



Human Rights Without Prejudice

Newsletter, Issue No. 2 2018



WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE ARAB REGION : BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

On the margins of the 36th session of the UN Human Rights Council

15 septembre 2017
from 10:00 to 12:00
Palais des Nations
Room XXIV

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue
in Special Collaboration Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations Office at Geneva
and other international organizations in Geneva

EXHIBITION and PANEL DISCUSSION



veiling unveiling

The Headscarf in Christianity, Islam and Judaism

23 February 2018
From 11:45 to 13:00
Palais des Nations
Room XXI

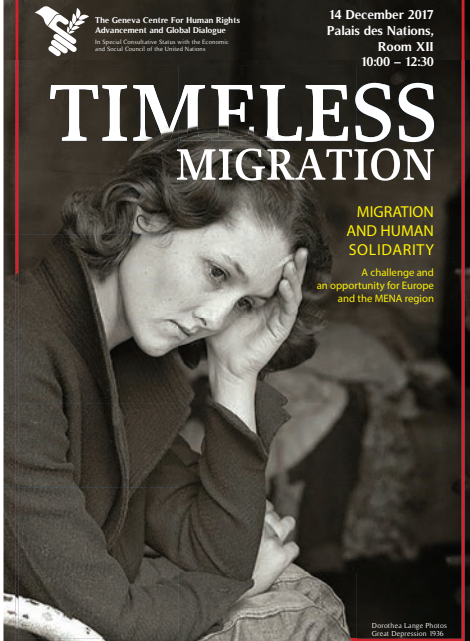
The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue
in Special Collaboration Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

14 December 2017
Palais des Nations,
Room XII
10:00 – 12:30

TIMELESS MIGRATION

MIGRATION AND HUMAN SOLIDARITY


A challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region



Dorothea Lange Photos
Great Depression 1930s

On the margins of the 37th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council


20 March 2018 | Palais des Nations
Room XXIV | 15:30 – 17:30



Improving access to justice for workers: the case of UAE

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue
in collaboration with


Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations Office at Geneva
and other international organizations in Geneva



On the margins of the 37th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue
in Special Collaboration Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations


In collaboration with



INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

21 March 2018
Palais des Nations
Room XXV
11:30 – 13:30

**PROTECTING PEOPLE ON THE MOVE:
Internally displaced persons in the context of the
REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CRISIS**





Introductory remarks by the Chairman of the Geneva Centre

Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim

Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

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How to adapt to global human mobility in the wake of the refugee and migrant crisis

Ambassador Idriss Jazairy

Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

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Activities of the Geneva Centre to promote a value-driving human rights system

Staff of the Geneva Centre

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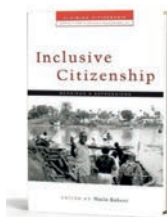


Independent views on human rights issues in the Arab region by guest writers

Dr. Azza Karam, Coordinator UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development and Senior Advisor UN Population Fund (UNFPA)

Dr. Ibrahima Guissé, Associate researcher at the Institute of Sociological Research (IRS) at the University of Geneva, and the Chief Executive Officer of Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO)

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Book reviews

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THE GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE

The Geneva Centre, an organization in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, is a think tank dedicated to the promotion of human rights through cross-cultural, religious and civilizational dialogue between the Global North and Global South, and through training of the upcoming generations of stakeholders in the Arab region. The Centre works towards a value-driven human rights system, steering clear of politicization and building bridges between different narratives thereon of the Global North and of the Global South. Its aim is to act as a platform for dialogue between a variety of stakeholders involved in the promotion and protection of human rights.

As of the latest Board meeting held on 10 December 2017 at the Geneva Centre's Headquarters, the Board of the Geneva Centre is constituted of the following members: H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim (Chairman of the Board of Management – UAE); Dr. Mohamed Butti Thani Tarish Al Shamsi (Treasurer – UAE); H. E. Saad Ahmed Al Faragi (Board Member - Egypt); Dr. Michael Kouly (Board Member – Canada); Mr. Trevor Mostyn (Board Member - UK). Ambassador Idriss Jazairy is the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre.

1. Foreword from the Chairman of the Geneva Centre



Dear readers,

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (hereinafter “the Geneva Centre”) is pleased to publish the second edition of its newsletter entitled “Human Rights Without Prejudice.” This edition reports on the initiatives undertaken by the Geneva Centre - from August 2017 to April 2018 - to encourage global dialogue on the values of justice and tolerance and to promote mutual understanding and cooperative relations between people. These ideals remain at the heart of the Centre’s efforts to promote a value-driven human rights system that serves the interest of all peoples worldwide.

The present issue includes an analytical think piece on the causes and consequences of the migrant and refugee crisis. The Executive Director of the Geneva Centre Ambassador Idriss Jazairy offers his insightful analysis on the solutions required to enhance global human mobility and to address the rise of populism in Europe. In his op-ed entitled “*Adapting to global human mobility after a refugee and migrant crisis*”, he calls for *inter alia* courageous European leadership and broad-based support from the media to depoliticise refugees and migrants and to free public opinion from irrational fear.

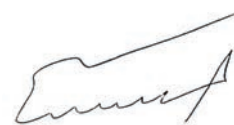
The newsletter also reports on the Centre’s endeavours to promote a value-driven human rights system. In the present edition, we announced that the Geneva Centre will be organizing a world conference on the theme of “*Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights*” which will be held on 25 June 2018 in Geneva under the Patronage of HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan. In view of the strenuous efforts of the Sponsoring Committee to advance the agenda of the World Conference, I felt it would serve the interest of the readers to learn more about the Geneva Centre’s endeavours to promote religious harmony and inter-religious among followers of different religions, creeds and value systems.

The Geneva Centre has also held numerous panel

debates at the United Nations Office at Geneva on issues related to the promotion and advancement of human rights in the Arab region. Issues related to access to justice for foreign workers in the UAE, women’s rights in the Arab region, the migrant and refugee crisis and the use of the veil in Islam, Christianity and Judaism were addressed by the Geneva Centre. The outcomes of these debates are referred to in this newsletter. Other developments related to the Centre’s activities – including the messages I issued in relation to the observation of the United Nations International Commemorative Days – are available to the readers.

