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**We stand for:**

- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
- *Modernity*
- *High standards of spirituality*

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# Abrar

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## Online activism is promising to all

Many practical considerations are often presented to justify people's lack of participation in public life. Distances, time and expenses are among the excuses that are often used by people who play no part in voluntary work, help others, attend mass prayers, cultural events or take active role in charity. The present pandemic has fundamentally changed the lifestyles of many. Earlier this year most places of worship were closed, lectures cancelled and other public events including sports were suspended. It was a cultural shock that lasted only short time. Then online activism emerged. It was there before but not on massive scale. Social distancing forced people to abandon large scale activism. But when online opportunities arose life, gradually returned to public life. The gloomy days of the first three months of this year gradually gave way to more optimistic approaches. While social distancing has remained in force and fully-fledged public events remain shelved at present, online seminars, meetings and conferences have now mushroomed. Abrar, for example, rushed to start their online activists in April with Ramadan programmes. Many mosques, churches and academic institutions have resumed their activities online. It is expected that even when life returns to normal after the Covid-19 has largely perished, a new "normal" will replace many of the old habits and practices.

What does this mean to those who had not been actively engaged in public life? Those who have lived on the periphery of life are advised to change their attitude and start questioning the purpose of their existence. Everyone on this planet can do something and is obliged to give. While many have let themselves to slip into the unenviable category of "takers" their human role must be re-activated. They must be reminded of their human, religious and social duties. Attending public functions, participating in charity work and engaging with others in voluntary activism are good avenues to pursue. Giving is a virtue which must be promoted especially among those who have not exercised it on large scale. Recently it was reported that charity work is a factor in personal

health enhancement. Prayers are also a source of self-satisfaction and inner-purification that is needed to defeat evil intentions and inclinations. Self-testing and examination must always be exercised by every person in order to ensure compliance with human and religious responsibilities. This is not an easy task but must be exercised on regular basis. Harmony between the inner and outer of the person is necessary to ensure healthy existence.

Online activism is now in fashion. This trend is likely to spread even more after many have tested its viability and ability to provide an alternative to direct engagement. It is unhealthy to see low attendance at significant intellectual and ideological events. The quality of the ongoing Islamic online work has greatly improved as the physical boundaries have been overcome by the online approach. People do not need to travel to deliver lectures or take part in meetings. The experiences of the past three months have been positive. Meetings, seminars and conferences have been organised and life has appeared near normal. While this is a welcome development the worry is that it must not be taken as a permanent substitute to face-to-face contacts among humans. The warmth of greetings, love, handshake and hugging cannot be replaced by the online activism. Those who are still reluctant to cross the psychological border that keeps them away from activism must take the opportunities provided by the online facilities to step forward and begin a new life of meaningful existence.

There is now good possibility that the new "normal" may yield more positive outcomes in terms of activism, inter-communal relations and pan-Islamic intellectual and religious homogeneity. Unique experiences will interact to enrich Islamic thought and culture. Inter-faith activism will also lead to improved relations among the people of faith. While the empty religious places do not provide for hope and communal atmosphere, the religious discourse through any means is a positive development. The hope is that the new "normal" may lead to constructive inter-communal relations and better understanding and mutual respect that will benefit all.



## Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands

A special seminar on Palestine was organised by the Islamic Unity Forum (IUF) on Saturday 11th July. The seminars which was chaired by Mr Yahya Harb was addressed by three speakers who spoke about the Israeli annexation of Palestinian land. The first speech was by Mr Ibrahim Munir, the IUF's chairman. He said: what is happening in Palestine today is extremely dangerous; international resolutions are flouted, The US president moves his embassy to Jerusalem and settlements are built on Palestinian land. Defending the holy land is the responsibility of all faith groups in the world.

Then Professor Munir Nuseibah (Academic Al-Quds University in Jerusalem). He dealt with the political and legal aspects of the predicament of Jerusalem where he lives. He reiterated disgust at the American policy towards Palestine and its attempt to wind down the case in favour of Israel. He gave a brief history of the city since the occupation of Palestine in 1948. He then talked about annexation plans and the targeting of its natives, revoking their rights of settlement, destroying their homes and expelling them. The aim is to change the demography of the city for its eventual annexation. More lands outside the city are being considered for annexation also. The plan also aims at fragmenting the West Bank so that no sovereignty remains for the Palestinians. He considered the policies of the Palestinian authority has not helped the case. Taysir Al Khatib from USA presented another version of the events surrounding the occupied territories. The Israelis continuously feel threatened by the Palestinian presence among them. The occupiers suffer on existential crisis at a time when it lacks national consensus, has no answers to questions surrounding its survival and it suffers lack of legitimacy. Support for the Palestinian cause continues to grow even in the countries that aim to establish links with the occupiers. I expect that only comprehensive solution would lead to peace.

