

Understanding an Islamic framework for peacebuilding



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Introduction

“Faith is a restraint against all violence, let no Mu’min [believer] commit violence”¹

Academics and practitioners now recognise that critically reflecting on Western conflict intervention models and incorporating local indigenous conflict resolution methods into these models is essential for resolving conflicts and building sustainable peace throughout the world (Abu-Nimer 2003). Islam as a religion and a tradition is replete with teachings and practices of nonviolence and peacebuilding, for example: the nonviolent response to the persecution faced in the first thirteen years of Islam by the early Muslims in Makkah; or by the letters sent by the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him – PBUH)² to the great powers of that time which scholars state sought peace and security combined with appeals for voluntary compliance (Crow 2013). Generally Muslims agree that Islam is a religion of peace and the application of Islamic precepts will bring justice, harmony and order, and consequently, peace to the world. “Since its formative years, Muslim communities have been empowered by various Islamic values and principles of peace which has allowed Muslim men and women to resolve their conflicts peacefully and to establish just social, political and economic systems” (Kadayifci-Orellana 2007: 85). They have adapted and applied these values and principles to unique day-to-day needs and requirements in their social, political and cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War in late 1980s a large number of studies (for example Kepel 1994; Kramer 1993) have ignored the Islamic tradition of peace and non-violence and focused mainly on Islamic fundamentalism and the emergence of radical Islamic movements. Scholars such as Samuel Huntington heralded a ‘clash of civilizations’ and associating Islam with terrorism, argued that Islam is an inherently backward and violent religion,

¹ Sahih Collection of Abu Dawud. See ‘A Collection of Hadith on Non-Violence, Peace and Mercy’, at <http://sufism.org/foundations/hadith>. Hadith (pl. *aHadith*) are recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) which are analysed and categorised on the basis of established ‘authenticity’.

² Prophets of God are honoured by Muslims with this saying when their name is mentioned.

stereotyping Muslims as ‘backward, barbaric, and violent’ (Huntington 1996). Ignoring inherent traditions of peace and nonviolence these studies presented Islam as an existential threat to the ‘civilized world.’

In contrast others (see Hashmi 1996; Khadduri 1983) have pointed out that Islam is, in fact, a religion of peace and tolerance, which permits the use of violence only under certain well-defined conditions and have focused instead on the specific conditions and circumstances under which Islam allowed the use of war to settle conflicts. Abu-Nimer contends that, although these scholars have attempted to present a more balanced perspective of Islamic traditions, they have “approached this topic from a framework of security, power politics, strategic studies or classical Islamic studies, not peace and conflict resolution” (Abu-Nimer 2003: 26) and therefore failed to pay sufficient attention to the Islamic tradition of nonviolence.

This paper is written in response to a commission by Islamic Relief to understand broad ethics and teachings on avoiding violent conflict and bloodshed at a community level from an Islamic perspective and how this can be used to identify ways to promote systems of conflict resolution with the communities it works with. As such the paper originates out of a theoretical construct that sets a foundation for understanding how conflict transformation from an Islamic perspective can be developed and used by Islamic Relief in its work. This paper will thus focus on the Islamic traditions of peace and conflict resolution and argue that nonviolent and the peaceful resolution of conflicts has been an integral aspect of Islamic tradition since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This paper will also discuss various community conflict resolution mechanisms that have been developed and effectively applied to resolve conflicts in the Muslim world such as *wasata* (mediation), *sulha* (reconciliation) and *hewar* (dialogue). This is not an exhaustive list and rather than providing a checklist of tools the paper aims to identify mechanisms to facilitate effective conflict analysis and intervention designs that are rooted in Islamic beliefs. In other words, it seeks to identify the principles which can be used to justify Islamic teachings against violence and a process of resolving conflict.

In keeping with the requirements for the paper it is important to note that this is, in effect, a theoretical exercise designed to provide a framework for practical action. Hence the methodology used has been to revisit existing pieces of work on the subject as well as to consult with scholars on the subject in order to contextualise this according to the stated needs by Islamic Relief. Without a proper understanding of the ground realities of Islamic Relief's work, it would be unfair to identify specific policy recommendations for the organisation, but in effect it is about identifying the conceptual framework with which to determine specific policy.

There are, of course, a few caveats that need to be addressed. Firstly, conflict transformation and peacebuilding mechanisms are not owned by any one culture and religious tradition; there is no such thing as Islamic peacebuilding tools. There are generic peacebuilding mechanisms, tools and theories that have been developed (mainly from the Western perspective), tried and tested. These should be understood and then contextualised for the situation without ignoring or imposing cultural biases. This means that practitioners should be able to utilise religious and social patterns already present in society and integrate that information with appropriate concepts and experiences from the West. This paper also recognises that "Islamic culture is not an 'object' that can be reified into one objective or dimension" (Abu-Nimer 2003, 5) nor is it distributed uniformly among all Muslims. Culture is not a static entity that can be identified as a constant but is always in the making, constantly evolving and changing with the experiences and context of society. Furthermore, there is more than one Islamic culture depending on geography and demography as well as various subcultures, within each community. This paper thus recognises that culture is always psychologically and socially distributed in a group (Avruch 1998). Therefore conflict resolution practices in different Islamic countries such as Egypt, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and Palestine, amongst others, have differences due to their unique contexts. Such an understanding of culture allows us to recognise that each Muslim community will have many internal paradoxes, subcultures, and identities.



In most Muslim communities, Islam plays an important role in social and political life and religion is one of the key components of people's identity both as a cultural frame-work and as a religious creed

This perspective also recognises that each Muslim responds to the realities and challenges of life in their own unique way influenced by the many identities and subcultures of which they form a part. These contextual factors and cultural differences have also led to different understandings of Islamic teachings and practices. In fact, as long as they do not contradict Islamic teachings, local customs (*'urf*) are often considered a source of Islamic law.³

Still, in most Muslim communities, Islam plays an important role in social and political life and religion is one of the key components of people's identity both as a cultural frame-work and as a religious creed. In these societies Islamic discourse becomes an important source of legitimacy upon which notions of truth, justice and peace are built. Here, Islamic tradition derives its legitimacy by virtue of the sanctity of its roughly 1400-year-old rules and customs derived from its holy texts, such as the Qur'an and the *Sunna* (Prophetic teachings) which contain sacred truths that form the basis for Islamic ethics and inform the actions of the Muslims.

This paper thus recognises that resolving conflicts in different Muslim contexts requires an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the Islamic tradition that unites Muslims and the unique geographical, cultural, historical and political contexts of each Muslim community that influences the specific tools employed for resolving conflict in a given situation. This paper will offer a framework of values, principles and tools to understand peacebuilding and conflict resolution practices in the Muslim world within this dynamic relationship. Lastly, while presenting conceptions of peacebuilding, conflict transformation and nonviolence from an Islamic perspective, the paper is cognisant of the fact that currently there is a 'politicised' discourse on 'Islam, Peace and Nonviolence' that has been developed largely by Muslim groups in the West to differentiate themselves from the manifestation of violence and violent rhetoric that has been perpetrated by different Muslim groups (especially since 9/11), such as the fatwa issued by Sheikh Tahir-ul-Qadri (2010) against *jihad*.

³ For more details, see Zahid & Shapiee (2010).

Whilst acknowledging this discourse, this paper is not about differentiating between ideologies or contributing to this particular political discourse, rather it is about understanding and recognising the crucial component of conflict resolution and peacebuilding within Islamic practices and traditions.



1. Islamic conceptual framework of peace

Whilst many Muslims recognise that life in the world often involves conflict and that it is inevitable, they also understand that peace is the highest goal (Zakzouk, 1996). This itself is seen from examples taken from the life of the Prophet (PBUH) where he was faced with situations of conflict as well as seeking peace. For example, Wahiduddin Khan (1998) notes that there were only three real instances when the Prophet entered into battle (Badr, Uhud and Hunayn) when it became inevitable to engage in physical contact, but the battles lasted for half a day from noon to sunset. Consequently when presented with the chance for peace and to establish the conditions for justice, the Prophet chose to sign the peace treaty known as ‘Sulh al-Hudaybiya’ despite unfavourable terms to the Muslim community.

Derived from the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*, an Islamic conception of peace begins with its attribution as a Divine name since the Arabic word for peace – Salam – is one of the ninety-nine names of God (Q59:23).¹ There are many references to peace (salam, silm, sulh, etc.) in the Qur’an that suggest that peace, together with justice (*adl*) is a central message of Islam (Q3:83; 4:58; 5:8; 10:25; 16:90; 41:11; 42:15; 57:25). These references make it clear that peace in Islam is not limited to a negative understanding of peace that is often defined in a passive sense as the absence of war, oppression or tyranny but it actually refers to a process in which human beings strive to establish foundations for interacting with God’s creation – human and non-human alike – in harmony and to institute just social, economic and political structures where they can fulfil their potential (Kadayifci-Orellana 2007). Such an understanding of peace requires a condition of both internal and external order that encompasses both individual and social spheres as “the individual must be endowed with the necessary qualities to make peace an enduring reality, not only in the public sphere but also in the private domain” (Kalin, 2012: 8). This approach seeks to attain peace through nonviolent means rather than violence and shares many similarities with the modern

understanding of ‘nonviolence’ as was articulated in the works of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Gene Sharp, among others.

Nonviolence, defined as “a set of attitudes, actions, or behaviours intended to persuade the other side to change its opinions, perceptions and actions” (Abu-Nimer 2003: 14), is now recognised as crucial for sustainable peacebuilding efforts. Nonviolence implies “an active commitment to social change that would ultimately result in a fair distribution of world resources, a more creative and democratic cooperation between peoples, and a common pursuit of those social, scientific, medical, and political achievements that serve to enhance the human enterprise and prevent warfare” (Smith-Christopher 1998: 10). According to proponents of nonviolence in Islam, non-violence is the preferred method in Islam to address all forms of violence, as the Qur’an commands.

The Qur’anic conception of peace has been best put into practice by Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) attitude towards peace and his diplomacy, which can be epitomised as the “reconciliation of hearts” (Troger 1990: 17). Troger states that “coming to terms with adversaries and enemies and the contractual guaranteeing of agreements were cornerstones of [the Prophet’s] policy” (*Ibid.*), and that he preferred peaceful regulation of conflicts and peaceful resolution of enmity. Tyranny, which is a system that perpetuates injustice, is viewed as one of the greatest evils that must be removed. Based on the Qur’anic verse “We did raise among every people a Messenger (with a teaching): worship God and shun the evil one” (Q16:36), scholars such as Jawdat Sa’id of Syria argue that “the Prophets come with the message to avoid wicked tyranny and they disclosed that the tyrant could not continue to exist without our obedience to him.” (Sa’id 1997: 5)

¹ Qur’anic references throughout this paper are from the English translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and are referenced as here (Q59:23).

1.1 Islamic principles and values of peace and conflict resolution

Considering the above basic conceptualisation of peace and nonviolence in Islam, there are various components (values, principles, and practices) that can lead to peace in human life. Adopting, implementing, and living by these values and principles is a necessary part of fulfilling the Islamic faith. All of these values and principles rooted in the Qur'an and put into practice by the Prophet (PBUH) inform the Islamic understanding of peace and nonviolence. This section will elaborate on these particular Islamic values and principles of peace and conflict resolution.

1.1.1 Pluralism, diversity, and human solidarity through the principle of *tawhid* (the oneness of God)

Discrimination based on religious, ethnic, racial or gender differences is often one of the main factors that contribute to conflicts. The conflict resolution field acknowledges that, identity – religious, ethnic, or racial – is a basic human need and failure to recognise these identities or discrimination with respect to them, often leads to frustration and conflict. The field also recognises that pluralism – the principle that recognises the worth and value of different beliefs and identities – is essential for resolving conflicts and establishing peace. This view is supported by Abu-Nimer et al. who argue that “pluralism, defined as seeking to move beyond exclusivist perspective of religion by affirming the inherent value worth of all religions” (Abu-Nimer, Khoury, and Welty 2007: 14), and respect for diversity (such as racial, ethnic, tribal, national, etc.) are cornerstones of peacebuilding and nonviolence. Pluralism thus requires collaborative action and recognises that solidarity among communities is more productive than competitive strategies in addressing root sources of conflict and responding to discrimination.

The Islamic tradition in general and the Qur'anic narrative in particular supports this view by explicitly stating that

existence of diversity (e.g. different religions and nations) is God's design that has to be celebrated. For instance the Qur'an states:

“To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what God hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute” (Q5:48)

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into Nations and tribes, that Ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.” (Q49:13)

Thus Islamic texts clearly call for solidarity and collaborative action as well. Social solidarity in Islam is reflected in the idea of brotherhood, particularly in the concept of the *Ummah* (nation / community) as the *hadith* highlights: “The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion & sympathy are just like one body, when one of the limbs is afflicted, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness & fever.”² However, solidarity and collaborative action are not limited to interactions with fellow Muslims only. Islam stresses that the source of creation is one, and thus the whole of humanity is a single family descending from a single mother and father (i.e. Adam and Eve). Therefore all human beings are brothers and sisters in humanity.

The Islamic ideal of diversity, pluralism, and brotherhood is rooted in the Qur'anic principle of *Tawhid* and *Wihdat al Wujud*, (principle of unity of God and all being). Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2003: 31) notes that the term “*Tawhid* has two meanings ‘the state of unity or oneness’ and ‘the act of making one or integration’”. While the state of unity,

² Narrated by Al-Bukhari, Muslim & Ahmad.

oneness and uniqueness belongs to God only, God's creation participates in multiplicity. Therefore to exist in the world is to live in the domain of diversity (*Ibid.*). At the level of diversity and multiplicity, the second meaning of *Tawhid* signifies integration, connectedness, and unity. The interdependency and interconnectedness of humans is thus a central aspect of this Islamic value and principle.

