
Executive Summary

Produced by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with Georgetown University
"Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue, published by the World Economic Forum Community of West and Islam Dialogue (C-100), is the first effort of its kind. The Forum trusts that this benchmarking study can bring to bear an intensification of efforts by global leaders from government, business, religion, media and academia to address the most pressing issues that will help to shape the dialogue positively."

Klaus Schwab
Founder and Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum

"The dialogue efforts outlined in this report – efforts oriented to action around social, political and economic agendas – have a vital, still underappreciated importance. Dialogue can increase knowledge and trust, point to both commonalities and differences, and frame joint efforts to address the global challenges of the new millennium."

John J. DeGioia
President, Georgetown University, USA

The World Economic Forum, a not-for-profit foundation based in Geneva, Switzerland, is the global community of the foremost business, political, faith, media and thought leaders addressing global challenges. The Community of West and Islam Dialogue (C-100) brings together Forum members and partners working together to promote dialogue and understanding across segments of society.

Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue is a joint project of the Forum and Georgetown University. Located in Washington DC, Georgetown is a global leader in the interdisciplinary study of religion and the promotion of interreligious understanding. Georgetown’s President John J. DeGioia is the lead author on the report. Two of its research centres provide academic oversight for the report project: the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs; and the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.

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Report Partners

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► Gallup Organization, USA
► Kingdom Foundation, Saudi Arabia
► Xenel Industries, Saudi Arabia

This is an executive summary. The full report is available for download at www.weforum.org and http://islamwest.org
“The promise of a world of peace and prosperity will depend as much on our norms and principles as upon formal rules and institutions. Universal principles inform basic ideals of universal brotherhood and compassion for all humankind.”

H.R.H. Princess Lolowah Al Faisal Al Saud
Princess of Saudi Royal Family; Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees and General Supervisor, Effat College
Saudi Arabia; C-100 Co-Chair

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Muslim-West dialogue is critical in today’s world. Terrorism and antiterrorism efforts, the US occupation and sectarian violence in Iraq, the enduring Israeli-Palestinian conflict, European Union efforts to integrate a growing Muslim minority, and the prospects for democracy in the Middle East – these and other issues involve complex strategic, political and economic calculations.

At the same time, such issues demonstrate the importance of dialogue together with greater understanding, mutual respect and sustained cooperation in the service of peace.

Today, dialogue at the intersection of the West and the Muslim world is a vital and expanding enterprise at the international, national and local levels. But our knowledge of its evolving contours remains inadequate. Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue aims to elevate the global visibility of dialogue efforts and to promote greater understanding and cooperation at a critical juncture in history.

This report is designed to be a global reference for leaders across multiple sectors, including government, business, media, education, civil society and faith communities. It seeks to advance communication and promote collaboration around global challenges, including combating extremism and violence, building peaceful and vibrant civil societies and furthering economic and social development.

Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue highlights the activities of some 90 organizations and describes more than 80 events around five pressing global issue areas. The issue areas also serve as a backdrop for an in-depth analysis of public perceptions of the state of the dialogue and a detailed assessment of the state of the relationship.

Defining Islam and the West

Issues at the intersection of the West and Muslim World are fraught with definitional complexity. Islam and the West are not mutually exclusive categories. Muslims who live in Western countries are Western Muslims, as well as members of a global religious community who – in the case of immigrants – may maintain cultural ties to countries of origin. Non-Muslims in Muslim majority countries are part of the Muslim world, even if they are not affiliated with its majority religious tradition. They may or may not be citizens of, or identify with, Western countries.

A Key Finding

The Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index finds that majorities across the globe believe that violent conflict between the West and the Muslim world can be avoided, but they also share a great deal of pessimism about the state of the relationship. Among both Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority countries, the proportion who say they think the “other side” is committed to better relations rarely rises above a minority of 30%. Notwithstanding the prevalent sense of skepticism, majorities also indicate that better interaction between the Muslim and Western worlds is important to them.
of trends in media coverage of the Western and Muslim “other”.

*Issue Areas*

- International politics
- Citizenship and integration
- Religion, ethics and ideology
- Education and intercultural understanding
- Economic and social development

“There is no point in dialogue if we are not prepared to change our minds, alter our preconceptions and transcend an orthodoxy that we have long ceased to examine critically.”

Karen A. Armstrong, Writer, United Kingdom

*Sources*

The annual report draws on a survey of activities, the Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index and media content analysis carried out by Media Tenor International. The report also includes short essays by prominent scholars and practitioners working at the intersection of the West and the Muslim worlds.

*Georgetown University Survey of Activities*

The survey of activities, conducted by Georgetown’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, maps statements, programmes and events at the intersection of Islam and the West. It captures both public diplomacy and the activity of religious and secular non-state organizations around cultural, economic, social and political agendas. The report survey is not exhaustive, but features a representative cross-section of important initiatives at the international, national and local levels. A more complete mapping of Muslim-West dialogue activities is available at http://islamwest.org

*Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index*

The report draws upon an original survey provided by the Gallup Organization that explores public perceptions of the state of Muslim-West dialogue and its future prospects. The survey, conducted across 21 countries, is the foundation for the Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index, a measure of perceptions of the state of dialogue.

*Media Tenor Content Analysis*

Analysis conducted by Media Tenor International provides an overview of media coverage of Muslim-West issues in 24 countries. Findings about the tone and salience of media coverage are analysed across the five issue areas considered by the report as a whole.

*Short Essays*

Short essays are interspersed across the five issue chapters. Contributors include scholars, public officials and religious leaders from across traditions, as well as thought leaders from within the worlds of media, culture and business.

