

الهيئة الدينية الإسلامية الرسمية في النمسا
Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich



Graz Declaration-English version

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Conference "Heads of Islamic Centres and Imams in Europe"

Graz, 15th June, 2003

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

The Conference "Heads of Islamic Centres and Imams in Europe" took place from 13th to 15th *Rabia aT-TAnI* 1424 h (13th to 15th June 2003) in this year's European cultural capital Graz.

Initiators:

- Dr. Benita Ferrero Waldner, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
- Professor Anas Schakfeh, President of the Islamic Community
- Dr. Mustafa Ef. Ceric, Rais al-Ulema of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Organiser:

- Islamic Community in Austria

Co-organiser:

- Islamic Organisation for Education, Science, and Culture - ISESCO
- European Islamic Conference - EIC
- Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Host:

- Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs - Austria
- Federal Province of Styria
- Graz Municipality

After three days of discussions and consultation the Conference "Heads of Islamic Centres and Imams in Europe" has adopted the following declaration:

GRAZ DECLARATION

The Conference "Heads of Islamic Centres and Imams in Europe" wishes to thank all institutions involved for contributing towards the realisation of this fruitful exchange of ideas. Agreement in the evaluation of the challenge of modern times in Europe has become tangible. Unanimity was also demonstrated in the theological choice of means to achieve a constructive approach. Thus a significant basis for future activities could be created.

More than 10% of the present population in Europe are Muslims. They all share the same religion, even if showing a wide variety of cultural and traditional diversities. This variety is a reality within Islam always considered a blessing. Variety in terms of ample options for solutions to new problems offers a unique chance. Awareness of this multi-faceted pattern of reflections in respect of a religion is a novelty. A spontaneous, direct exchange of opinions has been manifesting itself in Europe: it could, if promoted and institutionalised, send useful impulses to the Islamic world. The participants at the conference emphasised the theological instruments such as *ijtihAd*¹, the principle of a free formation of opinion within the framework of Islam, the freedom to apply the

¹ All Arabic terms are given in the transcription as used in: Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of modern written Arabic, Wiesbaden 1979

vast store of knowledge of the different schools of law creatively and in dialogues, and, in general, the central role of intellect. The core message of Islam advocates enlightenment, open-mindedness vis-à-vis the sciences, and makes education imperative.

The conference participants strictly opined that just as there is no African, Arab, or whatever other ethnic Islam, a "European" Islam is also non-existent. Only the term "Islam in Europe" offers an adequate definition for the development of an Islam of European style on the basis of the dynamic image of one all-encompassing Islamic belief. To accompany and enhance this process with theological expertise is seen as the task and duty of imams and heads of Islamic centres.

Muslims share common standards and values with other religious communities and philosophies. The position of related monotheistic religions is specially emphasised. SUra 3, verse 285 of the Qur'An² reads: *"The messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and (so have) the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and his Messengers, (saying), "We make no distinction between any of his messengers." And they say, "We hear and we obey. (We seek) Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the (final) destination.""*

Islam is historically and culturally associated with the history of Europe, constitutes an inseparable part of it. Recalling this and entering into, or also intensifying, a constructive dialogue will be an asset and a highly promising necessity. SUra 16, verse 125 of the Qur'An reads: *"Invite to the way of your*

² this and the following quotations are taken from:" The Qu'ān, Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings, Revised and Edited by SaHeeH International, RIYADH (ABULQASIM publishing HOUSE) 1997

Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. ..."

For pluralism to contribute towards maintaining social peace and social justice and towards bringing people closer to one another, verse 13 of sUra 49 serves as orientation: *"O mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."*

In order to meet its responsibility vis-à-vis society the Conference adopts the following statements grouped under three interrelated headings:

I. Islamic identity in Europe

- * European Muslims are equally aware of their religious identity as Muslims as they are of their social identity as Europeans. Their naturalization in no way entails a theological contradiction.
- * The Islamic message is oriented at moderation, the logical consequence of which is the explicit rejection of all forms of fanaticism, extremism and fatalism.
- * The medieval distinction between *dar al-Islam* (house of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (house of war) as contradictory worlds is to be rejected. It is not based on the Qur'An nor on the Sunna, represents an obsolete phenomenon and is in no way relevant today.
- * Human rights are an essential component of Islam. Safeguarding the dignity of the human being as a being created by the Lord from the same substance, and actively advocating human rights is the self-evident duty of every Muslim, male or female.

- * Man and woman are equal partners in Islam. In addition, they bear a mutual responsibility. Women enjoy essential rights on principle, securing their status. Women's rights should therefore not remain a theory, they must be activated in all aspects concerned. The participation of Muslim women in the various fields of social life is an essential criterion. All Conference participants acknowledge the theological co-operation of Muslim men and women, promote and encourage it.
- * Muslims must demonstrate loyalty to law and constitutional principles also as regards the secular structure involved.
- * Pluralism is considered divine will in Islam. Its implementation is not only defined in terms of competing with good deeds and dialoguing, but formulated as a mandate for Muslims. The concept of democracy as the guiding principle of the "*shurA*", i.e. mutual consultation, is anchored in the Qur'an.
- * Participation in all areas represents an essentially Islamic principle, furthering the harmonious and mutually enriching living together in an ever more pluralistic world.

