of the freedom to practice one's faith, as is stated in the verse: "*Those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, 'Our Lord is God'*" (Qur'an, 22:40).

As a rule, the state of relations between Muslims and people of other faiths and persuasions is one of peace. Jihad, in the intent behind its original legislation, is a search for "perpetual peace."

That is why all believers are ordered to enter into peace: "*O you who believe, enter wholeheartedly into peace, and do not follow in Satan's footsteps, for he is your sworn enemy*" (Qur'an, 2:208).

Believers are also ordered to accept any attempts at peace: "*But if they incline towards peace, you [Prophet] must also incline towards it, and put your trust in God*" (Qur'an, 8:61). It is also very well known that the Prophet, God's peace and blessings upon him, compromised greatly at the Armistice of Hudaibiyyah for the sake of making peace.

As for military jihad, that was prescribed for times when there were no global treaties or pacts leaving no means to convey the message of Islam other than with military support, and there were no borders that were acknowledged, unless they were maintained by force, or vast distances separated regions. Also, there were no weapons of mass destruction at this time. All of these premises are no longer the case. How can any Muslim who understands the texts and aims of Islamic law call for war against all other nations? One who does so is foolish, ignorant of the true nature of Islam as well as the realities of today, and seeks to sow corruption in the land.

4. There are many rulings in Islamic law that are not duties meant to be fulfilled by the individual; instead, they are the domain of the political authority or its representative. Among such rulings are military actions and the moral duty to enjoin good and forbid evil. Forbidding evil can sometimes have uncertain consequences, requiring serious deliberation that cannot be done by just anyone. Sometimes it can lead to an even greater evil, and in such a case, forbidding evil would be prohibited for individuals. The same applies to military action such that the government is the only one ordained to attack enemy states abroad, assemble troops, or suppress insurrection. This is mentioned in al-Qarafi's *Distinctions*, where he discusses the engagement by the government; he notes that individuals cannot take on such engagement and that it must be carried out by the government only. The wisdom behind this is that some of these groups that we see today working to redress wrongs by force actually cause civil strife and widespread corruption.

5. "The Islamic caliphate" was a phrase the companions of the Prophet, may God be pleased with them, accepted in order to denote the unification of the Muslims and their affairs under an administration that would uphold Islamic law and protect their lives, dignity, and wealth. But the caliphate is not a matter of theology; rather, it is a matter of law subject to legal stipulations, and it is one possible means among others that could be replaced today by other means in order to achieve unity between nations so that they may cooperate and complement one another. Actually, for many centuries, some Muslim lands were independent of the caliphate and were still able to uphold the religion, safeguard the law and sacred sites, and ensure peace and security. This is still the case. Our religion teaches us that our understandings stem from meanings, not words and forms. Consequently, there is no religious duty to pursue the establishment of a caliphate by force—even if we assume it is possible to do so. What then of those who spread corruption in the land, kill the innocent, terrorize the weak, destroy mosques and houses of worship, and disinter tombs? As Ibn Qayyim records, the Prophet Muhammad, God's peace and blessings upon him, and the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs never destroyed a church, synagogue, or temple!

6. All forms of oppression and aggression against religious minorities are in direct contradiction to the values of our religion. In fact, Islam calls us to do well by religious minorities, to place them under our protection, and threatens those who harm them with punishment in the afterlife. This is evidenced by the track record of the Muslim world, which has no peer in history when it pertains to people living harmoniously with religious minorities, beyond what basic humanity demands of equal rights and responsibilities. Hence, any aggression of any kind or coercion to convert is unacceptable. Coerced conversion is invalid in Islamic law. Islam has nothing to do with this, as the Qur'an states, "*There is no compulsion in religion*" (Qur'an, 2:256).

7. Fighting and conflict for reasons other than self-defense and repelling aggression are not Islamic values despite the attempts of some to dress it up as righteousness. These are values

foreign to the Islamic ethos; in the Islamic tradition, destruction has never been seen as a foundation for advancement; rather, it is seen as a result of ignorance and fanaticism, the effect of suppression and feelings of frustration and vengeance. Our values are intended to instill confidence and love in the hearts, to repel falsehood with truth without any enmity, and to respond to wrongs with patience, pardon, and forgiveness: “*Fight in God’s cause against those who who overstep the limits*” (Qur’an, 2:190). “*Repel evil with good*” (Qur’an, 23:96). “*They repel evil with good*” (Qur’an, 28:54).

8. Muslim societies need to inculcate peace as a goal and a priority. This should be done by means of clearly stated values, both Islamic and those common to broader humanity, and by means of elucidating the legal aspects of peace and reconciliation, its terms, principles, universals, and particulars. In this way, harmony can be restored, distorted perceptions can be corrected, and love and harmony will spread, pulling in the reins of excommunication, defamation, and conflict so that the culture of reason and understanding may again rise. People will then strive to promote the common good and ward off societal harms, following the path of wisdom so that a Muslim will practice his or her religion without feeling estranged or being prone to anxiety or despair.

For these reasons, we call yet again upon religious scholars, philosophers, writers, pioneers, the media, bloggers, and social media activists to take on the task to carry this message, assert its importance in creating harmony in society, and develop a roadmap towards promoting a culture of peace in Muslim societies. We call for an ideological review of curricula and other programming and a detailed analysis of the age in which we live: its needs, demands, ideas, and tools. Studies in the religious sciences need to be furthered in degree and level of understanding, augmented by consideration, reflection, interpretation, legal reasoning, and an understanding of the circumstances surrounding revelatory events. In this manner, the primary texts—both their statements and understandings—can be reexamined, and particulars can be taken back to the universals, restoring the regard the legal schools (*madh-habs*) had for differences of opinion.

This is not a call to change or replace our scripture; rather it is to go back to its essence and original intended implications using all available methods of research. Only then will we realize just how expansive the *shariah* is, how merciful, inclusive, and full of wisdom it is. The solutions will be borne out of the *shariah*, its spirit, and goals. This is an urgent need. The religious scholars and clerics must face it courageously in order to save our community from endless war. And the politicians and representatives must work to remove oppression. Also, world organizations should be more just and sensitive to the events that take place in our region.

9. Lastly, a warning to the youth of the Muslim world in particular, lest they become fuel for the fires of strife and corruption in this world and become fuel for the fire of hell on the Day of Reckoning. We call on them to remain steadfast in the face of the empty claims and promises made before them and to live the Islamic law properly so that they will not be confused and

duped into confusing falsehood with truth. This applies, in particular, to those who do not have a command of Arabic and do not understand the language of the Qur'an.

No Muslim is to be excommunicated unless he or she says or does something that is absolutely unambiguous and not open to alternative interpretations. The Prophet, God's peace and blessings upon him, declared that simply cursing a Muslim is deviance and killing him is disbelief. God has declared the human soul as sacred: "*Do not take life, which God has made sacred, except by right*" (Qur'an, 17:33). God has also made killing one soul equal to killing all of humanity: "*If anyone kills a person—unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land—it is as if he kills all humankind, while if any saves a life, it is as if he saves the lives of all humankind*" (Qur'an, 5:32). Also, a tradition of the Prophet, God's peace and blessings upon him, states: "*A believer will still have some leeway regarding his religious duties, as long as he has not spilled blood unjustly.*"

May God's sublime peace and blessings be upon our master Muhammad, his kin, and his companions.

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Abu Dhabi

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