The third speaker was Dr Khona Ahmad Mahmood from Algeria. He said Algerians are grateful to the Palestinian because it has remained the compass of struggle for Algerians. He approached the crisis from a religious perspective based on sayings from the Bible. He linked the liberation of Palestine to the unity of the Muslims. He described how Algerians have struggled for centuries against a more dan-

gerous enemy, but eventually succeeded. He urged the Arab elites to revive the feelings towards Palestine among the Arab masses in order to challenge the rush to normalize links between some Arab rulers and the Israeli occupiers.

## Tenth anniversary of Ayatullah Fadlullah demise

The tenth anniversary of the demise of Ayatullah Sayed Mohammad Hussain Fadlullah of Lebanon was marked by Abrar on Thursday 9th July. Two speakers remembered the great scholar whose demise on 4th July 2010 had deprived Muslims of a great scholar.

The meeting chaired by Sheikh Hassan Al Taraiki, listened to Sayed Jaffar, son of the late scholar who highlighted his father's life. He mentioned how the father had advised him to complete his university studies before joining the Islamic seminary. He considered knowledge to be consisting of all branches of disciplines. He tried to present the religious concepts in simple ways so that it can easily be understood. When he interpreted the Quran he wanted to highlight the moral and educational dimension. He was a modernist so he aimed at presenting the religious concepts with modern approaches. He talked about freedom making use of an approach by Imam Al Sadiq who said that the free man cannot be subdued by being imprisoned. He presented Islamic penal codes within the framework of the first chapter of the Quran known as "the Cow". He dealt in the same way with the issue of polygamy. Sayed Jaffar presented a concise account of his father's methodological approach to Islam that amalgamated modernity with conservatism.

Sayed Mohammad Taher highlighted the educational approach of Sayed Mohammad Hussain Fadlullah. He said the Islamic approach aims at creating "moral immunity" in the Muslim. The Sayed considered two elements that are fundamental to this approach, spiritual and scientific. Prayers, supplication and contemplation are practical methods to achieve spirituality. He drew from an abundance of resources relating to supplications and prayers such Dua' Ku-

mail and other prayers of Imam Zain Al Abideen. The Sayed considers these an important source to achieve spirituality. The integration of the individual and society form the basis of this development. He took interest in the Islamic movement which he had cared for. Love is the basis of knowledge. He often addressed people saying: O my loved ones. Education without love becomes a mechanical exercise.

## 13th IUF Conference

The Islamic Unity Forum held its 13th annual conference online on Friday and Saturday 3rd and 4th July. The theme was: Brotherhood values and discord ethics. There were four sessions of 90 minutes each with up to three speakers at each session. On Friday, the first and second sessions were held. In the first one several speakers addressed the main theme of the debate. Mr Ibrahim Munir presented the opening remarks emphasising the necessity to adopt the Islamic ethics of debate and difference. The Russian mufti, Sheikh Nafi'Ullah Ashirof also talked about the flexibility of the Islamic belief when dealing with matters of contention. Sayed Hashim Al Mousawi, the head of the Islamic Centre of England talked about the need to create a solid front for the Muslim Ummah drawing on the ethical approaches promoted by the Holy Qur'an. He cited several verses to this effect. He said when there are differences of opinion they must be referred to Quran and the leadership whose decisions must be final.

The other sessions dealt with similar issues. Sayed Ali Fadlullah from Lebanon discussed the foundations of Islamic discourse and how they can help avoid divergence among the Muslims. Other speakers include Dr Mohammad Al Hassani from Morocco, Dr Ali Qabani (Egypt), Sheikh Hamid Shahrari (from Iran), Ayatullah Sheikh Mohsin Al Araki (Iran), Sheikyh Yousuf Mashriya (Algeria), Sheikh Mohammad Al Zughbi (Lebanon) and Sheikh Mohammad Hilal (Egypt). At the end of the conference a final statement was issued which sought to promote Islamic approach to differences among people especially Muslims and how to avoid such differences becoming matters of serious contentions.





**UN rights investigator calls on Saudis to free women activists**

An investigator for the U.N. Human Rights Council urged member states on Thursday to pressure Saudi Arabia to free women activists before a G20 nations summit which Riyadh will be hosting in November.

At least a dozen prominent women's rights activists were arrested in Saudi Arabia in 2018 as it lifted a ban on women driving cars, a step that many of the detainees had long campaigned for. The women were rounded up as part of a broader crackdown on dissent that extended to clerics and intellectuals.

