

The MWL Helps the Neediest

The MWL Sponsors Interfaith Program at Columbia University

The Hijrah Exhibition: In the Footsteps of the Prophet

Ghanim Al Muftah: A Young Entrepreneur Defies His Disability



R20: RELIGION AS A GLOBAL SOURCE OF SOLUTIONS



Major global challenges today are not merely political or economic challenges. They are moral challenges... That is why this year the world's religious leaders are for the first-time part of one of the world's biggest political and governmental policy forums, the G20. It is time we acknowledge that religion and faith must be part of the solution for global political crises."

His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa,
Secretary General of the Muslim World League,
at the R20 Religious Forum in Indonesia



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Cover Photo: Participants in the historic G20 Religious Forum in Bali, Indonesia, celebrate together at the first such religious gathering before the Group of 20 summit of government leaders in November.





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Interfaith dialogue is an antidote to the ills of society. Events in very different parts of the world illustrated that fact in recent months.

In early November, the Muslim World League played a central role in the historic G20 Religious Forum in Bali, Indonesia, colloquially called the R20. The event, which featured leaders of many faiths, preceded the G20 summit of major nations. Its message was loud and clear: Religion can and should be part of the solution to major global problems.

At the end of November, in New York City, the Muslim World League helped to inaugurate a program at Teachers College, Columbia University that will train educators to help students — including very young students — feel like they belong in their surroundings rather than like outsiders. Bias

and bullying in schools have been shown to lead to extremism and militancy later in life.

In both cases, leaders from various religions talked seriously about working together to make things better. And that makes a bigger difference than many people appreciate.

In the case of the R20, the progress in Bali was primarily rhetorical. But even that was noteworthy. The event was the first interfaith meeting on the side of the G20, one of the world's most significant diplomatic meetings. R20 speakers raised vital issues that ranged from terrorism to refugees. Their persistent theme for each of them was that leaders of different faiths need to remind government officials that they have obligations to their common humanity to correct the world's ills.

His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa of the Muslim World League made this point

explicitly. “Global challenges today are not merely political or economic challenges. They are moral challenges,” he said in Indonesia. “It is time we acknowledge that religion and faith must be part of the solution for global political crises.”

As a step in that direction, Dr. Al-Issa announced a new bridge-building initiative designed to keep lines of communication open between East and West — a program called Building Bridges between East & West for Peace. Religious leaders need to be part of the bridge building, he said.

A similar reminder was on display in New York. Dr. Al-Issa shared a stage at the prestigious Columbia University with Timothy Cardinal Dolan, the Archbishop of New York, and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Senior Rabbi of the Park East Synagogue in New York, to launch the International Lab for Research

and Leadership in Interfaith Collaboration and Coexistence.

The program, which the Muslim World League helped to fund, will innovate ways to make children of different backgrounds and beliefs feel welcomed rather than shunned in school. That kind of inclusiveness is instrumental in heading off future extremism and dangerous bias that too often leads to hatred and hate crimes.

The cooperation among religions is fundamental to this exercise. It also was key to the promising start of interfaith dialogue that was an adjunct to international diplomacy of the G20. That’s why both events are featured in this magazine. They are trends that we will continue to monitor and comment on in the months and years to come.

The reason: Dialogue makes a difference.



Global challenges today are not merely political or economic challenges. They are moral challenges. It is time we acknowledge that religion and faith must be part of the solution for global political crises."

R20: Solving Global Problems with the Aid of Religion

Indonesia emerged as a global focal point for religion and politics this year. In November, leaders of the Ummah, the world's Muslim community, together with representatives of other faiths, converged in Bali for the inaugural meeting of the G20 Religion Forum (R20). The Muslim World League (MWL) played an important role in this historic event.

The gathering's purpose was unassailable and transparent: to make clear that religion can act as a catalyst for solving problems. This same message was expressed last May in Makkah at the MWL's Forum on Common Values among Religious Followers, and was reemphasized at the R20.

Fittingly, His Excellency Joko Widodo, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, served as the R20's chairman — as he did at the G20 meeting of major countries two weeks later. The MWL and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's most significant Muslim organization, conducted the R20 under their joint auspices.

The Noble Qur'an teaches that God created people in a multiple of colors, creeds, and tongues. Islam has always been mindful that humanity speaks in hundreds of languages and dialects. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) dispatched messengers to foreign kings and emperors. The Prophet's emissaries knew Greek, Aramaic, and Abyssinian.

In that same spirit, Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population. They live alongside Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus. It

is a country filled with many languages, ethnicities, and people, all created in the glory of the Creator. This wonderful human tapestry is but a hint of the wonder that is the Divine.

President Widodo spoke to the R20, as did His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, the Secretary General of the MWL, and His Excellency Miftachul Akhyar, Chairperson of the Supreme Council of the NU. In all, approximately 465 persons from 32 countries attended, along with 40 speakers.

The Indonesia president's message was precise and salient. "Religious leaders of various religions must work together to increase the contribution of religions in solving world problems to reduce rivalry and stop wars for the sake of a peaceful world, a united world, and a world that works together to pass on kindness to future generations," he told the assembly.

Dr. Al-Issa placed the work of the R20 into its proper global and moral context. "Global challenges today are not merely political or economic challenges. They are moral challenges," he reminded those in attendance. "It is time we acknowledge that religion and faith must be part of the solution for global political crises." Dr. Al-Issa also announced a new bridge-building initiative, designed to keep lines of communication open between East and West — a program called Building Bridges between East & West for Peace.

His Excellency Miftachul Akhyar of NU echoed similar sentiments. "The world needs this summit



The MWL hosts the R20 Summit, the official religion engagement group of the Group of 20, to foster a rules-based international order founded on shared values.

to deliver the influential voice of religion,” he stated. “Great hopes are pinned on global religious leaders to present religious values to solve global conflicts.”

Religion is like a flowing, vibrant river that carries with it the accumulated wisdom of the Ages. Texts remind us that it is not our duty to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist from it.

The R20 was also graced to hear from representatives of Christianity and Judaism; Shintoism and Hinduism; academics and leading laymen. Piero Pioppo, the Apostolic

Nuncio to Indonesia, read a message from His Holiness Pope Francis who reinforced the stated goals of the R20.

“The most obvious role of religion is seeking solutions to the challenges that today affect not only individuals but also entire societies, nations, and the world community,” the Pope explained. “The world’s faiths call on us to go beyond the illusion of our own autonomy and to bring our vision to the One Above, to the God who created us, to become one human family, and to the God who brings life and hope to all.”



His Grace, Archbishop Henry Ndukuba, Primate of the Anglican Church of Nigeria, condemned religious extremism and terrorism. "These attacks in Northern and Central and other parts of Nigeria are a clear attempt to terrorize and displace local populations of Christians so that they flee and leave their land and property," the archbishop lamented.

The MWL has repeatedly condemned terrorist attacks in Northern Nigeria, supposedly perpetrated in the name of Islam. "These terrorist acts will only intensify the war on terrorism through consistency and strength," Dr. Al-Issa has said. "Terrorists will persist through desperate criminal acts. They must be stopped."

The High-Profile Speakers at R20 Included:

- Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia
- Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League
- Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama
- Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
- Archbishop Henry Chukwudum Ndukuba, Primate of the Church of Nigeria
- Reverend Yoshinobu Miyake, Chair of the Board of International Shinto Studies Association
- Swami Govind Dev Giri
- Rabbi Silvina Chemen, Professor at the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary
- Sheikh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies
- Jan Figel, Former EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU
- Matthew Hassan Kukah, Roman Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, Nigeria
- Bashar Matti Warda, Archbishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Iraq
- Archbishop Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom in Germany
- His Excellency Andrés Pastrana Arango, Former President of Colombia and current Leader of the Centrist Democrat International

Beyond that, the MWL has actively sought to improve the plight of refugees, those who are driven from their homes through no fault of their own. At one time or another, Yusef (Joseph), Mousa (Moses), Issa (Jesus), and the Prophet, peace be upon them, were each forced to leave their homes or had no alternative but to flee.

