

Speech of H.E. Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs at the inauguration of Cambridge Inter-faith Program

Gentlemen,

When I received the invitation of Professor David Ford to attend this event, I saw that it is a duty on the eve of our cooperation to present some preliminary notes and suggest some mechanisms for fruitful dialogue, and to be able to pass this serious stage by necessary peace of mind to be able to follow and attain our goals. The initiative of Professor David Ford drew our attention, and aroused our optimism and approval. He came to Muscat on invitation of the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, and delivered lecture in the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. In this lecture, he noted some points and items of the so-called "Muscat Declaration" on Dialogue between the Abrahamic religions. Supporting this Declaration, as mentioned before, and considering it a basis for discussion and development of relation, we hope that the good offices of Professor Ford be encouraging move and intellectual and methodological work for improvement of relations between Abrahamic religions.

I believe that we are in a critical junction for two reasons: the unsuitable external conditions where signs of bad relations, such as clash of civilization and green danger, began to spread. The second reason is that four decades of communication went in vain because of weak will on the one hand, and the mistakes in programs and goals on the other.

The first point to assure in the field of goals is that the meaning is to reach the stage of acquaintance to be followed by sympathy. Allah, the Almighty,

defined acquaintance as goal of relations among the humans different in morals, doctrines, customs and traditions. Allah, the Almighty, said: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you". There is difference in creation (femininity and masculinity), and there is difference in group organization (nations and tribes). However, because of this reason, the goal shall be to transcend the disputes that arise out of difference by "acquaintance". Acquaintance is in three steps: knowledge in understanding and confession. Knowledge means objective, responsible and abstract introduction of the other. In addition, knowledge means identification of the subjectivity and methodologies of thinking, action and interests. There is no separation between knowledge and understanding. However, understanding implies an active part which is sympathy and will of convergence. Sympathy reaches the maximum degree by positive acknowledgement of the difference and moving towards it. It is not possibility in the humanity of man to assign his subjectivity regardless of his fondness of, or sympathy with the other. Recognition of difference and legitimate end of the other is key requirement that promotes the humanity of man.

In fact, Koranic acquaintance, whether in its individual or group dimensions, was not studied and its dimensions and requirements were not examined by Muslims and others, due to the unsuitable conditions that prevailed the relations among the nations in the last century, and the unsuitable conditions that prevailed the relations among the Muslims and

the West over two centuries of time. The reason for lack of acquaintance or targeting the attainment of it prevailed in the struggle, so it has become different for the parties to act out of the dominance relations. The dissidents or extremists of both parties dominated, so ability to intervention was crippled, and knowledge and acknowledgement retreated.

Acquaintance is a process that abounds with knowledge, understanding and recognition. The higher degree or result of it is mercy, or what Professor Ford named in his lecture in Oman as "Blessing". Allah, the Almighty, says, " We have not sent you forth but as a mercy to mankind". The Prophet (PBUH) says, "I am but a gift of mercy". Therefore, the apex of knowledge, acquaintance, understanding or recognition is the mercy that communicates the humanity of hum and brings it to rich and vast dimensions. With such mercy, apparent dispute and discord would be impossible. It is clear that the meaning of sympathy is primarily the relation between individuals. However, relations, with determination, perseverance, strong will and passion, can be harnessed as moral framework of the interfaith, intercultural and international relations. Recognition and acquaintance are right, and being merciful is virtue and duty.

These two goals (acquaintance and mercy) require believers, and fellows of Abrahamic religions move based on two principles defined by the holy Koran in addressing the people of the book: "Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)". This call of the Holy Koran includes several terms, or keys:

good saying, worship of Allah alone refusal of following any other gods than Allah, complete with Islam to Allah. If others refused partnership based on these principles, the good saying defines the methodology: precise compliance with rectitude, equality and fair communication, addressing and consideration of the other. Worship of Allah alone means monotheism in humanity and responsibility before the Allah. Refusal of religious captivation and alienation is a result of compliance with the monotheism of creation, ability and Deism. However, if the people of the book refused meeting on these principles, this wouldn't be reason for enmity or discord. In this case what is required is frankness of Islam for the sake of Allah, and compliance with the approach of acquaintance, understanding and sympathy.

The methodology of acquaintance and being merciful toward each other is a comprehensive human approach. However, Koran aspires that Abrahamic religions lead humanity toward recognition and sympathy. The common factors that unify them on good saying, monotheism and denial of deism for other than Allah, so careful consensus on this was serving the fellows of Abrahamic religions and all humans. The matter relies on whether we, people of faith, have the initiative or not? The good saying and monotheism are the closest ways to the approach of acquaintance and doing of mercy.