In a speech to the council in Geneva, Agnes Callamard, the U.N. special rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said Saudi Arabia should release "prisoners of conscience, women, human rights defenders that are currently in prison for demanding the right to drive".



There was no immediate comment from Saudi Arabia, the current chair of the Group of 20 major economies.

Several of the arrested women have allegedly been tortured and sexually assaulted in detention. Saudi officials deny this and said the detainees were suspected of having harmed Saudi interests and offered support to hostile elements abroad.

**Britain says it can restart Saudi Arabia arms export licences**

Britain can once again issue new licences to export arms to Saudi Arabia after complying with a court order, its trade minister said on Tuesday, a move campaigners condemned as "morally bankrupt".

The Court of Appeal last year ruled that Britain broke the law by allowing weapons sales to Saudi Arabia that might have been deployed in the war in Yemen.

The court concluded that Britain's government had erred in law in its decision-making processes on arms export licences to Saudi Arabia, after activists said there was evidence the weapons had been used in violation of human rights statutes.

While the court's decision did not mean Britain had to halt arms exports to Saudi Arabia, it did mean it had to pause the granting of new export licences to sell arms to the kingdom - Britain's biggest weapons purchaser.

Trade minister Liz Truss said the govern-

ment had re-taken those decisions on a "correct legal basis", meaning it could resume issuing licences.

"I have assessed that there is not a clear risk that the export of arms and military equipment to Saudi Arabia might be used in the commission of a serious violation of IHL (International Humanitarian Law)," she said.

The Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT), which originally brought the legal action and had argued that British weapons were likely to have been used in Yemen in violation of human rights law, condemned the decision.

"This is a disgraceful and morally bankrupt decision. The Saudi-led bombardment of Yemen has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, and the government itself admits that UK-made arms have played a central role on the bombing," said Andrew Smith of CAAT.



**UN: Terrorist groups must not be allowed to exploit pandemic**

As COVID-19 continues to disrupt the world's health systems, economies and local communities, UN Secretary General António Guterres on Monday highlighted how the pandemic has laid bare vulnerabilities to "new and emerging forms of terrorism", such as cyberattacks, bioterrorism and the misuse of digital technology.

While the coronavirus has put the international community in the crosshairs of a crisis like no other since the founding of the United Nations 75 years ago, Guterres noted that "like the virus, terrorism does not respect national borders".

"It affects all nations and can only be defeated collectively," he said, opening the second annual gathering of UN and international experts known as Counter-Terrorism Week, held virtually this year, with a call to "harness the power of multilateralism to find practical solutions".

Acknowledging that it is "too early to fully assess the implications of COVID-



19 on the terrorism landscape", the UN chief told the first of series of virtual interactive discussions on strategic and practical challenges of countering terrorism during a global pandemic that ISIL, Al-Qaeda, neo-Nazis and other hate groups "seek to exploit divisions, local conflicts, governance failures and grievances to advance their objectives".

**Skulls of Algerian resistance fighters return home**

The aircraft carrying the skulls of Algerian resistance fighters against French invasion and occupation, held for more than a century and a half at the Natural History Museum of Paris, landed on Friday in Houari Boumediene international airport of Algiers.

The military aircraft C-130 carrying, from France, the remains of the 24 Algerian resistance fighters against the French colonization, escorted by fighter planes, landed in the early afternoon at the Houari Boumediene Airport.

Algerian President Abdelmajid Tebboune chaired the ceremony welcoming the coffins, in the presence of senior State officials, including Acting Speaker of the Council of the Nation (upper house of parliament) Salah Goudjil, and Speaker of the People's National Assembly Slimane Chenine.

The ceremony was also attended by Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad; Chief of Staff of the People's National Army Lt. Gen. Saïd Chanegriha; and Commander of the Republican Guard Gen. Ali Ben Ali; as well as members of the government.

In a ceremony marking Algeria's Independence Day on Thursday, President Tebboune said the reception of the 24 skulls is a first step in the repatriation of the mortal remains of Algerian resistance fighters. He stressed the State's determination to continue the operation until the repatriation of all the Algerian resistance fighters, to be buried in the country for which they had sacrificed their lives. Algerians felt joy and a sense of historic achievements.



## Our Past Is Racist and Bigoted. How Do We Face It?

*Like biographies, the histories of countries have good and bad chapters. Only an honest reckoning allows good to prevail in the future.*

By Andreas Kluth, 11 July 2020

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

William Faulkner's famous line comes from a harrowing tale about two women in Mississippi. One is a Black nursemaid, Nancy, who is to be hanged for the murder of a baby girl. The other is her White employer, Temple, the child's mother, who ekes out the semblance of respectable married life. Neither can escape the vengeful reappearance of deeds done many years earlier.