At the R20, Professor Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School addressed the topic of “how religion is a fundamental force that cannot be ignored.” She acknowledged that religion has been a flashpoint, and has been misused as a “pretext for violence.”

At the same time, Professor Glendon was hopeful. “The world’s religions have long understood better than policy makers that a set of common principles can be properly applied within different societies,” she argued. Through this lens, it is not surprising that the Noble Qur’an, the Bible, and the Tanakh have each been translated into a myriad of languages.

In *First Things* magazine, an influential American journal of religion and public life, the profes-

sor acknowledged recently that Dr. Al-Issa’s presence illustrated the sincerity of the MWL’s endorsement of “religious tolerance and inter-faith cooperation.” Her essay is aptly titled, “The G20 Gets Religion.”

Swami Sri Govinda Dev Giri Maharaj, another speaker, touched on the themes of our interconnected existence. “We have to live with universal brotherhood,” he stressed. “In the same way, we should interpret those Asian scriptures as per the modern age focusing on how we can increase mutual love among us.”

Religion has been part of the human experience since the dawn of civilization. At its best, it creates a loving bond. The Noble Qur’an teaches us: “The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy.” India,

a majority-Hindu country, will host next year’s G20. In 2024, the baton will pass to Brazil, with its Christian majority. With God’s help, we can eventually transcend our differences.

Religion has been introduced as part of the solution to the world’s problems thanks to the R20. Future forums of its kind will no doubt keep that an active part of global dialogue.



The world’s religions have long understood better than policy makers that a set of common principles can be properly applied within different societies.”





The MWL Helps the Neediest

The Noble Qur'an demands that we act mercifully toward those who are forced from their homes through no fault of their own. We stand humbly, knowing that Musa (Moses), Issa (Jesus), and the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon them, each took flight at one time or another. Indeed, we commemorate the Prophet's Hijrah — his historic journey from Makkah to Medina. That central event is the moment from which Muslims measure time.

As faithful members of the Ummah, the entire community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion, the Muslim World League (MWL) has made it a special mission to help those who have been driven out by famine, flooding, and war.

Zakat is one of the pillars of our faith. As Muslims graced by God, we bear the obligation to help the needy and offer spiritual "cleansing." Sadaqah, voluntary giving, also drives our work. In the Noble Qur'an, God commands us: "And establish prayer and give zakah and bow with those who bow [in worship and obedience]." Religion inspires charity. At the same time, the MWL is unbiased in its giving. The MWL aims to provide relief wherever it is needed. On this, the MWL is emphatic. His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, made this abundantly clear: "I would like to start by emphasizing the pride of the Muslim World League, which is an actor in the relief, welfare and development fields, providing its humanitarian services to all, of course, without discrimination in this regard."

Just as the Prophet (peace be upon him) ventured into the broader world with the greatest

respect for God and his universe, so too must we. The MWL is deeply saddened by the extent of human dislocation. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN's refugee agency, reports there are 53.2 million internally displaced persons, among whom 32.5 million are refugees.

Zakat and Sadaqah drive the MWL to bring sustenance to them and those lacking shelter in places like Somalia and Pakistan, Nigeria, Sudan, and Bangladesh. Wherever and whenever needed, the MWL has diligently honored its obligation to assist refugees, conquer hunger, and make life less challenging for those less fortunate.

For many years, the people of Somalia have suffered from multiple and successive humanitarian crises such as drought and floods. They also have been burdened by sustained military conflict. In recent times, drought has displaced one million people in Somalia. At the same time, almost two million Somali children face malnutrition. The country also has witnessed severe locust infestation, which has resulted in the destruction of farmland and pastures. Somalia sits amid a grave food crisis.

Confronted by these harsh facts, the MWL distributed food and established drinking water wells and irrigation programs.

Pakistan has faced serious flooding. Water destroyed more than half a million homes and killed at least 1,700 people since mid-June. More than 660,000 people live in camps. Floods have impacted roughly 33 million. Large swathes of the country remain submerged, and food is not always available.

In October, the MWL formally commenced a program to aid the flood's victims. Dr. Al-Issa visited Pakistan and saw first-hand conditions on the ground. He also received a warm greeting from Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's prime minister.

Also in October, President of Pakistan Arif Alvi awarded Dr. Al-Issa the Crescent of Excellence, one of Pakistan's highest civil honors. The award marks Dr. Al-Issa's outstanding and sustained efforts in spreading the message of peace and combating the growing phenomenon of Islamophobia.

In Sudan, floods have left a wake of destruction in their path: death, damage, destruction, and injury. Hundreds of thousands of families



The MWL's commitment to the people of Sudan is long standing.

It dates back to 2004."

require assistance. In response, the MWL has launched a humanitarian aid campaign.

The MWL's commitment to the people of Sudan is long standing. It dates back to 2004. Recently, the MWL partnered with UNICEF. Together, they have strived to provide potable water, food, and medicine.

Elsewhere in Africa, Nigeria suffered its worst flooding in a decade. Hundreds are dead, thousands are injured, and more than a million are displaced. Farmland, infrastructure, and homes have been ravaged.

In Nigeria, the MWL works directly with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The MWL takes pride in its close partnership with the UNHCR and its mission to support and protect the most vulnerable and needy.

The MWL's formal relationship with the UNHCR began in 2018. Through this partnership, the two groups assisted hundreds of thousands of refugees in the past year. With the MWL's help, the UNHCR provided relief to nearly a half million refugees in 10 different countries, including Yemen, Bangladesh, and Jordan.

In July, Dr. Al-Issa met with Mr. Khaled Khalifa, the Senior Advisor to the High Commissioner and Representative of the UNHCR. They discussed the global status of refugees and how the MWL can help alleviate the suffering of millions.

Dr. Al-Issa praised the commitments made by the UNHCR. In turn, Mr. Khaled Khalifa expressed the UNHCR's appreciation of the MWL's support for its mission and commitment to provide safe haven for the displaced.

Likewise in June, the MWL conferred in Geneva with leaders from major international organizations such as the UNHCR and UNICEF, along with the World Health Organization (WHO), to coordinate and accelerate global humanitarian assistance.

The MWL understands that it must help those less fortunate. We are all created by the same God. Our common humanity stands as testament to the Creator's wisdom.

Somalia

The people of Somalia have suffered from drought, floods, and sustained conflict for many years. Drought recently displaced one million Somalians. On top of that, approximately 1.8 million Somali children face varying degrees of malnutrition. The country has also witnessed the worst desert locust infestation in a quarter century.

Confronted by these harsh facts, the Muslim World League (MWL) distributed food, and established drinking water wells and irrigation programs. Working in seven major Somali

cities in four states, the MWL was able to reduce the combined effects of conflict and drought.

Through its main relief programs, the MWL targets vulnerable groups in the country's rural and remote areas and camps. The MWL is also implementing its waterways project. War had put life on hold for far too many people and the MWL stepped in to help.

As part of its religious and humanitarian obligations, the MWL is attempting to alleviate the hardships endured by Somalia for far too long.



The MWL distributed food and established drinking water wells and irrigation programs in Somalia.

Nigeria

Nigeria is suffering its worst flooding in a decade. More than 603 people died, another 2,400 other people were injured, and more than 1.4 million were displaced. Farmland, infrastructure, and 200,000 homes were partly or entirely destroyed. Northeastern Nigeria is particularly hard hit.

