

## Al-Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

May God's peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you.

Honorable panelists,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Distinguished gathering,

On behalf of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, and on behalf of the Muslim Council of Elders, I welcome you, ladies and gentlemen! Egypt, the land of peace and tranquility, also extends its welcome and expresses its pleasure in hosting this highly significant conference, convened under extraordinary circumstances during a harsh period for both our region and the entire world. The fires of war have erupted in our Arab and Islamic lands without any sensible or justifiable reason that a twenty-first century man might accept.

It is astonishing, indeed sad and painful, that religion is depicted in this grim image as the fuel for these wars. It is portrayed to the public mind that Islam was the tool that razed the walls of the World Trade Center, that it was used in the bombings at the Bataclan Theatre and metro stations, and that it crushed the bodies of innocents in Nice and other cities across the West and East, among other horrific images that continue to expand in scope and darkness with the rise of extremism and the shrinking space for the correct understanding of the divine religions and the essence of the prophets' messages. These messages indeed clash dramatically with the distorted interpretations that stray from the path of religions and hijack sacred texts to turn them into a metaphorical 'gun for hire' for those who can pay the price demanded by warmongers and arms dealers, and the theorists of new colonialism.

Consider closely this oddity: They all rally under one banner, that of 'Islam', yet some soon begin to denounce and excommunicate each other, making it clear that this whole issue has little or nothing at all to

do with religion itself. The matter at hand is the diverse manipulation of Islam in this bloodshed, ranging from one extreme to another.

Another aspect that reveals the falsehood of these bloodthirsty calls is that, for their proponents, the matter was never about correcting a religion they claimed had lost its essence; rather, they purported to reform and rectify it within the framework of theoretical discretion and intellectual renewal. Instead, it centred on taking lives and spilling rivers of blood, encroaching upon human achievements, and demolishing them wherever and whenever possible.

This faction, straying from the path of religion, was until recently limited in its impact and threat, due to the scarcity of resources and their poor equipment, and was incapable of tarnishing the image of Muslims. However, they are now mobilizing nearly the entire world against this righteous religion, as evidenced by the phenomenon of Islamophobia in both northern and southern Western countries, which has severely impacted Muslim citizens in these nations.

We are not delving into the phenomenon of Islamophobia, nor the terrorism that daily fuels this phenomenon with deep-seated hatred for Islam and Muslims. Nor are we discussing whether terrorism is a local or global industry, meticulously orchestrated and conducted covertly, or in collusion with many of those who pretend to uphold human rights, global peace, coexistence, freedom, and equality, as enshrined in the international charters we know by heart.

I believe that discussing these issues is the most compelling reason to convene seminars and it represents a crucial obligation for religious leaders, thinkers, and all free and rational people around the world. Our goal must be to expose this modern plague, identify those responsible, and address the continual violence that stains our world, with lives lost daily as if sacrificed to the idols and false gods of extremism.

A fair observer of the phenomenon of Islamophobia cannot ignore this illogical differentiation or the double standards applied in the global judgment of Islam on one hand, and Christianity and Judaism on the other, despite their all being implicated in the same broad indictment of religious violence and terrorism. While instances of Christian and Jewish extremism have passed quietly and peacefully in the West

without tarnishing the image of these two divine religions, their third sibling, Islam, remains all alone in the dock, continuously condemned and with its image tarnished to this day.

Yes, the most egregious acts of Christian and Jewish violence have passed unscathed, with a clear separation maintained between religion and terrorism. Examples include Michael Bray's bombing of abortion clinics, Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the Oklahoma federal building, and David Koresh, whose religious teachings led to tragedy in Texas. Not to mention the religious conflict in Northern Ireland and the involvement of some religious institutions in the genocide and rape of over two hundred and fifty thousand Bosnian Muslim men and women.