*Essays Featured in This Chapter*

Dialogue: A Critical Challenge, Lord Carey of Clifton
The Meaning of Dialogue, Karen A. Armstrong
The State of West-Islamic Dialogue, H.R.H. Princess Lolowah Al Faisal Al Saud
A Dialogue for Results, John L. Esposito
Measuring the State of the Dialogue between the Muslim and Western Worlds

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How do people around the world view relations between the West and the Muslim world? Do they see cooperation or conflict? Where there are problems, who do they think is at fault? Are they optimistic or pessimistic about the future? Answers to these questions shed light on the state of Muslim-West relations and the state of the dialogue agenda. The Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index measures perceptions of the state of dialogue in 21 countries. It combines responses to nine questions about the state of Muslim-West relations and ranks countries in terms of their citizens’ optimism about the state of dialogue. The higher the score, the more optimistic, with a possible score of 100.

Commitment to Improving Relations

Majorities in populations around the world believe that violent conflict between the West and the Muslim world can be avoided, but they also share a great deal of pessimism about the state of the relationship. Among both Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority nations, the proportion who say they think the “other side” is committed to bettering relations rarely rises above a minority. However, majorities of residents in nations around the world say that better interaction between the Muslim and Western worlds is important to them.

Three-in-four US residents say the Muslim world is not committed to improving relations with the West; an identical percentage of Palestinians attribute the same apathy to the West. At least half of respondents in Italy (58%), Denmark (52%) and Spain (50%) agree that the Muslim world is not committed to improving relations. Israelis represent a notable exception; almost two-thirds (64%) believe the Muslim world is committed to improving relations. Among the majority-Muslim nations surveyed, we see roughly the same pattern; majorities in every Middle Eastern country studied believe the West is not committed to better relations with the Muslim World, while respondents in majority-Muslim Asian countries are about evenly split.

Asymmetry of Respect

The vast majority of Palestinians (84%) and Egyptians (80%) believe the Western world lacks respect for the Muslim world, while the numbers from Turkey (68%), Saudi Arabia (67%) and Iran (62%) are only somewhat lower.

Do residents of Western nations believe the Western world respects Muslim societies? In some cases, the answer is no; fewer than half of those in Denmark

Table 3.1 The Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index

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* Indicates a high percentage of “Don’t know” responses
100 points = Most optimistic
The Gallup Muslim-West Dialogue Index


(30%), the United States (42%), Sweden (32%) and Canada (41%) believe the West respects the Muslim world. In Israel and the Netherlands, the numbers are higher (45% and 46%, respectively), though still below half.

In contrast, most residents in all but one majority-Muslim nation believe that the Muslim world respects the Western world. Two-thirds of respondents in Indonesia (65%), the country with the world’s largest Muslim population, believe that the Muslim world respects the West; similar numbers are seen in Saudi Arabia (72%), the Palestinian territories (69%) and Egypt (62%). On this question, as on others within the Index, non-Arab nations of the Middle East diverge from their Arab neighbours. In Iran, the percentage who say the Muslim world respects the West is somewhat lower at 52%, while Turkey is the only country in which the figure (45%) represents less than a majority.

Eighty-two percent of Americans and 73% of Israelis believe that the Muslim world does not respect the West. Similarly high figures are seen in Spain (63%), site of the Madrid terrorist bombing of 2004, Denmark (69%), where the international firestorm over the Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad originated in 2005, and the Netherlands (55%), where the 2004 killing of a Dutch filmmaker by a young Muslim has sparked controversy. However, the Index reveals that even in the nations studied with no obvious conflicts or significant dysfunction with local Muslim minority communities – such as Italy (70%), Canada (67%) and Sweden (54%) – high percentages of respondents feel the West is not respected.

The Promise of Interaction

Clear majorities in all European countries surveyed see greater interaction between the West and Muslim worlds as a threat. This is true of 79% of the population in Denmark, 67% in Italy, 67% in the Netherlands, 68% in Spain, 65% in Sweden and 59% in Belgium. This corresponds to a growing fear among Europeans, evident in other surveys, of a perceived “Islamic threat” to their cultural identities, driven in part by rising immigration from predominantly Muslim regions.

Although some might expect the United States, Israel and the Middle East to be more likely than Europe to feel threatened by the “other”, the opposite is the case. In the United States (70%), Canada (72%) and Israel (56%), majorities say that greater interaction is a benefit. Similarly, residents of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Palestinian Territories, Malaysia, Turkey and Iran were more likely to feel that greater interaction between Muslim and Western worlds is a benefit rather than a threat.

Index Calculation

The State of Dialogue Index is constructed from aggregate responses to nine questions.

- Do you think the Muslim world and the Western world are getting along well with each other today?
- Do you believe the Western world respects the Muslim world?
- Do you believe the Muslim world respects the Western world?
- Is the quality of the interaction between the Muslim and the Western world important to you?
- Do you think the interaction between the Muslim world and the Western world is getting better or getting worse?
- Do you think the Muslim world is committed to improving relations between the Western and Muslim worlds?
- Do you think the Western World is committed to improving relations between the Muslim and Western worlds?
- Is greater interaction between the Western and Muslim worlds a threat or benefit?
- Do you think violent conflict between the Muslim and Western worlds can be avoided or not?

For Index calculation purposes, each of the items is scored as “0” for a negative (or unfavourable) response and “1” for a positive (or favourable) response. Those scores are then summed, producing a total of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or 9 for each respondent. The sum is then divided by 9 to produce a final individual-level Index score ranging from 0 to 1 that is then aggregated to produce a country-level Index score.

