

Ladies and Gentlemen
Greetings of peace and hope,

I, Dr. Khwaja Iftikhar Ahmed, Founder President, Inter Faith Harmony Foundation of India, a forum for interfaith and inter civilization dialogue floated by Indian Muslims, representing the legitimate interfaith voice of 200 million Indian Muslims feel privileged to be part of this conference. With me is the Secretary General All India Organization of Imams of Mosques who is representing half a million Imams and he is someone who is known for his bold initiatives on peace. He believes in peace by conviction and not by compulsion. Pl. welcome him. He is very much present amongst you.

Reform in Islam is a subject being debated by Non Islamists for more than fourteen centuries. The obvious reason for that is either non understanding of Islam or misunderstanding of it. The misconceived notions about Islam and their answers are as follows:

- **Islam is generally perceived as a religion that threatens the foundation of all other religions.**

"Islam is the consummation of all religions. By accepting the Prophets and Scriptures of all nations, Islam affirms God's Unity and universal providence, as well as the universality of religious experience. Muslims are true followers of all Prophets, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. In fact denying any one of them is like denying Mohammad. (SAW)"

- **It is identified with Jihad and Jihad is understood by killing of non Muslims.**

"To strive to purify mind, body, soul and spirit by developing resistance and resilience against evil and materialistic temptations, to keep the love of God above everything, to fight in the name of Allah when that is imposed on you but for no other cause except to establish justice, equity and fairness. Jihad has nothing to do with killing of innocent men, women and children belonging to any Faith"

But if the enemy inclines towards peace, you also incline towards peace and trust in Allah: for He is the one Who hear and know all things. Sura 8 Verse 61

- **It believes in the use of coercive methods including the use of force to further its ends.**

"That if one slew a person-unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land-It would be as if He slew the whole people: And if any one saved a life it would be as if He saved the life of whole people" Sura5, A32

- It negates pluralism and denies the individual right to freely think and act.

"To be your way, And to me mine" Sura.109, A6

"Islam like any other Faith is a religion of peace and brotherhood. It addresses humanity as one family, believes in equal respect for all religions, accepts the right of each individual to choose the Faith of his/her own choice. It restricts the conversion of non Muslims to Islam by force or allurements"

- It is against modern education, scientific temperament, rational thinking, democratic functioning and secular outlook.

This is a myth and nothing more than that. Islam calls upon the believers to go deep into orbit and space, earth and ocean to see what blessings God has kept for you there. Faith without logic is no Faith. If thinking is real thinking it has to be rational, All decisions must be made in consultation with those who are capable of that, Its outlook is based on equality, justice and fairness.

- It is against gender equality and denies women equal rights.

This is a charge on Islam which is based on the false understanding of the teachings and practices of Prophet Mohammad. In fact Islam is the first religion to give equal rights to women. However in Islamic perspective women is an independent entity with its distinct physical, emotional and intellectual instincts.

- Terms like fundamentalism, fanaticism, extremism and terrorism are synonymous with Islam.

It is fundamentalist because its fundamentals are very clear and authenticated; It is fanatic because it accords highest priority to the will of God and not to the will of man; It is extremist because it refuses to budge from its fundamentals; It is terrorist because it voices against injustice and inequality. Islam is synonymous with nothing but peace, peace and peace and that is for one and all which includes universe and everything that exists on it, known and unknown.

Islam is a blessing of God Almighty to humanity. Unfortunately there is not a single Muslim State that can be considered truly Islamic. Had that been a situation things would have been easy to understand and ameliorate.

Muslims need reform not Islam

Yes I agree that Muslims need reform practically in every walk of life. These reforms are required at the level of individual, group, society and state and they can also be described as educational, social, psychological, economic and political reforms. Let me detail them out now in points form only otherwise it would be too long a talk.

Educational reforms:

- Modernization of traditional Madarsa education through reforms in its curriculum
- Introduction of subjects like, English, psychology, sociology, mathematics, science and computer education as being the essential ingredients of traditional education
- Introduction of spiritual education because religion divides and spirituality unites / Commonalities of religion & Universal norms of morality can constitute the core of this education.
- Mass literacy awareness programmes are sponsored by State, Civil society and international community / NGOs' are utilized optimum for this purpose.

