

## Module for Inter-communal Peace-building In Iraq

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### Introduction:

The recent political history of a number of Muslim societies has shown increase in interfaith and intrafaith conflict. The highly desirable notion of religious pluralism and the kind of civil society founded upon coexistence and tolerance have almost disappeared in large sectors of Muslim communities. Mutual hatred generated by intolerant theology and legal-ethical evaluation of the cultural, religious, or ethnic “other” among religious expounders of Islamic juridical tradition has led to endless violence in the name of religion. Like wild fire, this hatred has spread from country to country in the Muslim world where destruction of human life and property are rampant and without any consideration of sparing innocent bystanders, including women and children. The most unfortunate aspect of this deadly conflict is the almost total silence of the religious leaders who are morally and religiously required to speak up when sanctity of life for any reason is under threat. Day after day, the toll on human lives and resources has been so heavy that it is possible to assert with much evidence that Muslim political authorities have done nothing to control this carnage. Is there nothing in Islamic sources that can provide the critical guidance to build a new civil association? I mean civil association founded upon human dignity without any additional qualifiers that lead to all sorts of discrimination against other

humans simply because they believe differently, because they belong to different ethnic group, or because they are unequal in gender or race.

This module aims at providing some guidelines in training youth leaders in Iraq to become important resources for conflict resolution and peace building, in the context of the turbulent political and social history of the country in the last four decades. The fall of the dictator and the experimentation with democracy has brought to the fore age old wounds inflicted by those who held and abused absolute power. To understand these moments of pain that have sparked endless violence in Iraq since the American invasion in 2003 is the key to provide meaningful tools of healing and peace building in Iraq. The Iraqi youth today is vulnerable to manipulation through recruitment by various warring factions in the country. The inclination to overdo revenge-taking of life and property makes it urgent to identify youth leaders, train them, and prepare them to become the “soldiers of peace” and the “ambassadors of reconciliation” in Iraqi institutions of secondary and higher education.

This module advances a particular understanding of the deadly conflicts and the causes that generate them. Our fieldwork and conversations with various groups in Iraq suggests to us that more than religion it is the socio-economic imbalances that function as potential sources for conflict in Iraq. Religion or, to be exact, religious culture, functions as the legitimizer of the violence that claims to redress the wrongs suffered by the downtrodden. This situation is aggravated in societies where the government fails to protect its citizens and their cultural-religious institutions. In the last decade or so, the modern state of Iraq has suffered

from mismanagement, economic corruption, and endless violence. More than often, one hears about religious groups involved in recruitment of the unemployed and economically deprived youth who can be easily tapped to deploy destruction and massacre of the innocent people.

### **Accessing and Evaluating Available Resources**

This module is founded upon a presumption that human societies, despite of the history of ongoing intercommunal and intra-communal conflicts, have searched for and have identified both religious and cultural resources to advance mutual respect and coexistence. One can produce much evidence in the local histories before the onslaught of colonial and post-colonial periods that reveal the pluralistic and accommodating notions that have prevailed at different times to bring about peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Furthermore, this module is built upon the confidence that in order for any lasting peace among peoples of one region we need to give primacy to the native modes and ways of overcoming hatred and hostilities in a war-torn society. The native paradigm of conflict resolution has a double advantage: it is more familiar to those searching for native resources, and it is easier to apply them with an appeal to minimum reason that could demonstrate the advantage of adhering to such a paradigm for its long-term benefit for economic and political well-being of all citizens. In search for these resources, the present module has identified the following resources in Islamic tradition and culture that could be garnered to teach principles of conflict resolution and tolerance in Iraq.

**Islamic Moral Vision:**

We begin with one religion here, namely, Islam to underscore the importance of identifying a target group that engages in hostilities and violence that has plagued Iraq. Understanding a moral vision is critical because we expect to discover the inclusive language that emphasizes human dignity and human moral agency as a universal trait of all human beings. Whereas religious language is particular and geared towards serving the interests of the members of the faith community, moral vision guarantees to go beyond the exclusionary theology to encompass a broader community of all humans. This is the fundamental requirement in teaching empathy towards other humans who do not belong to one's faith group. The critical element in teaching tolerance toward the "other" is to assert unconditionally the humanity of one's adversary. In other words, it is important to acknowledge the inherent human dignity as the sole principle of equality of all citizens. In order to nurture this essential prerequisite in dialogical discourse among hostile groups we need to recognize the inherency principle. In field studies conducted among a single linguistic or cultural group, single language or even culture has proved insufficient safeguard on encouraging dialogical engagement between rival traditions and political societies.