Since the killing of George Floyd, a Black American man, under the knee of a White police officer, the past has been reemerging with extra ferocity. In the U.S. and Europe, people have been pulling down statues of slavers and racists, renaming institutions and streets, and trying in countless other ways to change how the past is represented in the now.

In some cases, these actions seem so obvious it's hard to believe they weren't taken long ago. For more than a century, Mississippi, Faulkner's home, has had a flag containing the Confederate battle standard, adopted by White supremacist legislators a generation after the Civil War. It's coming down only now.

In other cases, the gestures may be heartfelt, but they come off as awkward. When King Philippe of Belgium sent his "deepest regrets for the wounds of the past" to the Congo, which his country colonized brutally under the reign of one of his ancestors, he still couldn't bring himself simply to apologize.

Nor could Mark Rutte, the prime minister of the Netherlands, which also has a history of trading slaves — because some people "may find that painful," as he said in parliament. He neglected to mention that many other people find the very omission of such an apology painful.

And then there are reactions like Donald Trump's. The entire debate about statues and symbols is "a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values," the U.S. president said against the background of Mount Rushmore and its granite faces depicting four of his predecessors, including two who owned slaves. Trump's approach — selective denial — is deceitful and insensitive. It's also cynical because his intent is to divide and mobilize a backlash.

The noble way is to confront the past honestly, as Faulkner's Temple does eventually. This path, however,

inevitably leads to frustration and anguish. Sometimes the past indicts us without mercy. Other times it's excruciatingly ambiguous.

As Rutte asked in parliament, can you "hold people who are alive today responsible for the past?" In one sense, doing so seems unfair, indeed impossible. But in another sense, it also seems unfair not to. After all, many American Blacks still suffer the aftereffects of slavery and Jim Crow, and many Whites indulge in their inherited privilege.

This moral ambiguity is why debates about reparations can never be satisfactorily settled, and not only when it comes to indemnifying the descendants of slaves in the U.S. Poles, Greeks and others regularly demand that Germany pay reparations for Nazi atrocities. Similar tensions exist between Japan and its former victims in Asia. But unless reparations are paid by the actual perpetrators directly to their victims, they can be counterproductive. Whoever ends up paying may feel absolved of all future responsibility. And both sides may inadvertently demean the original crime by haggling over its "price."

The most moving expression of Faulkner's simple and powerful message — that the past is condemned to keep living inside us — is this essay by Caroline Randall Williams. Genetically, she is more than half "White;" sociologically, she is "Black." Like many Americans of color, she's the descendant of the victims and the perpetrators — of Black female slaves and the White owners who raped

them for generations. As she writes, "My body is a monument. My skin is a monument."

Reexamining our public monuments is actually the easier part of dealing with the past. Ruthless honesty, combined with respect for ambiguity, must start here. I often stand in the heart of Berlin, gazing at the vast Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, an undulating sea of concrete slabs. Then I turn around and look at the statue of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe across the street, lost in eternal contemplation. Germany's lowest and highest, both in the same place, both at once.

The harder part is living with a past that never dies. We cannot edit or rewrite it. So we must understand it and accept its exhortation. "This country can only be loved with a broken heart," German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said on the anniversary of the end of World War II. Maybe that's also true of the U.S. and other countries — and of us as individuals. Maybe we can only love ourselves with a broken heart.

Faulkner's Temple eventually understands that it was ultimately she who was responsible for her daughter's killing. She goes to plead for Nancy's life, but is too late to save her. Perhaps in our own way, we can — each of us — do better.

Andreas Kluth is a columnist for Bloomberg Opinion. He was previously editor in chief of Handelsblatt Global and a writer for the Economist. He's the author of "Hannibal and Me."





## Britain imposes sanctions on Russians, Saudis over rights

Britain imposed sanctions on 25 Russians and 20 Saudis on Monday as part of post-Brexit measures foreign minister Dominic Raab said were aimed at stopping the laundering of “blood money”.

After leaving the European Union in January, Prime Minister Boris Johnson wants to forge a new independent role for Britain in foreign and trade affairs and this was the first time London could impose asset freezes and visa bans independently. Raab has pressed for tough sanctions and set out the first names in parliament, including Russian nationals Britain says were involved in the mistreatment and death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky and Saudis held to be involved in the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Russia said it would respond to the new measures. The Saudi government media office and Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

“If you’re a kleptocrat or an organised criminal, you will not be able to launder your blood money in this country,” Raab told parliament.