II. Requests submitted to the European States

The participants vehemently voiced a number of requests to be addressed to the European States. Against a background still insufficiently recognised by the public at large that Islam represents a significant part of the cultural history of Europe, this Islam must also be rendered visible as a component of European society by making the broad public realise that social integration cannot be tantamount to assimilation. Mutual recognition and respect will pave the way towards the integration of Muslims as Muslims.

- * The status of recognition that has existed in Austria for a long time, guarantees a legally defined relationship, promoting the integration of Muslims as part of society. This includes the right to free and public worship, and the right to

internal autonomy, permitting in turn the preservation of independence as claimed by the Islamic principle of a dynamic consideration of specific situations against the background of time, location, and acting persons. The status of recognition of Muslims should be adapted to this model in the individual European states. The Conference appeals to the competent authorities to take the necessary steps therefore.

- * The erection of mosques, the construction of Islamic cemeteries, the right of women to take up a job dressed according to Islamic conventions, and the right to slaughter animals according to Islamic rites are implicit requirements of the Muslim community. Infrastructural expansion will strengthen social peace and create transparency.

III. Education and upbringing

Imams and Muslim theologians essentially contribute towards education and upbringing and towards the creation of an Islamic infrastructure. A number of tasks take priority in this respect. Prejudices, clichés, stereotypes, and hostile images can only be approached by means of an education offensive which should reflect a co-ordinated strategy. Teaching peace should now become a common task for all those involved.

- * Educating and guiding young people is a priority concern of Muslims. The integration of Islamic religious instruction into school curricula has proved helpful. Teaching Islamic principles contributes towards showing the differences between tradition and Islamic doctrines and overcoming these. It stimulates the intra-Islamic integration of most diverse pupils living their religion, and thus creates a simultaneous identity of Muslims and Europeans. A qualified, institutionalised Islamic education will be a guarantor for avoiding narrow-mindedness, fanaticism, and fatalism. This includes the foundation of faculties for the training of native European Muslims to become experts in Islamic law.
- * Faculties of Islamic Sciences should promote the creation of a new legal system in matching harmony with European society.

- * Learning the local language should become obligatory. Only a person familiar with the language of the country he or she lives in will feel an integral part of it.
- * Educated Muslims can build bridges on the basis of their acquired knowledge, and this not only in the intellectual sphere of universities in order to promote interdisciplinary co-operation. Muslims who combine sound knowledge of their cultural background with practical experience of the European situation will be pillars for the establishment of social institutions such as meditation centres or crisis consultation facilities. They have become welcome applicants for jobs on the services sector too.
- * The image of Islam is still to a great extent determined by the mass media and partly faulty information based on knowledge gaps dating back to lack of instruction at school. Existing initiatives should be institutionalised, having until now largely been confined to private engagement as regards studies or programmes for bringing pupils together during lessons.
- * Muslims are exhorted to understand their obligation to da'wa in the sense of being requested to give information and live according to the ethic principles inherited in the context of Islam.

Recommendations of the Conference

1. The Conference recommends the setting up of an expert commission for the formulation of Islamic requests in Europe for presentation at the European Convent so that these requests can be duly considered in the final formulation of the constitution of the European Union. The commission should furthermore hand over this document to the president of the convent in Thessaloniki/Greece.
1. The Conference recommends the setting up of an Islamic liaison office in Brussels to deal with all matters of importance and interest to Muslims in Europe vis-à-vis the organs of the European Union.
2. The Conference has resolved to found a permanent council of imams and Islamic spiritual advisers. The European Islamic Conference (EIC) should arrange for the administrative steps necessary to realise this project.

3. The Conference recommends the creation of a fact-finding commission composed of a limited number of experts in Islamic jurisprudence in Europe in order to visit Nigeria so as to ascertain the circumstances of the conviction of Amina Lawal in situ. It is furthermore recommended that the competent Nigerian judicial authorities be contacted in order to discuss this matter.
4. The Conference recommends the foundation of an Islamic Centre in Graz in order to render possible adequate religious services for the Muslim population in this town. In this context the Conference appeals to the Austrian corporations under public law of the municipality of Graz, of the federal province of Styria, and of the federal government, to permit effective assistance in respect of the realisation of this project.
5. The Conference asks Professor Anas Schakfeh, the president of the Islamic Community in Austria, to forward letters on behalf of the Conference to all Austrian and Islamic institutions, thanking them for their co-operation in, and participation at, this conference.

Graz, 15th June, 2006/

15th Rabia aT-TAnI 1424 h.