What are the defining characteristics of Islamic moral vision? Before we do that it is necessary to outline modern secular moral vision so that we can begin to tap into the native resources to construct a modern-native paradigm. The most fundamental feature of modern ideology is the separation of spiritual and temporal authority and emergence of the state as an autonomous secular entity. Modernity

has insisted upon this separation as the sole guarantor of peaceful coexistence of diverse citizenry. The public square must remain free of religious doctrines and rivalries. The other striking feature of the modernity is the enormous confidence in human ability to undertake the charge of their morality. Human beings are the rational masters and unlimited sovereigns of their own destiny. In addition, modernism has emphasized and required religiosity and matters related to maintenance of faith within the private domain of individual and communal lives. Individuals must be guaranteed freedom to practice their religion within the private boundaries of their homes and religious-cultural institutions. In other words, modernism has advocated religiously non-interventionist constitutional governance.

Compared to this modern secular ideology, Islamic faith maintains the overall unity of the spiritual, philosophical and cultural soul of Islamic political society. It envisions the comprehensive human need to be responsive to one's spiritual as well as moral well-being. And, although it provides both the spiritual as well as temporal guidance to its adherents, in actual practice it divides the jurisdictions between spiritual and temporal meticulously to restrict human interventions in strictly spiritual matters that are envisioned between human beings and God. The scope of religious law of the Shari'a promotes separate jurisdictions for human-God relations (*ibadat*) and inter-human relations (*mu'amalat*). Whereas, human-divine relations are founded upon private spiritual and moral development in which no human beings or institutions have the authority to intervene; in the case of inter-human relations human beings and their cultural and

social-political institutions human agencies have the jurisdiction to further the legitimate goals of political society.

Another feature of Islamic moral vision is its emphasis on the partnership between reason and revelation for building a just society. This relationship is founded upon a belief in the co-relationship (*mulazama*) between the conclusions of reason and revelation in deriving the ideal laws to direct human endeavors to fulfill their responsibility as members of a given society. Civil association is founded upon human need to cooperate with one another and to advance their total welfare as equal members of the society. It is remarkable that even when the word “citizen” (*muwatin*) is nonexistent in the Muslim juridical heritage, historically the principles of inherency of human dignity and moral agency in the Qur’an, have been extrapolated to advance interfaith relations in the Shari’ah.

It is important to clarify that in this module our approach to Islamic moral vision is to understand their relevant meaning for the Iraqi society. We are not advocating its universal application in other non-Muslim societies. We are simply expounding those features that might prove to be useful and relevant for building a peaceful society in Iraq. Hence, we are aware that it is critical to determine the proper role and influence of religion in governance, policy-making, and politics. The underlying reasons for conflicts in contemporary Iraq can be traced back to problems in governance, discrimination in policies of the state, and unfair treatment of the minorities as part of the overall politics.

In the Middle East as a whole religion has emerged as a major force seeking to shape contemporary geopolitics. It has also become a major source of conflict

and discrimination. It is now evoked by the violent extremist like the ISIS who do not hesitate to kill in the name of religion. The latter development poses a challenge to all peoples of faith in Iraq. Peoples of faith are in the best position to understand and build bridges of peaceful coexistence in the Muslim societies. This module maintains that shared spiritual values can point the way forward in the future.

### **Accounting for the Past Intercommunal Conduct: Victimization of the “Other”**

Meaningful contribution to the process of reconciliation could begin by the political and religious leaders publicly acknowledging the sins of the past and apologizing to the wronged people – the basic principle in restorative justice. Following are some distinguishing features of that Abrahamic vision:

#### **1. Abrahamic transcendent vision constitutes to heal, to repair, and to transform the world.**

Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have invested in their communities a deep sense of justice and peace. To respond to faith in God has required moral commitment to uphold justice at all levels of human interaction. The most decisive element in the prophetic teachings has remained the guidance to found a political society that reflects principles of divine justice. At no point in their religious inclination have the founders of these traditions endorsed discrimination against peoples of other faiths. If the essential Abrahamic teaching of human being created in God’s image is recognized as the core value of intercommunal relations, then it is impossible for any human person to deny fellow human her dignity as a human person. Core values derived from Abrahamic religions for faith-based

reconciliation promises to be spiritual, social, political, and economic revolution in the affairs of nations. As the Truth and Reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa has demonstrated religion has the potential to be both a source of conflict and an asset for peacemaking; reconciliation is not merely a response to a crisis or conflict; it is intended to be a permanent and preventive moral vision.