For more details on the index and other findings, download the entire report at www.weforg.org or http://islamwest.org
International conflicts at the intersection of the West and the Muslim world dominated headlines and diplomacy in 2006-2007, including the United States occupation and civil war in Iraq, the Israeli war in Lebanon, instability within the Palestinian Territories, international terrorism and efforts to combat it, and the US-Iranian confrontation over Tehran’s nuclear programme. Other flashpoints included the Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Pakistan. Each international controversy had political, economic and strategic stakes. But each also had a religious and cultural dimension. Political leaders, whether religious or secular in orientation, often framed conflicts in the context of West-Islamic relations.

In the midst of international crises centred on the Middle East, United States President George W. Bush acknowledged the importance of dialogue on many occasions. In June 2007, the US announced the appointment of a first special envoy to the OIC. Bush used that occasion for dialogue to vigorously defend American foreign policy as consonant with Muslim interests and concerns. “For decades the free world abandoned Muslims in the Middle East to tyrants, and terrorists and hopelessness,” he argued. “This was done in the interests of stability and peace, but instead the approach brought neither. The Middle East became an incubator for terrorism and despair, and the result was an increase in Muslims’ hostility to the West.”

“Every organizer should make an extra effort to enlist some politicians in their work. The dialogue circuit is too full of people too far from decision-making.”

Jan Petersen, Member of Parliament of Norway

Thus far US public diplomacy efforts have failed to communicate this official position effectively. According the Gallup World Poll, between 2001 and 2005 the percentage of citizens in key Muslim-majority countries holding an unfavourable opinion of the United States increased – from 64% to 79% in Saudi Arabia, for example, and from 33% to 62% in Turkey. A parallel BBC World Poll discovered sharply negative assessments of the US: 58% in Lebanon, 57% in the UAE and 59% in Egypt.

At the level of international politics, the US-Iranian standoff through the end of 2007 illustrated the limits of Muslim-West dialogue. In an open letter dated May 2006, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad invited Bush into a dialogue based on shared Abrahamic principles, including “monotheism, justice and respect for human dignity”. The administration refused, citing Iran’s ongoing nuclear programme. In the midst of the standoff on the nuclear issue, efforts to defuse tensions through dialogue centred on the level of civil society. In February 2007, for example, a high-profile religious delegation from the US met with the Iranian...
leadership in Tehran. The group, which included representatives from the Mennonite, Quaker, Episcopal, Catholic and United Methodist communities, called for direct, face-to-face talks, and abandonment of negative images of the other.

The Centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian Issue

More than any other issue, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict represented a difficult challenge for dialogue. In its November 2006 report, the High Level Group of the UN’s Alliance of Civilizations argued that progress in dialogue depended on advance towards a just peace. The report argued: “Israel’s continuing occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and the unresolved status of Jerusalem – a holy city for Muslims and Christians as well as Jews – have persisted with the perceived acquiescence of Western governments and thus are primary causes of resentment and anger in the Muslim world towards Western nations.”

The idea that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might lead to a breakthrough in overall Muslim-West relations is not universally shared. At the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2007, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni expressed her scepticism. “Since our establishment we have been on the frontlines of a conflict that many perceive to be a major flashpoint between Islam and the West,” she noted. “Some believe – mistakenly in my view – that resolving this conflict is the key to restoring harmony between Islam and the West.” She pointed instead to deeper problems, in particular the struggle between Muslim moderates and extremists. In her view, the latter are exploiting the conflict to mobilize their supporters. The core political issue, Livni insisted, is the willingness of Israel’s neighbours to respect its right to exist within secure borders.

Whatever its centrality to broader Muslim-West relations, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained high on the international agenda through 2007. In November 2007, the Bush Administration convened the Annapolis Conference, during which both parties agreed in a joint statement to “immediately launch good faith, bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues, including core issues, without exception.” The discussions and potential negotiations that ensue into 2008 will shed new light on the interrelationship between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular, and West-Islamic relations in general.

The Alexandria Process

A rich array of dialogue efforts at the level of civil society has sought to lay foundations for a durable Israeli-Palestinian peace. Perhaps the boldest is the Alexandria Process. A historic meeting of religious leaders in the Holy Land culminated in 2002 in the Alexandria Declaration, a pledge to work for lasting peace in Israel and Palestine based on the principles of security and self-determination. The process of interreligious consultation has continued quietly, and not without difficulty, over subsequent years. A newly formed Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land made up of a wide range of Christian, Jewish and Muslim representatives, has underscored commonalities across the traditions and sought to build on the 2002 Alexandria Declaration.

Essays Featured in This Chapter

Three Simple Questions, Jan Petersen
Rethinking Moderates and Extremists, H.R.H. Hussam Bin Saud Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Public Dialogue, Marc Gopin
Challenge for a Meaningful Dialogue, H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa
Excerpts from Address at the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum, Tzipi Livni
Over the past several years, citizenship and integration issues have moved to the center of Muslim-West relations. This is nowhere more true than in Europe, where the Muslim population has been growing steadily. In Germany and the UK, Muslims comprise about 3% of the population. In France, the figure is about 9%. Europe’s Muslims are a diverse group, comprised mainly of the children and grandchildren of immigrants from Turkey, North Africa and South Asia. Some have made great economic strides and enjoy social and political rights, while many others remain mired in poverty on the margins of European society.

The bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 heightened fears of Islamic extremists and contributed to a sense of cultural isolation. The vast majority of European Muslims reject violence against civilians and are more concerned with economic opportunities and social services than with cultural differences and religious symbolism. Nevertheless, Muslim minorities in Western Europe have often emerged as an “other” in anti-immigrant domestic politics.

Within this volatile political context, European governments have sought to institutionalize dialogue with Muslim citizens and residents. Commissions and consultations have proliferated, with either direct or indirect state support, to engage different forces in civil society in a productive discussion of how best to combine cultural and religious diversity with national identity and social integration.