“Today this government...sends a very clear message on behalf of the British people that those with blood on their hands, the thugs and despots, the henchmen and dictators, will not be free to waltz into this country to buy up proper-

ty on the King’s Road, to do their Christmas shopping in Knightsbridge, or frankly to siphon dirty money through British banks or other financial institutions.”

Investors from Russia, China and the Middle East have poured billions into London, buying everything from luxury properties to entire companies, but the source of some of the wealth has been questioned by transparency campaigners.

The biggest Russian name on the list is Alexander Bastrykin, whose Investigative Committee reports directly to President Vladimir Putin.

He has also been blacklisted by the United States and Canada over the death of Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer arrested in

2008 after alleging that Russian officials were involved in large-scale tax fraud. Magnitsky died in a Moscow prison in 2009 after complaining of mistreatment.

“It is particularly outrageous that the senior representatives of the General Prosecution and the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation as well as judges were included in the sanctions list,” RIA news agency cited a Russian embassy spokesman in London as saying.

Raab also announced sanctions on 20 Saudis who Britain says were involved in the death of Khashoggi, following other western countries who have put sanctions on officials there.

Saud al-Qahtani, a former Saudi royal adviser, and Ahmed al-Asiri, a former deputy intelligence chief, both had charges against them dropped by a Saudi court. Eleven suspects were put on trial in December over the killing, with five sentenced to death.

Bill Browder, a client of Magnitsky who has led a campaign to expose corruption and punish Russian officials whom he blames for the lawyer’s death, welcomed the move as “a huge milestone in our campaign for justice for Sergei Magnitsky”.



## ICESCO to explore future of Arabic language for non-native speakers beyond COVID-19

The Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) will hold today the Virtual International Forum “Arabic Language for Non-Arabic Speakers beyond COVID-19: Renewing Strategies and Developing Tools and Methods”.

During the forum participants will explore the major lessons learned from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Arabic language for non-native speakers, and outline the future action priorities and strategic choices likely to improve the quality and outcomes of this type of education and promote the position of Arabic language in Muslim countries and the world in the next phase.

The forum agenda features the opening remarks by ICESCO Director-General Dr. Salim Mohammed AlMalik, and the address by Director of ICESCO Center of Arabic Language for Non-Arabic Speakers Dr. Abdullah Al Obeid. Afterward, the floor will be given to President of the International Agency for Natural Language Processing Dr. Mohamed El Hannach; and Executive Director

of the Center for Arabic Study Abroad Dr. Khaled Hussein Abuamsha.

The four sessions of the forum will then respectively examine “Regional and international action in the field of teaching Arabic to non-Arabic speakers: challenges and opportunities”; “Leadership roles of university institutions in national capacity-building”; “Capitalizing on the telecom and digital revolution to serve Arabic language dissemination”; and “Prospects of teaching and spreading Arabic around the globe.”

In addition to ICESCO’s representatives, the forum will bring together a host of senior officials in charge of the regional and international specialized

institutions and centers, including Secretary General of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for the Arabic Language Dr. Mahmoud Ismail Saleh; Secretary-General of the International Arabic Language Council Dr. Ali Moussa; and Director of Arabic Language Education Center for the Gulf Countries Dr. Issa Saleh Al Hammadi.

The participants also include Arabic Language Programs Coordinator at the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Faisal Al-Juhani, in addition to a host of officials in charge of faculties, university departments, educational and cultural centers in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Uzbekistan, Mali, Benin, China, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, France, Britain, Serbia, the United States, India, Vietnam, and Brazil.

The forum seeks mainly to develop a shared vision for regional and international institutions and specialized university, educational and cultural institutions regarding future action priorities in this field. It aims to enable these institutions and education specialists to develop strategic options to keep pace with the runaway changes, draw on the Fourth Industrial Revolution and harness its digital innovations to promote the teaching and learning of the Arabic language and ensure its international empowerment.



## Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand: 'The government had failed the Muslim community'

7 July 2020

The Islamic Women's Council says the Christchurch mosque shootings might not have happened, if it weren't for the failures of multiple government agencies - particularly the security intelligence service and police. In the aftermath of the shootings at the Al Noor and Linwood mosques on March 15 last year, the Royal Commission was ordered to investigate what government agencies knew about the attacker before the shootings.

The commission will also look into what, if anything, they did with that information; what measures agencies could have taken to prevent the attack; and what measures agencies should take to prevent such attacks in the future.

Brenton Tarrant has pleaded guilty to 51 charges of murder, 40 charges of attempted murder and one charge under the Terrorism Suppression Act. He is due to be sentenced on 24 August in the High Court at Christchurch - a hearing that could last at least three days.

The commissioners' final report is due at the end of this month, but the Islamic Women's Council has decided to make its submission public ahead of that.

The 170-page submission includes almost 40 recommendations.