The Geneva Centre has also included intellectual think pieces written by renowned human rights experts. Dr. Azza Karam - Coordinator UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, Senior Advisor UN Population Fund (UNFPA) – shares her perspectives on the interplay between religion and development. Dr. Ibrahima Guissé - Associate researcher at the Institute of Sociological Research (IRS – University of Geneva) and the Chief Executive Officer of Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme (RADDHO) – offers his insights on the causes and consequences of clandestine migration of young Saharan people to Europe.

Finally, the present version of the Geneva Centre’s newsletter contains an overview of books addressing themes related to the promotion of equal citizenship rights and women’s empowerment in the Arab region.



Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim

*Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights
Advancement and Global Dialogue*

2. Op-ed from the Geneva Centre's Executive Director: *"How to adapt to global human mobility in the wake of the refugee and migrant crisis"*



By: Ambassador Idriss Jazairy
Executive Director of the Geneva Centre

**This article was firstly published in the media outlet EURACTIV and was issued as an outcome to the 14 December 2017 panel debate "Migration and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region"*

Ever more people are on the move under the centrifugal impulse of globalization. Fifteen percent of the world's population or one billion of the Earth's seven billion people are considered as people on the move. Host developing countries or societies bear the brunt of those that flee from their homes. There are 740 million internally displaced people. On top of this, the world is home to 244 million international migrants and 22.5 million refugees. The world has thus never witnessed a more complex and massive movement of people since the end of the Second World War. Yet, attempts to deny the inevitability of global human mobility and to demonize globalization until recently hailed as an expression of "*the magic of the market*", are the preferred responses to the protracted migrant and refugee crisis.

On-going armed conflict and indiscriminate terrorist attacks in their wake as well as climate change have brought bereavement principally to the Middle East and the North Africa (MENA) region and are spilling over to other regions including Europe. This has given rise to an exacerbation of human rights violations in societies in the MENA region. More than 10 million people in Syria, Sudan, Iraq and Yemen have been forcibly displaced from their home societies or countries owing to the rise of extremist violence and to water scarcity. Thousands of refugees and migrants undertake perilous and treacherous journeys in a desperate search for a better and a safer future. Only a small proportion of these goes to destination countries that are advanced and prosperous societies and who champion human rights and democracy. Yet, this is where the backlash is now occurring. Thus, the aspirations of "*huddled masses*" for a safer and better life remain in limbo as multilateralism and consensus building are being challenged by unilateralism, populism and political adventurism.

Extremism and populism are being mainstreamed in the rich world. Eastern Europe is threatening the democratic traditions of a continent referred to as the birthplace of democracy. The electoral outcomes in numerous European countries illustrate that populist parties are emerging as credible political actors. Although the internationally displaced only account for 0.2% of Europe's population and are not statistically significant at all in some countries of Central Europe, short term perceptions of national interests and fearmongering together with an outburst of identity politics downgrade human rights and specifically the need to respond to the plight of people on the move.

How can one overcome these challenges that threaten to destabilize peace and stability in the world?

On 14 December 2017, a coalition of civil society organizations and specialists adopted the 2017 Geneva Declaration entitled "*Mobility and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region.*" This declaration was signed by representatives of

12 organizations worldwide¹ who were driven by the idea that the migrant and refugee crisis can be addressed through dialogue and joint action.

To achieve this noble goal, the Geneva Declaration calls upon international decision-makers to uphold the view that global human mobility can become the driving-force of social progress. It appeals to decision-makers in the Arab region and the West to identify equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing mechanisms to provide protection to people on the move. Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey host displaced people that may add up to 25%, 20% and 3% of these countries' populations respectively. The burden has thus been put on poorer countries to deal with a complex situation that is not of their doing.

Attempts in prosperous societies to "*fortify*" and seal off borders exacerbate the plight of these people on the move. It contributes to the criminalization of migrants and refugees. The Declaration echoes the need to enhance the fairness of responsibility-sharing mechanisms for hosting displaced, mostly young, people guided by the principles of international solidarity, justice and, why not acknowledge it, of long-term self-interest of host countries where the proportion of the elderly keeps increasing. This is an occasion for all to keep alive the lofty aims of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

A key outcome of the Declaration is the joint call to action to establish a Global Charter to enhance the protection of the rights of people on the move.

The refugee and migrant crisis has ceased to be rational, and is being caught up in an emotional whirlwind. The Global Charter should caution the EU against "*externalizing*" or "*outsourcing*" compassion to people on the move or envisioning the situation merely as a security and border control issue. European officials must consider global human mobility as a human right, and not just as an issue of protection. Nor should selective compassion and selective mercy for people on the move be allowed to prevail. A multilateral task force should be put in place to coordinate the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees and hopefully the future Global Charter.

Global human mobility must not be considered as an obstacle to the social progress of societies. Societies that demonstrate respect for human dignity are the ones most likely to be winners in the long run. There is need for courageous European leadership and broad-based support from the media to "*depoliticize*" the issue of refugees and migrants and to free public opinion from the irrational fear that has gripped it in this regard.

1. The Geneva Declaration was signed by the Geneva Centre, the International Catholic Migration Commission, the European Centre for Peace and Development, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Sovereign Order of Malta, the International Press Syndicate, the European Public Law Organization, the African Centre against Torture, Webster University, Citizens United Switzerland, the Global Cooperation Council and UN University for Peace. The United Nations Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order likewise signed the Declaration.

3. Promoting a value-driven human rights system on the principles of justice and solidarity

A: The advancement of human rights in a global context

2018 World Conference: “Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights”

The Geneva Centre is currently in the process of organizing a major international conference on the theme of “Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems, Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights.” This event will be held on 25 June 2018 in collaboration with the World Council of Churches, the International Catholic Migration Commission and Bridges to Common Ground. It will be held under the Patronage of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan.

How was this idea born?

This initiative is the fruit of the 15 March 2017 panel debate “Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights” which was organized at the United Nations Office in Geneva in collaboration with the Permanent Missions of Algeria, Pakistan and Lebanon as well as the Permanent Delegation of the Sovereign Order of Malta.

The objective of this event was to harness the joint potential of Islam and Christianity in promoting equal and inclusive citizenship rights for all in such a way as to reduce concern about the plight of religious and ethnic minorities as well as of people on the move, worldwide.

