

**SPEECH BY GRAND MUFTI OF EGYPT SHEIKH DR SHAWKI ALLAM AT THE
MUIS LECTURE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FOURTH DISTINGUISHED
VISITOR PROGRAMME (DVP) 2015 ON MONDAY, 26 JANUARY 2015**

(Speech translated into English from Arabic)

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds, praise that befits Your Majesty and Sovereignty. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet of mercy, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his household) who was sent by God as a mercy and guide to the worlds, as per God's words: "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds: [21: 107]. And I bear witness that there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

Your Excellency Minister Yaacob Ibrahim,

Honorable Scholars,

Distinguished Guests.

Assalamu 'Alaikum wa Rahmatuallah wa Barakatuh (May God's peace, mercy and blessings be upon you).

First, allow me to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the government and people of the Republic of Singapore for this kind invitation. My special thanks to His Excellency, Minister Yaacob Ibrahim and to all the Muslim leaders in Singapore, to whom we hold all respect. We look forward to cooperating with its honorable people in what accomplishes the common interest and mutual good for our people.

Honorable guests

The message of Islam is universal; it was not limited to Mecca or to the Arabs but encompasses the entire world as per the words of Allah the Almighty Who said: Blessed is He Who sent down the Furqan (Quran) upon His servant that it may be a reminder to the worlds a warner" [25: 1].

Being a universal religion, Islam was able to embrace all past nations and civilizations, with their various cultures, multiple faiths and different customs. This is confirmed through the verses of the Glorious Quran such as: "And We have not sent you except comprehensively to mankind as a bringer of good tidings and a warner" [34: 28]. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Verily, God the Exalted has sent me as a mercy to all mankind." It was for this reason that, after signing the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) sent messages to all the kings and nations to promote the message of Islam worldwide. At the time, the manner he adopted in his message suited the prevailing conditions and requirements without undermining the status of Islam or Muslims. Rather, his call was clemency, enlightenment and a mercy to the worlds. The message of a Muslim, as elucidated by Allah the Almighty in the Quran: "And thus

we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you” [2: 143].

Looking back into Islamic history, we realize that whenever true Islam and faith exist in any country, prosperity, abundance and mercy prevail in all of its people's affair. This becomes evident if we compare the status of the Arabian Peninsula, West Africa, Indonesia or India before and after Islam. Every time we look at any of these nations, we will find that faith has imbued them with beauty and tolerance. Every country that came under Muslim rule enjoyed what is known as a golden age. Verily, faith never enters a heart, except that it enhances it. Similarly, believing people never develop in a community, except that they enhance it. We do not limit this to cultural beauty such as art, architecture, music and poetry, but extend it to the beauty of conduct and manners.

True faith therefore means to live and let others share this life with us as civilized humans. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “I was sent to perfect good manners.” The main objective of the Prophet's mission was to ameliorate human conduct and promote sound manners. The Prophet's message was addressed to all mankind and not just to Arabs in specific. He is our good role model.

We must exert utmost efforts to achieve prosperity for the society in which we live. We have to improve our conditions and work on reforming our moral values on the individual level, and then promote them among our families and societies. Consequently, we should help in rectifying our moral compass and set a new moral agenda.

It is important to show respect to all people. Islam prohibits directing any aggression against those who do not attack us. It likewise prohibits theft, fraud and deception either with Muslims or non-Muslims. Whatever is impermissible to do to a Muslim is likewise impermissible to do to a non-Muslim based on the words of God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) who said: "None of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." The Hanbali Imam, Ibn Rajab, and others mentioned that the word "brother" in this prophetic tradition does not refer to fellow Muslim only. Rather, it is comprehensive and includes the broad meaning of brotherhood that encompasses all mankind since all humans are born of the same father, Adam (peace be upon him). This fact makes us realize the existence of ties, remote as they may seem, that connect all mankind, necessitating treating non-Muslims like we do to Muslims. God the Almighty therefore directed us to: “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best” [16: 125]. This means that our dialogue with the other should be free of disputes and cruelty. We should neither be offensive nor transgress limits. Our manner and arguments should be motivated by reaching the truth and respecting it. We must be advocates of peace.