The Muslim World League (MWL) works directly with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nigeria, under a standing written agreement. Their projects benefit more than 20,000 people, including refugees and internally displaced people.

The projects also support the education sector and offer classrooms and other safe spaces for children. The MWL and the UNHCR also seek to

provide shelter for refugee families, especially the elderly, those with disabilities, or families supported by women.

This past summer, the MWL visited camps in that region to assess the progress of its efforts to protect displaced children.



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Pakistan

Our sisters and brothers in Pakistan are afflicted by the scourge of flooding. Water has destroyed more than half a million homes and impacted some 33 million people. At least 1,700 people have been killed in the floods since mid-June. Over 660,000 persons live in camps. In response, the Muslim World League (MWL) initiated a program to aid the flood's victims.



We are proud of the performance of our Islamic and humanitarian duty toward our brothers, which represents the compassion and affection of Muslims among themselves."

His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, visited Pakistan in October and saw first-hand conditions on the ground. Dr. Al-Issa also met Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's prime minister. "We highly appreciate the delegations of the association in this difficult circumstance that our country is going through," the Prime Minister said.

The flood relief campaign launched in Islamabad was part of a "humanitarian duty," Dr. Al-Issa observed. "We are proud of the performance of our Islamic and humanitarian duty toward our brothers, which represents the compassion and affection of Muslims among themselves."



After the horrible floods in June, the MWL launched a flood relief campaign in Islamabad to aid the victims.







Sudan

Floods have killed at least 134 people, left at least 120 others injured, and damaged or destroyed more than 128,000 homes. Tens of thousands of families require assistance. In response, the Muslim World League (MWL) has



In 2020, the MWL partnered with UNICEF to reach more than 90,000 refugee children and their families living in Darfur.”

launched a broad humanitarian aid campaign, the Clothes and Food Baskets’ Distribution Project for Orphans and the Poor.

The MWL’s commitment to the people of Sudan is long standing. In 2004, the MWL made clear that it would seek to ameliorate the conditions in Darfur, Sudan, and help dispense food and medicine.

The MWL has assisted with drilling water wells and helped prepare accommodations for the displaced. In 2020, the MWL partnered with UNICEF to reach more than 90,000 refugee children and their families living in Darfur.



In Sudan, the MWL assists with drilling water wells and preparing accommodations for more than 90,000 refugee children and their families living in Darfur.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh provides shelter to one million Rohingya Muslim refugees who fled the terrorist attacks in Myanmar (formerly Burma). As a steadfast member of the Ummah, Bangladesh has shown continuous compassion to their Rohingya brothers and sisters.

Consistent with this kindness, the Muslim World League (MWL) has opened a relief center in Bangladesh. There, the Rohingya can obtain medical care and vocational training. Body and soul deserve sustenance.

The MWL's assistance to the Rohingya was provided after direct consultation with His Excellency Md. Shahriar Alam, the country's

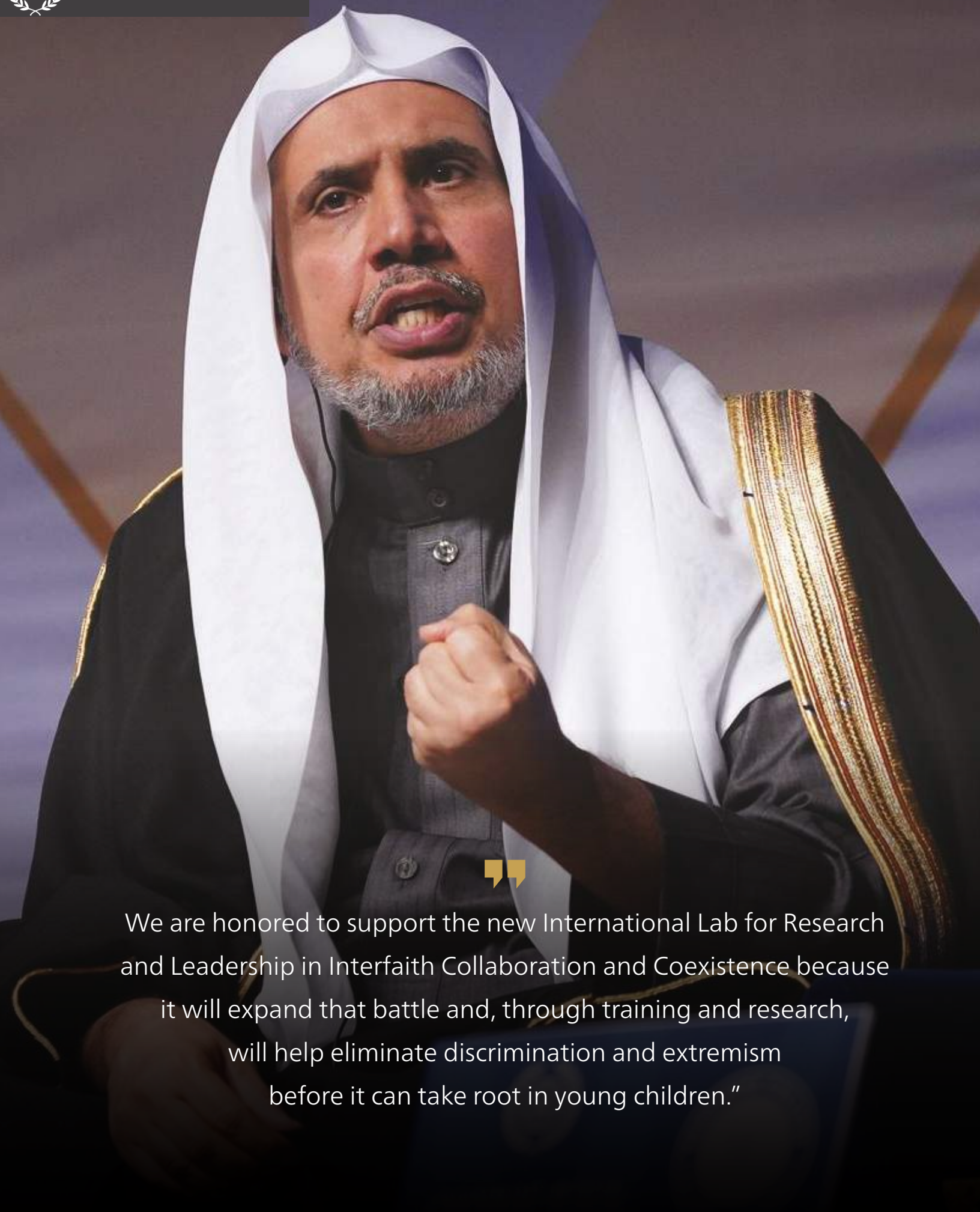
State Minister for Foreign Affairs. Minister Alam has expressed his appreciation for the assistance provided by the MWL.

Aiding refugees is a paramount concern of the MWL. To that end, it has issued a fatwa permitting giving Zakat — or Muslim-mandated charity — to eligible refugees and internally displaced people. In other words, aid to refugees is tethered to one of the Pillars of Islam. Fittingly, together with the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, the MWL has established the Zakat Fund for Refugees. Bangladesh is among the dozen countries that receive assistance.



The MWL has opened a relief center in Bangladesh that provides medical care and vocational training.





We are honored to support the new International Lab for Research and Leadership in Interfaith Collaboration and Coexistence because it will expand that battle and, through training and research, will help eliminate discrimination and extremism before it can take root in young children."

The MWL Sponsors Interfaith Program at Columbia University

The Muslim World League (MWL) inaugurated a major research institute to combat hate speech and hate crimes in one of the most prestigious universities in the United States. On November 28, His Excellency Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, joined His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Senior Rabbi at Park East Synagogue, to open the International Lab for Research and Leadership in Interfaith Collaboration and Coexistence. A grant from the MWL established the Lab and will support its research and education programs to eliminate hate and extremism.