There was very broad support at this gathering for following up on, and broadening, this initiative to include all religious and ethnic minorities as well as people on the move, worldwide. This follow-up, it was felt, should take the form of a World Conference to be held in Geneva on the theme: “Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems, Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights.”

Who are the members of the World Conference Sponsoring Committee?

In order to provide the impulse for this World Conference, a Sponsoring Committee – both lay and religious – of Statesmen and Stateswomen and independent Elders has been set-up. The Sponsoring Committee will carry the process forward towards holding a successful World Conference. It consists of the following Eminent Dignitaries representing major world religions and institutions worldwide both from the Global North and the Global South:

Islam and Christianity
The Great Convergence:
Working jointly towards
equal citizenship rights

Wednesday 15th March 2017
from 15:00 to 17:30
Palais des Nations,
Room XIX

Moderator:
H. E. Mr. Idriss Jazairy,
Executive Director of the Geneva Centre

Opening Remarks:
H.E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim,
Chairman of the Geneva Centre's Board of Management

Panelists:
H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Alihan,
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN
H.E. Ambassador Tehmina Janjua,
Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN
H.E. Sheikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi,
Minister of State for Tolerance of UAE
Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit,
General Secretary, World Council of Churches (WCC)
H.E. Minister Lakhdar Brahimi,
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria and a member of the Elders, a group of eminent personalities
H.E. Minister Tarek Mizri,
Former Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, Director of the Centre for Dialogue on Faith, Policy and International Affairs (CFDIA)

Honourable Mark D. Siljander:
Member of the Congressional U.S.-U.S. International & author of "A Deadly Misunderstanding: A Congressman's Quest to Bridge the Muslim-Christian Divide" President of Bridges to Common Ground

Reverend Timothy Radcliffe:
Commons Lord of the King's Bench and former Master of the Chair of Theology (currently Bishop of the Diocese of Exeter)

Professor Carole Hillenbrand:
Professor of Islamic History, University of St. Andrews

In the presence of H.E. William Lairy Swigg, the Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

1. **His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan** – Amman (Jordan).
2. **Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim** – Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue. Former Minister in the government of UAE.
3. **Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit** – General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).
4. **Monsignor Robert J. Vitillo** – Secretary General of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC).
5. **H. E. Lakhdar Brahimi** - Former Foreign Minister of Algeria, Member of the Elders.
6. **Ambassador Mark D. Siljander** – Former US Ambassador to the UN. Author of “A Deadly Misunderstanding: A Congressman’s Quest to Bridge the Muslim-Christian Divide” and President of Bridges to Common Ground.

7. **Rabbi David Shlomo Rosen** - International Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and the Director of the Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding. Member of the Board of Directors of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue.
8. **H. E. Ambassador Juan Somavia** – Director, Diplomatic Academy of Chile. Former Director General of the International Labour Organization and former Ambassador of Chile to the United Nations.
9. **Dr. Azza Karam** – Coordinator UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development, Senior Advisor UN Population Fund (UNFPA).
10. **H. E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann** - Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta.

11. **Dr. Farhan Nizami** – Director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.
12. **H. E. Amre Moussa** – Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt and former Secretary General of the Arab League.
13. **H. E. Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar** – Secretary-General of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), Vienna.
14. **H. E. Hoda Al-Helaissi** - member of Saudi Arabia’s Shoura Council and former Vice-Chairperson at King Saud University.
15. **Professor Shahrzade Houshmand Zadeh** - Professor of Islamic Studies at the Centre for the Study of Theology of Religions, Faculty of Missiology, Gregorian University, Rome, Italy.



The Sponsoring Committee is chaired by the Geneva Centre’s Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy and the Director of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (Jordan) Dr. Majeda Omar.

What is the aim of the World Conference?

The aim of the World Conference is to chart a more inclusive understanding and forward-looking discussion of equal citizenship rights informed by religious pluralism and to unite the voices of religious and lay-leaders in their joint efforts to promote and advance equal citizenship rights. The conference will seek to capitalize on the convergence between religions, creeds and value systems to mitigate the marginalization of minorities worldwide.

When all citizens are entitled to enjoy the same set of rights, privileges and duties, they will be looked upon as equal citizens. The effective enjoyment of citizenship rights will pave the way for the celebration of cultural diversity to become a plus to be celebrated thus fostering greater mutual understanding worldwide. This is the vision that guides the Eminent Members of the Sponsoring Committee to move forward the agenda of the World Conference.

How can I receive further information about the World Conference?

Interested parties should contact the Geneva Centre’s Headquarter either on email info@gchragd.org or phone +41 (0) 22 748 27 80 requesting further information about the World Conference. The Geneva Centre would be delighted to share the concept note with interested parties.



| Al-Azhar conference on the situation in Jerusalem (January 2018)

The Executive Director of the Geneva Centre Ambassador Idriss Jazairy was a keynote speaker at the Al-Azhar sponsored conference on the human rights situation in Jerusalem. It was held from 17 to 18 January 2018 at the Al-Azhar International Conference Center in Cairo (Egypt) under the auspices of the President of Arab Republic of Egypt H. E. Abdel Fattah el-Sissi.

The situation has the potential to further exacerbate – he added – the daily human rights violations of the Palestinian people and to accelerate the judaization of Jerusalem despite the fact that the three Abrahamic religions should have the same standing in the Holy City. *“It may lead, inter alia, to the further expansion of settlements and systematic demolitions of homes in East Jerusalem, as well as to further restrictions on the Palestinians’ freedom of movement across the city,”* stated the Geneva Centre’s Executive Director.

It gathered numerous international figures including: The President of Palestine H.E. Mahmoud Abbas, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar H. E. Dr. Ahmed el-Tayeb and the Chief of the Arab Parliament H. E. Meshaal bin Fahm al-Salmi. Religious and political representatives of more than 86 countries were present at this landmark conference that was sponsored by Al-Azhar, the highest institution of Sunni Islamic authority.

In his statement, Ambassador Jazairy highlighted that the international community has a *“moral duty”* to protect and to uphold the human rights of the Palestinian people in the wake of the decision of the US to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. *“Al Quds is a textbook case of multi-faceted and cross-cutting violations of human rights,”* he said.

Ambassador Jazairy’s statement on Jerusalem was cited in major news publications in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and Algeria.



Special session at the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in Myanmar: The efforts of the Geneva Centre (December 2017)

In relation to the deplorable human rights and humanitarian situation in Myanmar, the Geneva Centre initiated a major international appeal to address the human rights situation of the Rohingya Muslim population.

