RELIGION AS A POTENTIAL CONFLICT DRIVER OR A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT MECHANISM

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Introduction

I shall be addressing the above topic from the Muslim perspective and concentrate on the second half of the sub-theme first, namely, the role of religion in conflict management.

Such a view confirms the paramount position of maintaining peace.

Islam is derived from the Arabic words *silm, salm* or *salam* (peace), suggesting the attainment of peace through submission to the Will of the Divine Being, *Allah*. It is believed by Muslims that the multitude of references to peace in the *Qur'an*, the Holy Scripture, confirm it as a central theme in Islamic precepts. *Salam* is one of Allah's ninety-nine glorious names\(^1\) and the word serves as a greeting among Muslims both in this world and the next besides being the condition prevailing in paradise\(^2\).

Endeavours at establishing peace are more laudable than the performance of daily prayers, the discharging of

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\(^1\) Qur'an 59:23
\(^2\) Qur'an 10:10, 14:23, 19:61-63, 36:58

237
mandatory charity or fasting\textsuperscript{3}. Even falsehood may be resorted to for this objective\textsuperscript{4}.

In tandem with peace go concepts like unity, justice, mercy, forgiveness and social responsibility. Let us elaborate on each of these now:

\textbf{Unity} operates at two levels, between Allah the Creator and the creation as well as among members of the creation. This principle stresses direct contact with the Almighty for all and the maintenance of harmony in all humanity and all life. People are interconnected, regardless of differences in nationality, ethnicity, language, gender or socio-economic status. They are all descendants of common ancestors, Adam and Eve\textsuperscript{5}. This serves as the basis of universalism, tolerance and inclusivity as people all belong to a common family of humanity\textsuperscript{6}. Diversity is apparent rather than real, even in religious matters\textsuperscript{7}.

\textbf{Justice} at all levels is crucial for establishing peace and harmony. Neither should partisanship or hatred towards people cause us to swerve from implementing justice\textsuperscript{8}. In

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\textsuperscript{3} Abu Dawud. n.d. \textit{Sunan}. Beirut: Al-Maktabat al-Asriya Chapter on Etiquette:50. This book will henceforth be referred to by the compiler’s name.


\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Qur’an} 49:3

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Qur’an} 10:99 and 11:118. \textit{Muslim}. Chapter on Release of Slaves: 16

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Qur’an} 5:48

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Qur’an} 2:30, 2:178, 4:135, 16:90 and 57:25
turn, it contains both awesome power and many benefits⁹, and constitutes the basis for concord and equilibrium in the cosmos¹⁰.

**Mercy** is one of the Divine attributes featuring prominently in the Qur'an. Almost all its 114 chapters commence with the formula outlining Divine Beneficence and Mercy. It extends over everything¹¹. As Divine representatives, human beings are ordered to show mercy to one another in order to receive Divine Mercy¹². The underprivileged and miserable ones, such as the hungry, the sick, the orphans and widows are specially identified as those deserving compassion¹³. Thus true Muslims cannot be insensitive to the sufferings of others or inflict injury of whatever kind upon them.

**Forgiveness** is constantly preferred to retribution¹⁴.

**Social responsibility** results from our role as Allah’s representatives on earth¹⁵. Human beings have been created, metaphorically, in God’s image. Muslims are to discharge their obligations to His creation with care, love, wisdom and justice.

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⁹ Qur’an 57:25  
¹⁰ Qur’an 55:6-9  
¹¹ Qur’an 7:156  
¹³ Bukhari. Chapter on the Sick:4, Muslim. Chapter on Abstention:2  
¹⁴ Qur’an 42:37, 40  
¹⁵ Qur’an 2:30 and 33:72
This also relates to Muslim conduct with others who need to be given freedom of religion\textsuperscript{16}. Dialogue with others is urged in a spirit of cordiality and with sensitivity\textsuperscript{17}. The Qur'an regards all places of worship as sacred and asks Muslims to defend the right of liberty of worship for everyone\textsuperscript{18}. Thus it acknowledges that the differences in beliefs and outlook among people are not a negative feature; instead, they constitute a Divine-willed, essential trait of human life.

