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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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## Looking for peaceful post-Trump world

Never in the past had the American elections been followed by the inhabitants of this planet in the same way that happened recently. The world held its breath for five days after the closure of the voting process while the counting continued. Everyone was anxious to know what the American people had decided. Many had questioned the wisdom of electing Donald Trump in 2016, but those who did could be given the benefit of the doubt: They did not know him. But the closeness of the final result still paint a grim image of large sections of people who, having experienced the bad taste of the past four years, have yet resorted to grant him their votes. The experience has been sour to all; Americans and others. The way he had behaved could not be justified or accepted by decent people. He had created an atmosphere of hate within his own country and elsewhere. His first step after assuming his post was to ban visitors to US from seven Muslim countries. Then he started to withdraw from international bodies such as the Paris Climate Agreement, a policy that annoyed his Western allies. The US also withdrew from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in October 2017 and June 2018 respectively.

His recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem claimed over 100 Palestinian lives and injured 11,000 more and also angered several countries. The move also violated the United Nations 1967 resolution, which asks Israel to vacate all the occupied territories of Palestine and work toward building peace in the region. Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership early in 2017 under his "America First" policy, reversing decades-old trade policies, hoping to bring jobs back to the US. In May 2018 he withdrew the US from the landmark nuclear accord with Iran, restoring harsh sanctions in the most consequential foreign policy action of his presidency. He declared he was making the world safer, but he also deepened his isola-

tion on the world stage and revived doubts about American credibility, in a move to underline Washington's drift away from international institutions.

Under his motto "America First" he adopted divisive policies that irritated his close allies in Europe. No sooner had he lost the election than Germany rushed to congratulate Joe Biden expressing hope of resumption of the muted cross-Atlantic relations. People across the globe loathed his as a world leader and prayed for his disappearance from the political stage. But many were shocked to see that over 70 million Americans had voted for him. He was seen as a white supremacist whose election had led to sudden escalation of racism in the Western world with extremist white supremacists gaining foothold in the political arena. The world seemed to be edging towards serious division. The Middle East and other Muslim countries were seen as the main target of the Trump-related emergence of racism, prejudice and intolerance. Now that he has lost his bid for a second term in the White House the world started to breath a sigh of relief. The hope is that Mr Biden will be able to put right what his predecessor had damaged. With the wide spread of the pandemic, the Americans paid the highest price of all, with almost quarter a million fatal Covid-19 fatal infections. With the newly-announced vaccination by Ptfizer and Biotech and the absence of Mr Trump from the international political scene the world can look forward with a degree of optimism.

People of religion in USA must revisit their values and speak out in favour of a human approach to world's politics. Religion must re-assure the public of the its unifying values and must disavow the tendency among some public figures for unilateralism and push for collective efforts to enhance the quality of life of all. The end of Trump's era must give impetus to reformers to push forward their agendas, uphold the rule of law and human values as they seek a better world, free from evil values of hate, prejudice, racism, occupation and dictatorship.



### Prophet's birth advent

A seminar to mark Prophet Mohammad's birth advent was held online by the Open Discussion and the Gulf Cultural Club on Tuesday 3rd November. It was chaired by Mr Mohsin Abbas and addressed by three speakers.

The first was Professor John Tolan, Professor of History at the University of Nantes in France. He is author several books including "Faces of Mohammad" which traces European perceptions of the prophet. He said: We can start with Ignac Goldziher who revolutionised the study of Islam by non Muslim Europeans in two essays written in Hungarian in 1872 – 1873. He portrays Mohammed as the bearer of a universal message of monotheism who struggled to overcome tribal divisions among Arabs. Goldziher at the age of 23 travelled to Istanbul, Beirut, Damascus and Cairo where he became the first non Muslim European enrolled in Al Azhar. He sought out Muslim thinkers especially those interested in reform. In Damascus he met Taher Jazari the 22 year old partisan of Islamic reform in the Arabic cultural renewal. Goldziher enthusiastically joined a group of young reformers round Al Jazari. Their deep friendship and mutual admiration is seen in the many letters that were exchanged between the two. He developed a similar relationship in Cairo with Jamal El Din Al Afghani whose attempts to reform Islamic doctrine and practise to unite Muslims and resist British imperialism provoked Goldziher's enthusiasm. He thought it could serve as a model for Jewish reform. He was inspired by Islam during his studies in Al Azhar living in Muslim Egypt.

He sees Christianity as an abominable religion largely because of the anti Semitic legends invented by Christian authors which he says engendered the worst forms of fanaticism. So he saw Islam and the reform Islam represented by Al Afghani and others as a possible model for the reform of Judaism.