On 11-12 October 2017, the Geneva Centre's Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy sent out individual letters to the Permanent Representatives of all the diplomatic community at the UN Geneva and in particular to the members of the Human Rights Council. The Geneva Centre appealed in this correspondence for the holding of a Special Session in relation to the human rights situation of the Rohingya Muslim population in Myanmar.

Although reluctance and hesitancy was initially expressed, the statutory number of sponsors was reached subsequently to organize the advocated Special Session to address the situation of the Rohingyas in the State of Rakhine.

A background note in English, French and Arabic was also prepared by the Geneva Centre's Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy on the rationale of holding a Special Session during the month of December 2017 on Myanmar that was sent to all member States on 3 November 2017.

On 5 December 2017, the Geneva Centre's advocacy campaign brought results as the Human Rights Council held its 27th Special Session entitled "*Human rights situation of the minority Rohingya Muslim population and other minorities in the Rakhine State of Myanmar*" at the United Nations Office in Geneva. This session was attended by a members and observer States of

the Human Rights Council as well as by permanent observer missions and NGOs including the Geneva Centre.

In the Geneva Centre's oral statement, it was highlighted that the Rohingya Muslim population in Myanmar "cannot be erased from Burmese soil or their identity stamped out and that refugees here as elsewhere have a right of return when it will be safe for them to do so." The Centre also called for an "*urgent supply of humanitarian assistance in Rakhine State*" and for "*accountability of the perpetrators of the heinous crimes that have been committed and for reparations to the victims.*"

The draft resolution on the human rights situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar – submitted and tabled by the OIC members Algeria, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan and Turkey – was adopted by 33 votes in favour, 9 abstentions and 3 votes against.

The results of the vote were as follows:

- **In favour (33):** Albania, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, Indonesia, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States.
- **Against (3):** Burundi, China and Philippines.
- **Abstentions (9):** Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India, Japan, Kenya, Mongolia, South Africa and Venezuela.


The adoption of the Geneva declaration on “Mobility and Human Solidarity”: An additional opportunity to identify new solutions to the migrant and refugee crisis

As an outcome to the panel debate entitled “*Migration and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region*” on 14 December 2017, a declaration entitled “*Mobility and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region*” was adopted. The objective of this declaration is to highlight that States and decision-makers in the Arab region and the West are morally and legally bound to enhance human mobility. It behoves them to respond with a unified voice to the tragedy of those millions of people on the move in the Middle East and North Africa region.

As of 19 April 2018, the Geneva Declaration has been signed by the following civil society organizations and migration specialists from the Arab region and the West. The list of co-signatories of the Declaration stand as follows:

1. H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim, Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (Switzerland/UAE);
2. H. E. Ambassador Idriss Jazairy, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (Switzerland);
3. Monsignor Robert J. Vitillo, Secretary General of the International Catholic Migration Commission (Switzerland);

4. Dr. Roberto Savio, Founder and President Emeritus of Inter Press Service (IPS). Director for International Relations of the European Centre for Peace and Development (Italy);
5. H. E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann, Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta (Switzerland);
6. Dr. Alfred de Zayas, United Nations Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order (Switzerland);
7. Mr. Edouard Rodier, Director of the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Europe Office (NRC) (Belgium/Norway);
8. H. E. Ambassador George Papadatos, Head of the European Public Law Mission in Geneva (Switzerland/Greece);
9. Mr. Ramesh Jaura, President of the Global Cooperation Council and the Director General Chief Editor of the International Press Syndicate (Germany);
10. Mr. Halle Jørn Hanssen, journalist and author (Norway);
11. Mr. David Koros, Director of the African Centre Against Torture (Switzerland);
12. Dr. Oreste Foppiani, Head of the Department of International Relations and Associate Professor of International History & Politics at Webster University (Switzerland);
13. Ms. Ngoneh Panneh, Founder and President of Citizens United (Switzerland);
14. Prof. Dr. Negoslav P. Ostojić, Executive Director of the ECPD UN University for Peace (Serbia);
15. Ms. Samar Muhareb, CEO of Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (Jordan);
16. Reverend Mike Deeb, Permanent Delegate of the Dominican Order to the United Nations (Switzerland);
17. Dr. Ibrahima Guissé, CEO of Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme (Switzerland/Senegal);
18. Mr. Joseph Désiré Zebaze, National Coordinator of the Cameroon Network of Human Rights Organizations (Cameroon);
19. Mr. Manou Nabara Hamidou, President of Jeunesse-Enfance-Migration-Développement (Niger);
20. Mr. Hacem Mohammedi, President of Solidascension (Switzerland/France);
21. Mr. Deen Gibril, President of the Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organisation (Hungary);
22. Mr. Raimondo Schiavone, President of the Arab Italian Centre for the Mediterranean (Italy).



Geneva declaration: Mobility and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region

The co-signatories of this declaration adopted during the panel debate entitled “*Migration and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region*” organized on 14 December 2017 at the United Nations Office in Geneva hereby agree to the proclamation of the following declaration:

“We take note of the fact that mobility has become a global issue affecting every corner of the world of which approximately 1 billion people are on the move encompassing migrants, refugees and other persons in need of international protection as well as internally displaced persons;

“We acknowledge that migration is part of globalization and remains a positive factor to achieving sustainable development in line with the provisions set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

“We recognize that the unprecedented rise and forced displacement of people on the move is a global problem requiring global solutions and should not merely be

B: Enhancing global dialogue through the holding of panel debates at the United Nations Office in Geneva

Response to migrant and refugee crisis must recognise the adverse impact of forced displacement of IDPs

The forced displacement of internally displaced persons (hereinafter “IDPs”) in the Middle East cannot be left unaddressed by decision-makers in the context of the refugee and migrant crisis, highlighted a group of human rights experts during a panel debate at the United Nations Office at Geneva.



The debate entitled “Protecting people on the move: Internally displaced persons in the context of the refugee and migrant crisis” was held on 21 March 2018 at Palais des Nations in Geneva on the margins of the 37th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council. The debate was arranged by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to UN Geneva.

