

# AN ACTION PLAN FOR CONFERENCE ATTENDEES

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As we leave this hall many attendees will think, "I have been inspired, uplifted and motivated. What can I now do in a practical sense?" This is a question that usually goes unanswered after such events and the attendees' enthusiasm gradually fades. We do not wish to see this happen. Our deliberations today around the themes of compassion, mercy, unity and destiny are represented here, in order to focus our efforts at effective follow-up, around the themes of self, community, society and world. Hopefully, the steps below will prove invaluable as we try to go forward and play our role in creating a world characterized by greater harmony, peace and mutual cooperation in addressing the many ills we see all around us.

## Self

1. Know that Almighty God is in control of the affairs of the creation and has promised good to the people of goodness. Therefore, do not allow the climate of hatred being fostered by some to cause you to despair. Your love and mercy are greater than their hatred. Also, know that if you are an active agent of good you will see unexpected positive consequences result from your actions. God mentions in the Qur'an, "Good and evil are not equal. Respond to evil with what is best. Unexpectedly, you will see one between whom you and him was great enmity become like an intimate friend. This is only realized by those who patiently persevere; this is only realized by one possessing a lofty spiritual station (41:34-35)." Have faith in God and His promise and never despair. Good is more powerful than evil; do all in your power to ensure that you are a force for good in the world. Patience is a great virtue; patiently persevere in doing all of the good things you are currently doing and God will bless you in many wonderful ways.

2. The true strength of a believer lies in the strength of his or her connection to God. That connection is in turn nurtured by our devotional acts. We must strive to engage in a consistent regimen of devotional acts if we are to see our connection to, and the depth of, our communion with God increase. This includes our prayer, fasting, litanies, supplications and invocations. Be consistent in conveying your obligatory prayers on time and try not to miss the highly encouraged voluntary prayers associated with them. Try to establish the practice of reciting ever-increasing amounts of the supplications of the morning and evening. These are available in a variety of formats, such as the *Ma'thurat*, or the *Wird al-Lateef*. Try not to let a day pass without opening the Qur'an and reading at least a few pages. If you do not understand Arabic, read a few pages in a language you are fully conversant with. If you are fluent in Arabic, try to gradually work up to reading one thirtieth of the scripture each day of the month. After Ramadan, try to identify days during which you will consistently fast, i.e. Mondays, Thursdays or both, the three middle days of the month, etc. These are all tried and tested ways of cultivating a deeper relationship with Almighty God. Try to engage in some portion of worship during the night, either before going to sleep at night, or by getting up before fajr. You will find many spiritual secrets shown to you if you can consistently do this.

3. Much of the conference focused on compassion and mercy. Try to become an em-

bodiment of these virtues in your daily life. Do not wait for a situation to occur that will call out these virtues in you. Rather, seek out opportunities where you can manifest them along with all of the other prophetic virtues. Do not live your life passively waiting to be used, roused or stimulated into action by events. Live an active life wherein you become the one who is initiating acts of goodness and kindness in all that you do. Be an embodiment of the truth you represent. Let your words and comportment convey the dignity of the believer to all that you meet.

## Community

1. Know that falsehood cannot exist in the presence of the truth. The current falsehoods, half-truths, distortions and myths defining the debate on Islam in this country prevail because as Muslims, we have not done our part to bring the truth to people. There are several things you can do to address this situation. Organize book clubs in your neighborhood and campus that involve not just Muslims, but members of other faith communities. By doing so, you can introduce to them literature that reflects the rich history, lives and struggles of Muslims in America. Those who have already organized such clubs find that they become forums for intelligent discussion and not vitriolic polemics. Three great starters for such an endeavor are: *Zeitoun*, by David Eggers; *Muhammad Ali: His Life and Times*, by Thomas Hauser; or *A World Without Islam*, by Graham Fuller.

2. Host Seminars on Islamic teachings in your home, community centers, campuses, public libraries, etc. A three to five week series on Islam and Muslim life and culture is a great way to inform people of your faith and beliefs. There is a lot of ignorance surrounding Islam. If we do not begin educating people about our faith, as we know, there are people of ill-will who are all too eager to miseducate them. These programs should be tailored for a non-Muslim audience. I have participated in such programs in the past and you would be surprised at how eager people are to get information from a Muslim source. Networks of such seminars can be formed to share best practices concerning advertising, structure, etc. To facilitate such events, and to augment your strength, start a dawah committee in your school, masjid or community.

3. Start Qur'an study circles and invite your friends and neighbors of other faiths. Again, you will be surprised by the result. A good text to begin introducing the Qur'an to members of other faith communities is *The Qur'an: A Biography*, by Bruce Lawrence. Muslims who are not conversant with the logic of the Qur'anic message will also benefit from this work. A good follow-up to this introduction would be Thomas Cleary's *Essential Qur'an*, which is an excellent selection of passages that illustrate the essence of the Qur'an's timeless message.

