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A Report on The International Conference on Religious Freedom and Peacebuilding

Laporan tentang Persidangan *The International Conference on Religious Freedom and Peacebuilding*

Sekou Marafa Toure*

The International Conference on Religious Freedom and Peacebuilding took place in Doha, Qatar, from February 18 to 21, bringing together a diverse array of scholars, religious leaders, policymakers, and peace advocates from around the world. The conference, titled "From Religious Freedom to Religious Responsibility: Peacemaking in a Destabilized World," served as a crucial platform for discussing the evolving role of religion in global peace efforts amid increasing political and social instability. The conference was organized by Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) And Multi-Faith Neighbors Network (MFNN). The DICID is A Qatari-based semi-government organization dedicated to interfaith dialogue, intercultural cooperation, and capacity building. The MFNN on the other hand is an American organisation founded by Pastor Bob Roberts Jr., Imam Mohamed Magid & Rabbi David Saperstein, to coordinate grassroots movements with religious leaders across various faith traditions.

The event, which was held under the patronage of the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, was formally officiated by the Minister of State for International Cooperation, Maryam bint Ali bin Nasser Al Misnad. This high level of political patronage underscored Qatar's firm commitment to fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation, particularly in a region that has long been affected by religious and sectarian conflicts.

* Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID).

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The conference was held against the backdrop of rising global polarization, where the rhetoric of influential figures has further exacerbated societal divisions. In this climate of heightened tensions, the discussions at the conference took on even greater significance, as religious freedom and responsibility were examined not just as abstract ideals but as practical imperatives for global stability.

With broad international and regional participation, the conference featured ten main sessions, each focusing on a critical aspect of religious peacebuilding. Some sessions explored the foundational role of the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—in fostering peace, while others tackled practical challenges of religion and conflict resolution in conflict-prone regions such as West Africa, Sudan, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Palestine. These discussions provided valuable insights into how religious communities can transcend theological differences and work toward sustainable peace in deeply divided societies.

In her officiating address, HE Maryam Al Misnad emphasized the urgency of religious collaboration in addressing global instability, framing the conference as an essential effort in bridging divides and promoting coexistence. In the opening speech Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al Naimi, Chairman of DICID, stressed the practical applications of religious responsibility in peacebuilding, and the role of faith traditions in conflict resolution, humanitarian efforts, and the promotion of social harmony in an increasingly fragmented world. Pastor Bob stressed his firm belief that religious leaders have a profound role in shaping the status quo and the future. He mentioned that leaders of religious communities cannot be mere observers of world crises but should rather be agents of peace. When faith communities come together with humility, respect, and a shared commitment to human dignity, Pastor Bob sees this as the moment when real transformation happens. He said that this conference and similar events can deepen our trust, help in formulating actionable strategies, and returning to our communities equipped to be ambassadors of peace.

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Archbishop Eugene Nugent, a Vatican ambassador, highlighted the role of Christians in protecting religious freedom wherever it is threatened. He called for the brothers and sisters of all faiths to defend this freedom as it is a gift to be defended for the sake of human dignity and the common good. He said the people of all faiths are not free to harm, to divide, or to disregard the suffering of those around them. Accordingly, religious freedom is not merely a concept or an ideal; it is a fundamental human right. It is the right to seek the truth and follow it. It is the right to freely worship God according to the dictates of one's conscience, to live one's life in accordance with one's deepest beliefs.

Prof. Dr. Raafat Al-Mikati, President of University of Tripoli Lebanon, highlighted numerous points based on the Lebanese experience such as the role of religious discourse in enflaming or reducing conflicts, the misuse of religions by politicians and agitators, the use of religious texts to justify aggression or occupation, the role of Arab and Muslim religious leaders in contemporary conflicts, and the influence of religion on public opinions globally. Prince Ousmane Amirou Dicko of Liatko stressed the role of Customary and Traditional Leaders in Africa to bring about the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the promotion and awareness of tolerance, living together, peace, security and development in an inclusive and participatory approach based on a dialogue without exclusion.

Several papers presented at the conference explored the significant contributions of women in peacebuilding, showcasing successful models from Ghana, Croatia, the Sudan, and global initiatives like the Global Multi-Faith Fellowship. The discussions reinforced the necessity of women's inclusion in decision-making and conflict mediation, recognizing their underappreciated yet impactful role in fostering sustainable peace.

Oliver McTernan, Director of Forward Thinking, in addressing the Challenges of Peace building in Conflict Zones, highlighted the core principles of integrity, transparency and commitment are essential in order to build the level trust required for a meaningful level of engagement on both sides of the conflict. An informed historical and contemporary analysis is indispensable in order to distinguish between

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misinformation/disinformation and the realities that drive the conflict and perpetuate the cycle of violence, at the cost of endless human lives. An inclusive engagement with all the relevant parties to the conflict, aimed at understanding their motivation and goals, is fundamental in order to identify a level of sufficient consensus that would provide a framework for a dialogue aimed at reaching a sustainable agreement. An awareness of the religious significance of sites and symbols in shaping the identity of the different factions engaged in what is essentially a dispute over competing claims to the same land. The willingness to engage with the relevant religious authorities and to explore the possibility of providing a theological underpinning for a political settlement of the conflict is an essential part of any process aimed at breaking the current cycle of violence and reaching a sustainable peace.

Rabbi Daniel Roth, a senior fellow at George Mason University's Center for World Religions, Diplomacy & Conflict Resolution, stressed that Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is at a critical turning point. It is essential that the current war and crisis not be simply "another round" in this endless violent conflict. There are real serious threats of the war escalating and spreading to a regional and even global 'Holy War', with traditional diplomatic channels of mediation struggling to shift this troubling trajectory. In addition, around the world, antisemitism and Islamophobia are at an all-time high, and rising, while Jewish-Muslim relations at an all-time low. When traditional governmental channels are not sufficiently able to address the ever-growing threats of intractable identity conflicts, there is an increased need to cultivate and strengthen trusted and practical back channels, known as "insider religious mediation" (IRM). IRM is a conflict resolution approach that leverages trusted religious leaders and insiders to mediate conflicts, especially in identity-based disputes where religion plays a central role. Unlike traditional diplomatic efforts, which often involve external political actors, IRM works within religious and community structures to foster dialogue, reconciliation, and practical solutions.

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The conference reaffirmed the interconnectedness of religious freedom and global peacebuilding, urging participants to shift from passive tolerance to active responsibility in promoting reconciliation and conflict resolution. Through these critical dialogues, the event laid the groundwork for future collaborations and policy initiatives aimed at reducing religious tensions and fostering lasting peace in an increasingly destabilized world.