The Lab, which is located at the prestigious Teachers College, Columbia University in New York, aims to foster a culture of resilience and understanding in schools and communities. It will be led by Teachers College Associate Professor of Practice Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess and will serve as a center of excellence for research, leadership, and training. Its goal is to identify and disseminate methods to combat all forms of hate and radicalization based on religion, race, or ethnicity.

The MWL and Teachers College signed a memorandum of understanding as part of a ceremony launching the International Interfaith Research Lab held at Teachers College on November 28. The MWL's grant will support the Lab's work in developing innovative, evidence-based training programs and curricula to address biases in communities and classrooms, both among teachers and students. It also will advance new research to improve

coexistence, collaboration, and the co-creation of research-based solutions that build a more socially cohesive world.

"There is growing urgency to address the rise of religion-, ethnicity- and race-based hate and extremism across the globe," said Teachers College President, Dr. Thomas Bailey. "The International Interfaith Research Lab will lead the way in fostering the kind of understanding and collaboration needed to identify and deter the process of radicalization in schools and communities. We thank His Excellency Dr. Al-Issa and the Muslim World League for their generous support of this important initiative."

Dr. Bailey attended the signing ceremony along with Dr. Al-Issa, Professor Sabic-El-Rayess, Dr. Samuel Sia, Vice Provost for Fourth Purpose and Strategic Impact, Columbia University, Abdulwahab Al-Shehri, MWL's Undersecretary for Corporate Communication, and other prominent dignitaries.

"The Muslim World League is dedicated to fighting hate speech and intolerance in all its forms," Dr. Al-Issa said. "We are honored to support the new International Lab for Research and Leadership in Interfaith Collaboration and Coexistence because it will expand that battle and, through training and research, will help eliminate discrimination and extremism before it can take root in young children."

Sounding a call to action, Dr. Al-Issa continued, "Our international priority is to contribute to creating a world with more understanding, cooperation and peace, and national societies with better coexistence and harmony."



Our schools must make a sustained effort to make all children feel a part of society by reflecting their cultures and experiences.”

Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess,
Columbia University’s Teachers College Professor



What’s important is that we’re starting with the seed: schools and education. Hate can be taught; hate can be learned. Love and respect can also be learned and taught. That’s why we need to address and educate the heart, soul, and mind of young people. That holistic approach will help these seeds grow into healthy trees of life.”

His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan,
Archbishop of New York



I salute Dr. Al-Issa’s courageous outreach — uniting people, not dividing people. We have hope. We believe not in fear but in faith, perseverance, and patience.”

Senior Rabbi Arthur Schneier,
Park East Synagogue, New York





Thomas Bailey, President of Teachers College, Columbia University, and Abdulwahab Al Shehri, Undersecretary for Corporate Communication, the MWL, sign a memorandum of understanding as part of a ceremony launching the International Interfaith Research Lab at the university's Teachers College. HE Dr. Muhammad Al Issa, Secretary General of the MWL, and Dr. Samuel Sia, Vice Provost for Fourth Purpose and Strategic Impact, Columbia University, attend the agreement signing.

The launch event featured a special panel moderated by Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess, with globally recognized interfaith leaders. These were Dr. Al-Issa, Cardinal Dolan, and Rabbi Schneier. The leaders engaged in an eye-opening dialogue about the importance of interreligious collaboration, coexistence, and leadership, the foundational ideas of the International Interfaith Research Lab.

Of the new Interfaith Lab, Cardinal Dolan said that the Lab would “plant seeds for trees of life.”

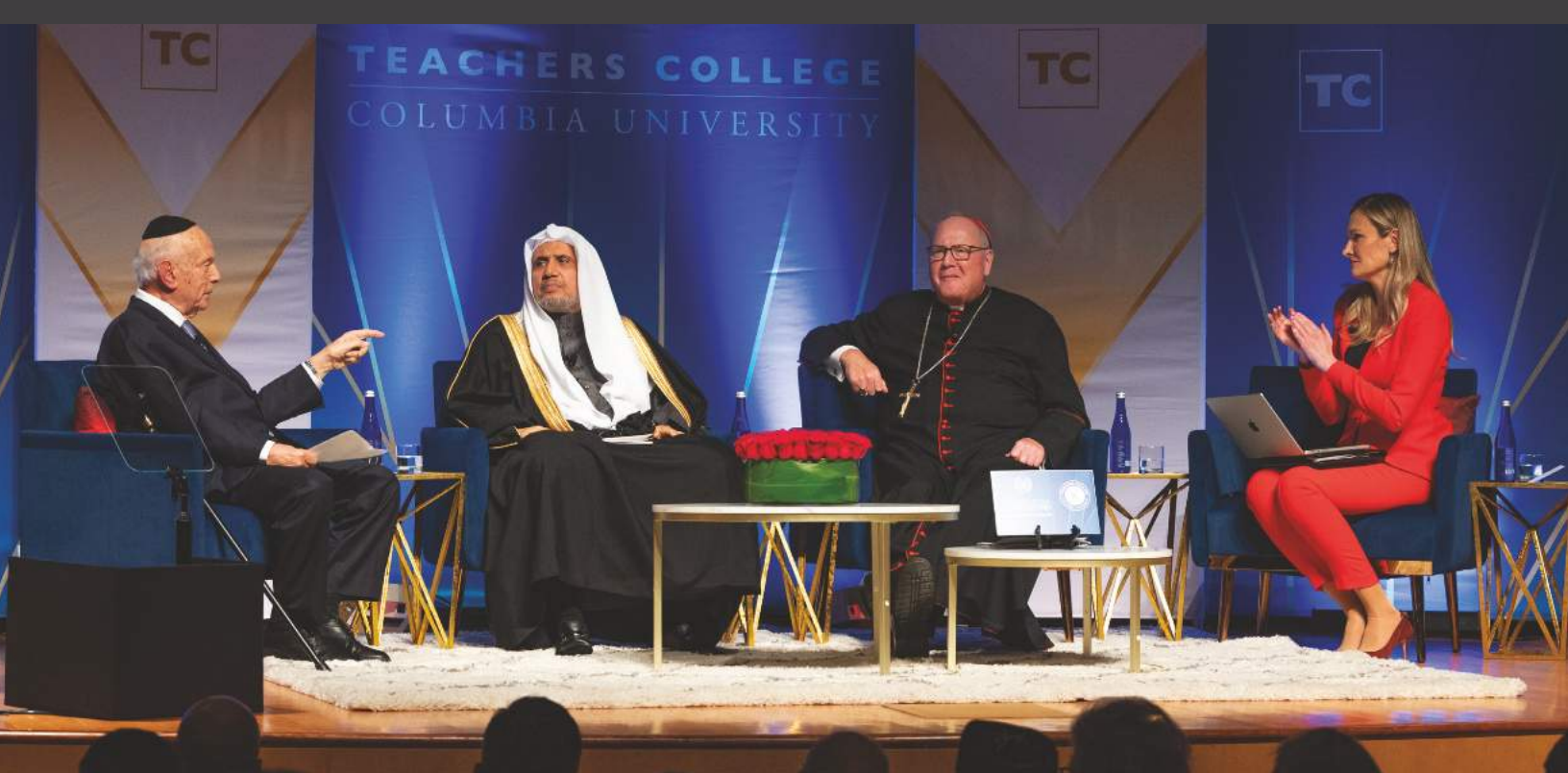
Senior Rabbi Arthur Schneier lauded Dr. Al-Issa saying, “I salute Dr. Al-Issa’s courageous outreach — uniting people, not dividing people.”