Briefly, the Islamic code accentuates the protection of five things for human beings: faith, life, intellect, posterity and property\textsuperscript{19}. Intolerable violation in their safeguard can cause reprisals, which will be clarified in the next lecture.

Let us now turn to peace building and conflict resolution traditions and institutions in Africa based on Islamic values.

Peace building and conflict resolution traditions and institutions in Africa based on Islamic values

We firstly take into account some problems in identifying such organizations.

\textsuperscript{16} Qur'an 2:56
\textsuperscript{17} Qur'an 3:64
\textsuperscript{18} 22:40
\textsuperscript{19} Al-Ghazali, A H. n.d. \textit{Al-Mustasfa min Usul al-Fiqh}. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, I:139-140
Structural differences between Western and Muslim communities and bodies

Western societies tend to be more individualistic, professional and bureaucratized. Many Muslim societies are traditional in which kinship, tribalism, and family ties dominate. Social institutions like NGOs reflect these disparities. These differences make it difficult to identify Muslim peace building organizations in the Western sense.

Often, in the absence of properly structured and constituted bodies Muslim volunteers attempt to serve the needs of people unobtrusively, believing that they are simply discharging their religious obligations. Their contributions remain largely unrecorded.

Peace building through development and humanitarian aid relief

Muslim communities have a long tradition of social assistance, humanitarian relief and charity. Based on the Islamic values of social solidarity, comprehensive justice and social upliftment which, in turn, influences care of the destitute, sick and disabled many Muslim organizations operate as relief and development agencies and undertake conflict resolution and peace building within this framework. This makes identification of Muslim peace agents difficult.

Lack of special peace building organizational capacities

Due to incoherent structures, their work remains highly obscure. So their contributions are rarely included on internet databases or global publications.
Muslim holistic view of life

There is no separation in Islam between the worldly and spiritual spheres. Islamic values underpin peace building and conflict resolution activities as they do in all other aspects of life. Therefore, many traditional Muslims regard it as superfluous to highlight the role of Islam in their work by attaching "Islamic/Muslim" tags to their work or organizations since they understand this to be common knowledge among both peace agents and communities they serve. This makes their recognition very intricate which is further compounded if they make contributions via secular forums. For this reason very few instances will be given in this discussion of individual contributions to peace building and conflict resolution.

Individuals and organizations primarily focusing on poverty alleviation, building of educational institutions, dispensing health, providing emergency relief or focusing mainly on women's or human rights are excluded from this presentation.

We now examine peace building through informal and unstructured initiatives.

a) Contributions through secular forums or interfaith bodies

In South Africa, the contribution of Muslims to the liberation struggle is appreciated. They were mainly people

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20Salam: Institute for Peace and Justice, 23 May 2005, Muslim Peacebuilding. Actors in the Balkans, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Regions, p. 5. Online details at www.salaminstitute.org

Subsequent reference to the report shall be made under Salam.
who, although guided by the Islamic social ethos, did not feel the need to reveal their Muslim identity. At least two exceptions may be identified in the form of the religious leaders Imam Abdullah Haron (d. 1969) and Maulvi Ismail Cachalia (d. 2002). The former was killed in detention by the security police while the latter played a leading role in the ANC during its passive resistance phase. He also participated in the leadership deliberations on the legitimacy of an armed struggle for toppling the apartheid state on the heels of the State of Emergency in 1960.

A colossal input was made by Advocate Ismail Mohamed when he presided over the CODESA talks in Kempton Park between the National Party and the African National Congress, which paved the way for democracy in this country. He was later appointed the first chief justice of the new South Africa.

From the beginning of the 1980s up to 1994, the Muslim Youth Movement and the Call of Islam were heavily involved with the interfaith body, World Conference for Religion and Peace (WCRP-SA). The latter had, among its priorities, the promotion of peace and justice, and the eradication of discrimination based on race and gender. It was also represented at some stages during the CODESA negotiations.

Ebrahim Rasool, current premier of the Western Cape, was closely affiliated to the organizations mentioned above and is thus a strong proponent of ecumenism.
Since 1997, the Religious Leaders' Forum which was
came into being at President Mandela's behest and
comprises representatives of seven faiths meets at least
twice a year with the State President to discuss matters of
mutual concern.