The French Council for the Muslim Faith, created in 2003 as a forum for consultations between the Muslim community and the state, proved to be the forerunner of a series of national dialogue efforts. Following the London bombings, the British government created a task force with Muslim participation, Preventing Extremism Together.

“The three Abrahamic faiths all came to Europe at times and by paths that we can pinpoint. All are equal in belonging to Europe. Europe must understand that we are here as indigenous Muslims.”

Mustafa Ceric, Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina

In September 2006, the German government created the German Conference on Islam “to improve religious and social integration of the Muslim population in Germany”. The conference seeks to promote “an understanding of integration which recognizes cultural and

The Headscarf Issue

Women’s rights were another prominent issue in West-Islamic dialogue in Europe in 2006-2007, and a source of continuing debate. Controversy centres less on workplace discrimination than on the symbolic politics of the headscarf. French legislation banning headscarves and other conspicuous religious signs in public schools had placed the issue on the European agenda in 2004. Supporters of the ban often charge that the wearing of headscarves is an indication of women’s subjugation. Prohibiting headscarves in schools and other public spaces is viewed as a means to uphold ideals of equality. In contrast, critics of the ban insist that it violates religious freedom and, more broadly, that the choice of clothing is individual self-expression that should be beyond the reach of state power. The headscarf has figured prominently in national controversy elsewhere in Western Europe, including Britain, Germany and Sweden.
religious differences, while requiring the complete acceptance of Germany’s liberal democracy”.

**The United States**

In the US in 2006-2007, concerns about discrimination were primary drivers of Muslim engagement in dialogue with fellow citizens and government officials. Those concerns centred on enhanced security and surveillance measures implemented after the 9/11 attacks and the possibility they might be further intensified. A 2006 Gallup Report, for example, found that 39% of Americans supported the idea of a special identity card for Muslims.

The same poll suggested the importance of dialogue and interaction as a way of breaking down mutual suspicions. Only 24% of those who know a Muslim personally would approve of a special identity card, but such a measure could find support among 50% of those who do not. A similar pattern with respect to the importance of face-to-face interaction emerged on the question of loyalty to the US: 45% of Americans surveyed who do not know a Muslim view them as not loyal to the US. That figure drops to 30% among Americans who know a Muslim.

**Christian Minorities in Muslim Majority Countries**

In 2006-2007, the Western media picked up on two high-profile cases concerning converts from Islam to Christianity in Afghanistan and Malaysia who were subject to persecution under the prevailing Sharia law courts. Abdul Rahman faced the death sentence in Afghanistan, but following international pressure, was allowed to emigrate. In Malaysia, Lina Joy sought to have her conversion to Christianity officially recognized on her national identity card, but the state courts referred the matter to the Sharia courts. These high-profile cases have overshadowed several important examples of long-standing and robust religious and civic pluralism in Muslim majority states, including Senegal and Indonesia, in which minority rights are guaranteed and interfaith dialogue is a continual reality.

**US Muslim Organizations and Dialogue**

National-level Muslim organizations in the United States have undertaken a wide variety of initiatives to promote dialogue. The Muslim Public Affairs Council brought young Muslims from across America together in 2007 with high-level government officials and Congressional staffers for a National Muslim American Youth Summit. The Washington DC-based Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has convened a variety of dialogues that bring together Muslim and non-Muslim citizens around issues of common concern. The organization has joined with others – Muslim, Christian, Jewish and secular – to fight the Patriot Act in court and promote national and state legislation to protect the rights of Muslim citizens.

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**Essays Featured in This Chapter**

Islam in Europe: Ideals and Realities, Mustafa Ceric
Respect, Maria J.A. van der Hoeven
Civic Values, Ismail Serageldin
The Imperative of Integration, Daniel Sachs
The Imperative of Moderation and Toleration in the Global Environment, Muhammad Sa’ad Abubakar
Sharp debates about international politics and about citizenship and integration marked both by polemics and openness to dialogue were not the sole focus of Muslim-West relations in 2006-2007. Questions of religion, ethics and ideology were also an object of controversy and a spur to dialogue activities among Muslims, Christians, Jews and other religious and secular citizens at all levels of civil society – transnational, national and local.

A series of high-level meetings brought together religious leaders to address issues of common concern, including the Global Assembly of the World Council of Religions for Peace in Kyoto Japan in August 2006 and the annual interfaith meeting convened by the Rome-based Catholic lay organization, the Community of Sant’Egidio, which took place in Naples in October 2007 under the heading "A World Without Violence: Faiths and Cultures in Dialogue".

Two ambitious meetings brought together Jewish and Muslim leaders over this period. The first World Congress of Rabbis and Imams for Peace took place in Brussels, Belgium in January 2005, and was followed by a second in Seville, Spain in March 2006 that gathered more than 250 participants.

The Amman Message

In an effort to counteract fragmentation within the decentralized Muslim world and to isolate extremists, H.M. King Abdullah Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan supported the proclamation of the Amman Message in November 2004. Developed with the input of leading Islamic scholars, the Amman Message recognized established schools of law, forbade charges of apostasy among Muslims and set forth the preconditions for authoritative legal rulings or fatwa.

The Amman Message Committee noted: “This is good news not only for Muslims, for whom it provides a basis for unity and a solution to infighting, but also for non-Muslims.”

The Regensburg Controversy

Each of these international gatherings received only a modest press echo. During the summer of 2006, the media focused on the Israeli war in Lebanon and on the decaying situation in Iraq, which was slipping into civil war. One day after the fifth anniversary of 9/11, however, questions of religion, ethics and West-Islamic relations moved up the global political agenda in a dramatic and entirely unplanned fashion. What sparked the new controversy and subsequent dialogue were Pope Benedict XVI’s critical remarks on Islam during an address at the University of Regensburg in his native Bavaria.
A political firestorm followed the speech. Demonstrations and isolated instances of violence took place across the Muslim world, and leading Muslim figures and organizations criticized the Pope’s speech, in particular his quotation of a 14th century Byzantine emperor, who maintained that Mohammed had brought things “evil and inhuman” into the world. With limited success, the Pope sought to soften the impact of the speech, emphasizing that the quotations did not “in any way express my personal thought”.