Teachers College, Columbia University, is the first and largest graduate school of education in the United States and is perennially ranked

among the nation’s best. Teachers College’s mission is to create a smarter, healthier, and more equitable and peaceful world. Students choose from among 150 separate programs to earn graduate degrees, which are conferred by Columbia University.

The MWL, which is based in the Holy City of Makkah, is the world’s largest Islamic non-governmental organization, and comprises a global network of Islamic religious scholars spanning 139 countries. The MWL follows the path of centrism and moderation to realize the message of Islam and ward off movements calling for extremism, violence, and exclusion for a world full of peace, justice, and coexistence.

Dr. Al-Issa has led the MWL since 2016. He is widely recognized as a leading global voice on moderate Islam, committed to bringing global awareness to the religion’s true message



Dr. Al-Issa talks with Senior Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, and Professor Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess at Columbia University in November.

of empathy, tolerance, understanding, and cooperation among all people and cultures. He made global news after leading a high-level interfaith delegation to Auschwitz and meeting His Holiness Pope Francis in the Vatican.

All participants agreed that hate crimes are increasing and that religion-based hatred is an important cause.

Religious discrimination has spurred a string of mass shootings — from the 51 people killed at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019 to the deaths of 10 people in a Buffalo, N.Y., supermarket in May. The attackers in those incidents were inspired by the heinous Great Replacement Theory, which imagines that migrants from places like the Middle East and Africa — often Muslims — are determined to overwhelm the inhabitants of Western countries.

Part of the solution is to teach people that religion abhors violence and hatred. In Islam, extremists have promoted the falsehood that

Muslims must reject non-Muslims. Yet from its earliest days, true followers of Islam embraced diversity. Consider Baghdad’s House of Wisdom, where Muslim and non-Muslim scholars collaborated and valued diverse knowledge. What’s more, followers of all religions share common human values. Their sacred texts urge them to coexist peacefully.

The Lab was devised to promote mutual respect and peaceful coexistence as antidotes to extremism and violence. It will develop and disseminate innovative training methods and create educational experiences for teachers, students, leaders, and local communities that will encourage inclusiveness and reject divisiveness, especially among young students.

Research funded by the U.S. government has shown that children who are subjected to biased behavior by their teachers or peers learn from an early age that they don’t “belong.” This concept of the “other” can metastasize into religious, ethnic, and racial discrimination, radicalization, and, eventually, militancy and



Dr. Al-Issa, Senior Rabbi Arthur Schneier, and Cardinal Timothy Dolan

violence. Mass violence is made possible because narratives of superiority and dehumanization precede the acts of killing.

To combat this, the Lab intends to promote a sense of connectedness and shared values in schools. From preschool onward, the program wants to instill in students that they should feel accepted and part of a community, not alienated from those who look or worship differently than themselves. This lesson would be part of curricula and in extracurricular activities. The Lab's working theory is that training along these lines will lead to a safer and more loving world.

Educators too often ignore social and behavioral cues in students who fall victim to these biases. Without this kind of education, research shows that young people searching for a sense of belonging frequently turn to radical groups that offer empowerment along with messages of hate and violence. The Lab will use the tools of interfaith dialogue and collaboration to create projects that embrace storytelling to build cohesion across racial, religious, and ethnic divides.

One such project features the story of how Muslims in Bosnia saved an ancient book treasured by the Jewish people — the Sarajevo Haggadah — even during the genocide against Muslims there three decades ago. The Lab also will work to bring all religions together by producing an Encyclopedia of Common Human Values and convening conferences of religious leaders to encourage others to embrace these common values (as MWL has done previously). It also plans to host "Oceans of Ink," the first U.S.-based program for education professionals to embrace the work of Muslim American authors, a step toward acceptance of groups too often considered part of the "other."

The objective of these efforts is to welcome racial diversity, social justice, and interfaith understanding — the kinds of activities that can transform the ways we think about each other, not as enemies but as diverse members of the same human race. The hope is that the program will be the bulwark so desperately needed against hatred and violence.

Highlights

KAZAKHSTAN CONFERENCE

The MWL Participates in Kazakhstan Conference of Religious Leaders



September 15

At the invitation of the President of Kazakhstan, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL), Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, delivered a keynote speech via a pre-recorded video message. Kazakhstan conference's final statement praised the Charter of Makkah and its importance in promoting peace, dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. The MWL Deputy Secretary General Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Zaid met with Kazakh political figures and religious leaders who expressed appreciation of the MWL.

Dr. Al-Issa Celebrates the International Day of Peace

September 21

Dr. Al-Issa celebrated the International Day of Peace at the MWL headquarters in Riyadh along with the United Nations General Assembly President and a delegation from Sweden. Together they unveiled the "knotted gun" statue. The "knotted gun" bears the name "non-violence" and is the strongest symbol of peace and the rejection of violence. It is permanently located at UN headquarters in New York. The celebration highlighted the MWL's call for peace and the rejection of violence as part of the true meaning of Islam, reflecting the Creator's gifts and blessed message.



The MWL Participates in High-Level U.N. Meeting on Supporting Minorities



September 22

On the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, the MWL participated in a meeting chaired by the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) and the President of the UN General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York. The meeting served as an important platform to support the effective participation and equality of minorities around the world.

The MWL Expands its Partnership with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

September 30

The MWL expanded its partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC) to further support humanitarian responses to the urgent needs of refugees around the world and find sustainable solutions to their issues.



The MWL Celebrates International Day of Nonviolence



October 2

Every year, the world celebrates the International Day of Nonviolence, celebrating the life of the pioneer of the nonviolence philosophy, Mahatma Gandhi. It is an occasion to spread the message of nonviolence internationally through education and public awareness.

VISIT TO PAKISTAN

Dr. Al-Issa Arrives in Pakistan



October 5

Dr. Al-Issa arrived in Pakistan. His visit included meetings with Pakistan's President, Prime Minister, Speaker of Parliament, Speaker of the Senate, and religious leaders. Dr. Al-Issa was greeted by representatives of Pakistan's President, the Minister of Religious Affairs, and government, parliamentary, and religious leaders.

Pakistani Leaders Praise Dr. Al-Issa

October 6

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Mr. Shehbaz Sharif, told Dr. Al-Issa: "We thank you for your great role in bringing together the Islamic scholars and highlighting the true face of Islam."



October 15

Dr. Al-Issa met with His Excellency the Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan, Senator Sadiq Sanjrani. Senator Sanjrani congratulated Dr. Al-Issa on receiving the Presidential Medal and praised Dr. Al-Issa's international efforts to address Islamophobia, spread the message of peace, and promote positive dialogue between diverse religious groups.

Dr. Al-Issa Delivers Friday Sermons



October 7

Dr. Al-Issa delivered a Friday sermon from King Faisal Mosque, Pakistan's national mosque in Islamabad, at the invitation of and in the presence of scholars, dignitaries, and diplomats. An Icon of Pakistan, the King Faisal Mosque is one of the largest in the world.

October 14

Dr. Al-Issa delivered the Friday sermon at the Badshahi Mosque, which is world-renowned for its unique architecture and its capacity for more than 100,000 worshippers. In his sermon, Dr. Al-Issa spoke about the moral values in Islam.



The MWL Launches Humanitarian Relief Campaign in Islamabad



October 8

The campaign aims to secure the food, shelter, and health needs of tens of thousands of people affected by the floods in several Pakistani provinces.

October 8

Dr. Al-Issa met with Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony and Grand Mufti, Abdul Shakur Sardar Khan. They discussed Islamic issues and humanitarian work in the region, and the prospects for bilateral cooperation.