We must also be good citizens, since a true believer must necessarily be a good and righteous individual in the society in which he lives. This does not mean forfeiting our Muslim identity and completely dissolving in the society in which we are a minority. I do not advocate this. We must hold fast to what distinguishes us as a community, and at the same time comprehend the existence

of other aspects which are common among all mankind and which we cannot neglect. It is our duty to hold firmly to our roots as we possess strong faith in ourselves as Muslims. We must nevertheless open up to the other to show this spirit. In addition, it is necessary to believe that God's creation is based on diversity, manifested in the colors of creation around us. God did not create just one type of tree or one species of animals. Even humans have different languages, skin color, faiths and orientations. There is a certain wisdom to all of this for this is God's decree. He says: "And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ" [11: 118]. All mankind might have been one but God has created us different to show us His mercy. This is a great challenge before which we must remain steadfast.

Islam has established rules and principles for coexistence with the other which must be applied under all conditions, at all times and in all places. This enables Muslims to live in harmony and assimilate into the societies in which they live, guaranteeing their interaction and communication with the other without neglecting Islamic fundamentals. Based on these principles and fundamentals, Muslims continue to depict Islamic civilization to accommodate unprecedented matters. Similarly, the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) continues to be held up as the good role model to follow in everything as per the words of the Almighty: "There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of God and excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day" [33: 21]. The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) showed us how to coexist with the other, both inside and outside the Muslim state.

When we speak of Muslim communities and their role in non-Muslim societies and countries, we should not forget to mention that Islam calls upon Muslims to participate in and cooperate with the societies in which they live, even if they are non-Muslim. Islam instructs Muslims not to live in closed communities or ghettos separate from the rest of society lest they become alienated and rejected by the other. Allah says: "Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, God loves those who act justly" [60: 8]. Commenting on the verse, Al-Kawashi said: "This verse was revealed as an instruction to maintain good ties with non-Muslims who are not hostile to Muslims. Dealing kindly and equitably with others is further exemplified in the Prophet's words to Aisha, the mother of the believers, when she responded harshly to the Jews who greeted the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) with 'As-Samu Alaikum' [Death be upon you]. He told her: "Calm down Aisha! Verily, God loves that one should be kind and compassionate in all matters."

There are wonderful examples of peaceful coexistence with the other in Islamic history. The early Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia, fleeing from the oppression of polytheists in Mecca, integrated in the society they moved to, interacting and engaging in trade with the Abyssinians. They even prayed for Al-Najashi to prevail against his enemies and rejoiced at his victory. Some reports mention that Muslims joined forces with Al-Najashi against his enemy, in support of justice and reciprocation of his favor. It was reported that Ja'far Ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet's

cousin fought in Abyssinia against the enemy of Al-Najashi to defend his safety and the safety of Muslims during their secure stay in Abyssinia. From this, we learn that there is no harm for Muslims in fighting alongside the Non Islamic state. Rather we maintain it is a duty to do so. It was also reported that Az-Zubair IbnAl-Awwam fought alongside Al-Najashi. In appreciation, Al-Najashi gave Az-Zubair a lance which the latter later gave to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him).

This is an example of a non-Muslim society in which Muslims lived as a minority enjoying security, justice and freedom. Muslims living in non-Muslim lands need to follow the example and guidance of Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) and apply it to their reality without neglecting the fundamentals of their religion.

Islam has established principles for peaceful coexistence and enjoins maintaining just, tolerant and harmonious relations with non-Muslims in Muslim societies. The Muslim state was established on the basis of citizenship, regardless of faith or ethnicity. The religion of Islam came to support truth, establish justice and eliminate inequity. Justice is the main pillar and an inseparable part of Islamic law which enjoins fair dealings even with opponents. God says: "And do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness" [5: 8]. Justice is incumbent even if it is detrimental to oneself for Allah the Almighty says: "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for God, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives" [4: 135]. The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) also said: "By Allah, if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, I would bring her to justice."