Muslim leaders have since seized upon the controversy as an opportunity for dialogue. Thirty-eight leading clerics and academics endorsed an open letter in October 2006 that rejected any connection between Islam and illegitimate violence and offered to begin a formal dialogue with the Holy See. A second letter, released in October 2007 and signed by 138 Muslim leaders, was directed more broadly towards their Christian counterparts. *A Common Word Between Us and You* generated positive reactions from Protestant and Orthodox scholars and clerics. And in November 2007, the Pope extended an invitation to a Muslim delegation to visit the Vatican for formal talks in early 2008.

**Religious Freedom and Proselytism**

In the contemporary era of globalization, with its increased cross-border flows of people and ideas, an age-old problem in Muslim-West relations has gained greater visibility – proselytism. Responding to the challenge, the World Council of Churches has structured dialogue about how best to combine the right to religious freedom with respect for the religious and cultural heritage of the other. The code of conduct that emerged out of an interfaith gathering in Toulouse, France in August 2007 emphasized a need to avoid coercion in the promulgation of faith but also raised the problem of state sponsored anti-conversion and forced conversion laws, specifically within the Muslim world.

The ongoing controversy over proselytism suggests that this universal impulse within both Christianity and Islam is likely to generate tensions and complicate dialogue on other issues in years to come. There is cause for optimism, however, in the fact that a majority of religious and secular citizens within Muslim and non-Muslim majority countries do not see religious differences as insuperable obstacles to cooperation. According to a major BBC World Service poll across 27 countries in December 2006, only 26% of responders saw “fundamental differences” as the cause of tensions between Islam and the West.

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**The Building Bridges Seminar**

Not long after 9/11, then-Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey initiated the Building Bridges seminar, which brings Christian and Muslim leaders and scholars together for focused conversations on an annual basis. In March 2006, Carey’s successor, Rowan Williams, convened the gathering at Georgetown University in Washington DC around the theme “Justice and Rights in Christian and Muslim Traditions”. The sixth annual Building Bridges meeting took place in Singapore in December 2007. There, Williams underscored that “very frequently the engagement of different religions in dialogue and cooperation will open up and highlight the many ways in which diverse traditions share a heritage at various points in history.”
Social and political tensions at the intersection of Islam and the West are often fuelled by prejudice and ignorance. In both the educational and cultural spheres, multiple efforts are underway to dispel misunderstanding and build mutual respect among different national, cultural and religious communities.

Knowledge Gaps

A host of polls and surveys document how little is understood about Islam and Muslims in Europe, but above all in the United States. For example, a September 2007 study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in the US indicated that 58% of respondents said they knew “nothing” or “not very much” about Islam. More worrying is that the number had changed little since 2001, despite a blizzard of efforts to increase public awareness.

Where religious literacy is weak, efforts to demonize the religious “other” flourish. Anti-Muslim prejudice, or Islamophobia, is increasingly recognized as a problem to be addressed through dialogue. At a 2004 UN forum on Education for Tolerance and Understanding, Secretary-General Kofi Annan emphasized “the resentment and sense of injustice felt by members of one of the world’s great religions, cultures and civilizations”. Subsequent national and local efforts to address Islamophobia included a December 2006 consultation of leading American Muslims and US officials, organized by the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

Anti-semitism is also a persistent problem. A tendency to blame Jews for the world’s ills and to see a vast Jewish conspiracy behind the travails of the Arab and Muslim world is evident in extremist Internet sites and in the discourse of some prominent imams. One example of efforts to counter such voices is the UK organization, Muslims Against Anti-Semitism, which supports events and programmes to combat hatred and Holocaust denial, and to highlight Muslim-Jewish commonalities, including positive legacies such as coexistence in Medieval Spain. Another is the US-based Daniel Pearl Foundation, created to honour the memory of the Jewish-American journalist executed by extremists in Pakistan.

“We must truly believe in the boundless potential of young people, respect their talents, creativity, perspectives and backgrounds, as well as treat them as partners and collaborators.”

Sheikha Hessa Bin Al Khalifa, Executive Director, INJAZ Bahrain, Bahrain

Educational Reform

A series of educational and curricular reform efforts designed to close these knowledge gaps and promote greater mutual understanding has been initiated over the past several years. These programmes have sought to strengthen the overall quality of education, to link curricula to the promotion of civic values, and to promote social inclusion and economic opportunity.

In May 2007, H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates; Ruler of Dubai, announced a US$ 10 billion gift designed to make a leap forward in knowledge and education, with a focus on the Arab world.
In the West, educational institutions have begun to adapt to greater cultural and religious pluralism, and the increasing salience of Islam in particular. Primary and secondary schools in Europe and the United States are devoting more attention to diverse cultures and religious traditions, including Islam. The Three Faiths Forum, a London-based interfaith foundation, promotes school programmes involving “scriptural reasoning” that exemplify efforts to bring religious traditions into school curricula in ways that encourage deep discussion of shared values and differences. Another example is the Australian government’s Values Education and Good Practice in Schools programme.