Dr. Al-Issa Serves as the Main Guest at World Conference on the Life of the Prophet



October 9

The subject of the conference was "Islamophobia and its Impact on Relations between Islamic and Western Civilizations."

October 9

At the conference, Dr. Al-Issa received the "HUI Peace Award" in recognition of his work to promote dialogue and limit the spread of misinformation about Islam.



Dr. Al-Issa Meets Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, President of the Assembly of Islamic Clerics



October 9

Dr. Al-Issa met with His Eminence Sheikh Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, President of the Assembly of Islamic Clerics, the oldest association of Muslim scholars in the Indian subcontinent, to discuss the role of scholars in promoting Islamic awareness in the face of the ideas of excess and negligence.

Dr. Al-Issa Arrives in Lahore



October 17

Dr. Al-Issa arrived in Lahore, the capital of Punjab, one of the main cities on his tour to Pakistan, to observe the conditions of those affected by the floods, meet Pakistani leaders and senior scholars, and deliver Friday sermons in several mosques.

October 17

Dr. Al-Issa met with His Excellency Mr. Muhammad Baligh-ur-Rehman, Governor of Punjab province, to discuss issues of mutual interest related to Islamic and international affairs, especially the situation in Pakistan after the recent floods.



October 19

Dr. Al-Issa gave a lecture at Ashrafieh University in Lahore. The President of the university and the Governor of Punjab Province attended as well as academics and students.

VISIT TO MAURITANIA

Dr. Al-Issa Arrives in Mauritania as Chief Guest at the 35th International Conference on Biography of the Prophet



October 22

At the invitation of the Government of Mauritania, Dr. Al-Issa visited Mauritania as the chief guest at the 35th International Conference on Biography of the Prophet. This year's conference topic was the moral values in the Prophet's biography and their impact on spreading peace around the world.

October 24

Dr. Al-Issa Receives National Order of Merit from Mauritanian President for his international efforts in clarifying the true image of Islam.



President of the African Scholars Forum, Sheikh Mohamed Al Hafiz Al Nahawi, Lauds Dr. Al-Issa



October 24

At the 35th International Conference on Moral Values in the Biography of the Prophet in Nouakchott, President of the African Scholars Forum, Sheikh Mohamed Al Hafiz Al Nahawi, said, "His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa's participation made the conference an unprecedented occasion with delegations from 50 countries."

Dr. Al-Issa Gives Address at Opening Session of the Interreligious Meeting for Peace



October 26

In the opening session, Dr. Al-Issa delivered a speech saying, “Wise dialogues not only prevent conflicts, but create clarity, understanding and joint action [...] All people want global peace, and there is no peace without internal peace, wise and brotherly understanding.” French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian President Sergio Mattarella attended the event, which was backed by the Vatican.

Honorary Medal from the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions Given to Dr. Al-Issa

October 28

Kazakhstan’s Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognized Dr. Al-Issa with an Honorary Medal from the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. The Honorary Medal was awarded in accordance with the decree of the President in appreciation of Dr. Al-Issa’s efforts to support interfaith dialogue and for his support for the success of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.



Dr. Al-Issa Meets with the Middle East and Gulf Working Group of the European Council



October 30

Dr. Al-Issa met with the Middle East and Gulf Working Group of the European Council (MOG), which is headed by Dr. Till Blume and Calin Mitri.

Washington Institute Executive Director Meets with Dr. Al-Issa



October 31

Dr. Al-Issa met at his Riyadh office with Dr. Robert Satloff, Executive Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and its members.

R20 INTERFAITH SUMMIT

Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama Chooses Dr. Al-Issa to Co-Chair the R20 Interfaith Summit

October 5

Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia with more than 120 million Muslim followers, chose Dr. Al-Issa to co-chair the first religious summit within the activities of the G20 Summit of major nations.



October 31

Dr. Al-Issa arrived in Bali, Indonesia, to chair the R20 Summit.

Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama Chooses Dr. Al-Issa to Co-Chair the R20 Interfaith Summit *(continued)*



November 1

The G20 Interfaith Summit announced the launch of the "Building Bridges Between East and West Forum: For More Understanding and Peaceful World, and More Coexisting and Harmonious Societies." The Forum sought to raise the most pressing issues in the international community, such as the integration of religious minorities, refugees, among other issues with religious, intellectual, cultural, and related political implications.

Dr. Al-Issa delivers the opening speech of the R20 Interfaith Summit. Dr. Al-Issa noted that religious leaders and especially R20 co-hosts, the Muslim World League and Nahdlatul Ulama, have a special responsibility.

ABU DHABI PEACE FORUM

The MWL Secretary General Delivers Keynote Address at Abu Dhabi Peace Forum

November 8

Dr. Al-Issa was keynote speaker at the opening session of the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum, and discussed "Global Conflict and Universal Peace: Urgent Needs and Opportunities for Partnership" in the presence of senior international political, religious, intellectual, and academic figures.



Dr. Al-Issa Meets Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth



November 10

On the sidelines of the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum, Dr. Al-Issa met with Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth, Ephraim Mirvis, and his accompanying delegation. Together they discussed several topics related to common religious and humanitarian values.

Museum of the Prophet's Biography Launched in Morocco

November 18

Under the patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, His Royal Highness Moulay Hassan, Crown Prince of Morocco, inaugurated the Museum of the Prophet's Biography at the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) headquarters in Morocco's capital, Rabat. Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Zaid attended the opening on behalf of Dr. Al-Issa.



VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

America Abroad Media Honors Dr. Al-Issa



November 24

America Abroad Media presented Dr. Al-Issa with an award for his commentary about how Muslims are portrayed in Western films. Undersecretary for Corporate Communication, Abdulwahab Al-Shehri, received the award on behalf of Dr. Al-Issa.

Teachers College, Columbia University Launches the International Interfaith Research Lab to Foster a Culture of Resilience and Understanding in Schools and Communities

November 28

Dr. Al-Issa attended the launch of Columbia University's Teachers College International Interfaith Research Lab in New York City. A grant from the MWL established the Lab and will support its research and education programs to eliminate hate and extremism.

To formalize the grant, Teachers College and the MWL signed a memorandum of understanding as part of a ceremony launching the International Interfaith Research Lab.



The signing ceremony was attended by Dr. Thomas Bailey, President Teachers College, Columbia University; Dr. Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League; Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess, Executive Director of the International Interfaith Research Lab; Dr. Samuel Sia, Vice Provost for Fourth Purpose and Strategic Impact, Columbia University, and other prominent dignitaries.

The launch event included a special panel moderated by Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess with globally recognized interfaith leaders including Dr. Al-Issa; His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York; and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Senior Rabbi at Park East Synagogue and Founder and President of Appeal of Conscience Foundation. The leaders engaged in a spirited dialogue about transformative interreligious collaboration, coexistence, and leadership, the foundational ideas of the International Interfaith Research Lab.

The MWL Participates in Mediterranean Dialogues Conference



December 5

On behalf of the MWL's Dr. Al-Issa, Under Secretary for Corporate Communication Mr. Abdulwahab Al-Shehri participates in the Mediterranean Dialogues Conference in Rome.

The MWL Signs Humanitarian Aid Agreement with IFRC

December 7

Dr. Al-Issa and the Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), sign an agreement to support victims of conflict, migrants, and displaced peoples around the world.



The MWL Visits The Gambia



December 7

Dr. Al-Issa arrives in The Gambia where he is received by the Vice President, Mr. Badara Joof, several African Muftis and scholars, and several ministers.

The MWL Visits The Gambia *(continued)*



December 7

Dr. Al-Issa inaugurates Al-Salam Medical Facility in the Gambian capital, Banjul, in the presence of First Lady Fatoumatta Bah-Barrow and several government officials. The project will contribute to improving health care services for the people of The Gambia.