Throughout Islamic history the notion of *Tawhid* encouraged Muslims to integrate both the individual and the society without destroying cultural and ethnic differences. In fact, *Tawhid* reminds Muslims of the connectedness of all beings, particularly all human communities, and calls on Muslims to work towards establishing peace and harmony among them. Thus, the concept of *Tawhid* mediates between the direct personal relations with the Absolute (which is Absolute Peace) and the maintenance of harmony with all of God's creation, including other fellow human beings and nature that surrounds us.³ “As the ultimate source of peace, God transcends all opposites and tensions, is the permanent state of repose and tranquillity, and calls his servants to the abode of peace (*dar al-salam*)” (Kalin 2010: 9). Therefore, the Unity, the unity of being, God's one reality, is the source of harmony, order and peace and from an Islamic point of view, recognising this Unity of all Being and obedience to God's wishes will lead Muslims to work towards creating harmony and peace on earth. *Tawhid*, then, becomes the basis of Islamic universalism, tolerance and inclusivity as everything emanates from God, and everything is part of His creation irrespective of species, race, nationality, creed or gender (Abu-Nimer and Kadayifci-Orellana 2005).

It is important to remember that the Islamic notion of *Tawhid* is not just limited to relations within and between human beings only, but among all God's creation including animals and plants as “human disobedience results in even consequences for the whole of creation.” (Chittick 1990: 152) As conflict and war between mankind results in the corruption and the ruin of the earth and all that inhabits it, therefore, Islam calls upon Muslims to collaborate and to actively pursue unity and harmony because, according to

Islamic theology, when human beings were created, God made them vicegerents or God's representatives on earth (Q2:30 and 33:72). Thus each individual as a representative of God on earth (*khalifat Allah fi l-Ard* Q2:30) is responsible for the order thereof⁴ and “to contribute towards bringing all creatures under the sway of equilibrium and harmony and to live in peace with creation” (Chittick 1990: 156).

1.1.2 Universality, dignity and sacredness of humanity through the principle of *fitrah* (the original nature of human beings)

From a nonviolence and peacebuilding perspective, each human being has dignity and human life is valuable and must be protected. Islamic traditions affirm the sacredness of human life and recognises the worth and dignity of each human being. For instance the Qur'an states, “*And if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people*” (Q5:32). Sacredness and dignity of human life thus is rooted in the Qur'anic Principles of *Fitrah* (the original constitution of human beings). According to some Islamic traditions, every human being is created in accordance with the form and image of God (al Hakim 1998: 5) and human spirit is of divine origin. This perspective holds that every human being is created “innocent, pure, true and free, inclined to right and virtue and endued with true understanding about... his [or her] true nature...” (Sharify-Funk 2001: 279). This belief is also based on the Qur'anic verse “*verily, we have honoured every human being*” (Q17:70). Thus the idea of *Fitrah* rejects notions of innate sinfulness, and recognises all humans are related and derive from the same pure origin as the Qur'an says:

“O mankind! Revere your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women – fear Allah, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you.” (Q4:1)

³ See Nasr (2003).

⁴ See Kadayifci-Orellana (forthcoming: a), p. 102.

“And He it is Who has brought you into being from a single soul, then there is (for you) a resting place and a depository; indeed We have made plain the communications for a people who understand” (Q6:98)

This principle recognises the goodness that is inherent in each and every human being at birth, regardless of different religious, ethnic, racial, or gender backgrounds (Q17:70, 95:4, 2:30–34, 33:72). It is noted that “although Qur’an occasionally describes the fallen nature of man in gruesome terms, presenting him as weak, forgetful, treacherous, hasty, ignorant, ungrateful, hostile and egoistic (e.g., Q14:34; 17:11; 18:54; 22:66; 33:72; 43:15; 100:6), these qualities are eventually considered deviations from man’s essential nature (*Fitrah*)...” (Kalin 2009: 10–11). *Fitrah* does not judge the wrong or right of human faith but rather evaluates the moral righteousness of the actions and thus has the capacity to relate and integrate individual responsibility with spiritual and moral awareness (Abu-Nimer 2003).

The *Fitrah*, moreover, recognises that each individual, irrespective of his or her gender, is furnished with reason and has the potential to be good and to choose to work for the establishment of harmony. Thus reason must be honoured since reason is the mechanism by which moral choices of right and wrong are made. According to the Qur’anic tradition, this faculty enables human beings to accept the ‘trust’ of freedom of will, which no other creature is willing to accept (Q33:72). Reason is also one of the ways through which humans understand the divine message and can implement it⁵ (Senturk 2004: 14) and hence the rational mind rooted in *Fitrah* is one of the sources of guidance for human beings. The quality of *Fitrah* furnishes each individual with the prospect of being perfect (*insan kamil*) as they can all find what is right and what is wrong through their rational mind. Consequently it indicates that “individuals can choose to follow the path of God as His steward on earth and strive to bring justice,

⁵ The rational mind (*Aql*) is only one of the ways through which a believer understands truth and the message of Islam. Other ways include the *Qalb* (heart) (Q53:11) and the *Lubb* (heart of hearts, pure intellect, inner most core, through which a believer understands Truth) (Q3:190).



Islamic peacebuilding frameworks and methods aim to restore or rebuild a natural tendency among humans to be in sync with their Creator. It assumes that people can change through reason and compassion

harmony and peace, thus perfecting their humanity; or they can choose their egos, (*al-nafs*) and follow their own interests” (Kadayifci-Orellana 2007: 103). Whilst it is hard to singularly find examples of where this concept of *Fitrah* has been singled out as a ‘cause’ for preventing or de-escalating conflict, the story of ‘The Imam and the Pastor’ (Henderson 2009) speaks volumes to the concept of going back to the source to understand commonality and to discover common approaches that question the cost of violence.

As a central principle of peace and conflict resolution the *Fitrah* reminds Muslims that, irrespective of gender, religion, race, etc, all human beings are created in the image of God, therefore they are all sacred. It also reminds Muslims that, only God knows the heart of a human being, and therefore God is the only judge (*Hakeem*), and that at any point in his or her life time, each individual, no matter what they have done in their lifetime, has the potential to repent and turn to God. As such, it is a safeguard against killing, torturing and dehumanising the “other”. Thus Islamic peacebuilding frameworks and methods aim to restore or rebuild a natural tendency among humans to be in sync with their Creator. In addition it assumes that people can change through reason and compassion.

1.1.3 Social empowerment by doing good (*khayr* and *ihsan*) through the principle of *khilafah* (stewardship)

Peacebuilding requires the involvement and social empowerment of community members to take action to transform the conflict. “Social empowerment and involvement through *ihsan* and *khayr* are also important paths to justice and peace in the Islamic tradition” (Abu-Nimer 2003: 55). Kalin (2005) notes that in the context of Islamic theology and philosophy the questions of peace and violence are treated under the rubric of good and evil (*husn/khayr* and *sharr/qubh*). He adds that, “war, conflict, violence, injustice and discord are related to the problem of evil” (Kalin 2005: 339). From an Islamic point of view evil is something that can be discerned by the intellect and correct reasoning and with the help of the revelation (*Ibid.*).

It is the responsibility of human beings to do good and strive to ward off evil.

The Qur’an recognises the capacity of human beings to do good in the face of adversity and evil and to change their conditions as it stated in the Qur’an “surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition.” (Q13:11) This therefore empowers them to change their condition by doing good and shunning evil. This is also supported by the Qur’anic verse (Q9:71) that clearly urges Muslims to forbid evil and do good. The *hadith* “Whoever sees something evil should change it with his hand. If he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot do even that, then in his heart. That is the weakest degree of faith,”⁶ also emphasises the importance of social empowerment to do good and forbid evil.

Social empowerment and involvement to do good is closely tied to the Qur’anic principle of *Khilafah* (stewardship or vicegerency). According to Islamic theology, when human beings were created God made them His vicegerents or representatives on earth as the Qur’anic verse “God has promised to those among you who believe and do good that He will establish them as (His) vicegerents” (Q24:55), clearly shows. Thus each individual as a representative of God on earth (*khilafat Allah fi l-Ard*) (Q2:30; see also 33:72) is responsible for the order thereof⁷ and to contribute towards bringing all creatures under the sway of equilibrium and harmony and to live in peace with creation (Chittick 1990).

Islamic teachings regard peace work as a collective responsibility. As Abu-Nimer (2003: 71) states, “peacebuilding in Islam is based on a framework of deeply embedded religious beliefs regarding individuals’ responsibility for their actions and their active participation in larger social contexts”. Muslims are thus expected to further maintain good and honourable interpersonal relationships (*Ibid.*). The Qur’an “promotes social responsibility and positive bonds between people because of their common

⁶ On the authority of Abu Sa’id (R.A.).

⁷ See Kadayifci-Orellana (forthcoming: a), p. 102.

ethical responsibility towards one another” (Sachedina 2001: 76). Nasr (2004: 159-160) supports this view when he notes that in the Islamic tradition “human community is judged according to the degree to which it allows its members to live a good life based on moral principles”. Islamic teachings emphasise doing good rather than force or power, and good deeds are associated with ‘*sirat al mustaqim*’ (the straight path) and the virtues of the Prophet (Abu-Nimer 2003). Muslims are urged to improve their communal life, to support one another, and combat poverty. Therefore, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, and race, they are responsible for the order on earth as they are God’s representatives (Q2:30 and 33:72) and, as vicegerents of God, Muslims must struggle to make life on earth safe and peaceful, resisting violence in all its manifestations.

1.1.4 Pursuit of justice, equality and fairness through the principle of *adl* (justice)

Peacebuilding perspectives recognise that justice (*adl*) is central to establishing sustainable peace. As a form of structural violence, unjust social, political and economic systems often deprive communities of their basic needs and rights and lead to grievances and resentment. As such, they are often a major cause of conflict. Therefore, just social, political and economic systems and institutions are a prerequisite for resolving conflicts.

Justice is an integral aspect of the Islamic discourse of peace, since the Qur’an clearly states that the aim of religion is to bring justice: “We sent aforetime Our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the book and the balance (of right and wrong), that men may stand forth in justice.” (Q57:25). Thus the Qur’anic conception of peace cannot be attained unless a just order is first established. Kadayifci-Orellana (2007: 102) observes that, “justice is the overriding principle and it must transcend any consideration of religion, animosity, race, or creed”. From an Islamic point of view without justice there can be no peace, “for peace is predicated upon the availability of equal rights and opportunities for all to realize their goals

and potentials” (Kalin 2010: 8). Muslims are asked to resist and correct the conditions of injustice, which are seen as a source for conflict and disorder on earth (Q27:52). Justice is the essential component of peace according to the Qur’anic message, therefore it is the responsibility of all Muslims to work towards the establishment of justice for all, including social and economic justice (Q4:135; 57:25; 5:8; 2:178; 2:30; 16:90). This notion of justice extends to both men and women, Muslim and non-Muslim, and cannot be achieved without an actively, socially engaged community. This is the crux for development and humanitarian work to achieve social justice thereby mitigating the circumstances for conflict. Hence any development work has to be comprehensive and done inclusively and within the confines of conflict transformation and peacebuilding to achieve maximum effects.

The Qur’an constantly reminds Muslims about the value of justice, which is a Divine command, and not an option. The Qur’anic notion of justice is universal and valid for all human beings with the universality of justice being clearly expressed in the following Qur’anic verses:

“O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to Allah even as against yourselves, your parents or your kin, and whether it be (against) the rich and poor...” (Q4:135)

“...To fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just for it is next to Piety...” (Q5:8)

“God commands justice and good-doing... and He forbids indecency, dishonor, and insolence.” (Q16:90)

“O ye who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you.” (Q2:178)

The Qur’an calls Muslims to mobilise and act against injustice, even if a Muslim originates the injustice (Q4:135). The universality of justice for all, not only for Muslims, is critical for the resolution of conflicts and developing peaceful relations as it calls upon Muslims to be self-

reflexive, self-critical, humble and to accept responsibility for one’s actions.

1.1.5 Transformation of relationships and rehumanisation through the principles of *rahman* and *rahim* (compassion and mercy)

Conflict and violence often involves the creation of an enemy through the process of dehumanisation, where the opponent is stripped from his or her human qualities. Dehumanisation makes atrocities such as rape, murder, torture and mutilation, among others, possible during conflicts, as the ‘opponent’ is no longer viewed as a human being. Scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution agree that transforming this relationship from one of enmity to a peaceful co-existence requires a re-humanisation of the ‘other.’ The Qur’anic principles of *Rahman* (Compassion) and *Rahim* (Mercy) are two main tools that can facilitate this process.

Rahman and *Rahim* are invoked by every Muslim before they take any action when they recite: “*Bism Allah al-rahman al-rahim*” (“We begin in the name of Allah Who is Compassionate and Merciful”) as a reminder that actions must be dedicated to God, who is Himself merciful and compassionate. The centrality of compassion and mercy is evident in the Qur’an as almost all chapters start with this recitation and God states “My mercy extends to all things” (Q7:156). Moreover, according to a famous *Hadith Qudsi*, God states: “Without doubt My mercy precedes My wrath”, which is one of the crucial principles of Islamic thought.

Mercifulness and compassion are key qualities of the Prophets as well. The Qur’an refers to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as “*Mercy to the world*” (Q21:107), thus, as the Messenger of God, he represents universal mercy. Again, Moses (PBUH) was declared a prophet after he had shown compassion to the ewe that ran off to the desert and fell down exhausted. “He compassionately said: ‘O hapless one, wither are you fleeing? Whom do you fear?’ After he picked her up and carried her back to the flock, God said to the angels: ‘Saw ye with tenderness my servant treated that dumb ewe? Because he took trouble

and harmed not the ewe, but rather had mercy on her, (I declare) be My glory that I will raise him up and make him My interlocutor; I will grant him prophethood and send him a book, and as long as the world exists, his name will be spoken” (Kadayifci-Orellana 2011: 212–213).