The Media and Popular Culture

The media – primarily television and radio, newspapers, magazines and the Internet – are powerful sources of knowledge about different cultural and religious traditions, as well as forums for the open exchange of ideas. Editors, columnists and talk show hosts play a critical role in shaping broader society-wide dialogue. Some of the most creative print journalists, including Thomas Friedman of the New York Times and Raghida Dergham, who is featured in Al Hayat, raise issues in provocative ways that can shift the terms of debate. Television personalities including Oprah Winfrey in the US and Amr Khaled in Egypt have huge audiences. Khaled, in particular, has helped to bring Muslim-West issues to the attention of a wider public in his native Egypt and beyond.

The Centrality of Youth

The importance of youth for intercultural and interreligious understanding was widely heralded in 2006-2007. Two of the most sustained and successful programmatic efforts in this area are Seeds of Peace and the Interfaith Youth Core. The former supports a summer camp which met for the fifteenth time in 2007, bringing more than 300 Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian, Palestinian and other Middle Eastern teenagers together to learn from one another, expand their mediation skills and advance the goal of coexistence through empathy, respect and engagement. The latter, founded by Ebrahim “Eboo” Patel in 1998, connects youth from different religious and ethnic backgrounds in dialogue and around concrete service projects in areas such as education and housing.

Closing knowledge gaps and promoting intercultural understanding does not always lead to greater sympathy; it can lay bare differences and even increase mistrust. But much confrontation and hatred is grounded in misinformed views of the “other”. “We’re not witnessing a clash of civilizations,” Bill Clinton recently commented. “We’re witnessing a clash of ignorances, people who don’t know each other and therefore fear one another.”

Media and the UN’s Alliance of Civilizations

The November 2006 Report of the High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations underscored the important role of the media in shaping attitudes around Muslim-West issues. The report also made concrete recommendations, including the articulation and implementation of voluntary codes of conduct, the creation of monitoring mechanisms, the institution of a risk fund to help temper market forces that encourage sensationalism and stereotypes, and collaboration with schools of journalism in improving journalist training. The Alliance planned to announce a major media initiative in January 2008 at its first annual forum in Madrid.

Essays Featured in This Chapter

The Power of Dignity, H.R.H. Crown Prince Haakon of Norway
Commonalities across Traditions, Peter Bisanz
Islam and the West: The Internet Dimension, Stanley T. (Shimon) Samuels
Young People: The Imperative, Sheikha Hessa Bin Al Khalifa
Dignity Day, John Hope Bryant
The world watched with horror as the rage of a young generation erupted in violence in France in late 2005. The Paris suburbs were shaken by nightly riots for almost two months. Many in the global media interpreted the events through the lens of Islamic radicalism. However, the evidence suggests that the rioters—mainly the children and grandchildren of North African immigrants—were driven by more mundane concerns: a yawning gap between rhetoric about integration and opportunity and the realities of unemployment and dismal prospects. Another wave of riots shook the Paris suburbs in November and December 2007. “Given the way these kids live, I wonder why it doesn’t happen more often,” commented a scholar who studies French-born Muslims.

“‘As long as many people are without a decent life today and can truly hope for a better life tomorrow, stable and harmonious societies are a wishful illusion.’”

Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow and Visiting Professor, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University, USA

Differing perceptions of economic and social realities are important drivers of relations between the West and the Muslim world. Increasingly, actors within public institutions and civil society are recognizing and debating the interdependence of religious and cultural dynamics with social and economic conditions.

The Global Dimension

How to speed economic growth and social progress in the Muslim world is a central strand of Muslim-West dialogue. The challenge was underscored in February 2006 by Ahmad Hasyim Muzadi, General Chairman, Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization, with some 40 million members: “In a community of poverty and ignorance, it is generally easier to be involved in the use of violence, irrespective of their religious beliefs,” he told the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Many Western leaders have acknowledged economic and social dislocations in the Arab and Muslim world and the importance of addressing them. Then-UK Finance Minister Gordon Brown, addressing the Islamic Finance and Trade Conference in London in June 2006, noted that he “was shocked to learn that while Muslims constitute 22% of the world’s population, almost 40% of the world’s out-of-school children are Muslims.” He went on to emphasize the importance of addressing a litany of impediments to growth in the Muslim world, including agricultural subsidies.

Crucial debates about the role of Islam and development—and the most significant programmes with an Islamic dimension—have emerged within the Muslim world itself. Both the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the World Islamic Economic Forum Foundation (WIEF), based in Malaysia, have played a significant role. Encouraging economic integration among members and enhancing the development of less developed Muslim societies has been a fundamental goal of the OIC since its creation. At a June 2005 forum to announce a preferential trading system encompassing many OIC members, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi argued that wealth creation depends on the organization’s ability to “promote greater involvement of the less-developed members in economic development as a whole.”

Local Initiatives

Often dialogue efforts linked to economic and social development centre on the local level. One
example is the observations and recommendations of the European Municipal Network meeting focused on community reconciliation in Amsterdam in August 2007. A collaboration with the International Center for Conciliation, the meeting grew out of a concern with practical issues that community and municipal leaders had raised, including housing, job training and crime. It particularly focused on addressing the influx of migrants from Muslim majority countries, including Turkey and Morocco.

Housing, too, is emerging as a critical development issue at the local level open to interfaith approaches. Since 2002, Habitat for Humanity Lebanon has assisted displaced Lebanese families in 40 mixed Christian and Muslim communities in the southern part of the country, and similar approaches are underway in Egypt.

Business and economic leaders can certainly contribute more to Muslim-West dialogue. Cultural and religious leaders, for their part, can do more to engage economic and social issues in a constructive way. Both groups have a shared stake in sustainable economic growth and opportunity that can meet human needs in both the developed and developing worlds. The obstacles are significant. Economic inequality between the West and the Muslim world does not offer a level playing field for dialogue and collaboration. Mistrust abounds on all sides. Corruption, dictatorship and failed states do not provide the necessary political foundation for sustained economic growth, effective social services and a just distribution of wealth. If dialogue and collaboration in the area of economic and social development have been less intensive than around the other Muslim-West, the last several years have seen important new departures.