December 8

The Gambia President Barrow presents Dr. Al-Issa with the Ambassador of International Peace Award.



December 11

Dr. Al-Issa inaugurates the Historic Conference of African Ulama, which gathers muftis and Religious Affairs Ministers to collaborate in promoting harmony and addressing security and development challenges.



An exquisite pulpit of yore seen inside the museum

The Hijrah Exhibition: In the Footsteps of the Prophet

By Aftab Husain Kola

Though most of us know about the Hijrah as the beginning of the Islamic calendar, few of us have cared to explore its significance. There has been no proper attempt to illustrate why the Hijrah is so important for Muslims around the world.

Fourteen hundred years ago, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) embarked on an eight-day journey known as the Hijrah (emigration). Encountering persecution in his home city of Makkah, he led his followers on



One of the rare exhibits at the museum

a 400km trek across the desert to Medina. Meaning the “migration” in Arabic, the event is considered a defining moment in Islam and marks the starting point of the Islamic calendar.

The “Hijrah Exhibition: In the Footsteps of the Prophet” that was launched at the Ithra Museum last year is a laudable effort.

Located in Dhahran on Saudi Arabia’s eastern coast, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (better known as the Ithra Museum) is operated by the state-owned oil and gas company Saudi Aramco, and opened fully in 2018. Its exhibits illustrate the art, culture and natural

history of the Arabian Peninsula, besides hosting temporary exhibitions of international art. The exhibition brings together contemporary and Islamic art and combines it with artefacts, films, performances and more for a first-of-a-kind, immersive and multidisciplinary experience.

This exhibition — with the Prince of Wales’ Turquoise Mountain, an HRH charity supporting arts and heritage in the Middle East; the National Museum of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh; the House of Islamic Arts in Jeddah and the King Abdulaziz Complex for Endowment Libraries as partner organizers — is being run at the Ithra Museum until March. This is the



One of the several halls of the museum

Ithra Museum's first touring exhibition — it will be shown at venues in Saudi Arabia for three years before traveling to venues around the world for a further two years.

The exhibition also features collective works by specialists and artists who ignited this journey through artworks, documentaries and books that narrate the story of Hijrah.

Among the academic contributors to the exhibition are Abdullah Hussein Alkadi, author of 'Makkah to Medina: A Photographic Journey of the Hijrah Route' and 'Milestones of Arabia'; Hamza Yusuf Hanson, President of Zaytuna

College in Berkeley, California, the first accredited Muslim liberal arts college in the United States, and Co-president of the Religions for Peace Coalition; Thalia Kennedy, Creative Director of the HRH, The Prince of Wales' conservation body Turquoise Mountain, and advisor to The Royal Institute for Traditional Arts in Riyadh, which is focused on the preservation of traditional heritage and practice; and Daoud Stephen Casewit, an independent Islamic scholar, writer, translator and lecturer.

Other contributors are Kumail Almusaly and Ovidio Salazar.



The book 'The Hijrah Exhibition: In the Footsteps of the Prophet' traces the physical route of Prophet Muhammad's journey to explore its historical significance and bring its human story to the fore

Now this travel exhibition has been presented in a book. Dr. Idries Trevathan, a scholar of Islamic studies and curator of the Ithra display, played a key role in curating and editing the book.

Ithra director, Abdullah Al-Rashid, in his foreword writes: "We humbly believe that this volume and this exhibition represent real steps forward and knowledge, scholarship, and understanding among all peoples and faiths. It is our hope that as we learn more about the Hijrah, we will be encouraged to emulate the values and practice of those who traveled and that this will lead to greater understanding, empathy, and tolerance. We trust that our efforts will give rise to still more research and insights as future scholars build on this work and use it to learn more."

The book uses the sacred landscape of the Hijrah as a receptacle for the stories, memories, and events that took place along the route, providing tangible links between us and this momentous journey. It is split into seven chapters.

Dr Idries was assisted by experts in trying to piece together the narrative using geography, storytelling, and landscapes along with high-resolution images of the actual route.

Farah Abushullaih, the head of the Ithra Museum, Anas Saleh Serafi, secretary-general of Dar



An old manuscript on display at the Ithra museum

Al Funoon Al-Islamiyya, and Laila Al-Faddagh, director of the National Museum of Saudi Arabia, have penned other forewords.

Ithra — meaning "enrichment" in Arabic — was built as part of Saudi Aramco's vision to be an ambitious initiative for the public. Ithra is the Kingdom's leading cultural and creative destination for talent development and cross-cultural experiences. Since its opening in 2018, each attraction by Ithra serves as a window to global experiences, celebrating human potential and empowering creativity.

The pillars include culture, creativity, community, art, and knowledge. With the visionary platforms and key pillars, Ithra continuously offers inspiring workshops, performances and events.



U.S. actor Morgan Freeman (L) and Qatar's FIFA Ambassador Ghanim Al Muftah attend the opening ceremony ahead of the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group A football match between Qatar and Ecuador on November 20.

Ghanim Al Muftah: A Young Entrepreneur Defies His Disability

By M. Minhaj Niloy

Ghanim Al Muftah is a young entrepreneur and philanthropist. He was born on May 5, 2002, with Caudal Regression Syndrome, a rare disorder affecting the growth of the lower spine. He is studying political science. When he was young, he wanted to become Qatar's prime minister. Now, he aspires to become a diplomat. Ghanim is immensely fond of sports like skateboarding, scuba diving, and rock climbing. He played football at school with his "normal-sized" friends while wearing shoes on his hands.

Before Ghanim was born, doctors told his mother to get rid of him, but she declined. She was determined to give the child a happy life. It was hard for him to attend school because his classmates teased and bullied him. But his mother told him to talk to these classmates, tell them about his illness, and raise awareness for the whole community. Ghanim gradually and quietly accepted his condition. Today, he is a social media star with more than three million followers on different platforms. He attended the 2022 FIFA World Cup inauguration ceremony.

The situation was not easy for Ghanim. He has been through many challenges in his life. He is still dealing with countless problems, including numerous medical interventions and surgeries. Even though he has to visit the hospital every day, he can see beyond these hard times and knows that with faith, dedication, and hard work, he will be able to reach his goals. One



Ghanim Al Muftah

was this: astonishingly, Ghanim has climbed Jebel Shams, the highest mountain in the Gulf region.

Ghanim opened a small business, Gharissa Ice Cream, with the help of a secret recipe from his mother. The company, based in Qatar, makes ice cream that gets five stars. The company has six branches and 60 employees. Ghanim has the rights to sell Gharissa ice cream as a franchise and wants to grow his business outside the Gulf region. Ghanim thinks being an entrepreneur is more than just starting a business or a few companies. He is always thinking of new ideas that involve taking risks and creating



Ghanim Al Muftah on the pitch

jobs. He enjoys the process of asking questions, developing new ideas, helping people, and continually improving things.

Muftah wanted to attend the World Cup opening ceremony to “encourage dialogue on inclusion and diversity.” He was appointed an official FIFA World Cup Ambassador this year. As such, he strives to send a message of hope, unity, peace, and acceptance for all people. “Sports have the unique ability to bring people together and help countries improve their international relations,” he said. “They also help keep society together in a significant way.”

Ghanim has received a lot of praise over the years even though he is still young. It shows how hard he has worked and how much he wants to succeed. He shares his successes with many people, especially his family and his home country of Qatar. He also keeps dreaming big. Ghanim has always had a can-do attitude, despite his disability. He said he thinks that “when entrepreneurial activities are done by especially vulnerable groups in the



Sports have the unique ability to bring people together and help countries improve their international relations. They also help keep society together in a significant way.”

labor market, the multiplier effect of this value is made clear in societies in general and in the group of people with disabilities in particular.”

