

FAISAL BIN MUAAMMAR

Secretary General of the Vienna-based KAICIID Dialogue Centre

Pierre Morel, Director of the Pharos Observatory of cultural and religious pluralism

We continue in the same region in a different way. Mr Bin Muaammar has been vice-Minister of Education in Saudi Arabia, but now has a new mission, which is quite recent but has started in an impressive way in Vienna, KAICIID, and I will let you explain what it is.

Faisal Bin Muaammar, Secretary General of the Vienna-based KAICIID Dialogue Centre

Your Royal Highness, Your Holiness, Ladies and gentlemen, I feel privileged to join you today to talk about what we do: bringing religious leaders and politicians to the dialogue table. I consider myself to be a servant of dialogue. Thank you for allowing me to share my views on this vital topic.

We meet at the end of a year where global governance has once more been severely tested, whether in Syria or in other places on the planet; God knows what is next. Nowhere is smart, careful leadership more needed than in the work of our political and religious leaders. It was this pressing need that inspired the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, to call for dialogue among the followers of different religions and cultures; that was 2005, and if you remember what happened after 2001, the world faced many problems, in Afghanistan, Iraq and many other places. The failure of military and diplomatic solutions spurred us to seek out a different solution. And the seed of this initiative grew into what we know today as "KAICIID".

The King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, where I have the honour of serving as Secretary General, works to create more dialogue between politicians and religious leaders, according to this idea that started in 2005 by King Abdullah. It took seven years from concept to reality. Just over a year ago, in November 2012, we established the KAICIID Dialogue Centre in Vienna. The Centre, was founded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Austria and the Republic of Spain, with the Holy See as a Founding Observer.

What KAICIID proposes is relatively new, at least in the intergovernmental circles of the international community. KAICIID does not subscribe to the idea that only separation of religion from politics is the answer, or that only the unity of the two is acceptable; a balance is needed. We work to create more dialogue between politicians and religious leaders on any issue they find necessary. Just last month at our global forum in Vienna, we announced a global policy network that is unique in interreligious education. The network connects experts and government ministries for education, religious affairs and integration around the world. This initiative was requested at all four regional conferences we held during 2013 in Vienna, Addis Ababa, New Delhi and Buenos Aires. We hope that the global policy network will sustain dialogue on the various issues and recommendations raised this year.

Religion and politics overlap in an interconnected world. Tension between the two, when it occurs, is not limited to one country, region or religion. The scars of history remain raw in people's hearts and minds. Today, they still remember drawn-out conflicts and live through unresolved hurts. Unfortunately, fresh wounds continue to be inflicted, in Myanmar, Syria, Central Africa and many places in the world. What are the expectations in the Muslim world, where religion is such a big part of national identity? Can religious intervention stop conflicts when politics fails?

Politicians in the West have separated church and state through a process that has allowed the emergence of various forms of democracy. To what extent can this model be applied universally? Despite successes, many challenges remain in the West regarding the management of religious diversity. Religion and politics in the Muslim world, in contrast, are much more closely connected. When we look at conflict in any region, the question must be: Where is



the dialogue? When things go wrong, why is destruction chosen over dialogue? The misuse of religion has caused many problems, and so has the misuse of politics, but we must remember that war in the name of religion is war against religion itself. War in the name of democracy is war against democracy. Dialogue is a *must*.

The true value of good governance is that it can be found in diverse models across the world. I, as a Muslim, can never blame the whole of Judaism or Christianity for the behaviour of a small number of Jews or Christians, nor can I blame a whole religion's tradition for the ideology of politicians who misuse their own religious tradition. Some extremists use religion as part of their identity, and then go on to commit acts in direct contradiction to the teachings of their faith. Therefore, we see the framing of the fallout from 9-11. Before that tragic event, I couldn't imagine that we would ever use religion against culture. It was a major mistake to do so. That was a really big problem.

Let us disconnect the image of violence from a single religion. Let us instead through dialogue seek solid, accurate and complete information, and let us consider the words we use as well. Religious leaders need to be careful how they relate to politics, but political leaders also need to be careful how they relate to religion; the key word is 'how'. Through dialogue we can discover our differences in understanding of the word 'how' in our respective societies. This comes from true dialogue, and KAICIID wants to improve the relationship between religion and politics.

We will do so mainly by improving the practice of dialogue in the various sectors of society, starting with policymakers and religious leaders.

Pierre Morel, Director of the Pharos Observatory of cultural and religious pluralism

With this new opening for which you have the responsibility, this is a real step forward, and you gave us the main direction, neither separation nor unification, but the middle ground to explore together.