Besides pointing out that God is most forgiving, compassionate and merciful, the Qur’an asks Muslims to be merciful and compassionate to all creatures: animals, plants and humans (Q17:18). As the *hadith* “God is not merciful to him who is not so to mankind” indicates, especially those seeking God’s mercy should be merciful themselves. Thus, a true Muslim must be merciful and compassionate to all human beings, irrespective of their ethnic, religious origins, or gender.

The salience of these values, together with the principle of sacredness of life, re-humanises the other by reminding Muslims that all human beings are sacred and must be protected. Therefore a Muslim should not be insensitive to the suffering of other beings (physical, economic, psychological, or emotional), nor can one be cruel to any creature, and torture, inflicting suffering or wilfully hurting another human being or another creature is unacceptable according to Islamic tradition.⁸

1.1.6 Reconciliation and healing through the principles of *afu* and *musamaha* (pardoning and forgiveness)

Peacebuilding processes require reconciliation and the healing of wounds and painful memories of war and conflict. Healing facilitates grieving and processing of the traumas of conflict and transforming the relationships between former opponents. Reconciliation aims to rebuild relationships between them by changing the way parties involved think about each other. Reconciliation and healing are key elements in Islamic traditions of peace. In this process, the Qur’anic principle of *afu*, or pardoning (which is a term that does not just mean forgiveness but with a more comprehensive meaning), plays a central role.

⁸ For more information on this see Salmi et al. (1998) and Khadduri (1966).

The principle of *afu* – considered as an act of *ihsan* (goodness) – is repeatedly emphasised in the Qur’an which urges Muslims to adopt *afu* as a way to reconcile. The Qur’an stresses that forgiveness is of a higher value than maintaining hatred or vengeance as the believers are urged to forgive when they are angry (Q42:37). Said, Funk, and Kadayifci (2001: 8) note that, “there is a clearly articulated preference in Islam for nonviolence over violence, and for forgiveness (*Musamaha*) over retribution” (Said et al. 2001: 8). The Qur’an relates that human life on earth started with an act of forgiveness by God (Q2:36–38). The Qur’anic narration of the story of Joseph (PBUH) and his brothers emphasises how he forgave them and treated them with respect and honour. Also, as the most forgiving, God has constantly forgiven the Children of Israel and indicated that those who seek the forgiveness of God should also be forgiving themselves. The Qur’anic verse: “the recompense of an injury the like thereof: but whosoever forgives and thereby brings about a reestablishment of harmony, his reward is with God; and God loves not the wrongdoers” (Q42:40) advocates sincere forgiveness as the preferred path to establish God’s harmony on earth.

Islamic principles of forgiveness also urge Muslims to acknowledge their own wrong-doing, repent and ask for forgiveness because the Qur’an informs Muslims that serving the Divine is the way to implement repentance (*tawba*), through which “the arrogant and jealous self, melted in the furnace of self-reproach, reforms in remorse and turns toward God by seeking the forgiveness of one’s fellow human beings” (Sachedina 2001). Even the Prophet (PBUH) himself was told by God to forgive in the Qur’anic verse “Keep to forgiveness (O Muhammad) and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant” (Q7:99).

Muslims have recognised that “The most gracious act of forgiving an enemy is his who has the power to take revenge” (Saiyidain 1994). The centrality of forgiveness was illustrated by the Prophet (PBUH) himself when he forgave all those who previously had persecuted and fought him, when he entered Mecca and stated “There is no censure from me today on you (for what has happened is done with), may God, who is the greatest amongst forgivers,



The Qur’an stresses that forgiveness is of a higher value than maintaining hatred or vengeance as the believers are urged to forgive when they are angry. The narration of the story of Joseph (PBUH) and his brothers emphasises how he forgave them and treated them with respect and honour

forgive you.”⁹ It is this attitude of forgiveness which was the basis of his reconciliation efforts to establish peace between the Muslims and the Meccans, who had fought them previously, which allowed him to win over friends among his former enemies. It made possible the peaceful building up of the Islamic community, and did away with the desire for revenge (Troger 1990). It is this example that builds the spirit of forgiveness within Islam, which continues to inform the reconciliation processes in the Muslim world today.

1.1.7 Nonviolent and creative solutions to problems through the principle of *sabr* (patience)

Another value which is critical to the Islamic conception of peace is patience (*sabr*). Patience is the focus of about 200 verses of the Qur’an and is referred to indirectly in many others. It is one of the core subjects of the Scriptures and “is a virtue of believers, who are expected to endure enormous difficulties and still maintain a strong belief in God” (Abu-Nimer 2003: 73). The Qur’an urges Muslims to suspend judgment and be patient as the verse states, “And endure patiently whatever may befall thee” (Q31:17). God asks believers to be steadfast and promises deliverance to those who endure these difficulties with patience:

“And We made a people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both the east and the west, - lands whereon We sent down Our blessings. The fair promise of thy Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they had patience and constancy, and We levelled to the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected (with such pride).” (Q7:137)

In another verse the Qur’an has all the Prophets speak: “And we shall surely bear with patience all the harm you do us” (Q14:12-13). Yet, the Qur’an does not ask Muslims to remain passive in the face of oppression and injustice. On the contrary, it asks Muslims to engage in active struggle

⁹ Based on Ibn Sa’d, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol 2 (1957), p. 142; cited in Saiyidain (1994), p. 93.

(*jihad*) to establish peace and harmony. However, Muslims must not transgress in their struggle and must also be patient. The Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said during the Farewell Pilgrimage: “The fighter in the way of God is he who makes *jihad* against himself (*jahada nafsah*) for the sake of obeying God.” Taming their tendency to transgress, these *mujahidin* (people who undertake *jihad*) exert energy to overcome the selfish promptings of their egos. For this reason, the Qur’an equates them with “the patient ones” (*sabirin*): “We shall put you on trial so that We know those among you who strive in the cause of God (mujahidin) and are the patient (sabirin)” (Q47:31).

According to Wahiduddin Khan (1988), patience (*sabr*) enables a person to find a positive and successful solution to a problem. He states that “patience is set above all other Islamic virtues with the exceptional promise of reward beyond measure” (Wahiduddin Khan 1988: 1). He further states that the entire spirit of the Qur’an is in consonance with the concept of patience. Patience, he states, implies a peaceful response or reaction, whereas impatience implies a violent response. He continues, adding that the word *sabr* expresses the notion of nonviolence as it is understood in modern times. As such it is the opposite of violence. In this context, “*jihad*” refers to nonviolent activism, while “*qital*” is violent activism. To support this view he invokes the Qur’anic verse “perform jihad with this (i.e. the word of the Qur’an) most strenuously.” (Q25:52). Since the Qur’an is not a sword or a gun but a book of ideology, performing *jihad* could only mean an ideological struggle to conquer peoples’ hearts and minds through Islam’s philosophy (*Ibid.*)

Patience, as a powerful value, was also emphasised by Ghaffar Khan who established the world’s first and only known nonviolent army in the North Western Province of today’s Pakistan during the struggle against the British in the early 20th century. Khan stated: “I am going to give you such a weapon that the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the Prophet, but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it... when you go back to your villages, tell your brethren that

there is an army of God, and its weapon is patience. Ask your brethren to join the army of God. Endure all hardships. If you exercise patience, victory will be yours.” (Johansen 1997: 57)¹⁰

1.1.8 Quest for peace through *hubb* and *mawadda* (principle of loving-kindness)

Islam obligates its believers to seek peace in all aspects of their lives, for the ideal society that the religion seeks to create is not only just but peaceful. Loving-kindness is an important component of peacebuilding as it helps transform former enemies into friends and establish healthy relations based on respect and understanding.

Loving-kindness is an important aspect of peacebuilding in Islam that is rooted in the conceptions of *Hubb* (love) and *Mawadda* (loving-kindness). According to Islamic tradition love is the source and cause of all creation. Since *al-Wadud* (the Loving-kind) is one of the 99 names of God, the source for humans to love one another and all creation is rooted in the loving nature of God Himself. This perspective contends that love is the function of human beings. The Sufi poet Rumi alludes to the significance of love in his famous *Masnavi* as the attraction that draws all creatures back to reunion with their Creator.¹¹

Love comes from God and is often associated with peace, mercy and forgiveness and is a sign to be reflected upon. For example, the Qur’anic verse Q30:21 reads: “And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from

among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love [*mawadda*] and mercy between your [hearts]: Verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.” Transforming enmity into love is a sign of mercy of God and emphasises the importance of transforming hostile relations into love and friendship. The Qur’anic verse (Q60:7) states: “It may be that Allah will grant love (and friendship) [*mawadda*] between you and those whom ye (now) hold as enemies. For Allah has power (over all things); and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” The relationship between peace and God’s love are also clear in other verses that call for restraining anger, forgiveness, and justice, all key components of peace according to Islamic tradition (Q3:134; 5:96; 60:8).

The Islamic concept of love has often encouraged Muslims in their work for peace and justice. For example Sheikhha Cemalnur Sargut¹² stresses in her work the need for love, compassion and mercy to build a peaceful world. In one of her inspirational speeches she summarises the Islamic perspective of peace rooted in Divine Love: “We should be in a state to forgive and love others, then Allah will not be leaving us alone and He will shower His choicest blessings on us... Let us unite and let us be the one committed to spread the message of Allah; of His love, compassion, peace and tranquillity to humanity at large which is now reeling under hatred, violence, wickedness.”¹³

Based on these selected set of values and principles the Islamic understanding of peace can be defined as a process through which human beings can establish foundations for interacting with each other and with nature in harmony, instituting just social-economic structures where human beings can flourish and fulfil their potential. Consequently tyranny, discrimination, and oppression, which perpetuate injustice, towards any group in the

¹² Sheikhha Cemalnur Sargut is a Turkish Sufi mystic. A former chemistry teacher, she is widely popular among the young in Turkey. Her teachings focus on the application of Sufi principles and ethics in daily life. See www.wisemuslimwomen.org/muslimwomen/bio/cemalnur_sargut and <http://spiritwoman.wordpress.com/2011/11/02/the-teacher-will-find-us> (both accessed 25 July 2013).

¹³ Zafaralam Khan, ‘There are different paths to the kaabah’ (interview with Cemalnur Sargut during the International Conference On Sufism, Bharat Bhawan, India, November 18–20), *The Pioneer* (Delhi, India), 25 November 2011.

Muslim society are viewed as being among the greatest threats to peace and harmony.

1.2 Conception of *jihad*

A discussion of Islamic action against injustice through nonviolence and peacebuilding is incomplete without also an examination of one of the most misunderstood concepts in Islam – *jihad*. To many non-Muslims the word *jihad* strongly connotes violence and intolerance. This is as a result of a group who have embraced an extreme minority opinion that justifies militant opposition to any ostensibly oppressive political activity (Hayward 2011).

Jihad has also been misunderstood even by Muslims as being solely a military term, even though this is only one part of the concept. Even though the Qur’an and *hadith* give a variety of meanings to the term *jihad* and it also refers to a body of legal doctrine (Bonney 2004), scholars of Islamic jurisprudence and law have usually been more concerned with the military form of *jihad* as this requires more jurisprudential elaboration and legal regulation (*fiqh*). Hence, the sections that deal with warfare in traditional Islamic law literature are usually under sections or books titled “*jihad*” (DIN 2009). This has unfortunately led many students of Islam to conclude that *jihad* has the exclusive meaning of fighting or warfare. However, not once in the Qur’an is the word used with the sole meaning of fighting. The most commonly used word for fighting, in the literal sense, in both the Qur’an and *hadith* literature is “*qital*” (*Ibid.*).

It is important to note that all the verses of the Qur’an and *hadith* relating to warfare can be generally classified into three main groups (DIN 2009): (1) verses which deal with the conditions for military engagement, or commencement of warfare, (2) verses concerning the conduct of war after it has commenced, and (3) verses related to the conditions of military disengagement and termination of warfare. The inability or failure to differentiate between these classifications in a given text of the Qur’an or *hadith* may result in misinterpretations regarding *jihad* and *qital*. Thus

in order to understand the differences in terminology, it is best to start from the beginning and understand the meaning of the Arabic word *jihad* in the Islamic context. *Jihad* (from the verb *jahada*) on its own simply means “to struggle”, “to exert effort” or “exert oneself”, “to toil” or “to strive” (*Ibid.*) The term *jihad* was first used in the Qur’an in verses revealed at Makkah, long before the early Muslims were permitted to fight, for example:

“And those who engage in *jihad* (striving) in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to Our paths.” (Q29:69)

“And whoever engages in *jihad* (striving), he does so for his own soul.” (Q29:6)

In addition there is a *hadith* that says that “The best *jihad* is for one to perform *jihad* against his own self and against his desires.” Another man asked, “What kind of *jihad* is best?” The Prophet (RA)¹⁴ replied, “A word of truth before an oppressive ruler.”

Therefore, contrary to the general belief, *jihad*, which is often mistranslated as “holy war” against external forces, does not mean war with weapons, but literally means “striving” or “struggle” as the Qur’anic verse “strive in the cause of God” (Q22:78) indicates, struggling for the cause of God by means of speech, property, wealth or life and is considered by some Muslims to be the sixth pillar of Islam (Satha-Anand 2001). *Jihad* in Islam refers to the unceasing effort that an individual must make towards self-improvement and self-purification. It also refers to the duty of Muslims, both at the individual and collective level, to struggle against all forms of evil, corruption, injustice, tyranny and oppression, whether this injustice is committed against Muslims or Non-Muslims, and whether by Muslims or Non-Muslims. It is in this context that *jihad* may include peaceful (non-violent) struggle or if necessary armed struggle. However Hayward (2011: 3) argues that the Qur’an is unambiguous in the sense that Muslims are prohibited from undertaking offensive violence and are compelled

¹⁴ “Radiallahu ‘Anhu” meaning “may Allah be pleased with him/her” which is used by Muslims referencing companions of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).