Now let me in the time that is left to me go through chronologically some of the other subjects that I have looked

at in my book. One of them is the portrayal of Mohammed as a founder of a heretical branch of Christianity. This is how many Christian authors portray him starting in the Middle Ages in the 12th century in various works in Latin including Gibel. He wrote a history of the first Crusade justifying the crusade in which gave a very brief biography of Mohammed in which he said Mohammed created false miracles to trick the Arabs into following him and we see a 5th century painting of two of these miracles.

**Mohammad Iqbal Asaria CBE** said: In a sense the Prophet is a competitor to all the other prophets who had gone before. Then somebody has come and upstaged them. Some of the people you referred to have been very honest and realised his character and his message. What I want to do today very briefly is to say that what is the message we can get from the life of the beloved Prophet? There are a number of characteristics of the Prophet which are often challenged.

One of them is that he became through his character before announcing Islam as one of integrity who was truthful. That is why his enemies, including to this day, could not say that he is lying because his character was such that he did not lie. So most people resorted to saying that either he has gone mad or something like that. This is very important to bear in mind because when his followers who were around him were so absorbed in his spirit they were very much willing to take ownership of what he was saying.

That is the first point. The second is that Allah describes the Prophet in the Quran as the mercy to the whole of creation not only mankind. This is a very important attribute. When we look at the history of most Prophets we find one very strange characteristic. We find that towards the end of their lives they become quite disappointed with their followers. Prophets like Nabi Noah and Issa who said Oh God I have done my job. Please destroy these people or relieve me of them. I have not got any more energy to do much more.

But here is a prophet who after a life-long struggle, denegation, abuse – his only prayer at the end of it is O Allah please redeem my ummah. My love for the um-

mah is such that anybody who ever came close to me needs redeeming. The character of the Prophet is quite strong and very impressive.

One of the other characteristics that I want to emphasise is that he is mentioned as the noblest of examples. He is the noble example of mankind. What was his character? What kind of impact does it have on the Muslims of the time? Juman Moon presented part of Mohammad's life in a story form. She started by saying:

**Jumana Moon:** This has been such a busy month, the month of the Prophet's birthday. We have had so many different events and for me this is a time when I tell so many stories from the life of the Prophet and it is such a great honour and pleasure to do this. I spent some time thinking about what story to tell tonight and I kept coming back to a story which is a very previous story at the heart of Islamic tradition. It feels really special to share it tonight. In the name of God the beneficent and merciful, praise be to the cherisher and sustainer of the world and prayers and blessings on the noblest of messengers. A little to the north of Mecca is a place where there lie many rugged low hills. The rock is craggy and barren and nothing grows there. The rock is furrowed and grooved by the sun and the wind and the sand. The rock has subtle shades of ochre light yellow and when the setting sun falls on the rock it seems to glow a little more orange.

**\* US elections:** The impact of the American presidential elections was discussed at Abar's weekly meeting on Thursday 12th November. Two speakers addressed the issue: Dr Salah Al Fadhli from Kuwait and Sheikh Dr Adnan Al Shahmani from Iraq presented valuable contributions on the subject Both agreed that there would be enormous challenges facing Mr Joe Biden, They expect a return to the Iran nuclear past but main policies to remain.



**\* Prophet's birth advent:** On Thursday 5th November the weekly meeting of Abar was addressed by Sheikh Mohammad Al Rubai'ei from Iraq. He talked about the divine project of prophet Mohammad. He then highlighted the attributes and shape of society he had wished to achieve, using Quranic verses, prophet's tradition and historic events.



## Biden wins US elections



Joe Biden, the Democratic Party candidate has won the election to become the US 46th president. The incumbent president, Donald Trump has yet to concede defeat. Mr Biden has kicked off his move to the White

House after winning the electoral college votes needed to become the next President of the United States of America, as Donald Trump again refused to concede the election.

Mr Biden set his transition in motion by launching a website, BuildBackBetter.com, after beating Mr Trump in the final key battlegrounds of the election, marking the end of a tense but protracted race for the White House.

Victory for Biden came after clinching Pennsylvania and Nevada, where vote counts continued for days after election night failed to deliver a clear winner.

The election saw the biggest voter turn out since 1968, with over 148 million votes tallied, and an Associated Press analysis highlighted that some of the biggest turnout increases occurred in states that liberalized their mail-voting rules.

Mr Trump continued to sow doubt about the election results, with baseless claims of voter fraud, and threatened legal action despite mainstream news outlets calling the election in Mr Biden's favour.

## Disrespecting Prophet is rejecting rationality, morality, honor

Ayatollah Reza Ramezani, Secretary General of Ahlul Bayt (AS) World Assembly, rejected sacrilege of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) stressing that as disrespect to rationality, morality, courtesy and honor.

Top cleric made the comments in an online meeting on "Respect for Religions and Freedom of Expression" held by Ahlul Bayt (AS) World Assembly in collaboration of Islamic Center of London and stressed desecration of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) cannot be justified as freedom of expression, reported Taqrib News Agency (TNA).