The aim of the panel debate was to discuss the issue of internal displacement from a global perspective, offering insights into how it fits within broader policy debates on refugees and migration. It addressed the challenges in protecting and ensuring the safe return and reintegration of IDPs through several case studies, including Iraq and Syria. Azerbaijan offered practical insights on the lessons that could be learned from assisting and supporting IDPs in protracted conflict situations.

Situation of IDPs in the Middle East remains an issue of major concern

The unprecedented rise of armed conflict and violence in the Middle East has further exacerbated the human rights situation of IDPs. It is estimated that more than 40 million people are considered as IDPs which exceeds the number of refugees. In 2016, IDMC reported that there were 31.1 million new internal displacements worldwide. 1/3 of conflict-related IDPs worldwide are located in the Middle East illustrating that forced displacement of IDPs has become an issue of growing concern to the region.



In light of these observations, the **Chairman of the Geneva Centre H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim** stated in his inaugural address that the discourse regarding the migrant and refugee crisis cannot afford to ignore the human rights situation of IDPs. He averred that neglecting the human rights and humanitarian situation of IDPs in countries with large-scale internal displacement could give rise to a new wave of people on the move. Isolating the situation of IDPs in the context of the lasting migrant and refugee crisis – he said - would be “counterproductive as internal displacement share the same causes as cross-border movement.” “Today’s IDPs could become tomorrow’s refugees,” Dr. Al Qassim remarked.



The UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) **Mrs. Cecilia Jimenez Damary** observed that the interplay between the migration and refugee crisis and IDPs is interwoven and related to one another. The protection of IDPs is an essential matter of implementing international obligations to protect the human rights of people on the move. In her recent country visit to Libya, it was concluded that IDPs “were considering crossing the Mediterranean Sea”, indeed recent arrivals to Italy were increasingly composed of *inter alia* IDPs from Libya.

In Iraq, the military defeat of ISIS has resulted in the

forced displacement of nearly 1 million people. Although some returns of IDPs are possible, “many other IDPs from the conflict are facing protracted displacement conditions in remaining camps and host societies, sometimes since after their very initial displacement,” stated Mrs. Jimenez Damary in her video statement.



In neighbouring Syria, the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Policy and Advocacy Advisor at its Syria office **Ms. Rachel Sider** remarked that an estimated 2.9 million new displacements were reported in 2017 only. 600,000 Syrians had already returned to their home societies in an attempt to rebuild their lives and their country. However, for every Syrian refugee or IDP who returned home in 2017, “a further three were newly displaced.” Protracted internal displacement was therefore a direct cause of the precarious and volatile security situation in Syria. “Those areas most likely to receive returns are the same areas where IDPs in protracted displacement are most likely to congregate. The global experience is that the longer refugees and IDPs remain outside their home country or home areas, the lower the chances of them returning,” Ms. Sider said.



The moderator of the panel debate – **the Geneva Centre’s Executive Director H. E. Ambassador Idriss Jazairy** – complemented these observations stating that greater solidarity is expressed to sufferings of IDPs that are decibel related than those that are silent. IDP dying from a “silent death” – as witnessed in Syria – are no less cruel than those deaths associated “with high levels of decibels.” It is thus key to steer clear from the politicization of issues related to the human sufferings of IDPs, Ambassador Jazairy suggested in his statement.

Achievements of Azerbaijan to address plight of IDPs are applicable to countries in the Middle East



The panel debate resorted to the endeavours of Azerbaijan to identify durable solutions to enhance the integration of IDPs within the Azeri society. Owing to the Nagorno-Karabakh military conflict, more than 600,000 Azeris have been forcibly displaced. The Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to UN Geneva **H. E. Ambassador Vaqif Sadiqov** said that his country hosts, in this regard, one of the largest proportion of IDP population per capita in the world numbering 1 million people which is equivalent approximately to the number of forcibly displaced people located in Europe. Despite this, Ambassador Sadiqov remarked that “in the last 20 years, Baku has invested USD 6 billion to alleviate the plight of IDPs” which demonstrates the commitment of the government of Azerbaijan to address the human rights situation of forcibly displaced people.



The results of the efforts of Azerbaijan to reintegrate forcibly displaced IDPs were brought to the attention of the panellists and the audience by the Vice Rector of ADA University **Mr. Fariz Ismayilzade**. It was highlighted in his statement that the government of Azerbaijan had made it a key priority to enhance access to “accessible housing, employment, livelihood options and education for IDPs” in the country. In this regard, “free education at universities and secondary school level” is provided to IDPs in Azerbaijan so as to enhance their social status within the Azeri society. “Close to 400 decrees and 35 laws have been adopted by the government to Azerbaijan to enhance the rights and social status of IDPs,” Mr. Ismayilzade said.

Government leadership needed

Although responding to protection needs of IDPs is of vital importance, identifying solutions to address the root-causes of such forced displacement must receive increased attention. Involved actors must resort to concerted and comprehensive efforts in their implementation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement to address the triggering factors. In this regard, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs – Ms. Jimenez Damary - noted that she had sent an open letter to stakeholders - participating in the UN Global Compact for Migration and on Refugees – in which she recommended that a solution to the migrant and refugee crisis address the causes and consequences of forced displacement of IDPs.



The **Director of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre Ms. Alexandra Bilak** stated that forced displacement of IDPs must receive increased political attention. *“There is a solid recognition that the issue of internal displacement”* – she remarked – *“is not just a humanitarian challenge, but needs to be treated as a fundamentally political and developmental one as well.”* However, protecting and assisting IDPs lie on the shoulders of national sovereign governments which makes forced displacement of IDPs an internal matter.

Ambassador Jazairy added his voice to this discourse suggesting that decision-makers identify a common framework to address the plight of IDPs. *“A constructive and open dialogue about the solutions required to enhance”* - he noted – *“the protection of IDPs in the context of the migrant and refugee crisis”* is of central importance. Ms. Sider also called for a strengthened role of governments in addressing the causes and consequences of forced displacement of IDPs. She said: *“Without government leadership to ensure respect for and protection of the displaced, it will be a much longer road towards distant durable solutions.”*

The panel debate on IDPs was attended by Ambassadors and other representatives from the Permanent Missions of Australia, Egypt, Norway, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, the Maldives, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United States (US), Iraq, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, Armenia, Oman, Malta, Pakistan, Jordan and Nigeria. Representatives from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Sovereign Order of Malta were likewise present.