Social reforms:

- Encouragement to scientific method of enquiry and investigation in all walks of life
- Rationality and moderation are adopted as the essential tools in all decision making exercises and mechanisms
- Adult education / literacy programmes are initiated locally
- Increase in environmental awareness through print and electronic media campaign
- Transformation of attitude and general behavioral tendencies for energy conservation
- Preaching and propagation of the concept of neighborhood
- Encouragement to women education and support for girl child at State's expense
- Empowerment of socially weaker sections through legislative reforms

Psychological reforms:

- Softening of temperament through training and counseling
- Discouragement to passion based actions, initiatives and decisions through effective attitude and media management
- Setting high standards of ethics and morality with examples of role models from living legends
- Generating space for fresh, scientific and innovative thinking by building up acceptance for diversity in views i.e. Honoring diversity and difference of opinion, make it a way of life
- Encouraging activities like theatre, drama, music & art, games and sports for generating community feeling

Economic reforms:

- Open Market economy / Deregulation and delicensing / Liberalization
- Development of investment friendly climate by providing effective equity management
- Encouragement of savings at the middle class level by providing it lucrative investment offers
- Encouragement to profit & loss sharing based economy to equitably divide the risk and profit among the players of business
- Privatization of core areas of development like Atomic & Space Research, Defense systems, Military hardware, Agriculture, industry etc.

Political reforms:

- Democracy at any cost/ End of all non democratic political systems
- Constitutional Supremacy at any cost
- Judicial reforms / independent judiciary
- Depoliticisation of Army and bureaucracy
- Participative governance
- Free print and electronic media

Though all the reforms are important but the most important amongst all is the temperament. What we gain with wisdom so easily we lose that through our too emotive temperament. Let us take few examples. Before 1967 Israel was literally pleading the leadership of Egypt to allow its ships to use Swiss Canal but the response was so emotive that we had to face 1967. Within 72 hours the total defense power of Egypt, Syria and Jordan was razed to the ground. I am sorry to use such harsh words. The same Egypt with a more realistic leader at the helm of affairs signs a peace deal, takes back all the occupied land and for more than twenty years nation takes the benefit of peace. Arabs after the signing of deal declare Egypt outcast, shifts the headquarters of Arab League to Tunisia and what not. Jordan follows the suit and is enjoying the fruits of peace. Lebanon too followed the suit, achieved peace and moved towards the path of progress

but it again comes in the grip of the same temperament and the results are before everybody. I very strongly believe that if Arabs in the first case have followed the Egypt way what we faced thereafter might not have been faced. Is Iraq a small tragedy? How Iraq and its leadership became the target of its own follies, it is again the temperament? Those who go for practical approach are charged initially with sell outs and after some time they again become dear. Iran and its leadership is committing the same mistake by denying the international community necessary space to intervene and peacefully resolve the issue. If you have achieved the military might will you use it to wipe out other nations? If so then what is the difference between you and others. May God be kind to them? I wish good sense prevails. I foresee the repetition of past follies and its consequences. Pakistan which used to be the largest Muslim country in the world before 1971 is also a victim of the same temperament. Its Army rulers have not learnt any lessons from the past follies. They are repeating the same mistakes again and again. Bengalis were on the forefront in creating Pakistan and then in breaking Pakistan. Bangladesh is another example and there can be many more. We the Muslims in India while protesting against the cartoon, or Rushdie or Tasleema controversy are found throwing stones at the shop of Hindus. How does it fit into the situation?

In our individual capacity we are not very tolerant. When I say this there is a possibility of some backlash. But I have to say the truth. Our reactions are very threatening in nature and our responses are too emotive. We are not governed by pragmatism rather we are ruled by passions.

As a group we are hardly coherent, consistent and compatible with each other. Escapism, conspiracy theory and enmity with Islam & Muslims are our pet responses to difficult challenges, threats and risks that we face.

As a society we are inconsistent with the time, energy, space, change and environment. Transformation is either negligible or too slow. Transition we generally resist.

As 58 States we have abundance of resources but in none of the world political, social or economic forums we are either not there and if are there then at the mercy of somebody else. As a community we are devoid of independent leadership, organizational network, strong institutions, democratic functioning and secular approach. Who is responsible for all this? Democracy, fundamental rights and civil liberties are still dreams for most of the citizens of Muslim states. There are many Muslim States but there is none Islamic in totality.

WE do need reforms. Let us admit it, accept it and act accordingly. Let us learn to admit our follies. Let our rulers read what is written on the wall. The revolution in media and communication is going to break all barriers. It is a wakeup call for

all non democratic regimes. Otherwise with the kind of temperament we have
God alone can save us. May Allah be kind to Ummah? Amen.

Dr. Khwaja Iftikhar Ahmed

Founder President, Inter Faith Harmony Foundation of India

www.interfaithharmony.org

ifhf2005@yahoo.co.in