***Islamic Banking***

There is a long-running debate within Islam about the compatibility of the tradition with modern financial instruments, and the charging of interest in particular. Debate and dialogue about Islamic finance highlight creative ways, in the contemporary political economy, to uphold the Qur’anic injunction against exploitation of the weak and in favour of economic activity that supports the community. The Malaysian government supported the creation of the International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance in Kuala Lumpur in early 2006, to develop and disseminate knowledge about Islamic finance and support national and international efforts to create new financial instruments. By the end of 2007, the Malaysian government had issued US$ 20 billion issue in Sukuk (Islamic bonds) – more than half of the global total.

***The Challenge of Global Warming***

In recent years, the threat of global warming has moved up the policy agenda across religious traditions. A recent report from the London Islamic Network for the Environment (LINE) warns of catastrophic effects for the Muslim world. In Bangladesh, a sea level rise of only 100 centimetres would reduce the country’s land mass by 20% and potentially affect the livelihood of more than 100 million people. In Senegal and Mauritania, a decline in rainfall of 20% would stifle agricultural production as much as 50%. In the United States in May 2007, Muslim leaders joined Christian and Jewish counterparts in support of An Interfaith Declaration on the Moral Responsibility of the US Government to Address Global Warming. “This is an historic moment when Jews, Christians and Muslims stand together in solidarity with a shared sense of moral purpose on global warming,” the declaration stated. “Each of our diverse traditions has a common concern for creation.”
Media Coverage

Authors: Sacha Evans, Christian Kolmer, Roland Schatz


How did the global media cover the five issue areas highlighted in this report? Media Tenor International carried out an in-depth survey of reporting on Muslim-West issues in 24 countries in 2007. The survey, undertaken in both Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority countries, indicates that most reporting on Muslim-West issues was neutral in tone. However, negative coverage was 10 times more frequent than positive coverage. This was in part due to a focus on international politics - including terrorism - Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The high volume of reporting on conflicts fueled negative presentations of the Western and Muslim "other" across all media outlets and countries. Reporting on other Muslim-West issues, such as citizenship, integration and religious ethics was less negative, but also much less frequent.

Examinations of religious and cultural traditions were the least negative areas of coverage, but they focused primarily on majority traditions in Western countries and were not heavily present in media from Muslim majority countries. Media coverage bearing on Muslim-West issues accounted for about one-fifth of total media output in the 24 countries surveyed.
Quantifying the “Other”

The distinction between Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority countries allows for a measure of how media cover the “other” side. In media from Muslim majority countries, the “other” is defined as Christian and Jewish actors and actors from non-Muslim majority countries. In media from non-Muslim majority countries, the “other” is defined as Muslim actors and actors from Muslim-majority countries. See methodology section in full report for details: http://islamwest.org

Key Findings

1. **Primacy of international politics**: Coverage of Middle East conflicts dominated media coverage of Muslim-West relations, giving it a more negative tone overall.

2. **Negative tone towards the “other”**: While most coverage of Muslim-West issues contained no positive or negative judgements, media from Muslim majority countries were more likely to provide negative coverage of individuals and groups associated with Christianity and Judaism and with non-Muslim majority countries. Conversely, media from non-Muslim majority countries covered Muslim majority countries and Muslim protagonists more negatively, but to a lesser degree.

3. **Focus on political and militant Islam**: Most reports involving Muslims depicted them engaged in political, militant and extremist activities. In contrast, Christians and Jews were most often presented in the context of religious activities.

4. **Education and intercultural understanding covered most neutrally**: Reports designed to inform people about religious and cultural traditions were the least negative and the second most visible coverage area. However, they focused primarily on Western traditions and were only covered heavily in non-Muslim majority countries.
Conclusions and Paths Forward

As the year 2007 drew to a close, Muslim-West relations were marked by contradictory trends. At a November meeting in Annapolis, Maryland hosted by the US government, Israeli and Palestinian leaders committed themselves to negotiations to bring about a peaceful two-state solution. That same month, Vatican officials responded positively to an invitation to dialogue issued by 138 Muslim leaders several weeks earlier. In December, the civil war in Iraq appeared to be ebbing, and a revision of the US intelligence community’s assessment of Iran’s nuclear programme reduced fears of an imminent military clash.

Not all the news at year’s end was good. The global media was transfixed by a crisis involving a British school teacher jailed in the Sudan for allowing her pupils to name a toy bear “Muhammad”. Observers questioned the ability of the Israeli and Palestinian governments, under pressure at home, to arrive at long hoped for compromise. The situation in Afghanistan and Iraq remained volatile. In December al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for a car bombing outside UN offices in Algiers, Algeria. And, during the final days of 2007, Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in Pakistan, dealing a blow to the country’s democratic prospects with potential repercussions far beyond.

It is not clear what 2008 will bring. Efforts to improve relations between the West and the Muslim world – and to foster peaceful interaction and collaboration among Muslims and non-Muslims within the West – will be shaped both by broad global trends and contingent, unforeseeable events. The success of those efforts will also depend on whether and how they link back to and build upon the diverse dialogue efforts that have expanded dramatically over the past several years.

Four Gaps to Address

The analysis of dialogue efforts across the issue areas, combined with the results of the public opinion and media analysis, suggests four gaps to be addressed in years to come.

The Elite/Grass Roots Gap: Dialogue among political and religious elites garners most media attention, while much of the most creative work takes place at the local level. Shining more light on the grassroots can address the gap in media coverage in two ways. First, it can bring local activities to the attention of leaders and the public and point to reservoirs of political support for more ambitious national and international efforts. Second, it can facilitate a sharing of best practices about how to convene people, set agendas, exchange views and further practical collaboration.