¹⁰ The concept of patience for Muslims as a methodology for dealing with unjust rulers comes from the *hadith* of the Prophet (PBUH) where he says: “It is obligatory for you to listen to the ruler and obey him in adversity and prosperity, in pleasure and displeasure and even when another person is given (undue) preference over you” (Muslim). The indication is that social injustice and corruption alone are not sufficient legal justification for armed rebellion against authority and that there has to be the contradiction of Islamic law for there to be such armed rebellion. Sheikh Qaradawi and many other scholars mention that the rebellion that is prohibited is the one that is armed rebellion. This could provide the foundation for peaceful protest against social injustice which is the basis for non violence and conflict transformation, but is a separate discussion which has to be understood within the contexts of Islamic Governance which is not the subject of this paper.

¹¹ First 18 verses of *Masnavi*.

if defensive warfare should become unavoidable to act within a code of ethical behaviour.

Jihad can be differentiated according to the direction (inner and outer) and method (violent and nonviolent). The inner *jihad* in the narrowest sense is fought within the individual. In a broader sense, it is the outer *jihad* that may be seen as a struggle to eliminate evil within the *Ummah*. On an even broader reading *jihad* can be thought of as a struggle within that portion of humanity that accepts some form of spiritual guidance in order to purify itself. In short, *jihad* can be interpreted as the command of Allah Almighty (SWT)¹⁵ and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that demand a perpetual self-re-examination in terms of one's potential to fight tyranny and oppression – a continual reassessment of the means for achieving peace and inculcating moral responsibility.

The Qur'an provides justification for fighting oppression in its various verses which include:

"For tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter." (Q2:191)

"And why should ye not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak are ill-treated (and oppressed)? Men, women and children, whose cry is "Our Lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from Thee One who will protect; And raise for us from Thee, One who will help!" (Q4:75)

The Qur'an though is clear that Muslims are not allowed to be aggressive or initiate wars, as it states: "...for God does not love aggressors" (Q2:190). In another verse (Q2:190) the Qur'an commands "Fight (*qātilū*, in Arabic) in the cause of God those who fight (*yuqātilūna*) you, but do not commit aggression, for God loves not the aggressor." (Q2:190) The Qur'an also teaches: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Q2:256), and "Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching." (Q16:125)

¹⁵ "Subhana wa ta'ala" meaning "Glorious and exalted" is used by Muslims when referring to Allah (God). For the purposes of concision, this is not continued through the report.



Islam strictly forbids the killing of non-combatants, including women, children, the blind, the old, monks and hermits, the insane or delirious, those who are physically incapable of actual fighting and servants

Although Islam permits defensive wars to protect the *Ummah*, it lays down definite conditions regarding how it should be waged and conducted. According to Islam "war is considered as just whether commenced and prosecuted in accordance with the necessary formalities required under a certain system of law, or waged for justifiable reasons in accordance with the tenets of the religion or the mores of a certain society" (Khadduri 1955: 57). According to Islam, military *jihad* can only be a last resort and the opponents must be warned beforehand. Furthermore, military *jihad* is permitted only for justifiable reasons such as to defend the *Ummah* when they are attacked and to eliminate oppression. However, another important requirement for military *jihad* is that it must be waged by a legitimate authority. Depending on how the model for governance within Islam is construed and understood,¹⁶ it is generally agreed that the head of the Islamic community, the caliph, is the legitimate authority to wage war. (Kadayifci- Orellana 2007).

Islam also lays down strict regulations regarding acts that are not allowed during war, distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants and strictly forbidding the killing of non-combatants, which include women, children, the blind, the old, monks and hermits, the insane or delirious, those who are physically incapable of actual fighting, and servants. Furthermore torture, rape, mutilation of bodies and burning of prisoners is strictly prohibited, as well as the execution of prisoners of war even if the enemy resorts to these actions.¹⁷ By placing *jihad* within the Islamic ethical sphere, unnecessary devastation of the enemy lands and destruction of harvest and cutting trees, especially fruit trees were considered not allowed (Kadayifci-Orellana 2007).

¹⁶ This is a separate discussion which has to be understood within the contexts of Islamic Governance which is not the subject of this paper.

¹⁷ Qur'an 60:8, and *ahadith* in Muslim, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, etc. In more recent years, the Islamic Research Council at Al-Azhar University, Egypt, issued the following statement against theological declarations which sometimes attempt to justify terrorist actions committed by Muslims: "Islam provides clear rules and ethical norms that forbid the killing of non-combatants, as well as women, children, and the elderly, and also forbids the pursuit of the enemy in defeat, the execution of those who surrender, the infliction of harm on prisoners of war, and the destruction of property that is not being used in the hostilities." (DIN 2009)

This principle was clearly stated in a speech the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, made when he sent his army on an expedition to the Syrian borders (DIN 2009):

"Stop, O people, that I may give you ten rules for your guidance in the battlefield. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services, leave them alone."

When the Qur'an gives Muslims permission to fight it also mentions, with regards to justification for fighting, that this is permitted to those who have been made the target of war or oppression by others. The Qur'an instructed the Muslims to fight against them so that *fitna* was ended and worship remained for God alone (DIN 2009). Here the Qur'an goes further in exhorting Muslims to wage war and declares:

"Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies and others besides whom ye may not know but whom Allah doth know." (Q8:60)

After this, the Qur'an exhorted the Muslims to spend their wealth in making preparations for war and to be prepared for sacrificing their lives. Yet, at the same time as it inspired them to take to the battlefield it also proclaimed:

"But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is the one that hears and knows (all things). Should they intend to deceive thee – verily Allah suffices thee." (Q8:61–62)

The particular background and specific context of the revelation of the above-quoted verse should be noted. The verses just before exhorted the believers to make preparations to wage war against their oppressors, but

in this verse God told them that they must accept peace if their enemy inclined towards it. Now, it could be possible that doubts could arise as to the intention of the enemy in suing for peace, for the enemy might use this as a stratagem to deceive. In response, this verse says that Muslims should incline towards peace and place total trust in God, adding that this trust alone is the true support for the believers. In other words, it cautions Muslims not to unnecessarily doubt and worry about the possibility of treachery by the enemy.

These verses of the Qur'an were revealed with regard to the pagans of Mecca, whom the Muslims were then at war with. They were stiff opponents of Islam. They had conspired to extirpate Islam and destroy its citadel, Medina. The Jewish tribes were hand-in-glove with the Meccan pagans in this. The actual aim of these verses was to exhort Muslims to go to war, but yet, in the same context, the Qur'an advised Muslims that if their enemies inclined towards peace, they must do the same, and place their trust in God, although their enemies were untrustworthy and that it was possible that the latter could renege on their promises and betray them (DIN 2009).

On the basis of these verses (and understanding the context in which they were revealed) one reaches the conclusion that it is wrong to suppose that peace between Muslims and others is conceivable only when the Muslims' position is so weak that they are unable to wage war. The background of these Qur'anic verses that speak about the need to accept offers of peace indicates that the Muslims' position at that time was certainly not weak. In fact, the verses exhort Muslims to fight. One of these verses even declares:

“O Prophet! Rouse the believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding.” (Q8:65)

Hence fighting in the cause of God in Islam is not only against oppression but is basically related to fighting for

justice. In this regard it becomes synonymous to a struggle for justice and truth against oppression, despotism, and injustice (whenever it is committed) and on behalf of the oppressed (whoever they may be) that need not be violent. As Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (2005: 37) says:

“Jihad, in essence, is a form of peaceful action or activism. This peaceful activism can take the form of inviting others to the path of truth. The Qur'an advises us not to obey those who champion falsehood, and, in one verse, tells us to engage in jihad with them through the Qur'an. This means that one should respond to them by inviting them to the path of the truth, striving till one's utmost in this regard. The jihad that this Qur'anic verse refers to is not physical warfare. Rather, reference here is to intellectual and ideological activism. In short, it means refuting falsehood and advancing the cause of the truth using peaceful means.”

Depending on the circumstances and those involved, the best type of *jihad* may take several different forms. Ibn Taymiyya, for example, argued that *jihad* is achieved sometimes by the heart, sometimes by the tongue, and sometimes by the hand, and suggested two cardinal rules for *jihad* by the tongue and by the hand: Understanding and patience (Sardar 1985). Other forms of *jihad* may include talking truth to power by advising a tyrannical ruler or engaging in *da'wah*; exercising discipline and self-restraint; performing pilgrimage to the *Ka'aba*; taking care of one's parents; studying for the sake of God and teaching others beneficial knowledge and defending one's community by taking up arms only as a last resort.

These diverse uses of the term imply that Muslims would have to undertake *jihad* in many diverse ways during the course of their lives. Strict regulations of when it is permitted and how it should be performed categorically place the notion of war and violence in the moral realm. The purpose of *jihad*, ultimately, is to put an end to all forms of violence including 'structural violence.' Islam clearly asks Muslims to strive actively towards establishing just social, political, and economic systems, and to eliminate sources of violence and conflict. However the

means used are not independent of moral scrutiny. Since military *jihad* is permitted only as a last resort, Muslims are urged to fight injustice and oppression with other means first. Therefore nonviolent *jihad* is not only an acceptable methodology, but is one that is preferred by God. Some contemporary Muslim scholars such as Chaiwat Satha Annand argue that because current wars utilise technologies that cannot distinguish between combatants and non combatants, they are not permitted by Islam and Muslims must employ nonviolent *jihad* to eliminate tyranny and oppression (Satha Anand 2001). This view is also supported by a group of Islamic scholars and clergy in Afghanistan who stated: “Best *Jihad* in our time can be fought through nonviolent methods, from the moral high ground” (Nouri and Cappiello, 2010).

Another crucial aspect to understanding *jihad* is the “intention” (*niyya*) behind it. The purity of one's intention that is focused in Allah's cause, “*fee sabeellillah*”, is central to *jihad* (DIN 2009). The Qur'an clearly states that *jihad* cannot be performed for personal gain. Numerous *hadiths* also warn that fighting for the sake of material gains, conquest, or even honour in the eyes of fellow men, will earn no reward and is not allowed, since Islam forbids all wars but *jihad* (i.e. striving in the way of God). For that reason, *jihad* must be fought only with the intention of drawing near to God, and only for God. *Jihad al-nafs*, the struggle to purify one's intention, which strengthens one's willpower, and ensures all deeds are in accordance with Allah's guidance, is therefore the prerequisite of all other forms of *jihad* (*Ibid.*)

Ibn al-Qayyim (Vol 3, p5 as specified in DIN 2009) summarises this point very clearly: “The *jihad* against the enemies of God with one's life is only a part of the struggle which a true servant of God carries on against his own self for the sake of the Lord... This striving against the evil tendencies which have dominated his mind and heart is more important than fighting against the enemies in the outside world... As long as (the servant of God) does not first strive against his own evil tendencies in obedience to God's commands it is not possible for him to succeed in striving against the enemies in the outside world.”

Thus *jihad* remains a constructive and continuous process, remaining active throughout the life of a believer (Khan 2005) with three aspects: Firstly, *jihad al-nafs* or the struggle against the baser self or the ego, against one's passions and wrong desires and to remain steadfast in one's commitment to lead the life that God wants for human beings. Secondly, *jihad* in the sense of striving, using peaceful means, to communicate God's word to others, inspired by a compassion and concern for others, even if this is not reciprocated. This is the *great jihad* according to the Qur'an. The third form of *jihad* relates to confronting one's foes and to remain firmly committed to the faith under all conditions. In the past, this form of *jihad* in the past was basically a peaceful action, and so remains even today. In this sense, *jihad*, properly understood, is a peaceful struggle, not military or physical confrontation.



2. Peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms in Muslim contexts

Muslim communities have valued wise leadership, consultative decision-making and peaceful resolution of conflicts since they first established themselves into political communities. This attitude is reflected in the various conflict resolution practices and mechanisms developed in many Islamic communities. Conflicts in the Muslim communities take place at various different levels (internal conflicts between Muslims or with non Muslims). In fact the majority of the conflicts are between different Islamic sects such as the Shia-Sunni conflict in Iraq, or ethnic communities within the same state such as the Kurdish-Turkish conflict (Abu Nimer, 2003). Nevertheless, there are also conflicts involving Muslims and non-Muslims such as the conflict in Mindanao, Philippines, or the Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Southern Thailand or Muslim-Christian tensions in Nigeria. Finally, family conflicts or conflicts within the same community are conflicts which Islamic conflict resolution practices aim to address. Conflicts involving Muslims include a wide range of issues such as land disputes, border disputes, economic issues, ideological or political issues as well as other social issues such as divorce, murder and theft, among others. Different conflict resolution mechanisms and strategies have been developed to address these types of issues and conflicts at different levels in the Muslim world.

2.1 Assumptions of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Muslim world

Peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms in the Muslim contexts are informed by various assumptions rooted in their respective religio-cultural traditions (Abu-Nimer 1996a). Although there are various differences between Muslim communities, it is possible to identify some common assumptions derived from Islamic values, principles and social norms.