According to Chikuku, the interfaith movement has
taken root in Zimbabwe\textsuperscript{21}
and Malawi as well though its contribution to peace
facilitation in the former country is not known. In Malawi,
peace initiatives are intended to be proactive to ensure that
the society is vigilant against the evils of governments,
fellow citizens and other systems\textsuperscript{22}. Ibrahim Panjwani, a
community leader, says that Muslim chiefs have inspired
their subjects through their non-violent conduct to such a
degree that they have been able to govern over the most
peaceful areas of Malawi for the last century. Moreover,
Muslims were insistent upon gaining independence from
Britain peacefully; consequently, an advisor to the national
delegation during the Lancaster Conference between 1960
and 1964 was a Muslim named Abdul Sattar Sacrami\textsuperscript{23}.
According to Omar, a special assistant to the President on

\textsuperscript{21} Chikuku, T. n.d. "A spiritual journey into interfaith dialogue" in \textit{Taking Our
Experience Home}. San Francisco: United Religions Initiative, p. 19. Information
on \texttt{www.uri.org/peacebuilding}

\textsuperscript{22} Maliwichi, E. n.d. "A Report on conflict transformation courses held at Summer
Peacebuilding Institute, Eastern Mennonite University, U S A" in \textit{Taking Our
Experience Home}. San Francisco: United Religions Initiative, p. 19. Information
on \texttt{www.uri.org/peacebuilding}

\textsuperscript{23} Panjwani, I. 3 September 2006. Written statement on Muslim contribution to
peace in Malawi.
Islamic Affairs, such peace has to be attributed to the paramount mutual respect prevailing in that society\textsuperscript{24}

b) Contributions through mysticism and trade

One of the most salient gifts bequeathed to Africa by Islam has been the mystical Qadiriya order that emanated from Iraq and was founded by Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, one of the most revered and popular saints in the twelfth century. His message centred around love of one’s neighbour and tolerance. His charity was boundless and he displayed no enmity towards Jews and Christians. He prayed to God for their constant guidance. This view has been a legacy to his disciples everywhere.

This order was introduced into West Africa three centuries later. Its influence extends from Senegal, through the Sahara to Sudan.

Its missionary effort relies entirely on personal precept, and the influence of the teacher over the learner through the dissemination of education.

The effect of knowledge disseminated was evident in the absence of cannibalism and alcohol, cleanliness and neatness, orderliness and skill among them.

In East Africa, the peaceful Muslim traders made a very positive impact upon the local population in the nineteenth century. Moreover, European colonialists assigned numerous administrative, military and teaching duties to the more educated and refined section of the

Muslim society. The acceptance of Islam was viewed as a sign of upgrading of one’s social status. In Malawi, some of the most intelligent people embraced Islam. The Horn of Africa benefited from both traders and mystics; consequently, life in that region has constantly been characterized by peace apart from political conflicts of various kinds.

Peaceful interaction with local inhabitants has resulted in:

- A warm reception from non-Muslim rulers.
- Pragmatic traders belonging to minority Muslim populations of Mali, Ghana and Ivory Coast who were not strongly influenced by this spiritual trend, left politics to non-Muslims although they practiced Islam enthusiastically. "But they could not afford to, and generally did not want to, change the religious identities of their hosts who welcomed their presence and accorded them favors because of the prosperity they brought though trade." They adopted the theological rationale developed by Al-Hajj Salim Suwari who maintained that piety and learning had to furnish good examples to non-Muslim neighbours. They could accept the rulings of non-Muslim authorities in exchange for protection of their lives, faith and prosperity. Any Muslim,

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than no government for him. Muslims only had to resort to armed struggle if they were threatened. God would guide people in His own time.

The ensuing interaction was very positive. Rulers sought the blessings of Muslims for their political realm through, *inter alia*, amulets and charms which were also used to ward off diseases, increase prosperity and avert catastrophe. (This six-century-old tradition has been challenged by Muslim reformers in recent times). Some Muslims were raised to the rank of royal councilors for Muslim affairs.

