

## Preventing Another September 11th

University of Texas, Austin, September 8, 2002

The tragic events on September 11, 2001 and following reactions showed the world, in the most horrible way imaginable, that we have to open a channel for dialog among the major religions as soon as possible.

It is our belief that one of the major barriers preventing this dialog is the lack of information or even worse misinformation about each other's religion or sometimes about one's own religion. Discrediting religion and blaming all problems on it is not an option. The solution is to learn and teach the true message of each other's religion as well as our own. Once the communication starts, people will understand that they are not that much different from each other and that they are definitely not enemies.

Speakers:

John L. Esposito, Director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, DC.

Lester Kurtz, Department of Sociology and Peace Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, TX

Denise A. Spellberg, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, TX.

Zeki Saritoprak, Visiting Professor from John Carroll University, OH

Mariam R. Kurtz, Journalist and Documentary filmmaker from Tanzania, TX.

Muhammed Cetin, Visiting Scholar, The President of the Institute of Interfaith Dialog, Austin, TX, USA "Introduction to the conference"

The tragic events on September 11, 2001 and following reactions showed the world, in the most horrible way imaginable, that we have to open a channel for dialog among the major religions as soon as possible. It is our belief that one of the major barriers preventing this dialog is the lack of information or even worse misinformation about each other's religion or sometimes about one's own religion. Discrediting religion and blaming all problems on it is not an option. The solution is to learn and teach the true message of each other's religion as well as our own. Once the communication starts, people will understand that they are not that much different from each other and that they are definitely not enemies.

In this regard, the Institute of Interfaith Dialog organized the conference "How to prevent another September 11" that searched for solutions to current conflicts by promoting understanding and respect, by bringing people from different religions and backgrounds together. Following the conference was an evening with the Whirling Dervishes and Sufi music. Muhammed Cetin commented on the Press Release on the condemnation of terrorism by the Turkish Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen.

We believe that it is through dialog that we learn to recognize the beauty in all of God's creatures and people. This recognition is the glue that binds multi- cultural, and multi- religious communities together.

We, therefore, invited distinguished scholars to exchange views and to share common values and goals for our common future and peaceful coexistence in diversity.

Keynote Speech by Dr Esposito

"Islam and the West after September 11: Civilizational Dialogue or Conflict?"

We need to move into act for co-existence, and hopefully cooperation. We need to distinguish clearly between Islam and extremism. We have to promote more in our societies, those of us who are academics and work in the field of religion, those of us who are believers, and others who are just people of goodwill, a recognition that Muslims are us, both as part of the mosaic of our society, but also theologically historically. Jews, Muslims and Christians are children of Abraham, it's not a Judeo or Christian or Islamic tradition alone, it's a Judao-Christian-Islamic tradition. That doesn't mean that there aren't distinctive differences, but there are similarities. There are enormous differences between Jews and Christians, but they also recognize the similarities by which we talk about and relate to each other in terms of Judeo-Christian tradition. We need to do that. Unless we do that, we have the situation that we have now.

We need to recognize what we share in common, religiously, socially, politically. We need to look at our shared values while not denying our differences. We need to look at our common interests, internationally and nationally as a country, as a society and as believers. We need to realize that all are challenged to adapt modern versions of pluralism and tolerance... Non-Muslims in the audience are challenged more and more to recognize and if you do, to be clear and to promote and to be part of the society that recognizes that the Muslims are the part of the mosaic. The Muslims are us, to put in poor syntax. They are our colleagues, they are our neighbors, they are our fellow citizens. We need to recognize what we share in common, we need to assure that the Muslims have equal place and rights and particularly celebrities in our society... The Muslims need to assure that the straight path of Islam, as we hear of it and read about it in the Koran and see it in the life of the prophet Muhammad, is not diverted by those who preach the theology of hate."

Dr. Spellberg: "Now more than ever, all of us need to stand together. United is not simply against violence but for the protection of the religions and civil rights of all citizens of this country."

Dr. Saritoprak: "An overwhelming majority of Muslims' organizations and communities denied and severely condemned terrorist attacks. No true Muslim accepts the killing of innocents. Islam is a religion that prohibits followers from even killing an ant. How can it allow them to kill an innocent human?"

Dr. Kurtz: "Gülen made a strong public condemnation of terrorism following the September 11th attacks in a letter to the Washington Post, he said, "no one and certainly no Muslims can approve of any terrorist activity. Terror has no place in one's quest to achieve independence or salvation. It costs the lives of innocent people."