2.1.1 Conflict as a negative phenomenon

Muslims consider conflict a negative phenomenon, destructive to the social order, and thus, should be avoided (Abu-Nimer 1996b). Since conflict is viewed as harmful to both divine and communal harmony, Islam instructs Muslims to take action to resolve conflicts and restore harmony. This perspective is based on the Qur'anic verses such as:

“If two parties among the believers fall into a fight, make ye peace [sulh] between them [...] make peace between them with justice, and be fair; for Allah loves those who are fair (and just).” (Q49:9)

“obey Allah and His Apostle; and fall into no disputes, lest ye lose heart and your power depart; and be patient and persevering: For Allah is with those who patiently persevere.” (Q8:46)

Conflicts especially rooted in tribalism, racism, and nationalism (*asabiyya*), among others is strongly discouraged as the *hadith* narrates: “He is not one of us who proclaims the cause of tribal partisanship, and he is not of us one who fights in the cause of tribal partisanship, and he is not of us one who dies in the cause of tribal partisanship.”¹

2.1.2 Community orientation

Group affiliation (family, clan, religion, sect etc.) and striving for the common good are central principles in conflict resolution practices in Muslim communities (Abu-Nimer 1996a). “Ever since Muslims first established themselves in political communities, they have believed that a society guided by Divinely-inspired laws, wise leadership and extensive consultation is superior to a society governed by the arbitrary whims of kings, dictators or oligarchy” (Said and Funk, 2003: 42). As stated earlier, Islamic teachings emphasise the importance of the common good, social and divine harmony, justice, social responsibility, and accountability. Islamic traditions conceptualise the

¹ Narrated by Tirmidhi and Abu Daud. See also Hashmi (2003), p. 181.

individual in terms of his or her place within the Divine project and network of social relations, and not only as an autonomous and self-regulating agent. There is thus a strong sense of community, solidarity of people and a collaborative understanding of freedom that is embedded in the notion of *Ummah*, the community of Muslims. Integration of the *Ummah* and creating harmony within the community is called forth by the principle of *Tawhid* as discussed earlier. The society and the common good comes before the individual, consequently the individual has obligations towards the community. The freedom of the individual exists within the framework of communal and public interest. The existence of creation is the reflection of the Supreme Being itself. Personal freedom lies in surrender to the Divine Will, and this must be sought within oneself. As group affiliation is considered to be the primary concern, conflict resolution techniques are directed at protecting this affiliation and conflict resolution processes aim to restore social order and the disrupted balance of power, rather than to change the power relationship or the status quo (Abu-Nimer 1996b). Thus in the Islamic peacebuilding discourse, the community's identity and interest is a central component of any effective intervention strategy.

2.1.3 Hierarchical and authoritarian procedures

As the unity of the social group is the ultimate goal in Islamic conflict resolution mechanisms, then hierarchical and authoritarian procedures and structures that can ensure the protection of the community interests and relationships are central in the processes. Therefore third parties are often chosen from among the high-ranking, respected people who have political, religious, or military power and are mostly people of age. Religious leaders in particular and faith-based actors are often viewed as high-ranking leaders in communities, where sources of legitimacy are based on custom and religious traditions (Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). Although women do play a role in these processes, the majority of the interveners tend to be men, especially at the official levels.² Third parties are expected to know the history of the community, the

conflict, and be familiar with the social, religious, and cultural norms of the parties involved. They might have a direct or indirect interest in his or her involvement in the conflict and this intervention is based on traditional social and religious norms and values. Especially religious leaders, who know the parties, the history of the conflict and Islamic values well, are legitimate authorities to intervene, either upon being called to do so, or on their own initiative. These religious leaders play the roles of arbitrators, mediators, facilitators, and educators of the parties towards the resolution of the conflict.

2.1.4 Centrality of social norms and Islamic values and rituals

One of the central characteristics of conflict resolution mechanisms in Islamic contexts is that they are rooted in Islamic values and principles of peace, which not only determine social norms and rules but based on the Qur'an (and other sacred texts as discussed above), will urge Muslims to resolve their conflicts peacefully. These traditional conflict resolution mechanisms then become internal sources for resolving conflicts and peacemaking in these regions. The Qur'an in particular is a very important source for comprehending conflict resolution and reconciliation processes. Whereas in the Western conflict resolution approach, individual interests, positions, desires, and needs are considered important and an agreement on these can be reached through human reason, according to the Qur'an, disputes among Muslims have to be judged according to the guidelines in the Qur'an based on clear proofs, as the Qur'an states:

“But no, by thy Lord they can have no (real) faith until they make thee [Muhammad] judge in all disputes between them. And find their souls no resistance against thy decision, but accept them with the fullest conviction.” (Q4:65)

² Although Muslim women's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution is a very important topic, it is beyond the scope of this paper. For more information see Kadayifci-Orellana & Funk (2010) and Kadayifci-Orellana (forthcoming: a).

In order to encourage resolution of conflict, third parties often emphasise the unity of the village, city or family, and urge parties to consider future generations. They will invoke Islamic values such as patience, acknowledgment of mistakes or guilt, apology, compensation, forgiveness and reconciliation to manage negative emotions and to rebuild broken relationships. In this process, they recite Qur'anic stories, Prophetic wisdom, as well as examples drawn from Islamic history that emphasise the importance of resolving conflicts peacefully, justly and restoring harmony among God's creatures. “As Muslims aspire to model their behaviours after Qur'an and *Sunnah* [sic], it becomes a task of Muslim conflict interveners to replicate the process of restoring Islamic principles by clarifying to conflicted parties the misperceptions and negative practices that for long have influenced their lives.” (Abu-Nimer 1996a: 171)

Rituals also play an important role in conflict resolution processes in the Islamic communities. For instance, conflict resolution processes in Somali communities start with a ritual gathering of the community leaders under a tree. Conflict resolution practices often end with a ritual of gathering the whole community together in a public space and declaring the agreement to all those present; when concluding a dispute settlement in the Middle Eastern context, drinking traditional coffee and sharing a meal is an essential component of the process.

2.1.5 Centrality of emotions

Understanding the emotional needs of the parties and transforming or containing negative emotions is central to resolving conflicts in Muslim contexts. It is the case, in any context, that conflicts often give rise to emotions such as anger, revenge or embarrassment. Spontaneous and emotional acts thus are considered part of conflict resolution and parties are allowed to express their feelings and vent. In the Middle East especially, individuals often engage in ‘heart-to-heart’ conversations where interruptions with expressions of empathy and support are quite common (Irani 2003) and talking together is not

considered rude but an expression of concern. Although negative emotions such as anger, hate, and fear are considered part of the human experience they are harmful to group unity and harmony and hence from a conflict resolution perspective, they must be transformed. For instance the Qur'anic verse (3:134)³ associates repression of anger with doing good. The Prophet (PBUH) is recorded to have said: “The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger.”⁴ Since shame, honour, dignity and reputation are the driving forces towards ultimate resolution, conflict resolution processes pay special attention to saving face of all those involved, especially the offender. They avoid humiliating the parties further and look for ways to restore the dignity, honour and respect of the parties. Managing the emotions of the parties as well as the communication between them is the responsibility of the third parties, but expressive emotional reactions are perceived as normal aspects of the process.

2.1.6 Binding nature of agreements

Another important aspect of Islamic conflict resolution traditions is the binding nature of peace agreements or arrangements as observance of treaties and oaths is considered crucial and a religious duty from the Islamic point of view. This is based on the Qur'anic verse “Fulfill the Covenant of Allah when ye have entered into it, and break not your oaths after ye have confirmed them; indeed ye have made Allah your surety; for Allah knoweth all that ye do.” (Q16:91). From an Islamic historical perspective, the Treaty of Hdaybiya is seen as a binding agreement that had conditions that were symbolic yet had the effect of bringing about an enforced period of peace. As *sulh* (reconciliation) is a form of contract (*'aqd*), it is legally binding on both at individual and community levels (Khadduri 1997). Likewise, although mediation is a nonbinding process, it becomes morally binding when the

³ The verse reads: “Those who spend [in Allah's cause – deeds of charity, alms, etc. in prosperity and in adversity, who repress anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allāh loves Al-Muhsinun (the good doers).”

⁴ *Hadith*, Sahih Al-Bukhari 8.135, Narrated by Abu Huraira.

parties to the dispute agree to the recommendation of the mediators. Agreements are often declared and agreed in a public forum with a handshake and become binding to all those present and not present (Abu-Nimer 1996b). In Arab culture especially, and in interpersonal and community disputes “a shake of hands, or a community and social gathering, are more binding than a million papers” (Abu-Nimer 1998: 111).

2.1.7 Emphasis on restorative justice⁵

One of the key aspects of conflict resolution efforts in the Muslim context is the emphasis on restorative justice rather than retributive justice. The aim of restorative justice is to repair the relationships that were broken by the conflict and to heal the wounds caused by it. Restorative justice brings together offenders and victims as well as the community in general to talk about the events, seek to repair the harm done and prevent it from happening again. Restorative justice views the wrongdoing and injustice as a crime against the individual and community and involves making amends, restoring order and harmony and healing wounds. It emphasises dialogue between offenders and the victims by helping victims to share how they have been impacted by the events and also gives an opportunity for wrongdoers to talk about the background and circumstances of their wrongdoing; often, but not always, to offer an apology and amends for what they have done. Admission of guilt and acceptance of responsibility on the part of the offenders, participation of all the stakeholders, and finding a solution that restores the sense of justice and addresses the needs of those involved are key elements of this process.

Customary conflict resolution approaches that have emerged or been retained in Muslim societies, such as *sulha*, *xeer*, *jirga*,⁶ among others, view wrong-doing as an offence both against the individual and the community

⁵ Reconciliation as a concept is a very important component of the whole system of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, however it is one that needs a broad discussion which cannot be given its full due in this paper. For more details on this, please refer to Qafisheh (2012).

⁶ See the next section for more information on these conflict resolution practices.



Restorative justice views the wrongdoing and injustice as a crime against the individual and community and involves making amends, restoring order and harmony and healing wounds

and involve offenders and victims as well as the whole community through a participatory dialogue process to address the needs of the parties, restore a sense of justice and re-establish order and harmony within the community. These processes stress the importance of restoring broken relationships and compensating victims but do not go as far as ostracising the offenders to a point where their integration into society is no longer possible (Abdile, 2012). The process aims to empower the victims and affected communities, while reaffirming collective values, minimising retributions and maximising the restoration of community harmony through a collective decision-making process (Karakezi and Nshimiyimana 2004). Acceptance of responsibility, repentance (*tawba*), offering an apology and compensation rather than *qisas* (retribution) are encouraged by invoking unity, harmony and Islamic principles such as forgiveness and reconciliation.

Restorative justice is clearly supported by the Qur’an and Prophet’s (PBUH) tradition. As stated earlier, the Qur’an urges Muslims to restore justice, accept responsibility and be repentant stating that God “forgives all sins” (Q39:53). The Qur’an also asks Muslims to be forgiving, and merciful while seeking justice. Although retributive justice may be permitted, the following verses clearly indicate that God prefers reconciliation and restorative justice:

“O ye who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman. But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand, and compensate him with handsome gratitude, this is a concession and a Mercy from your Lord. After this whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave penalty.” (Q2:178)

“The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree); but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for (Allah) loveth not those who do wrong.” (Q42:40)

2.2 Reconciliation through mediation and dialogue

The main mechanisms for conflict resolution in Muslim communities include Islamic Courts, formal arbitration (*tahkeem*), mediation (e.g. *wasata* in the Middle East and *arabulucuk* in Turkey), dialogue (*hewar*) and reconciliation (*sulh/sulha* in the Middle East; *suluh* in Kenya, Indonesia; *xeer* in Somalia, and *jirga* in Afghanistan and Pakistan). As Islamic courts and official arbitration are extensively dealt within the *fiqh* literature, this paper will not discuss them. This paper will focus rather on less examined yet often resorted to informal conflict resolution mechanisms of mediation, reconciliation and dialogue at community levels. It is important to remember that these mechanisms are not always separated clearly from each other in the Muslim communities and often overlap or feed into each other. It is equally important as well to understand that most of these mechanisms are traditional practices within societies that share universal principles and are not in contradiction to Islamic values. Following a widely held Islamic concept of the adoption of local social customs and norms that are not in contradiction to the fundamental tenets of Islam, many of these traditional mechanisms have found good symbiosis with practices of the Prophet (PBUH) and being justified from the Qur’an and hence been adopted as tools to be used.

2.2.1 Mediation in Islamic contexts

Mediation as a nonviolent dispute resolution approach in which a third party, that is not a direct party to dispute, helps disputants through negotiation, is one of the most widely employed tools of conflict management and resolution. Mediation is also one of the most common conflict resolution mechanisms in the Muslim world. For instance *wasata*⁷ (patronage-mediation in Arabic) and *arabuluculuk* (mediation in Turkish) are often used to

⁷ *Wasta*, which roughly translates as connections, clout, influence or favouritism, comes from an Arabic root (w-s-t) conveying the idea of ‘middle’, and a *wasta* is someone who acts as a go-between.

resolve conflicts in countries such as Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan or Turkey. Mediators (e.g. *wasit*, in Arabic, *ergo* in Somali or *arabulucu* in Turkish and *jirgamar* in Pashtun) in the Muslim communities intervene in a conflict in an ad-hoc nonbinding and voluntary process to help parties find a common solution. Mediation is often associated with formal third party interventions into disputes between states through diplomatic channels and is often used by Muslim states and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to resolve conflicts between states. Mediation is also a common informal conflict resolution tool to resolve family and communal conflicts in Muslim countries.

The practice of mediation has been part of Islamic conflict resolution processes since the early days of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) often used mediation to resolve conflicts and he himself acted as a mediator-arbitrator. Having a reputation for being trustworthy – he was nicknamed “the Faithful One” (*al-Amin*) – allowed the Prophet to be a good mediator in helping to resolve conflicts in Mecca. He was also accepted as the mediator-arbitrator between the tribes in Yathrib (Medina) by all the communities. His role as a mediator-arbitrator was recognised in the Constitution of Medina (Yetkin, 2006). One of his well-known interventions involved the process of relocating the Black Stone from *Ka’aba*, when he was the only person who was trusted by the three major Meccan tribes to mediate their dispute over who would have the honour of carrying and moving the Black Stone. His mediation and problem solving skills inspired him to suggest that they all participate in carrying the stone by placing it on his cloak. Many mediation efforts in the Muslim world are often inspired by the Prophet’s (PBUH) examples and are derived from Islamic principles and values rooted in the Qur’an and *hadith*.