The cleric said, "Disrespect is not included among the disciplines of freedom of expression."

"The key mission of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is to promote blessings among all people and all can live at peace and security" noted the cleric and

added, "This peace means fair peace for everyone."

Ayatollah Ramezani slammed sacrilege of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in some countries as contrastive with rationality and that it is not classified as freedom of expression.

He said, "Among the disciplines of "freedom of expression" there is no such thing as disrespect" and added, "Freedom of expression exists in criticism of the state and thoughts though criticism is not married to disrespect."

Secretary General of Ahlul Bayt (AS) World Assembly stressed, "Among worldly agreed ethics is to avoid disrespecting prophets, hence, to desecrate Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is to reject the role model of rationality, morality, courtesy and honor."

## 'Countdown to catastrophe' in Yemen as U.N. warns of famine

Millions of men, women and children in war-torn Yemen are facing famine - again, top United Nations officials warned on Wednesday as they appealed for more money to prevent it - again.

"We are on a countdown right now to a catastrophe," U.N. food chief David Beasley told the U.N. Security Council. "We have been here before ... We did almost the same dog-and-pony show. We sounded the alarm then."

The United Nations describes Yemen as the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with 80% of the people in need of help.

"If we choose to look away, there's no doubt in my mind Yemen will be plunged into a devastating famine within a few short months," Beasley told the 15-member council.

In late 2017, U.N. aid chief Mark Lowcock warned that Yemen was then facing "the largest famine the world has seen for many decades with millions of victims". "We prevented famine two years ago," Lowcock told the Security Council. "More money for the aid operation is the quickest and most efficient way to support famine prevention efforts right now." He said the world body had received less than half of what it needed - about \$1.5 billion - this year for its humanitarian operations in Yemen. Last year it received \$3 billion.



## Libya talks reach election breakthrough, U.N. says

Political talks on Libya's future have reached agreement on holding elections within 18 months, the United Nations acting Libya envoy said on Wednesday, hailing a "breakthrough" in a peace-making process that still faces great obstacles. "There's real momentum and that's what we need to focus on and encourage," envoy Stephanie Williams said at a news conference in Tunis, where 75 Libyan participants chosen by the United Nations have been meeting since Monday.

The meeting has reached preliminary agreement on a roadmap to "free, fair, inclusive and credible parliamentary and presidential elections" that also includes steps to unite institutions, she said. Libya has been in chaos since 2011 and divided since 2014 between rival factions in east and west, with major institutions also split or controlled by armed groups.

The internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) holds power in the capital Tripoli, while Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) holds sway in the east.

## Imran Khan : We must oppose racist ideologies

Pakistan on Tuesday urged member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to collectively oppose the rising wave of Islamophobia and neo-Nazism across the globe.

"We must oppose all extremist and xenophobic ideologies, including racist ideologies inspired by neo-Nazism and Islamophobia, and call for focusing on building interfaith and cross-cultural bridges," Prime Minister Imran Khan said in his address to the 20th meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council.

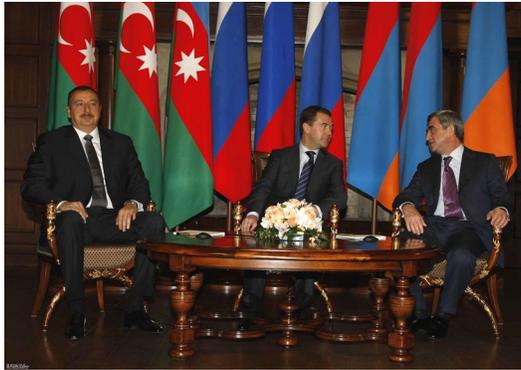
The online summit was presided by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Willful provocations and incitement to hate, especially on religious grounds, should be universally outlawed," Khan said, referring to French President Emmanuel Macron's recent anti-Islam remarks and the republication of offensive cartoons of Prophet Muhammad in the country. "We must continue to call for mutual respect of all religions and beliefs, and for fostering a culture of fraternity and peace, including in our own region and beyond."



## Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia sign agreement to end Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin signed today a complete cessation of military operations in the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, starting from Tuesday midnight, Moscow time. The following is the full text of the agreement signed by the three leaders to the decades-long Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, re-erupted on 27 September 2020 between Azerbaijan and Armenia.



We, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan I. H. Aliyev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia N. V. Pashinyan and President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin, declare the following:

1. A complete ceasefire and a cessation of all hostilities in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict shall be introduced at 00:00 hours Moscow time on 10 November 2020. The Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, hereinafter referred to as the Parties, shall stop at their current positions.

