

THE SABAN CENTER *for* MIDDLE EAST POLICY
at THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

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**Islamic Reform Conference
Cairo, October 5-6, 2004**

Concluding Statement

Under the name, “Islam & Reform,” the Ibn Khaldun Center for Developmental Studies and The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution, in association with the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington, DC, and the Islamic Dialogue Forum in London, held a two-day workshop on October 5-6, 2004, at the Piramisa Hotel in Cairo.

More than 20 scholars, intellectuals and researchers attended the workshop, representing most of the Arab and Islamic world, and some came from Europe and the United States.

The participants discussed 10 major studies, and the two main emphases of the workshop were:

- 1) Frameworks for reforming Islam and the possibility of Islamic movements participating in democratic systems.
- 2) The relationship between U.S. foreign policy and the newer democratic parties in the Islamic world.

During three sessions, more than 100 comments on the presented studies were presented by those attending the conference as commentators.

The participants arrived at 10 basic recommendations, which were:

- 1) Reformulation of a new epistemology for Islamic thought that is clear and uniform in its concepts. It should aim to take into consideration all the changes that have taken place in the social life of Muslims over the past 11 centuries.



- 2) Radical reconsideration of Islamic heritage, to include all Islamic sciences founded during the first three centuries of Islam, such as Qur'anic Interpretation, Foundations of Islam, and Jurisprudence. The participants encouraged the adoption of Qur'anic verses as the sole arbiter and reference [as opposed to the Sayings of the Prophet as well, as most Sunnis do - ed] for the rest of the theological heritage in Islam.
- 3) Confrontation of the ideas of the organizations that monopolize religious speech, in an attempt to create a new school of religious interpretation that would be the standard bearer of new religious thought in the current century.
- 4) Rebuttal of the rhetoric, vision and thought of the extremist religious trends, in an attempt to stop their infiltration of Arab society, especially the youth. They are taking advantage of the frustration that large sectors of our youth feel.
- 5) Deepening dialogue with moderate and enlightened groups in Western societies, especially in the United States, and adopting the language of dialogue and partnership as the main instrument of dealing with others (ie, non-Muslims) in general. Dialogue should be based on cooperation and peaceful co-existence between all civilizations and nations in a framework of respect for sovereignty and avoidance of the temptation to dominate the other. Muslim communities in those countries should be used as bridges of communication.
- 6) Despite the heated debate on the priorities of reform and duality of religious and political reform, the majority of participants have agreed that there is no contradiction between these two types of reform. They stressed the need for both, which created a consensus on the need for comprehensive reform.
- 7) The participants stressed the need to integrate the Islamic movements into the democratic process, and permit the moderate movements to exist legally, as long as they accept democracy as a strategic option and adopt the basic principles that provide the foundations of civil society and the modern civil state.
- 8) The participants noted the need to have a broad dialogue with the different leaders and organizations representing peaceful political Islam, to reach a joint agenda in the framework of a popular, comprehensive, civil initiative for reform in the Arab world.
- 9) The proceedings of this conference will be collected in a volume to be published in Arab and English to amplify the influence of this workshop and address the media in the Arab and Islamic worlds to promote the importance of efforts exerted in this vein.
- 10) Consider this workshop and its participants the core nucleus of a network of reformists and revivalists in the Islamic and Arab worlds. They will be extended personal invitations twice a year to follow up on the final recommendations of the workshop. These members of the Reformers' Network will recommend whomever they see fit to benefit the cause of reform and Islamic renewal to join the Network. Seven participants who are representatives of civil society organizations have declared their initiative to establish a movement called, "The Islamist Democrats." They call upon anyone who shares their vision to support

dialogue, human rights and basic freedoms to join the movement. The Ibn Khaldun Center in Cairo will be its temporary headquarters.

Participants:

Dr. Saad Ad-Din Ibrahim, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Ibn Khaldoun Center
- Egypt

Jamal Al-Banna, president, International Islamic Workers' Union - Egypt

Dr. Sayed Al-Qumni, enlightened thinker - Egypt

Dr. Mohammad Shahrour, Islamic thinker - Syria

Dr. Radwan Masmudi, president, Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy - USA

Dr. Najah Kadhem, president, Islamic Dialogue Forum - UK

Dr. Salah Ad-Din Al-Qurashi, Islamic thinker - Tunis

Ms. Sherifa Macarandas, president, Mindanao Society, Philippines

Dr. Abdul Hamid Ansari, Dean, College of Islamic Law, University of Qatar - Qatar

Dr. Fabuleh Badawi, president, Arab-European Association for Democracy and Dialogue
- France

Mr. Abdullah Ali Sabri, editor in chief, Sawt Al-Shura newspaper - Yemen