## **2. Unity in the midst of diversity; pluralistic vision of community**

One of the major sources of reconciliation and building peaceful coexistence is that world religions and cultures have acknowledged the diversity of human societies, in terms of the Qur'anic phrase that uses "tribes" and "peoples". The differences are to serve as a source of human identity. The Qur'an celebrates differences in human languages and cultures. It also endorses the divinely ordained religious and cultural pluralism. There are numerous passages in the sacred texts of world religions that are committed to pluralistic religious variations. It is important to emphasize that peoples of different faiths and ethnicity have lived together in all parts of the world. One can assert that it is the logical necessity that required people of different cultures and religions to respect one another and work together to build good and enduring human relations. Indeed, the idea of common moral terrain and ethical necessity bound people together to advance peaceful and harmonious coexistence. If this was true throughout history, then today, in ever-growing closeness of the people through expanding boundaries of internet and travel, learning to live together as human beings is preordained. Human beings need to come out of their self-centeredness to embrace fellow humans and citizens to create a truly global society. People need one another; relationships are naturally and intentionally



advanced to further public good of all humans. Civic virtues develop in the context of social interaction. The religious goal of Abrahamic traditions is social formation founded upon equality and divinely endowed dignity (*karama*).

**3. Compassionate inclusion: to overcome hostility by the practice of unconditional love toward others, including one's enemies**

Modern secular culture emphasizes our membership in a nation's citizenry that requires all citizens to abide by decent civility and respect for one another, even when there might be sharp differences in one's personal life style and choices. As long as, there is a clear empathetic understanding between citizens whose lives are regulated by a fair legal system and social formation, there will be peaceful coexistence. Under modern nation state cultural and religious differences need to be tolerated since, it is not possible to coexist if the value of toleration and mutual respect are lacking. Each individual is unique and enjoys freedom of religion and conscience.

Religions in general teach love and compassion as founding values for social formation. In Iraq or in any other country in the Middle East, where the dominant faith of the people is Islam or other Abrahamic traditions, it is a fact that to expect or deserve divine compassion people need to be compassionate to one another. The teachings of the founders of these religions are absolutely clear that if humans fail to show mercy and compassion towards one another, they will suffer the divine reprimand. In order to overcome hostilities one needs to practice love and forgiveness towards those who have wronged them in any way. The Qur'an explicitly forbids offensive hostilities. In fact, in the context of meaningless violence

in the tribal culture of Arabia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Qur'an advanced moral and legal restrictions on endless violence. More importantly, Islam instituted restorative justice to underscore the need for peaceful coexistence.

#### **4. Forgiveness and repentance as individuals and communities to create a better future together**

One of the critical issues that comes up very often in conflict resolution is the role forgiveness plays in peacemaking. Whenever, individuals or groups commit acts of aggression against one another, relationships are fractured. Religions speak about penance and remorse as sources for reestablishing our fractured relationship with God when we commit sins and with fellow humans when we cause harm and inflict detriment on others. Repentance, as Abrahamic traditions teach, restores our relationship with God and restitution mends our relationship with each other. More importantly, Abrahamic traditions stress the need on human beings to forgive each other, if they expect God to forgive them for their shortcomings.

If the goal of peacemaking is to restore relationships that would usher peace, then forgiveness is the process that can regenerate relationships between victimizers and victims. Responding in a constructive manner to victimhood is inevitable in restorative justice. There are several ways proposed by the political psychologists to convene meetings between the victims and those who engaged in the wrongdoing. Such meetings have been arranged in many war-torn regions of the world with astounding results in peacebuilding.

## **5. Social justice by seeking the common good through transformation of the soul of the community**

In the worldwide study of political and social conflicts it has been noted that it is the unjust treatment of others that is at the heart of growing and perpetual violence and maltreatment of others. Whereas religious sources are emphatic about their confidence in the ordinary people's sense of fairness and public good, in a number of societies around the world socio-economic imbalances have generated a sense of unfair deprivation that is perpetrated by those in politically and financially powerful positions. The moral responsibility to alleviate poverty and help the downtrodden has been neglected. The desperate situation has led to conflicts and violence. The ethical sensibilities nurtured by the Abrahamic sense of procuring justice function as the most important value in combatting the selfishness and greed of some to give fresh hope to social justice.

Resolution of conflicts has demanded redressing injustices and working towards sharing of the resources through acts of charity and founding of the institutions that become the paragon of human connectedness in times of economic and social hardships. In the Qur'an the command for establishing a sincere relationship with God through prayers (*salat*) is intimately connected with the requirement of sharing the wealth (*zakat*) through charitable donations for the needy and downtrodden in society. In fact, faith is incomplete without a commitment to care for the downtrodden.