Ghanim’s achievements include being named one of the “Unsung Heroes” by the 21st Century Leaders Foundation in 2009. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait, gave him the title “Ambassador of Peace” in 2014. In 2015, he was named a Goodwill Ambassador for Reach Out to Asia — ROTA Foundations. He was also appointed an Ambassador for Childhood and a Brand Ambassador for the Qatar Financial Centre Authority. Ghanim raised a million riyals for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The list goes on.

Ghanim has shown the world that having a disability does not mean one cannot live an active and valuable life. People all over the world have been amazed by his story. He is a well-known face among young people as well as among disabled people worldwide. More than that, he is an inspiration.



Paul Pogba, Juventus & France

Muslim Footballers: Ambassadors of Faith

From the world's biggest cities to remote villages, football helps to unite humankind. The recently concluded World Cup was the most-watched broadcast of an international sporting event in history. The joy and drama of human competition on the football pitch transcends cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. Football — the world's most popular competitive sport — breaks down barriers and inspires the best in us.

Many of the world's finest footballers are Muslims who are as dedicated to their religious beliefs as they are to winning. A growing number of Islamic football stars are finding fame playing for the most followed clubs in the world, especially in England's Premier League. But many of them stay rooted in their Islamic faith. In 2012, a match between Newcastle United and Aston Villa at St. James' Park symbolized the impact Muslim players are



Mohammed Salah, Liverpool & Egypt

having on the Premier League. After Newcastle United's Demba Ba scored, he raced to the corner flag and was joined by Senegalese compatriot Papiss Cisse. The two Muslims sank to their knees in joyous prayer.

Today's Islamic football stars are more than sports icons, they're also ambassadors of faith.

Two of the world's most visible footballers — Liverpool's Mohamed Salah and Bayern Munich's Sadio Mané — visit local mosques each week for Jumu'ah, an obligatory prayer for Muslim men. Locals jockey to take photos with them. Social media posts are filled with messages that mix sports references with praise for Islam.

Such interactions have led to greater understanding about Muslims and a willingness of Premier League clubs and fans to respect and accommodate players' religious faith. The league employs a Muslim chaplain — who is provided by the Muslim Chaplains in Sport organization — and some clubs have dedicated prayer rooms in their stadiums. Aston Villa is one club that provides prayer facilities not only for its players, but also for its fans and employees.

Other Premier League clubs including Newcastle United, Swansea City, Sunderland, Bournemouth, Norwich City, and Watford also accommodate match-day prayers. In May 2022, the Blackburn Rovers became the first club in the United Kingdom to host Eid prayers with thousands celebrating the end of the holy month of Ramadan on the pitch.

Ramadan is challenging for Muslim players as they work to strike the right balance between devotion to their faith and loyalty to their team. Muslim Chaplains in Sport (MCS) was formed in 2014 to help provide guidance on how to do so. MCS works with all 92 professional football clubs to deliver lectures, seminars,



MCS mandates nothing. But it provides Muslim footballers advice and counsel about how to sustain fasts and explores solutions helping them to be true to their faith while maintaining peak physical performance."

and workable solutions. Premier League clubs regularly seek MCS' guidance on behalf of their Muslim players, including issues like deferring fasts so their performance during training and matches is not affected.

MCS mandates nothing. But it provides Muslim footballers advice and counsel about how to sustain fasts and explores solutions helping them to be true to their faith while maintaining peak physical performance. MCS has also helped ensure Muslim footballers are provided with halal food, have the option to shower separately from the rest of the team, and are given time and space for prayer.

Several Muslim footballers are prominent on the world stage:

Mohammed Salah: One of the best forwards in the English Premier League, the Egyptian national puts his faith on display by celebrating his goals by performing the Sujud, the bow for prayer. Salah has won two PFA Players' Player of the Year awards, three Premier League Golden Boots, and a Premier League Player of the Season award. He named his daughter, Makka, after the Islamic holy city of Makkah.



Sadio Mané, Bayern Munchen & Senegal

Sadio Mané: From Senegal and playing on Germany's most successful club, Bayern Munich, Mané is considered one of the best players in the world. He is known for his pressing, dribbling, and speed. His father was the Imam of a Senegalese mosque. Mané was the Premier League's top goal scorer in the 2018–19 season and won the Premier League Golden Boot. He helped end Liverpool's 30-year drought by helping the club win the Premier League title in the 2019–20 season. In 2021, he scored his 100th Premier League goal, becoming the third African to achieve this milestone.

Paul Pogba: A high-profile star for Italian giant Juventus, Pogba has been a practicing Muslim since birth in Lagny-sur-Marne, France. While



Today's Islamic football stars are more than sports icons, they're also ambassadors of faith."

playing in the Premier League for Manchester United in the 2018–19 season, he helped lead the team to becoming the Professional Footballers' Association Team of the Year. Pogba's international accolades include a 2013 FIFA U-20 World Cup championship and a Best Player award in that year's tournament. He also was a Best Young Player at the 2014 FIFA World



Karim Benzema, Real Madrid & France

Cup and was a member of France's 2018 FIFA World Cup Championship team.

Karim Benzema: A star for Real Madrid, a Spanish professional football club, Benzema is a devout Muslim. He is regarded as one of the best strikers of all time. Born in Lyon to Algerian parents, Benzema began his career with hometown club Olympique Lyonnais in 2005. Between 2018 and 2022, Benzema was named to the La Liga Team of the Season in four consecutive years. During that time, he also won the La Liga Best Player award twice and the Pichichi Trophy.

N'Golo Kanté: The French footballer is a central midfielder for Premier League club Chelsea and the France national team. Considered by

many to be one of the world's best midfielders, Kanté is widely praised for his work ethic and defensive acumen. In 2017, he was named the French Player of the Year and a year later was a key member of the 2018 FIFA World Cup winning squad.

Antonio Rüdiger: The German professional footballer and Muslim is a center-back for Real Madrid and the German national team. He was signed by Chelsea in 2017 and helped his team win the FA Cup that year, followed by the UEFA Europa League in his second season, and the UEFA Champions League in 2021. Rudiger does not drink alcohol and has said he hides in bathrooms while teammates celebrate victories with champagne.



Riyad Mahrez, Manchester City & Algeria

Ilkay Gündogan: Outspoken about his Muslim roots growing up in the German city of Gelsenkirchen, Gündogan is a midfielder for the Premier League club Manchester City, which he captains. He led his team to Premier League championships in 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022. He sent more than 3,000 meals to Indonesia — the country with the largest Muslim population — to help those in need during the month of Ramadan.

Riyad Mahrez: This French star is a winger for Premier League club Manchester City and captains the Algerian national team. In 2014, Mahrez signed with Leicester City, helping it win the championship and promotion to the Premier League at the end of his first season. In the 2015–16 season, Mahrez was the Algerian Footballer of the Year, the PFA Players' Player of the Year, and a member of the Premier League PFA Team of the Year,



The Muslim faith is having a profound and positive impact on football across the globe and will continue to do so as more players of faith join the world's best teams."

helping Leicester City win the Premier League championship.

The Muslim faith is having a profound and positive impact on football across the globe and will continue to do so as more players of faith join the world's best teams.



Globally acclaimed as the most transformative voice in the Muslim World for his remarkable efforts to eradicate hate, promote genuine dialogue, and collaborate with other faith communities. Dr. Al-Issa leads the world's largest international Islamic NGO that has partnered to those ends with the International Committee Red Cross, UNHCR, world food program, international organization for migration, UNESCO, and other global organizations."

Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess. Associate Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University, during the launch of the International Lab for Research and Leadership in Interfaith Collaboration and Coexistence

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