Report of Seminar on Islam and the West: Emerging Challenges and Way Forward

MUSLIM Institute organized a seminar at a very topic, 'Islam and the West: Emerging challenges and way forward' on March 9, 2017 at National Library of Pakistan, Islamabad. The seminar was chaired by Vice chancellor Air University Air Vice Marshal (R) Faaiz Amir. Former senator and senior diplomat Honourable Akram Zaki, Chairman MUSLIM Institute Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Ali, Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan H.E. Mr. Stefano Pontecorvo, Ambassador of Portugal to Pakistan H.E. Mr. Jao Paulo Sabido Costa, Former President National Defense University Lt. Gen. (R) Saeed Uz Zafar, Dr. Bakara Najimdeen (CIPS) National University of Sciences and Technology, President International Islamic University Prof. Dr. Ahmed Yousif Ahmed Al Draiweesh addressed the gathering. While President Just International Malaysia Dr. Chandra Muzafar, Vice President for policy and research, The Middle East Institute, USA Mr. Paul Salem addressed the audience via a video link. Former Principal (CIPS) National University of Sciences and Technology Gen. (R) Shahid Hashmat, Former Federal Sec. Mr. Javed Zafar, Former DG. ISI, Lt. Gen. (R) Assad Durrani, Former Chairman Islamic Ideology Council Dr.Khalid Masood, Admiral Mukhtar Jadoon, Prince Adnan Aurangzeb Khan, Former Federal Sec. Muhammad Faheem, President PML (Q) Women Wing Ms. Farrukh Khan and others also participated in the discussion. Research Associate, MUSLIM Institute, Ahmed AlQadri moderated the proceedings of the session. Foreign delegates, professors and students of universities from different institutions, analysts and media persons also participated in the discussion.

Experts expressing their views observed as under:

There is a dramatic change in International political scenario in past two decades; Islam is a victim of negative perception in west particularly due to small fraction of people who claim themselves of being representative of 1.5 billion Muslims across the globe. Resultantly, misperceptions like incompatibility of Islam with west started emerging with a view that Muslims cannot live in western societies. These perceptions are negating in totality the historical perspectives of

cooperation between Muslims and the west. Intellectual and educational services rendered by Muslims in past are at a mercy of ignorance in the wake of such dogmas. In fact, transfer of Muslim knowledge and literature into west is deeply endorsed by the French historian, Robert Briffault in his book "The making of Humanity". He acknowledges vehemently, "What we call science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs".

The troubled relationship of west and Islam has great deal to do with the imperialistic agendas of west. Western desire for control and hegemony over Muslim countries cause frustration and irritation in Muslims, this frustration gives rise to anger. Moreover, the policy of waging war in order to exploit resources invokes resentment among Muslims across the globe.

Changing dynamics of world politics in the wake of globalization is leading the world again towards multipolarity. So, Muslim should be more confident about themselves, their history and past and should move ahead. This is the great strength of Islamic civilization that it is cognizant of individual identities and differences and at the same time, it is capable of blending the local with the global. In future, all human beings have to play their role in this transformation of world about which great Allama Mohammad Iqbal envisaged. A world in which citizens will able to shape their future and a world where there is justice, dignity and equality. This vision is not confined to any particular group, it is for whole humanity. Pakistan has a role to play due to its strategic location.

Whether it is western or non-western communities, policy makers, educationists, media and civil society activists, Muslims or non-Muslims, should come forward and propagate inter-faith and inter-cultural harmony. The age of learning from each other's experiences and knowledge needs to be highlighted. Inter-faith dialogue is of prime importance today. Complex interdependence is increasing day to day among our communities in the wake of globalization. In this respect, inter-faith dialogue will help a great deal in the achievement of collective

peace. Speakers emphasized that despite differences on religious grounds, we should unite at humanitarian grounds. Muslims living in west should collaborate with their local community leaders while promoting mutual peace. The west also needs to recognize and encourage the contribution of Muslims in the renaissance of Europe. A pivotal role played by Muslims living in Europe for centuries in the development of Europe speaks clear of the fact of peaceful existence of Muslims in European communities. However, ground realities cannot be ignored. A survey conducted by Pew research centre reveals that 72% people from hungry, 69% from Italy, 66% from Poland, 65% from Greece showed dislike regarding stay of Muslims in their respective countries.

A dramatic change occurred when Trump administration wanted to ban all the Muslims travelling to US, which is completely unprecedented in the whole American political history. It is very troubling as it indicates a huge anti-Muslim bias by Trump team. The team's linking Islam with terrorism is also very troubling even among republicans. Any terrorist attack in the wake of such mistrust can create havoc in the world. Extremists in different part of the world can easily exploit such policies. While analyzing Trump administration's policies and repercussions and its impact over Muslim world, they said that the administration is concerned over US becoming more energy dependent and Middle East stands to be the biggest supply line. Trump is actually a businessman and he has no conviction but forces behind him are real threat. Unfortunately President Trump got advisors which are anti Muslim; this is where the danger lies. There is a long history regarding world felling a prey to such atmosphere of mistrust. In all this demonization, there is lack of focus on the basic needs of every human being, the need for security, prosperity, harmony and peace. Despite the advocacy of Islam as a religion of peace; a strong and malicious campaign of disinformation has been demonizing Islam, whether it is internal or external, thus portraying Islam and terror in the same category. Politicians from western countries should not push minority groups such as Muslims in a position where they have to choose between their religion and country.

Islamic world and west are two major civilizations inhabiting the world. Any conflict between them can air distress and misery among humans across the globe. It troubles Muslims in the world in general and Muslims living in Europe in particular. Diversity in culture, language, history, norms and values, traditions and customs should be accommodated with patience. Differences can only be resolved in the wake of love for humanity and belief in collective will. Unfortunately, aggression in socio-political behaviours is further fueling difference. If there is mistrust regarding Muslims' stay in Europe, there also held demonstrations in favor of Muslims detained at American airports. A large number of American protesters came forward and manifested their firm support. Furthermore, protests were observed around Europe against prescribed ban against Muslims. Contribution of civil society and intellectuals is quite encouraging in this respect. However, more efforts are required. It is a very positive development that people in Europe have started studying the Holy Quran in personal capacity in order to acquaint with the essence of Islam. Recent refugee dilemma has paved many social reactions. Greater responsibility falls on the leaders both from Muslim and western world to come up with constructive approach to cope with such emerging challenges.

Interactive Session

The problem is not exclusively religious but also lies with geo-politics and geo-economics. As long as there is lust and greed for grabbing resources, the situation is not going to improve. Law of life is that weak and timid do not invite respect. Why west should listen to Muslims when Muslims have stop contributing towards art and science. It is only knowledge and wisdom that can answer narratives which are denting the image of entire Muslim world.

Recommendations

Following suggestions are extracted from the discussion:

- Emerging challenges are widening the gap between the west and the Muslims. Serious efforts are required from leadership of both to bridge this gap and for normalcy in the world.

- There is a dire need to promote inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue. It will help a great deal in bringing harmony between the two civilizations.
- Leaders from western countries should not adopt anti-Muslim policies. It may compel Muslims to choose between the religion and the state.
- World should accept the notion of cultural and ideological diversity rather portraying Muslims as strangers. Muslims living in west should also collaborate with local representative with the intention to rectify the image of Islam while playing their due role in the development of society.
- It is the need of the hour to introduce the world with centuries long Muslims' contribution towards modern sciences and how the west adopted those scientific traditions and worked further.
- A huge influx of refugees and immigration crisis around the globe needs to be addressed in proportion with geo-economic strength of that country rather dividing refugees on the basis of religion.