**6. Healing by seeking to heal the wounds of history through acknowledgement of suffering and injustice.**

There has been much debate about the benefit of keep the history of suffering alive in the development of needed sensitivity towards those who have suffered the wrongs inflicted by the political and social systems. The usual advise given to the victims of a deadly conflict is to “forget, forgive, and move on!” However, from the perspective of the victims, what is critically needed is the acknowledgement of the wrongs committed by the powerful so that the healing process can begin.

Acknowledgement of the past injustices and offering apologies has done miracles in building a constructive national culture, for instance, in South Africa and Nigeria. Had there been no recognition of the systematic discrimination and atrocities committed in the bloody conflicts of apartheid and religious differences in Biafra, the healing that has taken place now after many years of field work would have been impossible.

It is quite instructive and realistic that intrafaith conflicts that lasted a number of years between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and the present day Sunni and Shia sectarianism in Pakistan and Iraq could last forever if there was no acknowledgement of the oppressive systems that were in place until recently in those regions. Restorative justice operates on the assumption that the oppressors have acknowledged their guilt and are now in the process of restoring or normalizing intercommunal relations.

**7. Recognition of the dignity of every human being in a society would establish the common good.**

As stated earlier the key to interpersonal and intercommunal justice and equal rights is the recognition of God-given dignity. World religions have emphasized this basic inherent principle for affording equal treatment of all human beings.

Understanding and applying the principle of common good (*maslaha*) is dependent upon the sense of justice and equity. In addition, promotion of common good seeks to do away with racial, creedal and gender discrimination because it also seeks to remove all the causes of corruption (*mafsada*) in the society.

In the case of Iraq, conflict resolution is contingent guaranteeing human rights of all citizens, regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliation. This can be achieved only when religious values like human moral agency and human dignity are adhered to by all citizens. With the development of national collective identity through Iraqi citizenship and the constitutional guarantees to defend this identity and accruing rights through democratic governance, there is much hope in Iraq to build an ideal society founded upon core values that comprise a moral vision of faith-based reconciliation.

### **Concluding Observations of this Native Paradigm of Conflict Resolution**

Establishing a civil society in Iraq depends upon the following values identified as fundamentally derived from the living experience of the citizens of Iraq in history. Iraq has been historically an ethnically and religiously pluralistic society. The contemporary politics demands that Iraq should search for cultural-religious resources to construct its native paradigm of conflict resolution. Modernization has identified other ideological resources that can be tapped for enriching the native resources to advance most critical values for building a viable modern society that

regards common civil decency (*maslaha*) as a prerequisite for a peace-loving and harmonious society. The core values, largely derived from Abrahamic heritage of the region include: pluralism, inclusion, peacemaking, social justice, forgiveness, healing wounds, and human dignity.

What are the potential challenges to this paradigm from within the Iraqi society? The most challenging factor that can undo an ideal model is overemphasis on ethnocentric or exclusionary politics of identity.

### **Politics of Identity:**

In a faith and culture based native paradigm of reconciliation we need to challenge the notion of “clash of civilizations.” This notion implies that collective identity is a primary factor in shaping interests, strategic alliances, and antagonisms in national and international politics. Shaping by parents, educational, religious, and social institutions play a significant role in the formation of our collective identity. Our collective ethnic identity or our religious identity or our political ideology might become exploding element for conflict with “the other.” In terms of faith-based reconciliation, it means that true and full reconciliation cannot take place without the will to embrace “the other.” Collective identity plays a role in how I define “the other.”

The “clash of civilizations” means that in many cases, religion serves as the anchor point in collective identity. Perhaps the most neglected and unappreciated aspect of diplomacy and policy making is the spiritual and religious dimension. Such activities as prayer, trust in God, sacred texts, forgiveness, or repentance rarely, if ever, find their way into traditional diplomatic discourse or Western

secular conflict resolution models. Transformation is often seen as simply self-actualization of the human potential or as individuals acting in their own interest or even more cynically as impossible. Let us keep in mind, then, that:

- (1) The “clash of civilizations” means that ethnicity, religion, and culture will serve as catalysts in provoking intractable identity-based conflict. This has happened in many parts of the world, including the First World where Islamophobia or racism has done irreparable damage to human relations.
- (2) The “clash of civilizations” means that the traditional models of conflict resolution are inadequate to address most intractable identity-based conflicts. The faith and culture based native paradigm of reconciliation carries with it the objective to heal, to repair, and to transform the world. God’s basic purpose for creation was to heal, to restore, and to transform. At the heart of Abrahamic tradition is the sense of divine purpose. *Salam* means “wholeness, harmony, and integrity.” *Salam* means reconciliation with God, self, and others. Faith-based reconciliation is restored relationships without which coexistence is reduced to minimal sensitivity, sincerity, and sacrifice that are needed to manage and sustain human relationships.