Syncrétic religious practices among Yoruba Muslims in Nigeria, whereby beliefs in certain tribal gods, customs, superstitions, life-view, arts and witchcraft have been inserted into their Islamic way of life. They have a taxonomy of superior and lesser deities. Such beliefs and practices also occur among educated people. Obviously, Muslim orthodoxy condemns these traditions.

A healthy marriage of politics and Islam in Senegal where, despite its faulty democracy, people have enjoyed remarkable stability and the benefits of a relatively benevolent state. Villón explains:

"Islam is, on the one hand, clearly central to the political sociology of Senegal: the religious elite carry great weight in national politics; political discourse is

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247
great weight in national politics; political discourse is replete with references and appeals to Islam; Islamic symbols are omnipresent, and a myriad of popular organizations centered around Islam are flourishing. At the same time, however, there is little evidence of the social phenomena which might be expected to accompany the politicization of Islam: socio-political cleavages based on religion, whether between Muslim and non-Muslim or between Sufi orders, are virtually non-existent; and outside a very small urban minority there is virtually no opposition to the much-touted principle of l'état laïc, the secular state. The political role of Islam in the country is clearly not that which much of the recent literature on Islam and politics would lead one to predict.\footnote{1995. *Islamic society and state power in Senegal.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 2}

protection of lives in Rwanda, where Muslims played a vital yet unusual role during the genocide by providing safe havens for both Hutus and Tutsis. In most cases, Muslims remained aloof to the conflict and were regarded as a separate community that was not to be targeted: because they were Muslims many did not consider them Rwandans;

After the genocide, Muslims have played an integral role in the reconciliation process which is headed by an Anglican Archbishop and a Muslim religious leader.
leader. Further, mosques are among few places where genuine reconciliation between warring parties occurs. They have thus become advocates of a proactive communal approach to reconciliation and are waging a jihad of protection and healing.

In turn, this conduct has won them great respect. Authorities have allowed them to expand their propagation activities and teach people about their faith.

- the management of community and government conflict and perpetuating peace by scholars throughout West Africa. The mosques of Timbuktu in Mali were centres of mediation and arbitration between warring factions. Imams, judges and scholars opened the mosques and declared them sanctuaries for any factions willing to seek resolution to their conflicts. The scholars even opened their homes to conflicting parties – be they domestic, local, or regional. They even traveled great distances to mediate. Many times, they personally reimbursed debts or fulfilled promises to reduce tensions and promote peace among factions. Mahmud bin Umar (1463-1548), the Chief Justice and one of the greatest jurists of Timbuktu, strongly disapproved the tyrannical arrest of Jewish merchants in the city of Gao. His pleas obliged

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the ruler to rescind his order and free the merchants. In extreme cases, religious leaders invoked the power of their positions and beliefs to conciliate belligerents. Once, reconciliation averted a siege and an intense famine in a city.\(^{32}\)

c) **Contributions by organized religious bodies**

We explore the topic more systematically through a scrutiny of characteristics of Muslim bodies:

**Characteristics of Muslim peace building and conflict resolution bodies**

According to the Institute for Peace and Justice they:
- draw on Islamic values, social relations and rituals;
- focus on repairing and maintaining social relationships;
- emphasise linkages among people and group identity;
- underline collective responsibility for wrong-doing;
- stress face-saving;
- highlight restorative justice and maintenance of social harmony; and
- urge actions like reconciliation, public apology, forgiveness and compensation\(^{33}\).

\(^{33}\) *Salam*, 23 May 2005, pp. 9-10
Criteria for inclusion in this category
The institute for Peace and Justice, which conducted this survey, included organizations if they identified conflict resolution and peace initiatives as a critical part of their mission and/or if their activities involved at least one of the following towards resolving conflicts and establishing peace.

- **Advocacy.** Religiously motivated advocacy deals mainly with empowering the weaker party(ies) in a conflict situation, restructuring relationships, and transforming unjust social structures. It aims at strengthening the representativeness and in particular the inclusiveness of governance.