In fact, the relations between the fellows of Abrahamic religions witnessed downfalls, disputes and failure. Deism or claim of dominance and control is the main justification in noncompliance with the good saying between us. How can humanity be called to acquaintance and doing of mercy. I mention that

when Taliban, in 1999, demolished the historical two Buddha Statues in Bamayan, Afghanistan, Dalay Lama, Leader of Tibet Buddhists, said: "Christians and Muslims, over the last centuries prevailed in the whole world, and didn't adopt between them, or in the attitude of other religions and cultures, the attitude of acquaintance and justice; they always embezzled, dominated and made violence control.' Distress and relations between Muslims and Christians in the last two decades prevailed, especially between Protestant and Muslims. This is attributed to two main reasons: aggravation of some political problems with religious, cultural and symbolic sides, such as the Palestinian Cause, and affairs of Muslim communities in the West. On the other hand, whether negative general view of Islam that was met by some Muslims negatively and with violence as well.

Over the last ten years, I followed the matter through several discussions with the leaders of thought and work in the West and East. As a result of a review, contemplation and discussion, I suggested a methodology and mechanisms to correct and restore the process through the approach of religion ethics in three intellectual processes; namely: mind, justice and ethics. Scientific investigation of the Holy Koran is achieved either by explanation; that is, direct understanding or interpretation, the indirect understanding. There is no doubt that the moral processing of thinking reported here (mind, justice and ethics) are interpreted in origin by the holy texts of the Abrahamic religion. In reference to this perception, I wanted that these steps constitute the methodology and mechanisms. In addition, we have previously talked about the objectives and principles, so in all cases we are committed to the foundations of Abrahamic religions. In the apex of this initiative for correction and moving ahead, we issued Al Tasamoh

(Tolerance) Magazine., of which twenty-six volumes are issued till now, and the critic reviews and procedures, indication of concepts and eradication of illusions. In addition, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs in the Sultanate of Oman, we organized annual cultural season in the last eight years. We invited about one hundred thinkers and lecturers by average of ten per year, to discuss the issues of difference, tolerance values and revival, and from the religious, political and economic West.

We meant by mind the implementation of reviews of the concepts, objectives and interests by rationalizing the problems and their management, and suggesting the definitions and way outs of distresses, working on the indication of the means of viable and constructive dialogue, exploration of the new and renewable means and media of knowledge. For dealing, it is said that knowledge is released. Actually, it shall be combined with criticism, review and redefinition of concepts as well as defining the domains of criticism. We have two contemporary Muslim thinkers in the nineteenth century; namely, Al Mohassaby (-243) and Al Kindi (-252 AH). Al Kindi embraced the perspective of Aristotle on the identity of mind and its functions. He said that it is a single essence that assumes the duty of perception and judgment of thinking, while. Al Mohassaby stated that mind is the instinct or light that is enhanced and strengthened by learning and experiences. By knowledge, learning, acquisition and reviews, we can always accumulated and properly place the matters, so long as we set the purposes of acquaintance and sympathy in focus.

The second step or comparison and approximation within this direction is justice. Justice means fair judgment and assessment of matters. In addition, we mean justice in behavior and disposal. If we considered mind in this system an ethical

and humanitarian value, characterized with abstraction, justice is a means of mind for correction of view and driving certain intellectual or practical act.

The third step is morals. It comes to connect us with the origin of monotheism and non-deism acquaintance and sympathy on the other hand.

The benefits of this three-step approach are that it connects us to the divinity of Abrahamic religions, and, on the other hand, with the other cultures and religions. So that we associate no partners with him, and that we don't underestimate the value of acquaintance and sympathy. This would bring us without much difficulty of thinking and action to the means of looking forward for virtues or free positive competition on, and to, virtues. Allah, the Almighty, said: "so strive as in a race in all virtues" The importance of this lies in that divine virtues are free values that can be attained by fellows of Abrahamic religions and fellows of other religions.

Gentlemen,

It is said that the world of the twenty-first century, at least in its first half, is the world of religion. Some devout believers judge the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as worlds of disputes on religion and morals. However, what we find in the last decade is that religions are also used to arouse and fuel disputes. In the 1990s, Professor Hans King said that peace of the world is conditional upon interfaith peace, and there is no peace between religions without dialogue between them.

By these notes, I wanted to help adopt a new approach of interfaith and intercultural dialogue to serve in the fields of world peace, stability and security.

We prospect cooperation with the interfaith programs in Cambridge University through the course given by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, May Allah Guard him, to the university. The text of Muscat Declaration will be one of the first topics on which we will cooperate to discuss and support its items and understand it. I hope these notes contribute to ease cooperation and dialogue.

Thanks for your time.

Peace Mercy and Blessings of Allah be upon you