Islam affirms equality as one of its features and principles. It puts all people on equal footing, breaking down differences and removing all considerations except for piety. All mankind are equal. The Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) said in his Farewell Sermon: "O people! Verily, your Lord is One and your father is one. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, a non-Arab over an Arab, a red over a black or a black over a red except in terms of piety. Verily, the most noble among you in the sight of God, is the one who fears Him most."

Attesting to the value of justice and equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, God, Exalted be He, revealed verses that demonstrate Islam's good and fair dealings with the other. The verses refer to a particular incident when the sympathies of some of the Companions were with a Muslim who was suspected of stealing at the expense of a Jew in whose house the Muslim planted the stolen property. God revealed eight verses in the chapter An-Nisaa` in defense of the Jew, exhorting Muslims to maintain justice: "Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth so you may judge between the people by that which God has shown you. And do not be for the deceitful an advocate" [4: 105] and "And whoever commits a sin only earns it against himself. And Allah is ever Knowing and Wise" [4: 111]. That this incident is mentioned in the Quran and the Prophet's biography and Sunnah, makes it a clear cut example and an incontrovertible application of the values of justice and equality in Islam. It helps to strengthen and propagate the spirit of citizenship among the people

of the same country. Man is always in search of justice and equality and aspires to live in a country that realizes these noble values for all segments of the society.

Muslims must be motivated by the principle of harmonious mutual coexistence and not by converting non-Muslims to Islam for Allah says: "There is no compulsion in religion". Interfaith dialogue should not necessarily end in a win-lose scenario. The purpose of such dialogues should not be to bring others into Islam but is for its participants to share values and principles. God Says: "And say, 'The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills—let him believe; and whoever wills—let him disbelieve [18: 29]. The words of God confirm a very important fact, mainly that matters of faith are delegated God and he will settle them on the Day of Judgment. Humans have no hand in them.

Here, it is worthy to mention another important matter namely the moderation of Islam. Muslims hold a middle position between excessiveness and laxity. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "May the extremists perish." He also said: "Beware of excessiveness in religion." The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) detested excessiveness and warned us against it. Excessiveness undermines sound judgment; consequently a person who indulges in it cannot judge the implications of his actions because he strays from the middle position. He assumes his actions to be right when others deem them wrong.

Herein lie the importance of weighing matters according to the standards of Islamic law and a moderate balanced reason. This means that we should neither fear nor attack others. In other words, we should not be cowards or hold an extreme position such as for instance murdering innocents and committing acts that are far removed from the teachings of religion. The consequence of this would be a distorted image of Islam, leading to its rejection and antagonism towards it. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Moderation is the best of all actions."

It is also important to respect the laws of the countries in which one lives for many considerations, the most important of which is that a Muslim should not humiliate himself. A Muslim lives among people who respect their laws. If he violates them, he becomes a criminal, taken to court and jailed, subjecting himself to humiliation as a result. It is likewise important to know that your neighbor, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, has rights over you. There are many examples attesting to this but I will only mention the story of Imam Abu Hanifa, known as the great Imam, with one of his neighbors. Abu Hanifa was known to observe night vigil prayer every night and would spend the night reading the Quran. However, he had a neighbor who was alcoholic addict and who would spend the night drinking and singing immoral songs, a matter that annoyed the Imam. One night when the Imam did not hear his neighbor's usual revelry, he went to ask after him. Upon learning that the man was arrested and put in jail, Abu Hanifa went to visit him. When news of this reached the governor, he asked about the reason for the Imam's visit. And when he was told that Abu Hanifa was concerned about his neighbor, he ordered his release. When the man asked Abu Hanifa why he visited him in jail, he replied: "You have a right over me which I cannot deny." This led the man to repent and return to God the Almighty.

We should reach out to our neighbors and invite them into our homes and mosques. And as I have previously mentioned, we should support all initiatives that promote societal prosperity. We should know how to help local and voluntary charities and enter in partnerships with them. We must extend a helping hand to wherever there is youth crimes, drug abuse, family breakdowns, poverty and homelessness. This is the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) who said: "Spread peace, feed the hungry, pray at night when people are asleep and you will enter paradise in peace." This was the Prophet's first message to the people after he migrated to Medina.