- **Intermediary.** They refer to peacemaking, and focus on bringing the parties together to resolve their differences and reach a settlement. More specifically this category includes fact-finding, good offices, peace-process advocacy, facilitation, mediation and conciliation.

- **Observing.** In a conflict situation, religious observers provide a watchful, compelling physical presence that is intended to discourage violence, corruption, human rights infringements, or other behaviour deemed threatening or undesirable. Observers can for instance actively monitor and verify the legitimacy of elections, or can form ‘peace teams’ or ‘living walls’ between sides active in conflict situations.

- **Education.** Education and training aim to sensitize a society to inequities in the system; to foster an understanding of and build the skills of advocacy, conflict
resolution, pluralism and democracy; or to promote healing and reconciliation.

- **Transitional justice.** Especially in the post-conflict phase, activities have been undertaken to pursue accountability for war crimes or human rights abuses.
- **Intra-faith and inter-faith dialogues.** While some dialogues occur in conflict settings and relate to peace, many other dialogues do not. Only religious actors, who organize dialogues in conflict settings with the aim to contribute to the peace process, are mentioned in this category.\(^{34}\)

A peace builder is classified as Muslim if the individual:

- Identifies itself as Muslim or Islamic and/or
- Operates in a community where Muslims are majority and/or
  - Is led by a Muslim and/or
  - Includes Muslim religious leaders as equal partners and/or
- Uses Islamic values, teachings and practices to conform to conflict and/or
  - Is led by, or established by Muslims inspired by Islamic values.\(^{35}\)

**Salient features of Muslim-Building Agencies**

There was a total of eighteen organizations from countries as diverse as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia,

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\(^{34}\) **Salam,** 23 May 2005, p. 11

\(^{35}\) **Salam,** 23 May 2005, p. 12

252
Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Their levels of action are varied with some operating at local level, while others operate at national or international levels. Many operate at two levels or at all three of them simultaneously.

Six of the eighteen agencies focus on advocacy, five in education, three in intermediary, two in interfaith mediation and one in interfaith areas. None of them undertakes transnational justice as its main area of operation. Fourteen agencies target mainly Muslim communities while the remaining four concentrate on different religious and ethnic communities. Of these fourteen groups five target mainly Muslim women.

Hereunder appear some details:

1. **Wajir Peace and Development Committee, Kenya.**
   It uses traditional conflict resolution tools, which involve the entire clan for conflict resolution. Traditional law seeks justice not so much through punishment as through material appeasement. They utilize religious values and traditions, and cooperation from religious leaders and elders, who are well respected in their community and have great moral and spiritual legitimacy and leverage. Among others, they concentrate on conflict prevention and resolution, addressing root causes of conflicts, peace festivals and instituting early intervention measures.

   As a result of their work, women's roles in these tasks are acknowledged and work as peace-makers and even more in communal decision-making. They have also succeeded
in convincing government about providing peace education schools. They are proactive and do not wait for the government in taking initiatives. Their efforts have resulted in violence reduction in Kenya and neighbouring countries. More women and youth have been attracted to the peace process.


It works with religious leaders in Kenya, Uganda and Somalia, where the Islamic justice system of *sulh* inspires people's approach to conflict resolution at all operational levels.

It has embarked on linking policy with practice by producing videos at community level based on specific peace-building work in Kenya, Somaliland, South Africa and Uganda.

It has reacted to terrorism threats by devising early warning mechanisms and responses, and community policing in Uganda.

Actually, its Human Safety and Security concept has broadened the understanding of security to embrace not only the protection of people and their property or only military issues but also constitutional order, non-discrimination, no impunity and issues of good governance, respect for human rights (protection from abuses, humiliation, torture, ethnic cleansing, freedom of movement and speech, and so on), food security and other basic needs.

This is a multi-faith peace group in Northern Uganda that provides a proactive response to conflicts through community based mediation services, advocacy and lobbying and peace-building activities. Muslim leaders who are members of this body include the District Judges of two districts. It has also mediated in conflicts between rebels, such as the Lord's Resistance Army, and the government. For this it has won international acclaim.