Distinguished gathering,

What I intend—God knows—from this extensive introduction, perhaps longer than necessary, is not to reopen wounds or ignite disputes between one human and another. This is neither the message of religion, nor of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, nor of the tolerant East or the rational and civilized West. Rather, my intention is to convey that, if religious institutions in both the East and the West do not collectively confront Islamophobia, it will inevitably extend its reach to Christianity and Judaism sooner or later. By then, it will be too late for the wisdom that says, "I met my fate when the white ox was slaughtered."

Atheists proclaiming the death of God, promoters of materialist philosophies from the dungeons of Nazism and Communism, advocates for the legalization of drugs, destroyers of the family structure, proponents of 'social gender' systems, supporters of abortion rights, allowing individuals to choose their gender whenever they wish, and those pushing for globalization over nationalism and seeking to erase distinctions among peoples after erasing their cultural, historical, and religious characteristics—these calls are growing stronger today, demanding that such authority be vested in the European Union. All these calls are coming powerfully and will first sweep away divine religions, as they are seen as sources of wars; Christianity begot the Crusades, Islam spreads terrorism and bloodshed, and they advocate for nothing less than the eradication of religion from the face of the Earth.

These voices ominously remain silent about the victims of civil wars ignited by atheists and secular extremists in the early and mid-20th century, where religion played no part, even though any elementary student can recount the deaths from modern social doctrines to confirm that ‘history has not recorded, from the days of ignorance till today, even a tenth of the millions of victims killed, exiled, and tortured in the name of false colonial prophecies, none of which has been proven, and which, indeed, have been conclusively shown to be impracticable’.

Distinguished academic gathering,

I believe you will agree with me that simply exonerating religions of terrorism is no longer sufficient, given the grave challenges we face today. We must take another crucial step: applying the principles and ethics of our religions to this turbulent reality. This step, in my view, requires essential preparations, the foremost being the removal of any lingering tensions and suspicions among the leaders and scholars of religion, which now lack any justification. After all, peace cannot be achieved by its advocates if they themselves are not at peace. How can one give what one does not possess? This step can only be realized through mutual acquaintance, which necessitates cooperation and integration, a primarily religious mandate. Islam, to which I proudly belong, reminds us of this in a Quranic verse well-known to both Muslims and Christians due to its frequent citation in various forums:

“O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may ‘get to’ know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware” (The Quran, 49:13).

Islam also highlights a fundamental right that Allah has innately bestowed upon humanity, which is the right to freedom and liberation from pressures, especially concerning the freedom of religion, belief, and thought: “Let there be no compulsion in religion.” (The Quran, 2:256); “Had your Lord so willed O Prophet, all ‘people’ on earth would have certainly believed, every single one of them! Would you then force people to become believers?” (The Quran, 10:99); “You are not ‘there’ to compel them to believe.” (The Quran, 88:22); and “Your duty is only to deliver the message.” (The Quran, 42:48).

Included in the provisions of the letter from the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, to the people of Yemen, was the directive that, among other religious texts that uphold the right to freedom and liberation, “If a Jew or a Christian dislikes Islam, they are not to be forced to convert from their religion.”

Al-Azhar, in advocating for the adoption of the concept of ‘citizenship’ over the terms ‘minority’ and ‘minorities’, calls for a constitutional principle that the Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him, applied to the first Muslim community in history—the state of Medina. He established equality among Muslims, both the Migrants [from Makkah] and the Helpers [the hosting community in Madinah], as well as among Jews of all tribes and sects, treating all as equal citizens in rights and duties. Islamic tradition has preserved for us a detailed document in the form of a constitution, a system unknown to history before Islam.

Distinguished gathering,

I have perhaps spoken at length, and I beg your indulgence as your attentive listening encouraged me to share all the concerns and problems mentioned in this paper. In conclusion, I extend my sincere thanks to President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, who graciously agreed to sponsor this conference in recognition of your significant role in advocating for peace, freedom, citizenship, and coexistence among all people. I also thank our esteemed guests, the attendees, and all the brothers, colleagues, students, and staff who have worked tirelessly to prepare this conference, which I hope meets your expectations. I apologize to our guests, both international and domestic, for any shortcomings on our part in serving you to the fullest.