The submission outlines the council's interactions with a host of government agencies in recent years, including the Security Intelligence Service, the Human Rights Commission and the Race Relations Commissioner, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Internal Affairs and the Office of Ethnic Communities.

The council said the government failed to support and protect the Muslim community and prevent the 15 March attack. "In the years prior to 15 March 2019 there were repeated major public service delivery failures in relation to government dealings with and responsibilities towards the Muslim community in Aotearoa New Zealand," the submission said.

"It is certain that but for the failures of the other public sector agencies there would have been greater support and protection of the Muslim community before 2019 as the pressure on them grew and after, when the trauma and shock had to be dealt with."



The submission details a number of meetings council members had with various representatives from the Security Intelligence Service, including its head Rebecca Kitteridge.

The council said at those meetings, its message was clear: "It was that the government had failed and was failing the Muslim community. There was a lack of support on the preventative side. There was a rise in hate and hate groups in New Zealand".

The council said the Security Intelligence Service could not have been surprised by what happened on 15 March,

To discover this, they were spying on the young men online. Why was there no equivalent spying on young white supremacist men?"

The council said the police failed in not developing a national strategy to deal with threats against Muslims and mosques.

Among the council's recommendations, it wants an apology for the failings of the SIS and government agencies in relation to the attack. It also wants reparations paid to those who have suffered economic loss, that is not covered by ACC or any other workplace scheme.

### UNFPA: Women must be protected during pandemic

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem in her statement on World Population Day, 11 July 2020, called for attention to the vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls during the COVID-19 crisis. Kanem's message which was released on the occasion of World Population Day was e-mailed to IRNA by the United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in Tehran. Here are excerpts from the statement:

Peace in our world begins with peace in the home, as the United Nations Secretary-General stated in his call for a global 'ceasefire' on gender-based violence - a pandemic within the COVID pandemic. One woman in three experiences physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Now, with countries on lockdown and household tensions heightened, gender-based violence is on the rise, and sexual and reproductive health services are being sidelined by health systems struggling to cope with COVID-19.

We call attention to the vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls during the COVID-19 crisis, and why protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights and ending the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence is imperative, especially in these challenging times. "We are encouraged that so far 146 Member States have signed on to the Secretary-General's call to make peace in the home a reality, and we are partnering to support them. No organization or country can do this alone. The pandemic is a stark reminder of the importance of global cooperation. The United Nations, which this year marks its 75th anniversary, was founded to foster international cooperation to solve international problems. As the global community comes together in solidarity to survive this pandemic, we lay the foundation for a more resilient, gender-equal societies and a healthier, more prosperous future for all."





## The Arab Winter: a tragedy

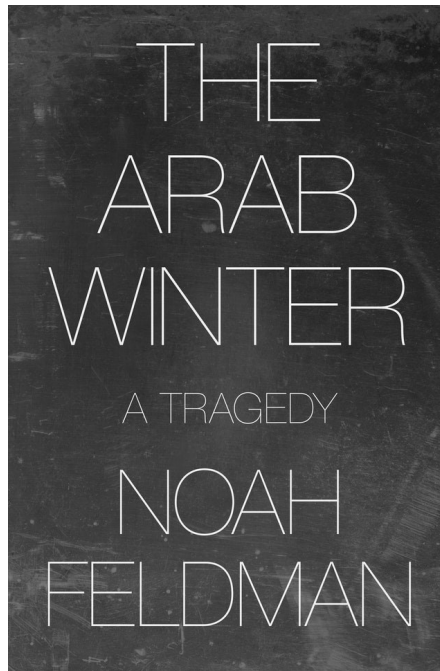
By Noah Feldman

The Arab Spring promised to end dictatorship and bring self-government to people across the Middle East. Yet everywhere except Tunisia it led to either renewed dictatorship, civil war, extremist terror, or all three. In *The Arab Winter*, Noah Feldman argues that the Arab Spring was nevertheless not an unmitigated failure, much less an inevitable one. Rather, it was a noble, tragic series of events in which, for the first time in recent Middle Eastern history, Arabic-speaking peoples took free, collective political action as they sought to achieve self-determination.

Focusing on the Egyptian revolution and counterrevolution, the Syrian civil war, the rise and fall of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and the Tunisian struggle toward Islamic constitutionalism, Feldman provides an original account of the political consequences of the Arab Spring, including the reaffirmation of pan-Arab identity, the devastation of Arab nationalisms, and the death of political Islam with the collapse of ISIS. He also challenges commentators who say that the Arab Spring was never truly transformative, that Arab popular self-determination was a mirage, and even that Arabs or Muslims are less capable of democracy than other peoples. Above all, *The Arab Winter* shows that we must not let the tragic outcome of the Arab Spring disguise its inherent human worth. People whose political lives had been determined from the out-

side tried, and for a time succeeded, in making politics for themselves. That this did not result in constitutional democracy or a better life for most of those affected doesn't mean the effort didn't matter. To the contrary, it matters for history—and it matters for the future.