It wishes to engage religious communities across Africa to cooperate for peace, deepen interfaith commitments to dialogue and cooperation for promoting peace on the continent, equip African interfaith partners with knowledge and skills related to peace promotion work, respond to the challenges of promoting peace in Africa, human rights and humanitarian law education.

It has advocated social justice and the care for vulnerable people to government authorities and convened conferences on these topics. It has written letters to Heads of State and mediators in peace negotiations in Sudan, Ivory coast, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia, expressing the concern of the religious community and urging the authorities to find rapid solutions. It has organized solidarity visits to Liberia to promote peace. A high level interfaith mission visited Democratic Republic of Congo. Peace missions have been sent to conflict ravaged
areas of Africa like Liberia, DRC and Southern Sudan. Exchange visits have been arranged between landmine survivor groups in Africa for advocacy and awareness raising about the suffering of war victims.

5. Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Interfaith Mediation Center, Nigeria.

It also has as its aims to propagate value of religious harmony; and to serve as a resource body in conflict intervention, mediation and mitigation. For this objective it published a book based on passages from the Bible and the Qur'an which was co-authored by a religious leader from the Muslim and another from the Christian faith. This Muslim religious leader has reached out to religious groups within his country and other parts of West Africa. His other focus areas are: de-escalation of ethno-religious crises in the community, state and country; mediation between people of different faiths in terms of their relation to religious, social, political, economic and environmental justice; and policies governing the standard conduct of religious leaders.

6. Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone.

It was established in 1997 with the blessings of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. Numerous Muslim bodies serve on it. Its primary focus is social justice based on religious beliefs. It was also inspired in this regard by the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia which was very vocal against human rights abuses during and after Liberia's civil war. Community members urged it to be proactive in preventing violence.
It became an intermediary between the government and rebels. Although it could not prevent the coup of 1997, it actively pursued talks with coup leaders while condemning the overthrow and human rights abuses. Its high visibility and engagement with the junta prevented greater abuse against civilians. Their attitudes and involvement have won the respect of both the government and the rebels. During the violence of 1998, it recommended the convening of a national consultative conference and the closing of the border with Liberia. It met the rebel leader as well as the Heads of State of Liberia and Guinea. Its religious leader stayed in the country to advocate peace through press releases and radio broadcasts. They asked usurpers of power to return it to its rightful executors. An important lesson they learnt was that religious leaders should remain above taking sides in national political matters.

7. Sudanese Women Civil Society Network for Peace.

It aims to advocate women's issues and include their agenda in peace processes, and involve women from conflict areas like Nuba Mountains, Darfur, Beja and Blue Nile. It developed a women's agenda in consultation with other women's organizations. It also provides training in conflict resolution, peace-building, and preventive diplomacy. Finally, it also promotes a culture of peace at different segments of society, particularly at schools and conducts research on the causes of conflict and its impact on women and children.

It was established in 2001 in Mogadishu. In 1990s Somali intellectuals supported the founding of this venture to support the settlement process that was taking place in the country. It aims to contribute to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in the country by neutral and independent reporting. The station focuses particularly on the reconciliation efforts following the confrontations by transmitting the peace appeals of chiefs and clans, and scrupulously avoiding to transmit the threats and menaces of warring parties. It emphasizes the values of Somali society, which are rooted in the Islamic tradition. They emphasise the values and principles of peace, conflict resolution, justice, equality and tolerance.

Some details of conflict resolution are as follows: The "Jama'ah" (group) Institution" is used for this purpose. Their major concern as an institution is to place themselves in a buffer zone between the two conflicting parties. They invite people from both groups to the buffer zone to create "a new community". Mosques, schools and other institutions are created for them in the buffer area. A common agricultural space is provided for farming and grazing. They use local resolution practices like finding an elder in the community who is charismatic and respected as a mediator together with Islamic concepts of peace-building.

According to Khalif Hassan Farah, during the years of factional fighting with the absence of effective governance institutions and rule of law, Islamic groups have emerged as a major social and political force with regard to maintaining
security, providing vital services and reviving spiritual renewal. Their role has been most palpable in those regions where political groups failed to set up institutions for governance such as Mogadishu, the central and southern regions.36

Specific contributions of Muslim Peace-builders

They may be summarized as follows:

1. Altering behaviours, attitudes, negative stereotypes, and mind frames of Muslim and non-Muslim participants.

2. Healing of trauma and injuries as well as rehumanising the "other".

3. Contributing to more effective dissemination of ideas such as democracy, human rights, justice, development and peace building.