An important aspect of mediation in the Muslim communities is the identity of the mediators. Identity of third parties is often recognised as an important element for the effectiveness and success of any mediation effort. Bercovitch and Kadayifci (2009) state that: “what mediators do, can do, or are permitted to do in their efforts to resolve a conflict may depend largely on who they are”. In a Muslim

context the person who is accepted as a legitimate mediator differs according to who the parties are and what the issues involved are about (Kadayifci-Orellana 2006: 2007). The identity and social ranking and status of the third party also determine their capacity to intervene and gain the trust and respect of the parties. As stated by Abu-Nimer (1996a) the credibility of third party mediators in an Arab cultural context is derived from their social ranking as opposed to mediators in Western context who derive their legitimacy from their level of education and professional training (Folberg and Taylor 1984). The mediator’s leverage over the parties often stems from their close linkages (tribal, family, social, regional, or sectarian). Such close relationships or affiliations are not viewed as weakness; on the contrary often people seek to include in the mediation panels third party members with certain linkages to the parties.

Depending on the conflict and the number of parties involved mediation in Muslim communities may involve a single mediator or a delegation of mediators. Often religious leaders such as imams, sheikhs or *alims*⁷ and local notables or leaders such as *zumas* in Lebanon or *mokhtar* in other places such as Turkey, who have a high status and prestige, often serve as mediators. However in recent years younger family members, friends, and neighbours are increasingly acting as mediators particularly in marital disputes. Although rare, women can also serve as mediators in Muslim communities the best example being Ghazal Ahmad ‘Alwan al-Magdashiyya of Yemen (b. 1860) who was known for her unique gift of resolving conflicts. She effectively resolved many conflicts in her community through traditional Yemeni poetry (Flagg Miller 2002). However, the majority of mediators in Muslim communities currently tend to be men.

Mediators in Islamic contexts are often ‘cultural insiders’ whose efforts are accepted because they have a better understanding of the way the collective communities make sense of the world and the way they think. Qualified mediators, also known as *hakam*, are chosen for being trustworthy and impartial. They expected to possess a

deep knowledge of the conflict and local customs as well. Their wisdom gives them the necessary qualifications and legitimacy to set the procedures and establish ground rules of mediation. Especially in Muslim Arab families, mediators should possess such qualities as high status, kinship ties, previous experience, honour and authority (Faour 1997).⁸ In Somalia, as well as in Afghanistan, mediators are often a jury of elders in the community who have good knowledge of the customary law as well as Islamic law (Shirwa 2003)⁹ In addition to being trustworthy their knowledge of the parties and history of the conflict is also important because they are a first step in understanding of the conflict. Mediators are also expected to have the ability to articulate the situation well, use the right rhetoric, idioms, and stories as well as references to the past (Yousufzai and Gohar, 2012). Similarly mediators among the Maranao Muslims of Philippines “must be *maongangen* (wise), *maontol* (honest), *masabar* (patient), *kasarigan* (trustworthy), *mawarao* (brave), *malaiparatiyako Allah* (faithful), *tatamoken* (moneyed) and *daa a pagampilaniyan* (neutral)” (Doro 2005,4). Somali tradition, on the other hand, emphasises patience in every aspect of life, ability to speak in a pleasant way, and ability to listen and observe well as desired qualities for mediators (Shirwa 2003).

Religious leaders who have moral and spiritual legitimacy to influence the opinions of people in particular can act as mediators in Islamic contexts. These leaders are highly respected and their opinions are generally held in high regard within their communities. Local imams and sheikhs know the history and the traditions of the parties and they also know the needs (both physical and emotional) of their communities. The imams or khatibs (preachers) in the mosque can fulfil this role of mediator in many Muslim communities, especially in rural areas where there is a weak presence of the state’s central authority. Thus imams in such settings usually act as mediators in many family and social disputes. Imams and khatibs are often better equipped to reach out to the people, mobilise them, to re-humanise the “other” using religious values such as

⁷ See role of Ulama in resolving conflicts in Turkey.

⁸ See also Abu-Nimer (1996a).

⁹ See also Abu-Nimer (1996b; 2003).

justice for all, forgiveness, harmony, human dignity and to motivate them to work towards peace.

As people of faith and God, imams and sheikhs are often perceived to be more even-handed, trustworthy, thus having stronger moral and spiritual legitimacy. This spiritual motivation enhances the effectiveness of mediation and reconciliation efforts and helps to gain the trust of both parties. Religious leaders as the moral and spiritual guides in their communities have unique leverage in communities as well as the authority to warn those who committed crimes, and to invite them back to the religious, spiritual path. This status helps them to persuade and re-frame the conflict in ways that are acceptable to their communities.

Mediators in Islamic and Arab cultural settings often have considerable control over the process of mediation which includes a fact finding set of actions as well as intensive negotiation sessions (mainly through shuttle diplomacy without face to face meeting between the disputants, especially in the initial phases). The control over the process and the outcome of the mediation allows the mediators to exercise their leverage over the disputants and extract from them certain concessions to reach a settlement. The mediators in the Middle Eastern context are also often involved emotionally in the dispute, through actual kinship relations or through a specific interest in the settlement. They are also often more direct, advocating for a settlement (Abu-Nimer 1996b). Due to the high rank and respected status of the mediators parties try to maintain a good relationship with them. Therefore both the mediators and the community in general put an enormous pressure upon the disputants to settle and abide by the settlement (*ibid.*). In Afghanistan’s Pashtun community; mediators may even raise a volunteer force to enforce the decision in some cases. This gives them enormous power in the process.

However mediators in these contexts also have greater responsibilities such as holding the public ritual of *sulha* once an agreement is reached¹⁰ and ensuring the delivery and arrangement of the payment. In some cases, if the

¹⁰ See also Abu-Nimer (1996b; 2003).

family of the offender cannot afford the whole amount of compensation, third parties contribute money to settle the payment (Hamzeh, 1997). Mediators in the Muslim contexts also have the responsibility to assist the parties during their reintegration into the community and to ensure that they follow the conditions of the agreement. For mediation efforts to be lasting and effective, mediation must not be seen solely as a short-term, isolated event, but mediators should continue to offer their assistance in the post-agreement phase through actions such as facilitating communication; clarifying and removing misunderstandings and misinterpretations; and providing know-how when necessary. Mediators in the Muslim communities as members of the society, will continue to have a relationship with parties, often assisting them in the post-agreement phase and together with the community at large, overseeing that the agreement is implemented by the parties. In fact, in most cases local mediators are part of the community and social fabric. They are in daily interaction with disputants or they are in short distance and proximity. Thus the notion of ‘follow us’ is an integral part of their community relationships. They participate in the social events and celebrations, which involve many of the disputants that they have worked with.

Active listening and consulting with parties to understand the needs and concerns of all those involved is an important mediation skill that is valued in the Muslim world as well. The example of Prophet (PBUH), who often consulted with the leaders of each of the communities and demonstrated a willingness to listen to all the parties, also emphasises this skill (Yetkin 2006). This allowed the Prophet to identify common interests and goals of the parties. His approach not only helped parties to see their interconnectedness and common interests beyond their tribal affiliations but also ensured that parties felt the process and the outcome was fair and just. His conflict resolution style especially emphasised the importance of community justice and protection and encouraged collective responsibility, while helping parties save face.

These principles of looking for creative solutions within the Islamic framework; consulting with the community; giving



Active listening and consulting with parties to understand the needs and concerns of all those involved is an important mediation skill that is valued in the Muslim world

priority to unity and interests of the community; willingness to listen to parties and helping them to find a just and equitable solution are key components of mediation in Islamic contexts. Gathering information through a fact finding process by visiting disputants, holding separate meetings with the parties and listening to their side of the story are often the first steps in the process of mediation in the Middle East, Somalia as well as Afghanistan. For instance, mediators in Lebanon visit the victim’s family and ask about their demands (Hamzeh 1997). Mediators then start extensive consultation focusing on two key issues: the fate of the offender and compensation.

A similar process takes place also in Somalia and Afghanistan. After listening to parties carefully and understanding their demands, mediators then come together to make a decision. During this process, mediators also consult the community members as well as the parties. For instance, Yousufzai and Gohar (2012) observe that *jirga* decisions are taken after debate and discussion and a decision is often made unanimously. At times the mediators also invite the public to discuss the issue. In these meetings younger members of the community are invited to speak first and after brainstorming, mediators announce a collective decision and seek the approval of the community. Another way of seeking mutual agreement involves obtaining the consent of the parties (Yousufzai and Gohar, 2012: 64). During this process, mediators often use Islamic stories, values, social norms and the importance of group cohesion to encourage parties to come to an agreement. Storytelling, using idioms and phrases with a focus on forgiveness, reconciliation and repairing the relationship is a critical part of this process.

2.2.2 Reconciliation (*Musalaha*)

One of the most common tools used to resolve conflicts in the Muslim world is reconciliation which aims at repairing relationships broken as a result of conflict. An example of Islamic reconciliation is the ‘*Musalaha*’ or *Sulha* process in the Middle East. Irani and Funk define the process of *sulha* as a “ritualized process of restorative justice and

peacemaking and as the actual outcome or condition sealed by that process” (1998: 52). Abu Nimer refers to *sulha* as “the event or ritual of reconciliation rather than the process” (2003: 99) and refers to the process as *musalaha*. *Musalaha*¹¹ is an authentic conflict resolution mechanism in the Middle East, dating back to pre-Islamic times, that attempts to reconcile conflicts between rival parties.

“According to Jordanian judge Abu-Hassan, there are two types of *sulh* processes: *public sulh* and *private sulh*.” (Irani and Funk 1998: 64) *Private sulh* takes place when there is a conflict between the members of a community who know each other. The aim of *private sulha* is to avoid revenge and to restore harmony within a community. The outcome of *private sulha* can be a total peace where two parties of the conflict forgive each other, forget what happened, and do not hold any resentment towards each other. The outcome of *private sulha* can also be partial or conditional where the conflict between two parties ends according to the agreed conditions set in the peace process. *Public sulh*, on the other hand, can be compared to the signing of a peace treaty between two countries to end conflict for a period of time. It takes place to resolve conflicts between tribes, or communities, or different religious groups (*Ibid.*). In Islamic history, the Hudaibiya Treaty, which was signed between the Prophet (PBUH) and the Meccans, is an example of a *public sulh* that aimed to establish a period of 10 years of *hudna* or ceasefire.¹²

2.2.3 Community practices of *sulha*

As discussed above, today, *sulha* is used in many inter- and intra-communal disputes in Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan, which officially recognise *sulha* as a traditional conflict resolution practice of the Bedouins. Similar reconciliation processes are common in other Muslim communities as well, such as the *xeer* in Somalia; *kokoman a kambhatabataa* among the Muslims of

¹¹ For more information on *Sulha* see Abu-Nimer (1996b); Abu-Nimer (1996a); Irani (1998); Irani (1999); Irani & Funk (1998) and Tarabeih et al. (2009).

¹² For more information see Weigert (1997) and Kadayifci-Orellana (2002).

Mindanao Philippines (Doro 2005) or *jirga*¹³ in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

► The *jaha*

According to Sheikh Farage Khneife, a member of the Sulha Committee of the Arab Community in North of Palestinian Territories, “there is no clan conflict too small for the *Sulha*, which takes a community approach to dispute resolution” because “if small and less severe conflicts are not dealt with at their inception “they might grow to become major conflicts” (Hamad, 2012). In its modern day application, *sulha* does not replace the modern civil/criminal law but is an addition to it, and its purpose is to restore peace so that normal life can be resumed. Especially in Palestine and Lebanon, where official institutions are not well established or have lost their power, it is still widely accepted as a means for resolving conflicts.

The process of *sulh* involves a number of stages and components. The first stage of the *sulha* process is forming of the *jaha* – delegation of third parties – who will assist the disputants to reconcile. The nature of the issue, and the parties determines the number and status of the people that will make up the *jaha*, and the intensity of the reconciliation process (Kadayifci-Orellana 2007). If the conflict is between two individuals, the *jaha* may be as small as one or two members, who are respected in the community. If the conflict involves two villages or two different religious communities, the number of *jaha* can rise up to twenty or more people, and in addition to the elected community leaders, the process usually involves the highest religious authorities in the region. These mediators use their kinship connections and social standing as a tool to exert pressure and gain access during the negotiation process. Furthermore, *jaha* members are expected to know the history of the communities or families, the customs and religious values well, and must be perceived as just and impartial. This delegation serves as the mediators between

the parties and initiates a fact-finding process while questioning the parties. The task of *jaha* is not to judge, condemn or punish but to preserve the honour, dignity and good names of the parties involved and reaffirm the necessity of ongoing relationships within the community (Khadduri 1955).

After the *jaha* is formed, its members decide upon a specific date to visit the offended family to listen to their demands and ask them not to retaliate. They plead with the offended party and tell them that the offender asked them to pay a visit in order to have the honour of offering their repentance and to express their sorrow for what happened. They invite the offended family to agree on their intervention. They also ask the offended family for forgiveness evoking religious values such as forgiveness, compassion, and unity of the community amongst others.