**Noah Feldman** is the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and the author of many books, including *The Three Lives of James Madison*, *The Fall and Rise of the Is-*



*lamic State* (Princeton), and *What We Owe Iraq* (Princeton). A contributing writer for Bloomberg Opinion and the host of the podcast *Deep Background*, he lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Twitter @NoahRFeldman

"Noah Feldman offers an interpretation of the meaning of the Arab spring and its aftermath in the Arab winter in his superb new book."—Joseph Richard Preville, *Informed Comment*

"A timely and insightful exploration of the meaning of the Arab Spring, and of its participants' agencies and responsibilities, by one of the foremost legal scholars and public intellectuals in the United States."—Malika Zeghal, Harvard University

"Noah Feldman has written an elegant and incisive book that illuminates one of the most important events of our time: the tragic failure of the Arab Spring. It was tragic because failure was avoidable. Tyranny returned in Egypt, horrendous slaughter followed the uprising in Syria, but Tunisia demonstrated what political prudence could achieve: the emergence of democracy in the Arab world. Feldman asks a question with haunting relevance well beyond the Middle East: can a people who have chosen a democratic path then choose to renounce it in favor of tyranny?"—Michael Ignatieff, President, Central European University, Budapest

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## Gender and Succession in Medieval and Early Modern Islam

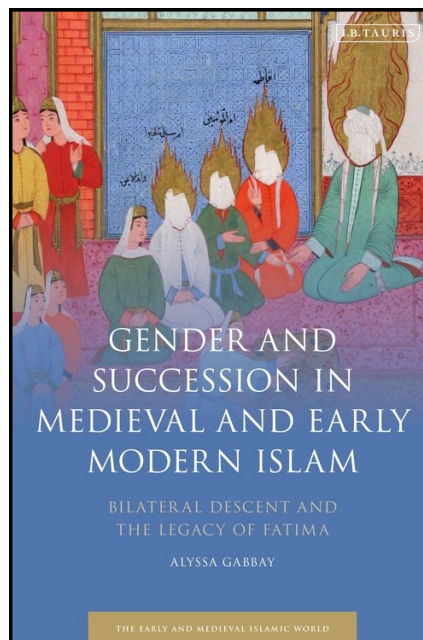
*Bilateral Descent and the Legacy of Fatima*

By: Alyssa Gabbay

About Gender and Succession in Medieval and Early Modern Islam

In *Gender and Succession in Medieval and Early Modern Islam: Bilateral Descent and the Legacy of Fatima*, Alyssa Gabbay examines episodes in pre-modern Islamic history in which individuals or societies recognized descent from both men and women. Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, features prominently in this study, for her example constituted a striking precedent for acknowledging bilateral descent in both Sunni and Shi'i societies, with all of its ramifications for female inheritance, succession and identity.

Covering a broad geographical and chronological swath, *Gender and Succession in Medieval and Early Modern Islam* presents alternative perspectives to patriarchal narratives, and breaks



new ground in its focus upon how people conceived of family structures and bloodlines. In so doing, it builds upon a tradition of studies seeking to dispel monolithic understandings of Islam and Gender.

"This book will be seen as a major contribution to the discussion of gendered inheritance in Islam, and the mechanisms whereby Muslim female authority was safeguarded and passed on to new generations."—Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, Associate Professor of Persian Literature, University of Oxford  
**Alyssa Gabbay** is the author of: *Gender and Succession in Medieval and Early Modern Islam*

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## Lockdown story: Human grit and kindness

By Mohammed Tarique, India July 5, 2020

.60 HAST THOU NOT TURNED THY VISION TO THOSE WHO DECLARE THAT THEY BELIEVE IN THE REVELATIONS THAT HAVE COME TO THEE AND TO THOSE BEFORE THEE? THEIR (REAL) WISH IS TO RESORT TOGETHER FOR JUDGMENT (IN THEIR DISPUTES) TO THE EVIL ONE THOUGH THEY WERE ORDERED TO REJECT HIM. BUT SATAN'S WISH IS TO LEAD THEM ASTRAY FAR AWAY (FROM THE RIGHT).

.61 WHEN IT IS SAID TO THEM: "COME TO WHAT GOD HATH REVEALED AND TO THE APOSTLE": THOU SEEST THE HYPOCRITES AVERT THEIR FACES FROM THEE IN DISGUST.