4. Continue the good things you are doing in your community and seek additional ways to get involved. If you are doing nothing, start doing something positive. One of the sad assumptions governing the growing perception of Muslims is that we are not involved in the life of our communities. To the contrary, there are countless Muslims who are engaged in countless endeavors that collectively enrich the lives of our communities. Most of those involved in such efforts do not undertake them as Muslims, or because they might be good for "Dawah"; they undertake them because they see a need in their community and they have the skills or resources necessary to meet that need. However,

as a community we can always do more. As the fiscal crisis of the state deepens, the needs of the poor and underserved will grow. We should anticipate that development and begin now to conceive of ways we can address an increasing array of needs. We can begin organizing free clinics for primary medical and dental care and referrals for those who require more advanced treatment. We can begin organizing feeding and food distribution centers. We can begin establishing job training centers. Many of us have old computers lying around our houses. These could be donated to a computer training center. Such a center could serve as a “halal” internet café during the hours classes are not being offered. We can begin establishing centers to teach English to recent immigrants to the country and to enhance the level of literacy for those who have been underserved by our decaying education system. Again, our efforts in this regard should be undertaken from our concern for our community and not out of any other motive, except seeking the Pleasure of God.

## **Society**

1. If you are living in this country and paying taxes, you have a right—rather, a duty—to become involved in helping to shape the decisions that determine how your tax dollars are being spent. If enough citizens protest against the policies that direct tax dollars towards endless wars, rewarding the greed and imprudence of venal financial institutions, and subsidies for undeserving corporations, the money will stop flowing in those directions. Similarly, if enough citizens demand jobs programs, enhanced public education and universal healthcare, those demands will be translated into public policy. Do not wallow in the despair of hopeless inaction. Add your voice, dollar and vote to the many groups and organizations that are challenging the militarism, reckless corporate greed, racism and selfishness, which are sweeping this country. Get involved in the politics of your town, state and the nation. However, do so with a plan. Consult Muslim organizations like MPAC, CAIR and others for direction in this regard.
2. Resurgent racism affects all racial and ethnic minorities in this country, not just Muslims. In addition to our support for Muslim organizations, we have to support and become involved with non-Muslim organizations, especially those whose work assists members of our community. For example, ColorOfChange, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Hispanic Media Coalition are doing incredible work to help keep hate speech out of the media. As Muslims are currently the greatest victims of publicly broadcast hate speech, we should be helping any organization that has proven effective in combating it. The Southern Law Poverty Center is at the forefront of those organizations that are combating the proliferating array of hate groups and organizations. Again, they provide an excellent platform for Muslims to become a part of work that has already proven effective. Similarly, Japanese American organizations have been swift and courageous in their defense of Muslims. Networking with organizations such as the Japanese American Citizens League and examining ways Muslims can begin working more effectively with such groups is an extremely beneficial proactive step members of our community can take.
3. It is naive and nonsensical to assume that all Jews and Christians are anti-Muslim. We should be looking for ways to cooperate with member of these faith communities, and others, to work towards creating better understanding and lessening the tension be-

tween members of our communities in this country. Much of the anti-Muslim sentiment that currently exists in the country is predicated on ignorance. It is our responsibility to educate our fellow citizens as to who we are, what we believe, and the issues that concern us.

## **World**

1. We must be a community that is working to end the scourge of war. Muslim societies, owing to no fault of their own, have been the most severely affected by the ravages of war. Some are so exhausted and disfigured by conflict that there is no space for the spiritual and ethical seeds planted by their Muslim forebears to take root. There are those Muslims who sense a “weakness” in this call that would eradicate the incumbency of Jihad. Jihad is a valid reality for the defense of lands unjustly usurped or occupied when the political and religious authorities of those lands deem it relevant. However, as a program of irrational, triumphalist conquest, “jihad” only serves to justify the continued cycles of violence that have so ravaged some Muslim lands. Under prevailing conditions, we should be clear that Muslims would be the greatest beneficiaries of the eradication of war. Misguided acts of senseless violence only serve to empower the racist, fascist and anti-Muslim fanatics who are clamoring for a justification to unleash the full fury of the Western killing machine, including nuclear hellfire, against Muslim populations. We must be wise and courageous in pushing for the eradication of all weapons of mass destruction. Being involved in such a struggle is one of the greatest acts of compassion any of us can do. Again, it is not necessary for us to reinvent the wheel in this regard. There is a wide array of antiwar groups ranging from the American Friends Service Committee to the War Resisters League to support and become involved with.

2. Make a regular contribution to a relief and development organization. The glaring inequalities that define our times demand immediate action. There are several major Muslim organizations, such as Islamic Relief, that are doing exemplary work in this regard. Find one such organization and support and promote its work. There is enough food to feed everyone on earth. There is ample medicine to cure many of those suffering from myriad illnesses. There are enough clothes to cloth everyone and enough material to provide secure shelter for all. The fact that hunger, hopelessness and disease are widespread realities in our world is a sad testimony to our lack of collective will. Let us begin to do little things that begin to address this situation. God-willing, our little drops of concern will come together to form a mighty river of good.

These are a few basic things all of us can immediately begin doing at various levels. If you think for a few minutes, you can come up with many things to add to this list. However, we should not overwhelm ourselves with more than our time, circumstances and resources allow. To end where we began, history is in the hands of God. We may see our lives and times as currently being filled with daunting challenges. However, we should understand that in the end Almighty God desires good for us. From God’s goodness is His allowing the good we do to be an integral part of the good we receive from Him. As He states in the Qur’an, “Is the reward for good ever anything other than good? Then which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?” (55:60-61)