UAE one of the first countries to offer assistance to IDPs in Azerbaijan

Mr. Izmayilzade highlighted in his statement that the UAE was one of the first countries to offer humanitarian assistance to IDPs in Azerbaijan following the outbreak of the military outbreak in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the statement of the representative of the UAE Permanent Mission during the interactive session, it was underlined that UAE is actively involved in facing the complexity of increasing humanitarian crises all over the world including IDPs.

UAE policy on access to justice a shining example of item 16.3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Initiatives implemented by the government of the United Arab Emirates to enhance access to justice for foreign workers have brought positive results and could be replicated on a broader basis in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. These were the conclusions drawn by labour law experts who participated in a panel debate held at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

The conference, entitled *“Improving access to justice for workers: the case of UAE”*, was held on 20 March by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue and the European Public Law Organization, in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to UN Geneva. The debate took place on the margins of the 37th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council.

The aim of the panel debate was to review the progress achieved in the UAE to enhance access to justice and to identify areas of possible improvement. It likewise served as a starting-point for a process that would advocate a broadening of issues related to human rights and labour rights for foreign workers in the Gulf region. The review was intended to assess the most innovative features of such reforms and their possible replication in GCC countries.

UAE Vision 2021: The blueprint for the implementation of innovative initiatives to enhance access to justice

The panel debate emphasised the importance of pursuing progress witnessed in the UAE with regard to justice for workers. Reforms in the UAE are part of a broad-based effort in GCC countries to improve workers' rights in these advanced liberal economies.

UAE government policy to enhance access to justice is embedded in the UAE 2021 Vision which stipulates, *inter alia*, the importance of promoting safe, public and fair judiciary.



The implementation of the UAE Vision 2021 is bringing concrete results, according to the Geneva Centre's Chairman **H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim**, in the field of enhancing judicial system access and efficiency. Key initiatives to promote the right and welfare of workers have been implemented by the UAE government in this regard. The introduction of e-trials, video conferencing, conciliation, real-time translations, mediation and court hearings are likewise telling examples of the UAE's aspirations to enhance access to justice.



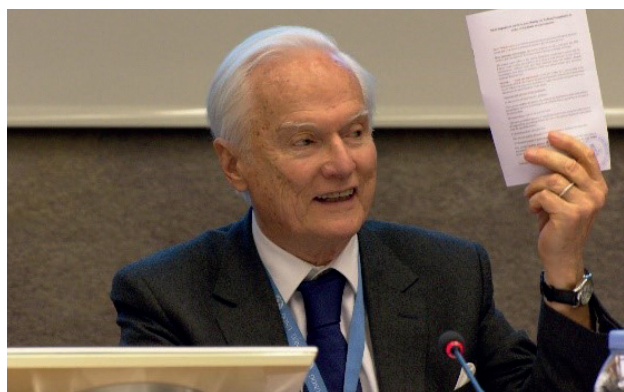
The achievements of the UAE government were also highlighted by other keynote speakers. In his opening remarks, the Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the UAE to UN Geneva – **H. E. Ambassador Obaid Salem Saeed Al Zaabi** – observed that the UAE is “governed by a legal system that protects their beliefs, respects their customs and traditions and their way of life.” “Multiple measures, decrees, and resolutions” will be considered by the UAE government so as to “implement these laws and increase workers protections.” Other initiatives related to *inter alia* the protection against work-related injuries, health, insurance and other related issues are also being implemented by the UAE government.



One concrete example of the UAE's endeavours to enhance access to justice is the introduction of the Wages Protection System (WPS). This is an “important step to ensure the protection of the rights of workers,” H. E. Ambassador Al Zaabi said. **Dr. Jill Wells**, Senior Policy Advisor at Engineers against Poverty, highlighted that the introduction of the WPS had contributed to resolving issues related to late payments of wages. In this regard, companies employing migrant workers need to set aside bank guarantees – it was highlighted - to pay workers' wages when employers default so as to protect the wages of migrant construction workers.



A case study analysis of the endeavours of the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD) to promote access to justice was likewise offered by **Mr. Benjamin George Burgher**, Judge and Legal Consultant with ADJD. In this regard, a mobile court is being used by ADJD – he noted - to carry out “court procedures in an accessible and effective manner.” More than 70,000 workers have so far benefited from this innovative method to enhance the provision of legal aid and access to justice.



In view of the fact that migrants and foreign workers may add up to 90% of the populations in GCC countries, the **Geneva Centre's Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy** – who also served as a moderator for the debate – underlined that labour reforms must benefit host and source societies alike. A “consensus around the adoption of policies and measures aimed at enhancing the legal empowerment of foreign labour” is therefore a key priority. Labour reforms must also recognise the interplay between human rights and labour rights. Access to justice is not only about guaranteeing access to courts and legal representation – he said – but also about “seeking and obtaining a remedy for grievances.”

Challenges impeding the enjoyment of access to justice must be given due consideration



During the debate, suggestions were made to improve access to justice of foreign workers in the UAE, said **Ambassador George Papadatos**, the Head of the European Public Law Organization's Geneva Delegation.

In this connection, **Mr. Ryszard Cholewinski** - Senior Migration Specialist at the ILO Regional Office for Arab States in Beirut – underlined that ILO remained committed to support the UAE government to address issues of relevance to access to justice. *“The UAE faces several challenges in the governance of its labour market”* – he noted – as *“low employment rate of nationals, a segmented labour market and deficits in the availability of reliable and comprehensive labour market data”* remain the key challenges, according to the speaker. The protection of migrant workers should also be addressed as part of consultation phases of the Global Compact on Migration and for Refugees.



