



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Human Fraternity and Word Peace: Interfaith Dialogue Symposium

July 21, 2022

Program

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO HUMAN FRATERNITY

FOR WORLD PEACE: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

**Presented by
Hassan Kinyua Omari, PhD
Lecturer & Lawyer**

Ph.D. (Philosophy and Religious Studies) LLD(Continuing) M.A (Religious Studies) UoN PGD (Islamic Banking and Insurance-IIBI-UK), B.A (Arabic Language and Religious Studies) University of Nairobi LLB(Bachelor of Laws) UoN Diplomas: Diploma Advocates' Training Programme (the ATP)-Continuing Kenya School of Law, Mass Communication, Public Relations and Customer Service - RCTFL; Arabic language -WAMY; Islamic Shariah-KIFLAPS; Translation and Interpretation-LCC

Background.

- The word "interfaith" describes an interaction between people of different religions or beliefs and traditions.
- Interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels
- This dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions or beliefs in order to increase acceptance of others, rather than synthesizing new beliefs.

Significance of interfaith to peace

- All humans, naturally, strive for a peaceful environment and the security of their lives and property, which in multi-religious societies can only be achieved through peaceful coexistence of adherents of different religions and different cultures.
- Achieving peaceful coexistence requires social cohesion, learning to recognize and live with differences, interacting and engaging in positive dialogue with each other in a commitment to tolerance and mutual respect; and agree to resolve conflicts between different religious and ethnic groups without the use of force.

Findings and Discussion.

- The importance of dialogue lies in the fact that people differ in their opinions, beliefs, attitudes, intellectual abilities and perceptions of issues, problems and decisions.
- They need to engage in dialogue and exchange differing opinions and viewpoints with logical evidence to narrow the range of differences between them and find common ground; unravel the truth for men;
- Improve relationships between different groups or even resolve conflicts;
- and to give the dialogue partners the opportunity to talk and listen to each other and to introduce them to others and learn to understand them.

Dialogue in Islam

- The Qur'an contains many examples of dialogue, debate and verbal exchanges: between God (the Most High) and His creations between prophets (peace be upon them) and their people between a believer and a disbeliever amongst believers; amongst unbelievers; and between a human being and an animal.
- In the Hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned the arguments of the believers with their Lord for their brothers who have entered the fire and the dialogue of Prophets Adam and Musa regarding predestination, among others.

Cont...

- Accordingly, from Islamic point of view, dialogue may be negative or positive. Dialogue is considered negative if done without any scholarly grounds, conducted in a bad manner or for an evil cause, assessed to be harmful, devoid of any benefit or assessed to be a reason for spread of evil.
- Negative dialogue is not allowed as it falls under the concepts of the type of jidal (unnecessary argument) and mira (unhealthy argument) and mukhasamah (opposition/intense dispute) that the Prophet (peace be upon him) and some of his Companions warned against.

CONT...

- Positive dialogue is the kind of interaction and exchange that is meant to call to the truth, establish proof, refute dubiety and ambiguity, reject unsound opinion, differentiate between truth and falsehood, show the strongest arguments in controversial issues and narrow the gap of disagreement.
- This kind of dialogue may be on religious, social or political issues. Its purpose is often to clarify issues, learn to understand the 'other', narrow the range of differences and improve relations between or amongst adherents of different/same religion(s) or culture(s) by facilitating social cohesion, improving peaceful coexistence and promoting national unity.

Islamic Perspective of Interfaith Dialogue

- Accordingly, the Qur'an encourages dialogue between Muslims and the People of the Book and states that dialogue should be positive. It also explains that positive dialogue is the basis for finding common ground between Muslims and followers of other religions.

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. [Q16:125]

And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best...[Q29:46]

Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him." [Q3:64]

Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) teachings on interfaith

- The Prophet (peace be upon him) is said to have held talks with Jewish scholars (rabbis/priests), who often wanted to test the truth of his prophecy through mystical things.
- At one point he engaged Abdullah ibn Salam in dialogue about the signs of the Last Judgment, the first food tasted in heaven and human formation and the factor affecting a child's likeness to its respective parents.

The Foundation of Interfaith Dialogue in Islam

- According to the Qur'an, Almighty God sent Prophets and Messengers (peace be upon them) to call to his way. They were sent to invite people to their religion and to provide the evidence necessary to justify their existence, unity and supremacy.
- Their role was simply to carry and deliver the message without forcing anyone to accept it, as they were not sent as the watchers of the people.

Freedom of religion in Islam

➤ The Qur'anic conception of dialogue is that people should be allowed to follow whatever religion they wish to follow, since the right way is clearly distinguished from error. However, they need to be reminded of the consequences of unbelief and disobedience. Interreligious dialogue is important to improve understanding and to promote social cohesion and national unity among and between members of different religions and to grant one another the right to human dignity.

➤ In the Qur'an, Al-Mighty God (the Most High) says:

There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion.

➤ Allah (the Most High) also says:

“And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed – all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers? And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ. Except whom your Lord has given mercy”.

CONT...

➤ In addition to requiring that no one should be forced to accept Islam against their will, the Qur'an went further by teaching Muslims the obligation to tolerate adherents of other religions with them on the basis of the principle of mutual respect and justice to live peacefully and equity.

➤ Allah (the Most High) says:

Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.

Role of Interfaith Dialogue in Promoting Peace

- a) give adherents of different religions and cultures the opportunity to learn about "the other" and to educate themselves in the principles of commitment, mutual respect and tolerance;
- b) To create a level of understanding and coordinated local action to promote peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and nation building;
- c) To enable people not only to learn and teach "others", but also to have the opportunity to express themselves clearly and confidently and to present their own perspectives, beliefs or values;
- d) Helping people to live with their religious and cultural differences and giving them the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills that will enable them to find alternatives to conflict when they disagree; and
- e) contribute to solving problems of identity and social cohesion by reducing emerging tensions between groups, strengthening communication and promoting mutual respect, community integration and national stability.

Conclusion.

- It is now evident that interfaith dialogue is well grounded in the Holy Quran and Hadith.
- Dialogue has been a practice since the time of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him).
- Interfaith as perceived in Islam is the basis of the principle of Human Dignity and Respect.
- We should all embrace interfaith dialogue for world peace

Recommendations

- a) governments should include the Islamic understanding and perception of interfaith dialogue in informing the state's foreign policy and domestic policies on integration, cohesion and peaceful coexistence.
- b) education stakeholders should review basic education curriculum to capture interfaith dialogue.
- c) All institutions of learning especially the University of Nairobi should give priority to interfaith dialogue in its program
- d) This interfaith symposium should be officially diarized in universities programs

END.