2. Aghdam district and the territories held by the Armenian Party in Gazakh district of the Republic of Azerbaijan shall be returned to the Azerbaijan Party before 20 November 2020.

3. Along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin corridor, a peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation shall be deployed in the amount of 1,960 military personnel with small arms, 90 armored personnel carriers, 380 units of automobile and special equipment.

4. The peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation shall be deployed in parallel with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces. The peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation shall be deployed for a period of five years with automatic extension by further five-year periods if none of the Parties declares six months before the expiration of the period of its intention to terminate the application of this provision.

5. In order to increase the effectiveness of control over the implementation of the agreements by the Parties to the conflict, a peacekeeping center shall be deployed to exercise control over the ceasefire.

6. The Republic of Armenia shall return Kalbajar district to the Republic of Azerbaijan before 15 November 2020 and Lachin district before 1 December 2020, while retaining the Lachin corridor (5km wide), which shall provide a connection of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and shall not affect the city of Shusha. By agreement of the Parties, a plan for the construction of a new route

along the Lachin corridor shall be determined in the next three years, providing communication between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, with subsequent redeployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent to protect this route. The Republic of Azerbaijan shall guarantee the safety of citizens, vehicles and goods traveling along the Lachin corridor in both directions.

7. Internally displaced persons and refugees shall return to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent districts under

the control of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

8. The exchange of prisoners of war and other detainees and bodies of the dead shall be carried out.

9. All economic and transport links in the region shall be restored. The Republic of Armenia guarantees the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in order to organize unhindered movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions.

Control over transport shall be exercised by the bodies of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia. By agreement of the Parties, the construction of new transport communications linking the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with the western regions of Azerbaijan shall be provided. 10 November 2020

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia

President of the Russian Federation

## British Muslims and the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Together in Tribulation** is a report by the MCB that seeks to highlight the specific issues Muslim communities faced during the first seven months of the pandemic. These include having the highest COVID-19 mortality rates by faith group and the particular circumstances which put many British Muslims at the highest risk, the suspension of mosque activities and the economic and social implication this has had, the adaptations made to traditional funeral and burial processes, mental health repercussions, and the way in which Muslims were often negatively portrayed in the media reporting of the pandemic.

This report also seeks to demonstrate how Muslim communities across the nation have responded to the impact of the pandemic thus far despite the hardships they faced, and showcase a mere handful of the incredible, innovative and impactful initiatives set up by Muslims to support their local communities and beyond.

Although the pandemic has shown the immense strength of Muslim communities, there has been a number of lessons which have been learnt so far, which can inform preparations to be better equipped in dealing with subsequent peaks of the pandemic and future surges in cases.

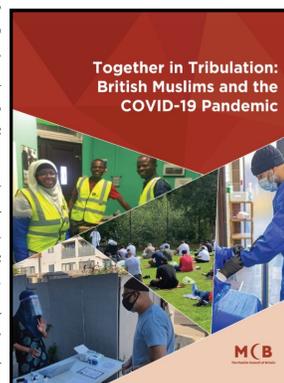
(i) There is a need for collective leadership and strong coordination between different sectors and service providers of Muslim communities. It is fundamental to have a coordinated and aligned response where resources and best practice could be shared.

(ii) There is a need to strengthen the burial sector, which can be met by investing in cold storage or external spaces in case of spikes in burial demands and establishing a centralised system in which the deaths of every Muslim in Britain can be recorded and from which this data can be analysed to get a better understanding of British Muslim communities and their needs.

(iii) With an increasing reliance on technology, it is essential that support is provided to those who are not technologically literate in order to help them to access services and programmes that have now moved online.

(iv) Community members should be encouraged to keep up their regular donations to their mosques, Islamic institutions and other charitable causes to help ensure the long-term financial sustainability of these institutions which are at the heart of the lives of so many Muslims.

(v) It must be ensured that every segment of British Muslim society is aware of and understands the public health messaging in order to keep safe. Alternative methods of communication should be explored, including translating all key public health messaging into community languages, having this relayed by Imams and community leaders from the pulpit, facilitating conversations between Muslim healthcare professionals and community members to directly answer questions and provide a greater understanding of the measures that must be taken to remain safe.



## Macron increases pressure on Muslims

Pressure on Muslims in France, including Islamic organizations and civil society, has continued to mount in recent weeks since the government announced its fight against "Islamic separatism."

On Sept. 1, French weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo republished blasphemous cartoons insulting the Muslim Prophet Muhammad ahead of the trial on the 2015 attacks on their offices.

Less than a month later, two people were injured in a knife attack near the former offices of Charlie Hebdo.

The attack on Sept. 25 was followed by French President Emmanuel Macron's controversial speech on Oct. 2, in which he announced plans to tackle "Islamic separatism" and restructure Islam in France.

