



بيت الرحمة للدعوة الإسلامية رحمة للعالمين

Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da'wa al-Islamiyyah Rahmatan li al-'Alamin

Home of Divine Grace for Revealing and Nurturing Islam as a Blessing for All Creation

Closing Statement of the Al-Azhar International Conference on the Renewal of Islamic Thought

Delivered by Ahmed al-Tayyeb, Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar, on January 28 in Cairo, Egypt

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In The Name Of God, The Most Beneficent, The Most Compassionate

Praise be to God, and prayer and peace be upon the prophet of God, his family, his companions and those who follow his guidance until the day of judgement.

Believing in the inevitability of renewal in matters of religion;

Following the methodology of our *shari'ah* in keeping up with developments;

Achieving the interests of the people in different fields; and

Fulfilling the responsibility of the scholars (*ulamā'*) of al-Azhar towards peoples and nations;

Al-Azhar invited the most prominent Muslim scholars in the world to convene an international conference and deliberate under the title “Renewing Islamic Thought” from 2 – 3 *Jumādā al-Ākhir*, corresponding to 27 – 28 January 2020, at the al-Azhar Conference Center in Nasr City, Cairo, under the gracious sponsorship of the President [Abdel Fattah al-Sisi], who had his opening remarks delivered by Prime Minister Moustafa Madbouly.

Over the course of two days, the conference held seven sessions to deliberate upon the issues of renewal (*tajdīd*) and many related matters.

Continuing the path of al-Azhar in the renewal of *fiqh* and [Islamic] thought according to the moderate (*wasatī*) methodology that has distinguished it throughout the ages, the *ulamā'* of the ummah announce to the entire world from the spacious grounds of al-Azhar that:

1. Renewal is an inescapable *shari'ah* obligation to keep up with the times and achieve the interests of the people.
2. Texts that are *qaṭ'ī* (certain) in their provenance and meaning cannot be renewed, but texts that are *ẓannī al-dalālah* (of uncertain meaning) are an area for *ijtihād*, and fatwas based upon them change with time, place and the understanding of the people:

provided that this is done in the light of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the purposes of *sharī'ah*) and its general rules, as well as in the interests of worshippers.

3. Renewal is a precise operation only to be performed by those anchored in knowledge; those not qualified should avoid involving themselves in this matter, so that renewal does not turn into dispersal/replacement [of religion].
4. Extremist currents and violent terrorist groups all reject renewal, and their proselytism is based upon falsifying meanings and *sharī'ah* terminology such as “system of government”; *al-ḥākimīyah*; *al-hijrah*; *al-jihād*; and *al-qitāl*. Their conduct towards opponents and violation of the immutable principles of religion (*thawābit*) through the commission of criminal assaults upon people, property and honor have defamed Islam and its *sharī'ah* amongst Westerners and Easterners like them [i.e., Easterners who are like Westerners], spreading “Islamophobia” in the West and causing many to link the extremists’ depraved actions with the rulings of *sharī'ah*. It is thus incumbent upon society and its institutions to support the efforts of states to be rid of the evils of these [extremist] groups.
5. Among the causes of this mistaken thinking is the equation of doctrinal and practical rulings, such as considering a sinful act infidelity (*kūfr*), or considering some permitted acts to be obligations, something that has caused people great injury and severely affronted Islam and its *sharī'ah*.
6. Extremist groups believe *al-ḥākimīyah* (divine sovereignty) means government is for God alone, and whosoever rules from among men contends with God most High regarding His most sacred privileges, and whosoever contends with God is a *kāfir* who may be killed. This is a blatant distortion of the *sharī'ah* texts of the Quran and Sunnah, which make abundantly clear that government depends upon people, and that the *ijtihād* of religious scholars can be relied upon. Here it is pertinent to recall the saying of Ibn Ḥazm “It is a judgement of God to make government for other than God [i.e., humans],” and the saying of God Most High “send an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people” and the saying of God Most High in *sūrat al-mā'idah* “the just among you [should] judge.”