.62 HOW THEN WHEN THEY ARE SEIZED BY MISFORTUNE BECAUSE OF THE DEEDS WHICH THEIR HANDS HAVE SENT FORTH? THEN THEY COME TO THEE SWEARING BY GOD: "WE MEANT NO MORE THAN GOODWILL AND CONCILIATION!".

63. THOSE MEN GOD KNOWS WHAT IS IN THEIR HEARTS; SO KEEP CLEAR OF THEM BUT ADMONISH THEM AND SPEAK TO THEM A WORD TO REACH THEIR VERY SOULS.

(AL NISAA)

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The country has been going through an unprecedented health crisis. There is despair and desperation all around. We are constantly getting news about uncontrolled virus spread, rising death tolls and collapsing health systems. Add to this chaos the unimaginable levels of sufferings of the workers walking hundreds of kilometres to reach back their homes, sights of police beating up or punishing those walking, and the picture of absolute hopelessness is complete. Prolonged exposure to this situation of pandemic is enough to severely compromise our ability to face the trauma created by it. All of us are getting affected with the distress caused. Unfortunately, softer yet powerful, invisible yet life-changing acts of compassion are lost in the roars of the crisis.

As a society, we do respond collectively. Within no time, hundreds and thousands of people took it upon themselves to support the needy and vulnerable. Our antidote for hopelessness and despair is hidden in stories of these people. When we hear about a person in a difficult condition herself but still helping another person, that does something within. Power lies in these acts of kindness from least expected quarters. They are mostly hidden, but in plenty. These are the stories that exist all around us, they just need to be seen and told. For our own sake. Let me share one such story of human compassion and empathy.

This is a story from Lalbagh Community at Mansarovar Park, Shahdara where Koshish has been working for few years now. This is the settlement of about 300 families, mostly from de-notified communities. With loss of traditional occupations, current generation engages in multiple vocations like selling old clothes, Lemon-Chilli threads, drum players etc. The community survives on daily earnings and therefore has been facing a very difficult time since the Covid-19 situation arose.

Geographically, the community is located close to the road that goes to Anand Vihar, place that workers walked to, in the hope of boarding buses for their native places. On hearing the plight of walking workers, youth from the community decided to 'do something' to make the sufferings little bearable.

Themselves being out of work for over two months, there was little that people had, except for the hearts with rare ability to feel others' pain and some grains they received as 'relief support'. They decided to use the rations to feed these walking people. Several families came together and brought portions of whatever little ration they had on them.

Women of the community made chapatis while men prepared 'khichdi'. Rotis were packed with pickle and group of youth went and distributed these packets to people walking back to their natives. These people used their meagre stocks but within two days they realised the risk this brought to their own survival. However, collectively they decided to continue this for as long as they had any ration left on them. Community ran this effort for more than a week.

When asked about what made them take

such a step or if they felt worried about what would happen to them once all the ration finished, their simple response was, 'we had few days food and we have roof on our head; people we are sharing our food with have their lives uprooted. Going hungry would be nothing if we can lessen the sufferings of our people in any way'. Such brave show of love and understanding of life is nothing short of an inspiration.

Something that even the government was not able to see but claimed that everybody was taken care of as people's miseries continued, these poor people saw and responded.

Interestingly, it is not the first time when this community did something of this kind. Last month when we got our ration tempo to the community for distribution but could not reach there due to some logistical breakdown, and requested community volunteers to receive the grains and identify which families to be covered firstly, community held a meeting and decided to give away entire ration to 100 odd families that lived in proximity and have not received any help from anywhere. Extremely happy but a bit surprised, when we asked them the reason for such a decision, they explained how they received ration a week ago and could manage for few days where as the families that they gave their food to, didn't have anything.

Covid-19 has created a crisis that probably remains unmatched in its reach and distress it has caused. The damage this pandemic has caused goes beyond physical health or the economy; it has threatened our emotional stability. It is such stories of human grit and kindness that we all need, to keep our souls healthy and alive. It is important that mainstream media acknowledges this essential need of human beings and brings out these stories. These are the stories that need to be told; not for the individual actors of these stories but for the good of the larger society. Reading such positive stories can serve as the daily pill, giving much needed hope. If it is immunity that has helped people affected with coronavirus in recovery, mental preparation to beat the battle is a crucial aspect of that immunity. When there is a constant supply of news and information that trigger anxiety and panic, few stories bringing out the humane side will definitely help us take better control of our lives. At the time when systemic indifference is shaking our belief in ourselves, such act of selfless humanity shall provide reassurance. 'Not all is lost' is the feeling that often is the first step for path to victory!

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