The government in France immediately began operations against Islamic organizations and places of worship in the name of "fighting radicalism."

Pressure on Muslims in the country further increased after Samuel Paty, a French teacher who showed blasphemous cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad during class, was murdered on Oct. 16.

In their defense, Macron said France would "not give up our cartoons" after the brutal murder. His remarks sparked outrage in the Muslim world with many calling for a boycott of French products.

The provocative cartoons were also projected on some hotels and official buildings in the cities of Montpellier, Toulouse and Beziers.

- Islamophobia in France

French police raided the homes of prominent Muslim figures after Samuel Paty's brutal murder.

Deportation orders were issued for 200 people and more than 50 Islamic associations and organizations are under investigation.

Some organizations, such as the Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) and Barakacity were dissolved.

The government's steps appeared to have further stoked Islamophobia in French society. On Oct. 18, two Muslim women of Algerian origin were stabbed near the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Two days later, in the city of Nimes, a woman allegedly suffering domestic violence from her husband called the police to report her Catholic husband as "a radical Islamist."

On Oct. 22, in the city of Angers, two Jordanian nationals were assaulted for speaking Arabic.

- Students and mosques are targeted too

In the city of Blois, a 22-year-old Chechen national was detained for liking a photo of the French teacher's murder on social media.

Further south, a 14-year-old Afghan student was reported to Marseille police by his teacher for welcoming Paty's murder. Seven other similar complaints were reported in the same region.

Last week in Albertville, southeastern France, four elementary school children were "terrorized" and grilled during more than 11 hours in police detention over false allegations of "justifying terrorism."

A threatening message was sent to a mosque under the National Vision of the Islamic Society (CIMG) in Chateaudun, France, saying: "The war has begun, we will expel you from our country."

- French politicians and Islamophobia Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire accused some municipalities of "surrendering to the idea of 'political Islam'" for allowing private sessions for women in swimming pools.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister GERALDARMANIN said that rejecting a doctor or teacher of the opposite sex would be fined under the new law against "Islamic separatism."

French feminist journalist Elisabeth Levy suggested Muslims wearing headscarves take off their hair coverings for a few days to honor the memory of the murdered teacher.

## Imam of Al-Azhar Insulting Prophet Is unacceptable

Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb received at the headquarters of Al-Azhar Sheikdom on Sunday French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian and his accompanying delegation.

"Insulting Prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him, is unacceptable and we shall pursue whoever does that in court, even if we spend the rest of our lives doing so," Sheikh el-Tayeb said in reference to the offensive caricatures of Islam's Prophet published by a French magazine last month.

"We reject the term 'Islamic terrorism' as well as any other useless terms that serve no purpose. This term must not be used as it offends Muslims around the world and is simply contradictory to the truth," said the grand imam. "When speaking of Islam and its holy Prophet (PBUH), I refuse to be diplomatic."

Muslims around the world reject all forms of terrorism committed in the name of religion and affirm that Islam and its Prophet have nothing to do with terrorism, he added. "Al-Azhar represents nearly two billion Muslims from around the world and I previously affirmed on the international stage that terrorists do not represent us and that we are not responsible for their actions," Sheikh el-Tayeb asserted, expressing hope that European officials were aware that such incidents do not represent Islam and Muslims, especially when Muslims are often the biggest victims of terrorism.

"I am the first to protest freedom of expression if it offends any religion and not only Islam," said the grand imam of Al-Azhar, Egypt's renowned Islamic institution.

"Transgressions are committed by all followers of religions. Since we never blamed Christianity for the terrorist attack in New Zealand, then we must also not blame Islam for terrorism committed in its name. I do not accept that Islam is blamed for terrorism," Sheikh el-Tayeb told the French delegation. "Throughout history, Al-Azhar has opposed terrorism and we created a set of curricula that have made clear that terrorists are criminals and that they have nothing to do with Islam," he concluded.



## 'It shut all my doors': Quebec law banning religious symbols derails women's careers

*Bill 21 theoretically bans all symbols, but it mentions face coverings, and critics agree the main targets are Muslim women*

Tracey Lindeman,  
The Guardian 7 November

Nour Farhat always dreamed of becoming a Crown prosecutor. At 28, she is a newly minted lawyer with a master's specialization in criminal law.

As a young woman of colour, her presence in Quebec courtrooms caught the attention of judges, other attorneys, even defendants – all of whom, she said, were happy to catch a glimpse of a rare non-white lawyer.

"In Montreal, they say that a third of people come from somewhere else, and you really see it in court. There's a lot of black people, Arab people, Hispanics, and they were so happy to see me," she said. After a year articling with the Quebec vehicle licensing bureau Farhat was hopeful for the future.

But the Quebec government dashed those dreams in June when it passed Bill 21, a controversial secularism law prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols by certain public-sector employees. Farhat wears a hijab, a non-negotiable item of clothing and expression of her Muslim faith.