Abuse and harsh working conditions involving working conditions for domestic workers likewise remain issues of concern in the UAE, according to **Ms. Rothna Begum** the Women's Rights Researcher on the Middle East and North Africa at Human Rights Watch. Labour law related to domestic workers is weaker than the UAE labour law for all other workers. The UAE should therefore seek to – it was recommended - ensure its law is aligned with the ILO's Domestic Workers Convention *“which maintains that domestic workers should have protections equivalent to those of other workers.”* The

decision to establish a prosecution unit in Abu Dhabi focused on crimes against domestic workers – Ms. Begum remarked - was an important step that *“could help increase investigations into abuses of domestic workers.”*



With regard to the adoption of labour legislation to address employment-related issues, **Mr. Jamie Liddington - Partner and Head of Employment Hedef & Partners LLC** – underlined that the elimination of administrative barriers related to justice requires increased attention. *“Practical difficulties posed by having to independently travel to Court, pay a fee in some cases, language barriers and then return on numerous occasions for hearing dates,”* illustrate that *“in a practical sense, there are significant barriers to justice for blue collar workers.”*

Nonetheless, the introduction of domestic worker legislation, the Tadbeer and Tawjeeh initiatives and removal of court fees have contributed to addressing some of these obstacles, said Mr. Liddington. The Permanent Representative of India to UN Geneva



– **H. E. Ambassador Rajiv Kumar Chander** – added, in this regard, that enhanced access to information regarding the rights and responsibilities of foreign workers would contribute to addressing these issues. He indicated that on a recent visit to the UAE, the Prime Minister of India had paid tribute to the Emirati policy towards Indian workers in the country.

The panellists' presentations were followed by a rich, frank and constructive debate with the audience which was attended by Ambassadors and other representatives from the Permanent Missions of Bahrain, India, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi-Arabia, Morocco, Libya, Algeria, the

Maldives and Canada. This event will pave the way for a series of panel discussions which will be organized by the Geneva Centre to encourage the process of reform which has been initiated in the Gulf region with respect to foreign labour. With the cooperation of other interested countries, the best practice case-study review will contribute to placing the GCC countries in the vanguard of labour-related migration and a source of inspiration of other countries witnessing large-scale migration.

Experts Stress Acceptance Of Headscarf In Abrahamic Faiths

On 23 February 2018, the Geneva Centre organized a panel debate on the theme of *“Veiling/Unveiling: The Headscarf in Christianity, Islam and Judaism.”* This debate was organized on the margins of the 37th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Democratic People’s Republic of Algeria to UN Geneva. The objective of the panel debate was to deconstruct existing myths regarding the use of the headscarf and its politicization in modern societies. It likewise aimed to explore the role of the headscarf as a source of unity and communality between different cultures and religions worldwide.

The freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief in public must be guaranteed

The moderator of the panel debate – the **Geneva Centre’s Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy** – observed in his statement that *“the headscarf represents commonality, rather than discord; it should connect and build bridges between cultures, rather than divide. It has played an important role in defining identities in all three Abrahamic religions.”*



During Ambassador Jazairy’s presentation, a video was projected to the audience in which showed the act of the Australian Senator Pauline Hanson in August 2017 to request the Attorney-General George Brandis to ban the use of the Islamic burqa in Australia. In this regard, the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre stated that this *“display of Islamophobia and cultural insensitiveness”* was an *“illustration of the ways in which the Islamic headscarf is being manipulated for political ends.”*



The co-sponsor of the debate - the Deputy Permanent Representative of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria **Mr. Toufik Djouama** – added that a *“degrading image about the Islamic headscarf”* is being cultivated by numerous groups that believe in the *“clash of civilizations.”* The use of the veil – he said – is *“a personal choice”* taken by Muslim women. *“Others see it as an attachment to their identity and cultural heritage. Others see it just as a traditional dress or a symbol of decency,”*

The use of the headscarf is a source of commonality between the three main Abrahamic religions Islam, Christianity and Judaism

Renowned speakers representing the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths were invited to offer their compelling insights on points of convergence between the three Abrahamic religions.



In her statement, **Ms. Elisabeth Reichen-Amsler** – the Director of the section *“Church and society”* within the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Neuchâtel Canton (EREN) – remarked that the use of the headscarf cannot be considered as solely belonging to Islam – as often presented in public discourse – as its roots can be traced back to ancient cultures in Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire and the birth of Christianity. *“She remarked as a Christian in her statement that “our multiculturalism can be a source of insecurity for some.”* This can however trigger people’s interest in the Other – it was noted - but also in their own roots so as to compare differences and similarities between cultures and religions.



Dr. Malika Hamidi – author of the book *“Muslim feminism – why not?”* – highlighted in her statement that feminist and secular movements in France had objected to the wearing of Islamic headscarves by Muslim women as it allegedly violated the right to their liberty and dignity. In this context, feminist movements in French-speaking Europe – she said – remain *“shaken”* by the fact that some Muslim women hold the view that the headscarf has *“liberated them in their relationship with men and European societies. The fact that women are wearing headscarves, within the limits determined by Islam may allow them to gain more respect but represents a vector of social, political and cultural participation which is strongly questioned in the West,”* she remarked.



Dr. Valérie Rhein – an expert on theology holding a PhD in Judaism at the Institute of Jewish Studies, University of Bern – stated that the use of the headscarf is an ancient tradition of Judaism. It was a custom – she said – *“for a Jewish bride to veil her face before the marriage ceremony”* as this practice is mentioned in Genesis 24 of the Bible which describes the first encounter between Isaac and Rebekah. She added that the Talmudic law – rooted in the concept of Zniut/Modesty – also required women to cover their hair after marriage as it symbolizes belonging to *“observant Judaism”* and of being married. It was also incumbent on men to wear a headgear (kippah) as it symbolises a *“sign of respect”* and a *“relationship towards God.”*

Addressing prejudice and intolerance must remain on the agenda of decision-makers



Following the intervention of the panellists, the moderator opened the floor to the audience. The counsellor for human rights of the **Permanent Mission of Australia** – Mr. Kevin Playford – welcomed the Centre’s comments on Australia and underlined that the *“veil can often be misunderstood”* as a symbol of religious expression. The act of the Australian Senator Pauline Hanson to wear a burqa in the Australian Parliament – he said – does not represent the true values of Australia. Her acts were meant to *“marginalize the Muslim community”* in Australia and were strongly condemned throughout the Australian society.



The Ambassador of the Permanent Delegation of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) **H. E. Nassima Baghli** asked the panellists to express their views on the restrictions of secularism in relation to the expression of people’s religious beliefs. Dr. Rhein said that different religious groups *“must work together and fight for their rights”* in order to address factors impeding their right to express their religious beliefs. Ms. Reichen-Amsler added in her statement that Switzerland is based on the ideal of inclusive secularity. *“Everyone must be included because of their specificities”* – she said – in order to allow members of society to live in peace.