In this matter the understanding of the people about *al-ḥākimīyah* should be corrected through the propagation of the Sunni creed, and it should be made clear that human government regulated by the provisions of *sharī'ah* does not oppose the *ḥākimīyah* of God, but is indeed a part of it.

7. Excommunication (*al-takfīr*) is strife (*fitnah*) which has consumed societies throughout the ages, and is not enunciated except by those who transgress God’s *sharī'ah* or are ignorant of its teachings, for the texts of *sharī'ah* make clear that whosoever throws the accusation of infidelity at another could by this act be guilty of it himself. *Al-takfīr* is a judgement upon the conscience made by God alone, for if someone says something that could be *kūfr* in 99 ways, but could not justify *al-takfīr* in one way, then it is not permissible to hurl the accusation of *kūfr* because of the possibility of the accusation being false, according to the principle that “what is proven with certainty, cannot be disproven except with certainty.”

8. What they [extremists] say of the necessity of emigrating from homelands is without basis, and indeed the truth of the matter is the opposite, for the prophet (pbuh) said “no emigration after conquest,” viz. the conquest of Mecca. Therefore, the exhortation of terrorist groups—for the youth to leave their homelands and emigrate to deserts and wastelands and join armed groups, fleeing societies which they stigmatize as infidel—is the exhortation of those religiously misguided and ignorant of *maqāsid sharī‘at al-muslimīn* [the purpose of the Muslim’s *sharī‘ah*]. The *sharī‘ah* judgement announced by the *ulamā’* of Islam from al-Azhar in this matter is: it is the right of a Muslim to reside in any Muslim or non-Muslim country as long as his self, money and honor are secure and he can perform his religious rites. The correct *sharī‘ah* definition of *al-hijrah* in our era is leaving sin and emigrating to receive sustenance and education, and seeking to develop the earth and to advance nations.
9. Atheism is a danger that undermines the stability of societies that hold religions sacred and follow their teachings, and [atheism] is one of the weapons of the intellectual invasion deployed—under the premise of “religious freedom”—to destroy religions and weaken societal cohesion, and is a direct cause of extremism and terror. It is incumbent upon society to be alive to the negative consequences that result from atheist proselytism, the denial of God’s existence and the deliberate confusion of those who believe in Him. Religious scholars must arm themselves with a progressive methodology (*manhaj tajdīdī*)—that employs logical arguments and the results of the modern natural sciences, which support faith-based facts—to deal with the dangers of atheism by engaging the youth in conversation and using modern communications technology.
10. *Al-jihād* in Islam is not a synonym for *al-qitāl* [fighting/killing]. Rather, the *qitāl* practiced by the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions is only one type of *jihād*, used to repel the aggression of those who assault Muslims, not to kill those who differ in religion, as extremists claim. The authoritative *sharī‘ah* judgement in Islam is that it is forbidden to assault or kill those who differ in religion, provided they are not killing Muslims.
11. Only the proper—constitutionally and legally authorized—authority may declare *jihād* and not groups and individuals. Every group that claims for itself this right [to declare *jihād*] and recruits and trains the young, pushing them to kill, be killed and cut off heads is a group that sows corruption in the earth and is at war with God and His prophet. It is incumbent upon the relevant authorities to stridently and resolutely eliminate these people.
12. The “state” in Islam is: the modern, constitutional and democratic nation state. Al-Azhar—represented by the *ulamā’* of Muslims today—resolves that Islam does not recognize the “religious state,” for there is no evidence supporting its existence in our heritage (*turāth*). This is clearly understood from the articles of the Charter of Medina, and from the policy of our Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Just as the *ulamā’* of Islam reject the religious state they also, to the same extent, reject states which erect systems of government upon the denial of religion and its separation from people’s lives.
13. The caliphate was a system of government employed by the Companions of the Prophet according to the times in which they lived, as it was appropriate for religious

and worldly affairs. There is nothing in the texts of the Quran or Sunnah that obligates a specific form of government, rather the *sharī'ah* accepts all modern systems of government so long as they provide justice; equality; freedom; protect the homeland and the rights of citizens of differing creeds and denominations; and do not conflict with any transcendent principle of religion (*thābit min thawābit al-dīn*).