"It really shut all my doors," Farhat said of the law. "Five months ago I would have told you 'I'm a future Crown attorney.' I was so sure of my path. And now I'm like, OK maybe I'll become an expert in insurance law?"

Farhat is just one of thousands of people whose careers have been derailed by Bill 21, which was rammed into law at 4am on a Sunday in June, after 16 hours of debate. She is watching closely as mounting legal challenges take on the discriminatory and possibly unconstitutional law.

The latest was filed last month by one of the province's biggest school boards. Another challenge, also launched on a teacher's behalf, is due back in court at the end of November. The law disproportionately affects the province's education sector, where 74.5% of teachers are women.

The law doesn't touch [most Quebecers] one bit, but for me, it has disastrous consequences on my whole life

Nour Farhat



Bill 21 came after a protracted debate in Quebec over minorities' rights to religious accommodations. The law prohibits people in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols at work, including police officers, lawyers, judges and teachers. Other public workers such as bus drivers, doctors and social workers must only keep their faces uncovered.

To further complicate matters, some established workers have been grandfathered into an exception clause that allows them to keep their religious garments and their jobs – as long as they don't get promoted, switch to a different employer or move to another city.

The legislation doesn't name specific religious symbols, and theoretically all symbols – kippahs, turbans, crosses – are equally prohibited. However, because the law specifically mentions face coverings, and because of longstanding and effervescent anti-Islam sentiment in the province, many Québécois agree the main targets are Muslim women.

The bill was passed against a backdrop of growing anti-Muslim violence in the province. In 2017, six Muslims were killed and 19 were injured in a Quebec City mosque shooting. In Montreal, police figures show 58% of hate crimes in 2018 involved Muslim victims. Muslims represent about 3% of the province's population.

Since publishing an open letter against Bill 21 last April, Farhat routinely receives Islamophobic screeds by defenders of the legislation. But she is determined not to be silenced. "I have a voice. I will use it, especially when my own government doesn't want me to," she said.

Amrit Kaur, the vice-president of the World Sikh Organization, receives her share of hate mail, too. The 28-year-old

recent graduate is a vocal opponent of Bill 21: she would have been a Quebec schoolteacher this year had she been allowed to continue wearing her turban.

Instead, Kaur reluctantly packed up her things and moved across the country to Vancouver BC, to accept a teaching position. "I had no choice. I think at this point in my life, I need job security," she said.

Kaur argued that the law reflects a profound lack of understanding about religions like Islam and Sikhism.

"Keeping your faith hidden is very much a Protestant way of doing things," Kaur said. "You need to understand that my faith, and the way I practice, doesn't work like that. And you don't have to be OK with it. You just have to accept that I have that right to live my life the way I want to live my life."

Although not all Sikh women – or men – wear turbans, Kaur says that it was her personal choice to do so. "I had pressure from people saying, 'Don't try it, people are going to racist towards you.' But I'm going to live my truth."

Among the province's chief justifications for the law is that it improves gender equality by freeing women from the constraints of oppressive religions. Critics say it targets women from religious and ethnic minorities who are already well-integrated into society, and damages their ability to earn a living and gain economic independence.

"Muslim women with government jobs – you don't get more integrated than that. They speak French unless they're teaching at an English school, they're part of a union. They're complying with all the rules and regulations," said Robert Leckey, the dean of McGill University's law faculty, who also suggested that those affected could demand compensation in court.

For someone like Farhat, who is just starting her career, the damages are near incalculable. She regularly questions whether she can stay and raise a future family at home in Montreal. "The law doesn't touch [most Québécois] one bit, but for me, it has disastrous consequences on my whole life," she said.

## Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age

By Nimrod Hurvitz, Christian C. Sahner, Uriel Simonsohn, Luke Yarbrough

Conversion to Islam is a phenomenon of immense significance in human history. At the outset of Islamic rule in the seventh century, Muslims constituted a tiny minority in most areas under their control. But by the beginning of the modern period, they formed the majority in most territories from North Africa to Southeast Asia. Across such diverse lands, peoples, and time periods, conversion was a complex, varied phenomenon. Converts lived in a world of overlapping and competing religious, cultural, social, and familial affiliations, and the effects of turning to Islam played out in every aspect of life. Conversion therefore provides a critical lens for world history, magnifying the constantly evolving array of beliefs, practices, and outlooks that constitute Islam around the globe. This groundbreaking collection of texts, translated from sources in a dozen languages from the seventh to the eighteenth centuries, presents the historical process of conversion to Islam in all its variety and unruly detail, through the eyes of both Muslim and non-Muslim observers.

