

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
2013 U.S.-ISLAMIC WORLD FORUM
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WORKING GROUPS PRESENTATION AND CLOSING REMARKS

PARTICIPANTS:

Speakers:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. BADANI: As all of you know, our working groups have been a key component of our forum this year. It's something that I'm particularly proud of. The working groups are really designed to allow a convener, selected through an open solicitation process, to bring together a dream-team of relevant officials, thinkers, activists, journalists, faith-based and community leaders, to deliberate over a policy question of relevance to global Muslim communities.

Each of you were invited to be part of that dream-team this year. And I now have spent over seven hours in formal discussions over the course of three days, and much more time, as I know, in informal discussions, as well. You have deliberated and debated, as I understand, quite intensely sometimes.

And now we'd like to just take a moment to share with all of you some of the outcomes of those discussions.

As all of you know, there have been four working groups: Advancing Women's Political Participation Within an Islamic Framework in Afghanistan, Egypt, and Libya; Supporting Economic Reform and recovery in Egypt and Tunisia; Assessing the Definition and Legal Standards Surrounding Freedom of Speech in the U.S. and Global Muslim Communities; and, Understanding in the Intersection Between Faith-based and Diplomatic Efforts, in Conflict and in Reconciliation.

So, I'd like to share with you, via a PowerPoint presentation, some of the recommendations from those working groups.

Rethinking the Red Line -- this particular working group was convened by Manal Omar and Kathleen Kuehnast. It's focused on the intersection of free speech, religious freedom, and social change.

Their first recommendation: Due to the increasing limitations on freedoms of expression and religion, when it comes to racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance, there are three central actors that must be engaged -- media, civil society, and government. Criminalization is not the most effective or productive means to address religious intolerance. Blasphemy laws are counterproductive, and, instead, public condemnations and social responses are far more effective and productive.

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Context matters. The problem of intolerance is not endemic to any one country or context. Any general recommendation has to be localized so that it can, in fact, reflect this particular context.

On supporting economic recovery and reform in Egypt and Tunisia, this working group was convened by our partners at the Brookings Doha Center, Salman Shaikh, Shadi Hamid, and Hafez Ghanem of the Center for Global Economy and Development.

On values -- governments are encouraged to develop economic reform and programs in a transparent way, reaching out to engage the general public, including opposition groups, and those with dissenting views.

On priorities -- the overarching objective is to achieve inclusive growth and greater social justice. This will require action on macroeconomic stabilization, in enabling regulatory environment for the private sector, control of corruption, a special focus on the social sectors, and greater economic inclusion of women and efforts to fight discrimination. These priorities need to be implemented within a sustainable, medium-term framework, avoiding a return to old practices.

For the international community -- successful transitions will require greater financial aid and technical support from the international community. In the context of country-owned programs, areas for action include better coordination of development partners, better alignment of partners' comparative advantages to country needs, and encouraging greater South-to-South cooperation and knowledge sharing.

Fostering synergies in advancing women's rights in post-conflict Islamic states -- post-conflict settings provide opportunities for advancing women's rights, upon a stage where religious identity, cultural norms, and law play an instrumental role in shaping the nature of the discourse. The most robust and sustainable approach to champion these opportunities must enlist the pillars of social change, integrating the approaches of women's political activists, state-oriented legal advocates and the informal sector, and Islamic religious leaders. And harmonizing each of these three pillars, with their distinct approaches for social change will vary, depending on each nation's respective institutional and human development capacities.

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I think we might be having -- here we go.

And, finally, our last working group, diplomacy and religion, seeking common interests and engagement in a dynamic world, convened by Bishop John Chane and Allen Keiswetter. Calls for increased diplomatic and religious cooperation to support mutual peace and respect of basic human rights within and among religions. Because of concern over the Iranian nuclear program, calls for the use of the Supreme Leader's fatwah as a potential basis for seeking a solution, in conjunction with other faith-based efforts to support nuclear disarmament. And, finally, calls for leaders of Abrahamic religions to support renewed Middle East peace negotiations toward a two-state solution.