Once the parties agree on *jaha*'s intervention, *sulha* becomes socially binding. An elderly person, who can ensure the implementation of the final decision, is also chosen as a guarantor of the process. After the offended side gives its consent to the intervention of the *jaha*, a *hudna* (which means ceasefire or a period of calm) is established between the parties to prevent future acts of vengeance and provide protection to the perpetrators' family members. During this time *atwa* (compensation in the form of money or word of honour) is paid to back the truce. After that, the *jaha* starts negotiating with the parties separately on a settlement. In this process, confidentiality and impartiality are central principles. After negotiating with the parties, the *jaha* meets as a delegation in a neutral place and decides on a ruling. After much deliberation and consultation, the *jaha* announces a decision. In this process the *jaha* considers the nature of the conflict, the demands of the offended party and the interests of the community. Usually a certain amount of money (*diya*) is given to the offended family to compensate their loss. However, *diya* can be a symbolic act and the crucial aspect of *sulha* is restoring honour to the offended family.

After the negotiations are completed, and a ruling has been decided, the *jaha* invites the whole community, and

depending on the case, notables from all over the country, to join the final ritual of reconciliation. The reconciliation ritual is done openly so that the whole community knows about the agreement and that the outcome is morally and social binding. The communal nature of the process creates a social pressure on the parties to abide by the agreement reached. It is also important to note that the reconciliation is declared binding to those who are present and not present at the ritual, including those that are not yet born.

Symbolic gestures and rituals thus play a crucial role in the process of *musalaha*. The ritual of *sulha* itself is a complex and symbolic process, and the details differ according to the customs of the region and the community. Nevertheless the basic principles of the *sulha* ritual is based on forgiveness (*musamaha*) shaking hands (*musafaha*) and sharing a meal and bitter coffee (*mumalaha*) between the opponents. The rituals and gestures of *sulha* are also aimed at restoring the honour of the parties.

Sulha is based on social conventions that require people to honour agreements that are founded on persuasion, mutuality and relativity, and often satisfy both parties. In Muslim contexts *sulha* reinforces the Islamic emphasis on harmony, restorative justice and the mending of relations. In restoring justice and harmony, both the interveners and parties must consider the common good rather than their ego and personal interests. The *sulha* process encourages the offending party to accept responsibility and to offer repentance. At the same time *sulha* aims to lift the burden of revenge by emphasising forgiveness, and collective responsibility, and by creating circles of loyalty aimed at building trust. It reinforces values of honour, saving face and dignity, wisdom, generosity, respect, compassion and repentance. Since protecting honour and dignity is key to the process, the *jaha* pays special attention to restoring the honour of the offended family by paying a visit to them.

► The *jirga*

The *jirga* tradition in Afghanistan and Pakistan is the product of Pashtun tribal society and operates according to the dictates of the *pashtunwali*, an inclusive code of

conduct guiding all aspects of Pashtun behaviour. *Jirga* can be defined as an informal “body comprised of local, elderly and influential men who undertake conflict resolution. It is a strategic exchange between two or more people to address an issue through verbal communication.” (Yousufzai and Gohar 2012: 17). A community member from the Lower Dir region of Pakistan defines *jirga* as “the historical and traditional institution and gathering of the tribal elders that every era has served to resolve our tribal nation’s political, social, economic, and even religious conflicts by making decisions based on mutuality, consensus and respect.” (CAMP and Saferworld 2012: 8). A similar tradition is referred to as *shura* among other ethnic communities in these regions.

A *jirga* may take place at different levels of the society (such as local, regional and national levels) and may have different objectives. *Jirgas* are often used at community levels to address conflicts involving as diverse issues as family conflicts, thefts or even murder. Following an event (such as murder) that can result in a conflict, community elders form a delegation gathers in *hujiras* (gathering at a community place for male members to get together to discuss common issues and pass time) or at mosque to discuss the issue. An important aspect of the *jirga* is the principle of equality of its members where members sit in a circle symbolising that there is no hierarchy and everyone has the right to put forth their arguments (Yousufzai and Gohar, 2012). In other cases, *jirga* members visit the parties invoking the principle of hospitality. By visiting the house of the victim, the *jirga* becomes a guest and Pakhtoon tradition of hospitality requires that the guests must be protected and respected. During these visits the *jirga* holds negotiations with parties separately to learn their demands and help them come to an agreement. Consultation of the parties and the community are essential to this process as *jirgas* listen to the parties and relevant witnesses to identify the facts and to find an unbiased solution that is acceptable to the parties and that maintains social harmony and good relations.

Jirga, like *musalaha*, focuses on restorative justice and considers community wellbeing, group cohesion and

¹³ *Jirga* is an original Pashto word, which in its common usage refers to the gathering of a few, or a large number of people; it also means consultation according to this source. For more comprehensive studies on the *jirgas* see Wardak (2003).

harmony first. Consultation and deliberation to find a solution that is acceptable to the parties and protects the community is particularly important in the context of the *jirga*. In addition to considering the ‘common good’ consultation of the community members is an important Islamic principle that is rooted in Qur’anic verses such as “and consult with them on the matter” (Q3:159) and “those who conduct their affairs by council are praised” (Q43:38). Rituals, symbols and Islamic and Pashtun values such as honour, respect, hospitality, integrity, justice, repentance and reconciliation among others play a central role in *jirga*. Forgiveness and hospitality are two such principles, for instance. Wardak (2004: 11) observes that “one important form of tribal *jirga* is ‘*nanawate*’ (meaning seeking forgiveness/pardoning) and the obligatory acceptance of a truce offer,” which takes place when the *jirga* makes a decision that relatives of the guilty party send a delegation to the victims house. As part of the ritual, this delegation consists of elders; a female relative of the offender party holding a Qur’an, and a *mullah* as well as the offender’s other close relatives and at times, the offender himself who bring a sheep and flour to the victim’s house. Wardak Ali (2004) adds that the sheep is usually slaughtered at the door and once inside the house, the delegation asks forgiveness and pardoning on behalf of the offender. Since it is against the codes of Pakhton *wali* to reject the *nanawate*, the victims pardon the offenders and agree to reconciliation, which is called “*rogha*.”

► The *xeer*

The Somali tradition ‘*xeer*’ is another example of reconciliation from an Islamic context to facilitate reconciliation and promote restorative justice (Abdile, 2012). *Xeer* is a dispute resolution tradition that establishes law, order, rules governing marriage, war, peace, sharing and use of resources, agreements between clans and punishments such as payment of blood money (also called *diya*). *Xeer* is obeyed by all the clans as such plays a pivotal role in relationships between them.

Similar to the *jirga* and *musalaha* processes, once an event that leads to conflict takes place, clan chiefs called *odayaal* and wisemen called *waxgarad* arrange a meeting under



Many of the peacebuilding principles are informed by the tradition of dialogue within Islamic contexts – working for coexistence is a duty upon Muslims

a tree called “court tree” (Shirwa 2003: 6) or “mediation tree.” The aim of this first meeting is to set up a committee or a delegation to help resolve the conflict. The Committee members deliberate on the issue to come to a consensus (*ijma*) and to find a solution that will satisfy the parties, also under the court tree. All adult males of the community can attend the meeting. Listening to both parties as well as witnesses is an important part of the fact-finding process to find an equitable solution. According to Somali culture, the offender is expected to hold the meetings and pay for the expenses.

The rules and procedures of *xeer* are influenced by Islamic values and principles as well as local customs and culture. Values such as community harmony, repairing of relationships, accepting responsibility, forgiveness and pardoning play important roles in reaching an agreement and repairing relationships. These principles and examples of reconciliation and agreements are often orally memorised and transmitted through traditional poetry, songs, proverbs, and storytelling (Abdile, 2012). Moreover, rituals and symbols such as forgiveness are essential components of the reconciliation process. For instance, once an agreement is reached, the offender is expected to offer a sheep or an equivalent to the offended as a sign to heal wounds. Offering of the sheep also represents an apology, an admission of fault, seeking amends and restoring community relations. In response, the party that receives the sheep returns half of it as a gesture of appreciation. Both parties also exchange kind words and willingness to establish new friendly relationships and commitment to cooperate. Similar to the *jirga* and *musalaha* processes, *xeer* also aims to protect the honour and dignity of the parties and maintain social harmony.

2.2.4 Dialogue

Dialogue – defined as a safe process of verbal and non-verbal interaction to exchange ideas, thoughts and information between people from different backgrounds (Abu-Nimer et Al. 2007) – aims to clarify misunderstandings and increase accurate knowledge of others’ perspectives,

belief structures, and traditions. Conversation between two or more people who hold different points of view on a common concern can enable parties to gain a better understanding of each other’s perspectives and is central to resolving conflicts and building sustainable peace.

Dialogue can take place to resolve community disputes, family disputes or disputes between communities with different religious beliefs and creeds. Abu-Nimer defines inter-religious dialogue as a safe process of verbal and non-verbal interaction to exchange ideas, thoughts and information between people from different religious backgrounds (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007). Interfaith dialogue is not debate; it does not look for winners or losers.¹⁴ Neither does it aim to undermine any religious tradition nor create a unified religious system. Interfaith dialogue aims to contribute to establishing tolerant and respectful relationships, as well as social, political and economic institutions and structures through actively and constructively engaging the ‘other’. The goal of dialogue is not to eliminate differences of opinion and conviction, but to gain an understanding and acceptance of those differences (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 2007). Both inter- and intra-religious dialogues aim to clarify misunderstandings and increase accurate knowledge of others’ perspectives, belief structures, and traditions.

Although the modern understanding of the term has been developed in the West, dialogue has also been an integral aspect of resolving conflicts between Muslims as well as Muslims and non-Muslims since the time of the Prophet (PBUH). Dialogue between community members and as well as between different religious communities is encouraged by foundational Islamic texts such as the Qur’an and the *hadith*. Many of the peacebuilding principles identified earlier inform this tradition of dialogue within Islamic contexts as they clearly show that diversity is a Divine plan that should be respected and protected and that working for coexistence is a duty upon Muslims. The Qur’an clearly prohibits religious oppression and asks Muslims to respect others in the verse “there is no compulsion in religion” (Q2:256). Respect for and protection of all places of worship is also an Islamic

command (Q22:40) as maintaining good relations with the Jews and Christians, as the People of the Book – *ahl al-kitab* – are particularly emphasised in the Qur’an. The Qur’an can be interpreted as not only permitting eating some of their food, but also encourages Muslim men to marry pious women among the people of the book as a way to build alliances and strengthen relations. The Qur’an clearly instructs Muslims to seek the commonalities with the people of the book saying “And do not argue with the followers of the Book except by what is best, save with those of them who act unjustly, and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit.” (Q29:46) Such a strategy is central to many interfaith dialogue encounters.

The Prophet’s (PBUH) tradition also supports dialogue. For instance he has said “Souls are like recruited troops. Those who get to know one another will develop mutual understanding, and those who are strangers to each other are more likely to dispute.”¹⁴ According to Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2007), this *hadith* makes intra-faith and interfaith dialogue a necessity for acquiring a better understanding and building bridges between different communities. Efforts to establish constructive relations with non-Muslims continued throughout the Prophet’s (PBUH) life by signing treaties with other religious communities to live in peace with them, displaying great respect to the religious beliefs and practices of other communities, and encouraging constructive relations with them in every aspect of daily life. One of the first recorded examples of Muslim-Christian dialogue took place during the time of the Prophet (PBUH) in 615 CE in Abyssinia between the Muslim emigrants and Ethiopian Christians. The Constitution of Medina, which established peaceful relations between the Muslim and Jewish tribes, exemplifies model relations between these communities. The Constitution recognised the Jewish community as a single *Ummah*, like the Muslim *Ummah* and gave them the right to profess their religion, have their places of worship protected and secured strong alliances

¹⁴ Kadayifci-Orellana (forthcoming: b).

¹⁵ Cited in Shafiq & Abu-Nimer (2007), p. 1.

between the Muslims and Jews and guaranteeing the protection of the other group, if they were to be attacked (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 2007), among others. This model became the basis of inter-religious coexistence in the Islamic world during the Abbasid, Andalusian, Mughul, and Ottoman periods.

Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2007) identify various other Qur’anic terms to support Islamic principles on dialogue. Some of these terms include *ta’araf*, *islah*, *mujadalahwa al maw’izat al-hasanah*, *ta’awun* and *istabiqu al-khayrat*. For instance, they state that, *ta’aruf*, which can be defined as knowing, understanding and building relationships rooted in verses such as Q49:13, invites human beings to get to know each other and add that Allah intended people to seek each other’s acquaintance and learn from their differences (*lita’arufu*). In this context, interfaith meetings would be defined as ‘*majlis li-ta’arufu*. *Islah*, which can be translated as building bridges and restoring relations, and is another term identified by Shafiq and Abu-Nimer (2007), who state, “interfaith dialogue is nothing more than working for *islah*” as it aims to bring unity between Muslims and fosters good relations and peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims (2007: 43). Qur’anic verses such as “Had God so willed, He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He has given you (He has made you as diverse as you are). So vie with one another in good works. To God you will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein you differ,” (Q5:48) urge Muslims to go beyond mere coexistence and to actively seek mutual understanding and cooperative relationships. The Qur’anic verse “do not dispute with the people of the Book except means better” (Q29:46) is another that supports this contention.

Ta’awun – working together for the good of God’s creation and *al hikmahwa al-maw’izat al-hasanah* (wisdom and goodly exhortation) – urges Muslims to go beyond just co-existing but invites them to work together with other communities for the betterment of the world. Muslims are told to excel or compete in good deeds (Q5:48) – *istabiqu al khayrat*’ as a distinguished community of the middle path ‘*al ummah al wasat*’. These qualities also indicate that a

model community of Muslims should invite others to work for the betterment and peace in this world.