Reviews

"This is an extremely well-conceived volume on the crucial topic of conver-

sion, composed of enthralling selections all translated and annotated by top specialists. The field of Islamic history lacks good sourcebooks, so this volume fills a large void and opens up new vistas for both teaching and research."—Ahmet T. Karamustafa, Professor of History, University of Maryland

"Any reader interested in interreligious relations and conversions will take great pleasure in discovering this diverse collection of texts, many translated into English for the first time from various languages. There is no doubt that this work, edited by renowned historians, will quickly become a standard reference."—Anne-Marie Eddé, Professor of Medieval Islamic History, Panthéon-Sorbonne University

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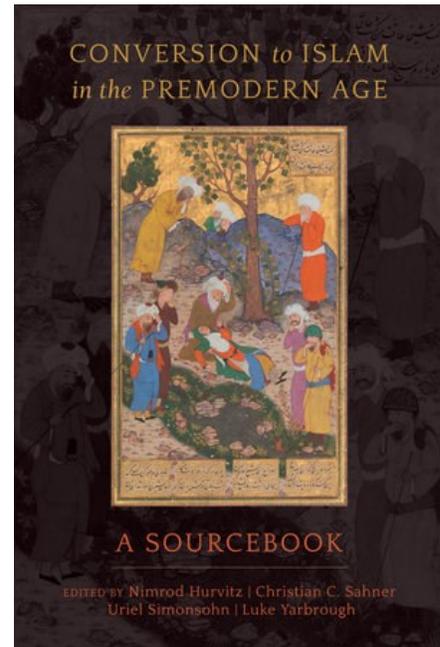
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## The Unforgettable Queens of Islam

*Succession, Authority, Gender*

By Shahla Haeri

In this landmark study, Shahla Haeri offers the extraordinary biographies of several Muslim women rulers and lead-

ers who reached the apex of political systems of their times. Their stories illuminate the complex and challenging imperatives of dynastic succession, electoral competition and the stunning success they achieved in medieval Yemen and India, and modern Pakistan and Indonesia. The written history of Islam and the Muslim world is overwhelmingly masculine, having largely ignored women and their contributions until well into the 20th century. Religious and legal justifications have been systematically invoked to justify Muslim women's banishment from politics and public domains. Yet this patriarchal domination has not gone on without serious challenges by women - sporadic and exceptional though their participation in the battle of succession has been. *The Unforgettable Queens of Islam* highlights lives and legacies of a number of charismatic women engaged in fierce battles of succession, and their stories offer striking insights into the workings of political power in the Muslim world.

Reviews

'Most women rulers in Islamic states succeeded their fathers or husbands, and Shahla Haeri shows that they cultivated an image as tolerant and caring 'mothers' of their nations. Her fascinating and original study concludes that an emerging generation of female politicians may represent a more democratic and inclusive force in Muslim societies, precisely because their very identity is a challenge to military and theocratic establishments.' Adam Kuper, British Academy

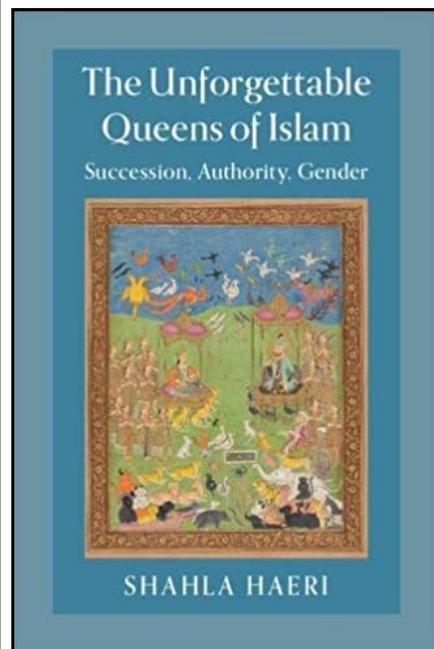
Shahla Haeri is Associate Professor of Anthropology and a former director of the Women's Studies Program at Boston University. She is the author of the pioneering ethnographic book *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'ī Iran* (1989, 2014) on the unique Shi'a practice of temporary marriage in Iran and *No Shame for the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women* (2002). She is the producer and director of a video documentary on Iranian women presidential contenders entitled *Mrs. President: Women and Political Leadership in Iran* (2002). Haeri is the recipient of many grants and postdoctoral fellowships.

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4. THEY ASK THEE WHAT IS LAWFUL TO THEM (AS FOOD): SAY: LAWFUL UNTO YOU ARE (ALL) THINGS GOOD AND PURE: AND WHAT YE HAVE TAUGHT YOUR TRAINED HUNTING ANIMALS (TO CATCH) IN THE MANNER DIRECTED TO YOU BY GOD; EAT WHAT THEY CATCH FOR YOU BUT PRONOUNCE THE NAME OF GOD OVER IT: AND FEAR GOD; FOR GOD IS SWIFT IN TAKING ACCOUNT.