The Politics/Religion Gap: While public rhetoric can help to set the tone for more substantive efforts within the state and civil society, political leaders often have little direct contact or interaction with diverse religious leaders. Given the importance of Muslim-West dialogue, political leaders would do well to reach out more proactively to faith communities, individually and through interfaith groupings, in order to understand better their motivations and support their engagement with one another around pressing policy challenges.
Looking Ahead

The Business-Professions Gap: Over the past decade, dialogue and debate about corporate social responsibility and educational, legal and medical ethics have intensified at the local, national and international levels. To date, however, conversations in both business and professional circles have rarely been linked to the parallel Muslim-West dialogues addressed in this report. If those dialogues are to move effectively beyond theological and ideological questions towards practical efforts to address global economic and social challenges, leaders across civil society must be engaged more fully.

The Inside/Outside Gap: Some of the most significant dialogue is taking place within, not across, religious and secular communities. Among Muslim, Christian, Jewish and other groups, some who hold that they possess the complete truth face off against others who are comfortable with their convictions, but respectful of and open to the beliefs and values of others. Often, moderates committed to particular beliefs and practices but open to learning from and collaborating with others through peaceful exchange are in the clear majority. Religious leaders, supported by scholars, can do more to highlight the rich diversity within traditions – to help both understand and counter the minorities attracted to extremist views and leaders.

Ultimately, efforts to close these gaps and address global challenges at the intersection of the West and the Muslim world will depend upon the actions of courageous and far-sighted individuals. Their myriad efforts to engage dialogue will not add up in a simple or mathematical way. If we cannot generalize about best practices, we can learn from particular experiences.

This report provides a partial overview of the vast universe of dialogue efforts unfolding around the world. It is a source of knowledge and, hopefully, an encouragement to those committed to improving West-Islamic relations in the service of peace.
Islam and the West Database

http://islamwest.org

The Islam and the West Database provides an up-to-date overview of dialogue activities at the intersection of the West and the Muslim World. The database, a project of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University, maps and archives organizations, programs, and events designed to advance the dialogue.

Visitors to the website will find examples of international, national, and local efforts that encompass a variety of religious and secular voices. The database features all of the activities addressed in the 2008 report, along with many others. Those engaged in dialogue around the world are encouraged to provide feedback on the database and updates on their various activities.
Upcoming West-Islam Events

24-27 March: Arabs’ and Muslims’ Scientific Contributions to Humanity, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
The University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates will host the First International Conference on Arabs’ and Muslims’ History of Sciences. The conference will convene more than 250 scholars and researchers from around the world. More information: https://www.sharjah.ac.ae

April: EU-Sponsored Debate on Interreligious Dialogue, Brussels, Belgium
The European Union has designated 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. As part of the project, a series of debates will take place in Brussels throughout the year. One of these is slated to cover the topic of interreligious dialogue. More information: http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu

5-6 April: Innovations in Islam, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Doha, Qatar
The Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown’s SFS Qatar campus will host an international conference to coincide with the opening of the Museum of Islamic Art in March 2008. The conference will explore a wide variety of Muslim contributions to culture through history. More information: http://www1.georgetown.edu/sfs/qatar/

13-15 April: Breakthrough: The Women, Faith and Development Summit to End Global Poverty, Washington DC, USA
The National Cathedral Center for Justice and Reconciliation will host a summit at the Washington National Cathedral on links between women, faith and global development. With the participation of former secretary of state Madeleine Albright and other world leaders, the summit will propose new global poverty alleviation efforts. More information: http://www.wfd-alliance.org/

24-26 April: Inaugural Conference of ASMEA, Washington DC, USA
The inaugural conference of the Association of the Study of the Middle East and Africa will be on The Evolution of Islamic Politics in the Middle East and Africa. It will focus on Islamic political tradition in its theological, juristic and practical aspects, with particular attention to salient contemporary debates. More information: http://www.asmeascholars.org

18-20 May: World Economic Forum on the Middle East, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt
The annual Middle East meeting of the World Economic Forum will convene leaders from across sectors to discuss the region’s economic, social and cultural trajectory. Topics for discussion will run the gamut from information technology to the arts. More information: http://www.weforum.org/en/events/

May: Encounter 2008, Rovereto, Italy
Religions for Peace will host Encounter 2008, a symposium on religions, values and European identity. It will bring some 200 religious representatives together with European officials to confront urgent issues including cultural pluralism, immigration, economic disparities and community cohesion. More information: http://www.wcrp.org/

April/May: URI Training on Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Manila, Philippines
The Peacemakers’ Cooperation Circle and the Institute of Islamic Studies of the University of the Philippines will offer training modules on Muslim-Christian Dialogue for Nation-Building in Metro Manila. This pilot programme is meant to launch a first-of-its-kind Interfaith Peacebuilding Institute in the Philippines. More information: http://www.uri.org/

6-14 June: Fes Sacred Music Festival, Fes, Morocco
The Fes Sacred Music Festival brings artists from around the world together in one of the world’s most ancient holy cities. The Fes Encounters, which are part of the festival, convene politicians, academics and social activists to discuss urgent issues ranging from conflict resolution to climate change. More information: http://www.fesfestival.com/

11-14 July: IslamExpo 2008, London, United Kingdom
London’s annual IslamExpo will be held in Olympia, London. In addition to a number of cultural and social programmes showcasing achievements in the Islamic world, this year’s programme will have a specific focus on the topic of Islamic Finance and specifically the need for ethical investment in the UK and abroad. More Information: http://www.islamexpo.com/
The World Economic Forum is an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging leaders in partnerships to shape global, regional and industry agendas.

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