I want to take a moment to thank all of our conveners for all of their hard work in pulling together these conversations. If all of you could please stand, so that we can take a moment to recognize all of your hard work -- Kathleen Kuehnast and Manal Omar, from USIP, Bishop John Chane and Allen Keiswetter -- anyone? Anyone at all? (Applause)

Salman Shaikh and Hafez Ghanem, and Shadi Hamid, from the BDC. (Applause)

And, finally, Asma Uddin and Haris Tarin. (Applause)

Thank you so much. Thank you to all of you for participating in our working groups. I know well all of the contributions you have made, and all of the time and energy and effort you have devoted to these conversations. And we thank you for it, and look forward to continuing these conversations with you.

I'd now like to turn it over to Tamara Wittes to prepare our closing remarks.

Tamara.

MS. WITTES: Durriya, thank you so much. And thanks to all of you for the hard work that you have put in over the last several days, and the working groups for your active participation in all of these very rich plenary discussions, and for your engagement throughout the conference in, what I've seen, a tremendous range of informal hallway conversations, late-night cups of tea, and all of the other ways in which we extend our dialogue beyond the formal sessions of the conference.

A few notes, as we close the proceedings.

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First, I want to emphasize that this annual meeting is a platform for work that both precedes and will follow on from the conference itself. Our work goes on, and I hope that all of you will continue to be a part of it.

I hope that the working groups have given you ideas for initiatives that you can carry forward, and I hope that you'll bring us those ideas so that we can be helpful, where we can, in following up on what's been produced over the last several days.

Thank you for coming, for being part of the network that we've built over 10 years of U.S.-Islamic world dialogue at this forum.

I want to also let you know that next year's U.S.-Islamic World Forum will convene, not here in Doha, but in Washington, D.C. We'll be returning to that venue for the first time in a few years, and I think it will be an opportunity to bring even more sectors of American society into our dialogue. So I look forward to seeing all of you, physically or virtually, next year in Washington.

I also want to remind you that when you went into your final working group sessions, we passed out a short survey about the conference, about your experience in the working groups and in the plenary sessions. And I hope that, if you haven't already, you'll fill out that short survey and hand it to one of our staff on your way out of the ballroom today.

And then, finally, it would be impossible to do what we do here without a lot of support from a lot of people. And I want to just take a minute to thank them all.

First of all, of course, this forum, this dialogue, the project on U.S. relations with the Islamic world, would not be possible without the partnership and support and vision of His Highness the Emir of Qatar, His Excellency the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, and our close partner here in Doha, the Minister's assistant for international cooperation affairs, Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Jabr Al-Thani.

There are literally dozens of people who have put in hundreds of hours of work to make this conference a success. I want to recognize, particularly, our friends here in Qatar from the Ministry, from the Permanent Committee for Organizing Conferences, led by His Excellency Ambassador Abdullah

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Faqru, without whom we simply wouldn't be able to do what we do. So, please join me in giving him and his staff a big round of applause. (Applause)

Secondly, I want to give a special shout-out to all of our colleagues at the Brookings Doha Center, led by their director, Salman Shaikh. They are indispensable partners in all of our work in the project, and especially here at the forum.

Thank you, Salman, and thanks to all of your team for your help. (Applause)

And then, finally, we have a number of people here, and back in Washington, from the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World from our Brookings foreign policy communications team, and, most notably, I really want to thank Durriya Badani, who has led that team here in Doha, and has made our work possible. Thank you. (Applause)

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, we have lunch waiting downstairs in the restaurant, and we hope that will be an additional opportunity to continue these conversations. For those of you who have travel tonight or tomorrow, just check with the Ministry table that is right by the front door of the hotel. They should have all of your flight information. They've got local transportation to the airport arranged, and you just need to check in with them, and they'll let you know what time you need to be here in the lobby, checked out and ready to go.

With that, I want to thank you all for coming -- some from near, some from far -- for giving us your energy, your commitment to this ongoing conversation. And we look forward to many, many more.

Thank you all so much. (Applause)

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