4. Ability to draft committed people from a wide pool due to their broad community base.

5. Challenging traditional structures, such as the perceived role of women in society.

6. Reaching out to government, effecting policy changes, and reaching out to youth.

7. Mediating between conflicting parties.

8. Encouraging reconciliation, interfaith dialogue, disarmament, demilitarization and reintegration.

9. Via international Muslim networks, connecting more easily to offer Muslim communities and

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non-Muslim leaders for support, and being able to convene large meetings among them.\textsuperscript{37}

We now conclude our presentation.

Conclusion

The Islamic legacy of peace building is a very solid one. In light of this, the Muslim contribution to peace facilitation in Africa has been impressive even though it has remained largely inconspicuous. This is so for various reasons, some of which have to be attributed to the nature of individual and group peace facilitators themselves.

Nevertheless, when pondering over our continent's security issues we need to take cognizance of existential realities of Muslims. It has been noticed that they have played very positive social, economic and political roles when there was constructive engagement with them: this was the case with the merchants of Mali, Ghana and Ivory Coast. Their experiences in Rwanda and Senegal reflect a different dimension to this topic: in both these instances they were proactive in forging the roles that have won them great accolades. Often, the solution lies in an equilibrium between Muslim initiatives and contextual challenges or restraints they encounter in the lands wherein they reside.

In this vein, it is worthwhile addressing the question: what should be the relationship between state and religion? In religiously pluralistic societies that prevail everywhere, a secular democratic state – as is the case with South Africa –

\textsuperscript{37} Salam, 25 May 2005, pp.13-28
with active intervention between it and religions, which not only have a constitutionally recognized sphere of autonomy, but collaborate with the state in tasks of mutual concern provides the most satisfactory solution.\(^{38}\)

This provides useful security against political violence stirred by religious extremism.

Religion generally has a crucial role to play in Africa. Unlike Europe, it has witnessed an astonishing increase in religiosity. It impacts on Christianity and Islam, which have three strengths over the nation-state on this continent. Firstly, trust. Whereas politicians are often synonymous with corruption, faith organizations are mainly trusted and enjoy grassroots' support. Secondly, delivery. They account for half of all health and education in sub-Saharan Africa. They are far more effective in reaching the most destitute than any state apparatuses. Thirdly, the offering of social change and redress. Faith groups have a track record of conflict resolution in troubled areas.\(^{39}\)

Finally, as stated earlier, these peace projects assume greater credibility if initiated from an interfaith springboard. Africa is the perfect backdrop for them. Ali Mazrui explains:


261
"Africa entered its postcolonial era with more dialogue and less conflict between civilizations than almost anywhere else in the world. Apart from the special problem of Sudan, relations between African Christians and African Muslims were often remarkably harmonious in the political process. Only in Africa could you have a country that is over 90% Muslim and still have a Roman Catholic President for 20 years — and that was Senegal. Only in Africa could you have a de facto rotation of the Presidency between Christian and Muslims — Christian Julius Nyerere, Muslim Ali Hassan Mwinyi, Christian Benjamin Mkapa and potentially Salim Ahmed Salim or another Muslim to succeed him. Only in Africa could you have a Christian presidential candidate and a Muslim running mate — and have the ticket triumph. And that was Kufour's Ghana following Jerry Rawlings. Alternatively you could have a Muslim presidential candidate and a Christian running mate — as in Malawi.

Africa has also experimented with a system in which Christians controlled the economy and Muslims controlled political power — as in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s. This division of power in Nigeria has been interrupted by the current Obasanjo era ... Only in Africa could you have a member of a religious minority, the Copts, be allowed to rise to eligibility for election to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with the support of the Muslim majority Government. I am of course referring to Boutros Boutros-Ghali sponsored and promoted by the Egyptian government to the top post at the United Nations towards the end of the twentieth century.”