14. The ruler in Islam is: whoever is chosen ruler by the people according to the method stipulated by the constitution of the state, or whatever method is stipulated by its system of government. Among his responsibilities is to work in the interests of his subjects; achieve justice between them; preserve the borders of the state and its internal security; make best use of its resources; and provide for the needs of the citizens within the means available.
15. Full citizenship is: a fundamental right of all citizens of a state. There can be no difference between them [as citizens] on the basis of religion, denomination, ethnicity or color, and this is the basis upon which the first Islamic state was founded and is guaranteed in the Medina Charter. Muslims must work to re-enliven this principle.
16. [Summary: It is perfectly legitimate to congratulate those of other faiths on their religious holidays.]
17. [Summary: Government must prevent the circulation of extremist content in the media.]
18. The crimes committed by terrorist and armed groups—especially the killing of civilians, members of the police, army and those who perform the task of protecting society and the borders of the homeland, in addition to assaulting public and private property—are crimes of sowing corruption in the earth (*jarā'm ifsād fī al-arḍ*). All *sharī'ah*, legal, security and military measures must be taken to combat these crimes, in addition to practical measures to deter terrorist groups and the states that sponsor and support them—including those states that shelter these outlaws and deploy them against their homelands.
19. [Summary: Condemns drugs and alcohol as absolutely forbidden and calls for all educational, cultural and security measures to be taken to prevent their circulation in society.]
20. [Summary: Fighting corruption and cronyism is a religious obligation.]
21. [Summary: Condemns suicide as a heinous crime.]
22. [Summary: Condemns taking revenge as an ugly *jāhilī* remnant unsuited to civilized societies, people must rely on the law and its officers.]
23. [Summary: Condemns the spreading of rumors as a danger to society and a great crime forbidden by *sharī'ah*.]
24. [Summary: The *sharī'ah* allows for tourism. The visa of entry is a contract of security that must be honored by all citizens.]

25. [Summary: Ancient statues and historic artefacts are a cultural and historic inheritance to be protected and managed by the state, they are not idols and cannot be damaged or attacked.]
26. [Summary: Women today can legitimately travel without a chaperone, provided measures are taken to prevent a woman’s exposure “to what she hates”.]
27. Women can be employed in all positions for which they are suited, including high offices of state.
28. [Summary: Condemns divorce as a social evil.]
29. [Summary: Calls for a fair distribution of family wealth to those who have contributed to its accrual in the case of family breakdown.]

In conclusion

Al-Azhar—and the scholars and intellectuals of Muslims—give thanks to President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for his generous sponsorship of this conference, and for his opening remarks, which so enriched its proceedings and were, indeed, among the most important factors contributing to its success. Al-Azhar also gives its upmost thanks to the distinguished scholars, excellencies, dignitaries, journalists and gracious attendees. Al-Azhar would also like to announce the continuation of this conference’s work in the “Al-Azhar International Center for Renewal,” which will deal with all new developments as they occur.

Before we say farewell, we would like to express our upmost esteem and thanks to the government of Gambia and its Minister of Justice for preparing, and presenting, a comprehensive case to the International Criminal Court detailing the maltreatment, expulsion and genocide perpetrated against Rohingya Muslims. All of us gathered here today affirm that to allow these crimes to go unpunished would constitute a collective stain upon the world, and that this must not be so.

Finally, I thank you and, God willing, we will meet at future conferences.

May the peace, blessings and mercy of God be upon you.

God is the arbiter of success.

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