5. THIS DAY ARE (ALL) THINGS GOOD AND PURE MADE LAWFUL UNTO YOU. THE FOOD OF THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK IS LAWFUL UNTO YOU AND YOURS IS LAWFUL UNTO THEM. (LAWFUL UNTO YOU IN MARRIAGE) ARE (NOT ONLY) CHASTE WOMEN WHO ARE BELIEVERS BUT CHASTE WOMEN AMONG THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK REVEALED BEFORE YOUR TIME WHEN YE GIVE THEM THEIR DUE DOWERS AND DESIRE CHASTITY NOT LEWDNESS NOR SECRET INTRIGUES. IF ANYONE REJECTS FAITH FRUITLESS IS HIS WORK AND IN THE HEREAFTER HE WILL BE IN THE RANKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE LOST (ALL SPIRITUAL GOOD).

(AL MA'IDA)

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## Truthfulness of a Young Boy

Abdul Qadir Jilani was an eminent Islamic scholar born in 11th Century CE, Persia.

Early stories of Abdul Qadir Jilani describe him as a youth with a strong inclination for learning with a pious mother who encouraged her son to acquire knowledge. The following incident is narrated in a number of biographies of Abdul Qadir Jilani.

At the age of eighteen he asked permission from his mother to travel to Baghdad to pursue his education. Baghdad then was the hub of political, commercial and cultural activity, and the center of world learning.

On hearing this his mother was more than happy to send her son off to follow the path of higher scholarship. It was for such a purpose she had saved forty gold coins for Abdul Qadir. As she prepared supplies for his journey she sewed the coins into the lining of his coat for safekeeping.

Before Abdul Qadir joined the caravan to travel to Baghdad, her parting advice to her son was, "Whenever you speak, speak the truth. Remember that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, 'Truthfulness leads to righteousness and righteousness leads to Paradise..' and the Quran tells us "O you who believe! Be careful of your duty to God, and be with the truthful." (Quran 9:119)

In route to Baghdad the caravan was assaulted by a band of robbers. As the thugs began to extract all the valuables from the travelers, one of the robbers started to search Abdul Qadir's belongings.

While searching, the robber asked Abdul Qadir, "Do you have anything valuable?" Abdul Qadir calmly replied, "Yes."

On hearing this the robber frantically searched further but could not find anything.

The robber took Abdul Qadir to his leader and said, "This boy says he has valuables but I cannot find anything on him."

The leader of the robbers asked Abdul Qadir, "Are you hiding any valuables?" Again Abdul Qadir answered, "Yes."

The robber asked, "What are you hiding?" Abdul Qadir replied, "Forty Gold Coins."

Upon further searching the robber discovered the coins hidden in the lining of Abdul Qadir's coat.

Among all the chaos and panic stricken travelers Abdul Qadir's unfrazzled demeanor and admitting the valuables he was hiding was perplexing to the robber.

The robber was now curious to know more about this boy who was not afraid and insisted on speaking the truth.

The robber asked, "What is your name and where do you come from?"

He got a reply, "My name is Abdul Qadir and I come from the province of Jilan in Persia."

"Where are you going?"  
"I am going to Baghdad."

"What do you plan to do in Baghdad?"

"I want to study with the greatest scholars to gain knowledge."

"Why didn't you hide the truth and keep your gold coins safe from us?"

Abdul Qadir related the advice his mother gave him and the directive of the Prophet and the Quran to always speak the truth.

On hearing this the robber was overcome with remorse and exclaimed to his companions, "This young boy is fearless and has an unshakable faith in God. He has the courage to stand up against people like us. Indeed his mother has taught him wisely and he is a true example of being a Muslim."

Holding his head in shame, tears started to roll down his face. He embraced Abdul Qadir and asked for his forgiveness.

Abdul Qadir responded, "You only need to pray to God and ask for forgiveness and guidance. God willing you will amend your ways."

On hearing this the leader of the robbers told his henchmen to return everything that was taken from the travelers. Then he cried out, "O God this young boy has shown us the straight path. Please forgive us and guide us to the right way."

This is how a simple moral value of truthfulness thought by a mother to a young boy affected a band of robbers to change their lives. Abdul Qadir Jilani went on to become a great scholar and teacher of Islamic jurisprudence.



*In your actions, don't procrastinate. In your conversations, don't confuse. In your thoughts, don't wander. In your soul, don't be passive or aggressive. In your life, don't be all about business.*

**MARCUS AURELIUS**

*In life it is more necessary to lose than to gain. A seed will only germinate if it dies.*

**BORIS PASTERNAK**

*The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.*

**NELSON HENDERSON**

*Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.*

**MARIE CURIE**