With regards to the dialogue with the other and the incurable events and conflicts the world is witnessing today, it is my personal opinion that we should not allow ourselves to submit to the inevitability of embarking on a course that would lead to a "clash of civilizations". It is our duty to take a preemptive approach to defuse tensions through methodological hard work. In this manner, stability will replace unrest and love will prevail over hostilities. This is because we will give precedence to higher human principles which include the preservation and protection of human life, intellect and freedom. What is required from the Islamic perspective to achieve these objectives, is to have a proper understanding of the nature and purpose of dialogue with the other as well to make a conscious effort to rebuild trust between the different parties and discover common interests. The objectives are part and parcel of the greater philosophy of dialogue based on sound Islamic teachings for the sake of a future for the world, harmoniously uniting all cultures and civilizations.

If Muslims resort to the Book of their Lord and the Sunnah of their Prophet, they will find that they are duty-bound to engage in dialogue and not in conflict. Dialogue comprises an attempt to get to know the other and his way of thinking with the aim of correcting erroneous misconceptions and reach common ground as a basis for mutual cooperation. The truth is that dialogue is a kind of jihad in its broadest Islamic sense. Just as the Quran and Sunnah shed light on the value of dialogue, so does our Muslim heritage.

For any interfaith and intercultural dialogue, it is absolutely necessary to build trust between people. From the Islamic perspective which agrees with that of many other religions, there are two forms of trust: trust in our Lord and relying on Him and belief in destiny. However, this belief in God does not mean neglecting the laws of the universe that regulate our existence in it. Thus, it is important to establish life relations based on trust, cooperation and mutual understanding.

Any endeavor to achieve mutual understanding and trust building which form the basis of any dialogue, requires willingness from all sides. The world is in dire need of forums to achieve real dialogue that springs from the acknowledgment of identities and particularities — a respectful dialogue that does not aim to fan the flames of hostilities and hatred or impose hegemony over the other, a dialogue that is based on religious pluralism and cultural diversity, a dialogue that does not end in a one-sided conversation. Consequently, it is in my view that this type of dialogue does not seek to defeat the other as much as it is an attempt to understand and fathom him. As God says in the Quran, we were created into different nations and tribes so that we may get to know one another.

It is also beneficial to bear in mind that dialogue should not be limited to academics and specialists as this will not only render it unprofitable but may even generate adverse ramifications. The reason for this is because the sublime objective of dialogue is to build bridges of understanding between the people of different cultures. The practice and application of dialogue is therefore necessary — it must not remain behind the walls of meeting rooms. Dialogue should help clear religious differences and understand the divine wisdom of religious plurality.

It is worthy to mention that the project of rebuilding a world where harmony and cooperation prevail is a two-way road, a matter that necessitates the united effort of all parties involved. This is the reason behind the rise in Islamophobia in the world. The fact that the perpetrators of Islamophobia occupy senior positions is indeed worrying.

The reckless actions committed against Islam and Muslims and the absence of a true desire to understand Muslims and their religion, not only hinders efforts to engage in true dialogue but precludes them altogether.

In conclusion, a Muslim should set a good example to others wherever he is, following in the footsteps of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the main source of guidance. God the Almighty says: “There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of God and excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day and [who] remembers God often” [3: 21]. Commenting on the verse, Ibn Kathir said: “This verse is an important principle for following the example of the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) in his statements, actions, and conditions.” God has therefore commanded us to follow the Prophet’s example on the Day of Ahzab with respect to his patience, persistence, diligence and anticipation of God’s relief. The methodology of Islam needs to be conveyed and exemplified through the conduct and actions of Muslims, and thus rendered into a perceptible reality. It is for this reason that God the Almighty sent the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as the embodiment of the methodology of Islam, making him the best example and role model for all mankind.

Thank you. And may God’s peace, mercy and blessings be upon you.