Interfaith dialogue also requires using respectful methods to increase mutual understanding. Being polite, gentle, and avoiding harshness are particularly important from an Islamic perspective of dialogue (Shafiq and Abu-Nimer 2007). God praises politeness and gentleness as the Qur’an states, “it is a mercy of Allah that you dealt gently with them. If you had been severe or hard-hearted, they would have broken away from you. So pass over (their faults), ask for (Allah’s) forgiveness for them and consult them in affairs (of importance)” (Q3:159). God says, “when a (courteous) greeting is offered to you meet it with a greeting still more courteous (or at least of equal courtesy) Allah takes careful account of everything” (Q4:86), and asks Muslims to be soft spoken as the Qur’an states “But speak to him mildly” (Q20:44), and to avoid speaking ill of others or their religion (Q6:108).

Furthermore, the Qur’an asks Muslims to overcome anger and be forgiving, patient and treat others equally and humanely. Smiling and laughing gently are also encouraged during dialogue as smiling is considered charity.¹⁶ Giving others a chance to speak and paying full attention while they are speaking and being ready to help and volunteer are also critical during dialogue in Islam. Additionally, punctuality and dressing well are also part of important aspects of Islamic dialogue (Shafiq and Abu Nimer 2007). Both the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions practiced these manners during their interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Intra-community and inter-religious dialogues have been used in Islamic contexts to build bridges between different religious communities in places like Palestine, Lebanon, Southern Thailand, Mindanao Philippines, Northern Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Kenya, among others. For instance, traditions of *sulha* often brought Muslims, Christians, Jews and Druze leaders to work together to resolve conflicts involving

¹⁶ Muhammad ibn Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Al-Shama’il al Muhammadiyah*, ‘Chapter on the Speech of Rasulullah’.

their communities and develop better understanding in Lebanon.¹⁷ Similarly, Muslim and Christian religious leaders often gather together to discuss community issues and explore ways to resolve conflicts in Mindanao, Philippines,¹⁸ or in Thailand. For instance Soraya Jamjuree, the founder of Friends of Victimized Families in South Thailand has focused on reconciliation between Muslims and Buddhists. Inspired by a strong sense of responsibility derived from Islamic principles of vicegerency, and justice, she works to build healthy relationships and bonds between Muslims and Buddhists and to improve coping skills and reduce pain. Similarly, the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria aims to respond to the conflict in their community through interfaith activism.¹⁹ Nigeria has also witnessed the work done by the Imam Muhammad Ashafa and the Pastor James Wuye in bringing warring Muslims and Christians together (Henderson 2009).

2.3 Final thoughts

The above section has explored three main practical strategies utilised by many Muslim communities around the world in settling disputes and contributing to peace and stability in their societies. As illustrated, since these strategies have deep roots in the Qur’an, *hadith*, and Islamic tradition, they are effective, and concomitantly any intervention in such Muslim communities can be effective only if it is derived from such Islamic discourses that promote peace and pluralism.

¹⁷ See Abu-Nimer et al. (2007), Jabbour (1993) and Kadayifci-Orellana (2007).

¹⁸ See Quijano, *Informal Mediators in The Peace Process in Mindanao*.

¹⁹ Kadayifci-Orellana (2010).

3. The way forward

This paper has focused on the Islamic tradition of conflict resolution and peacebuilding and analysed some of the main Islamic values and principles that inform this tradition. The paper has also discussed three specific conflict resolution mechanisms at the community level, namely mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation – by focusing on different Islamic contexts – mainly Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia. These are just a few examples from the Muslim world, among many others. Although particulars of these mechanisms differ from region to region due to different histories and socio-cultural contexts they all prioritise restoring peace (justice and honour) between individuals, families, tribes and villages. These traditions are deeply embedded in tribal local cultures, wisdom, and experience and are supported by well-established and long-standing rituals, sensitive to the community values which are essential to local cultures, including honour, dignity, and continuity,

These conflict resolution mechanisms have been effectively used to resolve many conflicts at the community level in Muslim communities. However, it is important to recognise that due to certain factors and conditions, these dispute resolution and peacebuilding traditions are in need of reframing and revival to be more effective in addressing modern conflicts.¹ Some of the challenges that face Muslim peacebuilding frameworks and strategies include:

► *New issues and dynamics*

Many conflicts in modern Islamic contexts involve dynamics that are different to those the traditional mechanisms are intended to resolve. Today, these conflicts involve social, economic, and political dimensions as well as identity issues that are unique to the modern era. New types of global and local actors such as international governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations as well as cartels and warlords, who are often called spoilers, play significant roles in these conflicts. The globalization of communication and transportation technology has also led to the interconnectedness of conflicts around the world facilitating rapid spill over effects that destabilise regions. By focusing on communal harmony, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are often not focused

on addressing root causes. For instance, they do not link issues related to development (such as social and economic needs, unemployment, lack of infrastructure and education, as well as discrimination of various groups) with the emergence of conflicts and long lasting peace. In addition, some of these mechanisms are practiced in a way that contributes to maintaining the status quo, which may have led to the conflict in the first place. Some may also fail to transform various traditional structures that perpetuate discrimination and marginalisation of various groups such as marrying young people, particularly girls, as part of the reconciliation agreement to create bonds between families, especially if the third party members act in a biased manner.

For peace and conflict resolution projects to be successful in a Muslim community context, there is a need for such a project to respond to the basic infrastructure needs (economic development, basic education facilities) of these communities and to combine peacebuilding with development efforts. Responding to modern-day conflicts and transforming traditions that are harmful to the society and perpetuate structural violence also requires systematic reflecting on rethinking of these traditions in the light of modern needs and requirements and connecting them to Islamic principles of peace and conflict resolution. It also requires systematic studies on effective strategies that bring about lasting peace.

► *Gender and age imbalance*

Traditional conflict resolution practices mainly involve mostly elder men who hold significant social power. Although young men and women may be included in some of these meetings or women may have their own ways of playing constructive roles in resolving conflicts these are exceptions or not systematically included in the processes.² Women and youth are often impacted by conflicts in their own way and have their own unique needs. For instance, many young people who are frustrated with

¹ These dispute resolution mechanisms have various limitations, which will not be addressed in depth in this paper due to limited space.

² This is a broad topic, beyond the scope of this paper. For a study on Muslim Women's Peacebuilding efforts see Kadayifci-Orellana & Funk (2010), and Kadayifci-Orellana (forthcoming: a).

a lack of education, employment or other opportunities for livelihood are easily motivated to take up arms and join extremist groups or gangs. On the other hand, women are often displaced, widowed, or raped as a result of conflicts and may have to take up new roles as single parents in charge of taking care of their families. Additionally, peacebuilding traditions that focus on clergy and politically and socially powerful individuals are often men and can often marginalize women from the process. Women have different strengths and perspectives that can help facilitate conflicts and build sustainable peace.³ Therefore, it is critical for the needs and perspectives of these groups to be included in peacebuilding and conflict resolution for them to be long-lasting and effective. For that reason, it is essential to integrate approaches that are sensitive to the unique needs of different groups in these communities. In a Muslim community context, the incorporation of women in social and public peacebuilding initiatives becomes a crucial and sensitive issue that often needs to be negotiated within a Muslim peacebuilding discourse and framework before it can be achieved.

► **Power dynamics**

Traditional conflict resolution approaches in the Muslim world often rely on third parties that have social, political power. These third parties often have enormous power due to their rank and status. The hierarchical and authoritarian nature of these processes may not only discourage community members, especially marginalised groups from talking up and presenting their views, but also resist or challenge the decisions. Although accountability, transparency, consultation, and the confidence of the community are important for the effectiveness of the process and the legitimacy of the third parties, hierarchies and power structures makes the process vulnerable to abuse or corruption by those who may have particular interests in the outcome. Social pressure or fear of being ostracised may make it difficult to stand up to abusive and unjust decisions taken by various tribal leaders. Although Islamic values and principles play a central role in the process, at times tribal practices may take precedence or lack of sufficient knowledge about Islam may lead to practices that do not always reflect Islamic ideals of peace and justice.



Focusing on Islamic education becomes extremely important in distinguishing what is Islamic and what is not, and establishing sustainable and just peace in Muslim communities

► **Education and understanding Islam**

Although knowledge of the context, customs and Islamic rules and norms are central to the credibility of the third parties and the process of conflict resolution practices, in many Islamic contexts, communal leaders, and at times imams, do not have the opportunity to study these themes. In many cases, these leaders may have memorised the Qur'an but do not have sufficiently advanced skills in Arabic or Islamic education to distinguish between that which is Islamic and the tribal and/or local culture. Although Islamic values and principles play a central role in the process at times, tribal practices may take precedence or lack of sufficient knowledge about Islam may lead to practices that do not always reflect Islamic ideals of peace and justice. As a result many un-Islamic practices are often considered to be part of the tradition, and thus inform final decisions.⁴ Focusing on Islamic education, as well as understanding the basics of conflict resolution in local contexts, becomes extremely important in distinguishing what is Islamic and what is not, and establishing sustainable and just peace in Muslim communities. Therefore, building the capacity of local leaders in peacebuilding and participatory development practices is far more effective in resolving conflicts than attempting to replace them with outsiders.

► **Synchronising peacebuilding efforts**

Despite various limitations of community practices in responding to modern conflicts, they have been effectively used to resolve conflicts in their communities and to re-establish peace and harmony. A majority of these organisations in the Muslim world today face the problem of lack of professionally trained facilitators, mediators or third parties. In addition, for peace and conflict resolution intervention projects to be successful there is a need for such projects to respond to the basic infrastructure needs (economic development and basic education facilities) of beneficiaries. Due to the dire need for economic and social development, especially in providing basic infrastructure and livelihood in many Muslim communities, the need

to combine development and peacebuilding initiatives becomes essential in introducing peacebuilding concepts and frameworks into such contexts. Often Muslim community leaders complain that peacebuilding projects have not produced any tangible results in improving the immediate lives of the participants or their communities. Another challenge in implementing peacebuilding programs in a Muslim community relates to the fact that women in such contexts have often been more limited than men in their capacity to access international organisations. Thus whilst the majority of the projects target men especially in the religious peacebuilding sector such as interfaith dialogue, training of clergy, there is less access for Muslim women to official peacebuilding mechanisms.

In most peacebuilding training and capacity building programs participants emphasise that they have no doubt that the Islamic tradition is peaceful and endorses values promoting diversity and peace. However, the challenge is often linking these values and moral teachings with concrete, relevant, and immediate solutions related to the lives of the participants or beneficiaries. When implementing initiatives of peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Muslim communities there is a need to engage the clergy and faith-based associations and individuals rather than secular NGOs, who mostly focus their peacebuilding efforts on local organisations that are non-faith, due to the sensitivity of engaging religious associations. One of the greatest challenges faced is the perception local communities hold that peacebuilding and conflict resolution are part of a non-Muslim agenda. This is primarily due to the nature of peacebuilding actors on the ground who either comprise international organisations based in the global north, who tend to have a secular approach, or involve non-Muslim faith-based organisations such as Catholic Relief Services and World Vision.

³ See Kadayifci-Orellana (forthcoming: a).

⁴ Some of these include forced marriages, mutilation of body parts or gang-raping women as a form of punishment as in the case of Mukhtar Mai in Pakistan.



4. Recommendations

Understanding the tools, mechanisms, nature, and challenges facing peacebuilding initiatives in Muslim communities has specific implications for programming. Recommendations to enable integration of peacebuilding into programming and the development of innovative approaches to transforming conflict include:

► **Institutionalisation**

Inclusion of peacebuilding as an integral part of an organisation's operations is essential for an effective implementation of an integrated peacebuilding framework, for both individuals and communities. Development without peace is unsustainable, and peacebuilding without development is often ineffective – as a result, it is essential to integrate peacebuilding concepts and tools into the approach of humanitarian and relief organisations (amongst others) (Zelizer and Oliphant 2013). Relying on individual consultants or sporadic initiatives in various regions may not produce significant results. Enhancing the institutional capacity of organisations to engage in peacebuilding initiatives is crucial in sending the right message to the various stakeholders associated with the organisation.

► **Conflict analysis**

Conducting a rigorous analysis prior to starting programming ensures that peacebuilding work is effective and efficient. Although there are numerous analytical frameworks and tools that provide the critical step linking theory to practice, an understanding of local contexts and cultures will avoid the exacerbation of conflict. Thus, on top of what has already been discussed, a conflict analysis should (Zelizer and Oliphant, 2013):

- Identify key parties and their underlying motivations and relationships (*who* is involved).
- Review the history and wider context of the conflict (*what* is the background; *when* events have occurred).
- Examine the dynamics of the conflict (*why* the conflict is happening).
- Coordinate with other actors (local and international) already engaged in peacebuilding work to help strengthen local capacity and not needlessly duplicate efforts.

► **Conflict sensitivity**

Based on the 'do no harm' principle of modern humanitarian response, this concept "recognises the political nature of assistance and shows 'politically informed neutrality' (active awareness of attempts to manipulate aid), integrates conflict prevention to avoid latent tensions, does no harm and engages with development and peacebuilding actors" (Jobbins 2013: 85). This approach attempts to address ways that aid can cause conflict or miss opportunities to create peace. One cause for humanitarian-linked conflict is in the identification of beneficiaries and aid recipients and whilst programs are designed to be as objective as possible in meeting the needs of a population, this does not often tally with the expectations of local communities. In order to reduce potential conflicts, the local community should participate in identifying beneficiaries, choosing trusted third parties to act as mediators and mapping conflicts. Communication and transparency, working with existing local structures and reflecting local diversity are also equally important. The conflict analysis methodology lends credence to this approach.

► **Organisational capacity development**

For any organisation training for staff at all levels from top management to program managers is imperative, even where there is a specialised team on peacebuilding and conflict management on staff.

► **Peacebuilding documentation**

It is also vital that a knowledge management system is put into place to capture lessons learnt and to provide a special portal for organisational learning through research topics and questions, reporting on best practices in linking peacebuilding and development, impact stories on macro and micro levels and utilising various forms of social media to capture peacebuilding.

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