H. E. Ambassador George Papadatos – the Head of European Public Law Organization’s delegation in Geneva – stated that the main triggering factors behind Islamophobia and the politicization of the use of the headscarf are ignorance and prejudice. Ignorance – he underlined – could be erased by disseminating information whereas prejudice requires a multifaceted approach to deal with its root-causes. In reaction to Ambassador Papadatos’ statement, **Dr. Hamidi** stated that access to education was hampered by not permitting girls to attend school while wearing a headscarf in some advanced countries.

The panel discussion was attended by Ambassadors and other representatives from the Permanent Missions of Austria, Algeria, UAE, Australia, Namibia, Djibouti, Italy, Bosnia, OIC, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Netherlands, Egypt and Côte d’Ivoire.

Inauguration of panel exhibition at Palais des Nations in Geneva on the theme of “Veiling/Unveiling”

After the panel debate, the Geneva Centre inaugurated its exhibition to explore the history and the religious-cultural roots of the headscarf. The exhibition was displayed at Palais des Nations (entrance E40) from 23 February to 01 March 2018.



The exhibition was part of the Geneva Centre’s awareness raising campaign to promote inter-cultural understanding and global dialogue on the values of justice and tolerance. The aim of the exhibition was to address the widespread misperception and stereotyping regarding the use of the headscarf in modern societies. It also raised awareness of points of convergence and mutual enhancement between Islam, Christianity and

Judaism regarding the use of the headscarf in different religious and cultural contexts.

A catalogue of the exhibition has been prepared by the Geneva Centre and can be obtained by sending an email to info@gchragd.org

The Protracted Refugee and Migrant Crisis: A Challenge to Multilateralism

In response to the protracted migrant and refugee crisis that has affected primarily Europe and the MENA region, the Geneva Centre organized a panel debate at UNOG on 14 December 2017 on the theme of “*Migration and human solidarity, a challenge and an opportunity for Europe and the MENA region.*”

The panel debate addressed the adverse impact of cross-border movement resulting from war-related insecurity and climate change. Violence and insecurity as well as climate change induced migration have adversely affected millions of people in the MENA region and have become issues of high importance for the countries in that region and in Europe. The debate offered a timely opportunity to address these issues in its Europe-Middle Eastern interactive dimensions rather than through focussing on the two regions separately.

The **Geneva Centre’s Executive Director H. E. Ambassador Idriss Jazairy** acted as a moderator to the meeting. He called upon all member States of the United Nations to contribute to the realization of the UN Global Compact on Migration. He warned that the realization of global human mobility would fail if “*multilateralism and consensus-building*” would be replaced by “*unilateralism and the fortification of societies*”.

He stated that the migrant and refugee crisis can be solved through dialogue, alliance building and multilateral diplomacy. In this regard, Ambassador Jazairy said there must “*be a sharing of responsibility for hosting displaced people*” to address the plight of people on the move and to support countries in the Arab region in their efforts to provide refuge and protection to people on the move.

Migration and human mobility are permanent human realities

The **Chairman of the Geneva Centre H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim** stated in his inaugural address that the increase in the numbers of people on the move around the Mediterranean Sea is “*not sustainable in the long run, either for Europe or the Arab region.*” He noted that the rise of populism in Europe and the rise of violent extremism in the MENA region threaten the long-stability of the region. The “*surge of violence begotten by conflict*” - he said - “*has resulted in the forced displacement of at least 10 million people.*” The Geneva Centre’s Chairman called for a “*new common agenda that unleashes the potential of global human mobility*” and to coordinate the “*efforts of countries in Europe and in the MENA region to respond with one voice to the current crisis.*”



IOM Senior Regional Advisor for the MENA region **Mr. Hassan Abdel Moneim** stated in his opening intervention that the world lives in an era of unprecedented human mobility. Migration is – he said – *“a fact of life and a reality as old as humankind.”* He noted that IOM has more than 20 years of experience in implementing development-oriented interventions that move beyond humanitarian response by addressing the root causes of forced migration before, during and after crisis. *“We must all stand ready to aid migrants, and to ensure social inclusion into ‘all policies. Migration is not a problem to be solved, but a human reality to be managed,”* concluded Mr. Moneim in his intervention.



Monsignor Robert J. Vitillo assessed the need for enhanced efforts between Christians and Muslims in jointly addressing the adverse impact of the refugee and migrant crisis. He observed that *“dialogue and practical cooperation among Christians and Muslims”* can create points of convergence and *“eliminate the tensions arising from a lack of direct familiarity with people whose cultures, faith traditions, and ethnic identities may differ from our own.”*

Monsignor Vitillo remarked that HH *“Pope Francis has spared no effort to join other religious leaders in a just and equitable response to forced displacement of peoples.”* The efforts of HH Pope Francis to address the plight of Syrian Muslim refugee families in the Greek island of Lesbos and the human rights situation of the Rohingya people in Myanmar are concrete efforts by the Catholic Church to *“put their faith into practice.”*



In her intervention, **H. E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann** informed the audience regarding the Sovereign Order of Malta’s humanitarian activities in addressing the plight of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. In this regard, she noted that the medical teams of the Sovereign Order of Malta has assisted more than 50,000 people in rescue operations at sea. Ambassador Pictet-Althann also remarked that the Sovereign Order of Malta carries out humanitarian activities in countries of origin, transit and arrival such as Turkey, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

Ambassador Pictet-Althann concluded her intervention stating that *“cooperation in the humanitarian field of faith-based institutions also creates a bond of mutual trust and confidence among people of different religions.”*

Promoting mechanisms to protect people on the move are needed more than ever



Dr. Roberto Savio spoke on the misuse of religion and the rise of populism and xenophobia. He said that the decision of the US government to withdraw from the Global Compact on Migration contradicts the founding ideal of the US as a country built by migrants. Dr. Savio added that President Trump has *“set a perfect example”* for other countries in Europe to ignore the decisions of the European Union to address the plight of migrants. *“Nationalism, populism and xenophobia are back with growing popular support and politicians openly riding them,”* highlighted Dr. Savio.



In his deliberation, **Mr. Edouard Rodier** assessed the response of the European Union in relation to the refugee and migrant crisis. He said that people on the move leave their home societies as a result of armed conflict, violence, starvation, misery and persecutions. *“Those who are reaching Europe are claiming for a better life: a life where without fear, where fundamental rights are protected, where dignity is restored,”* he remarked.

In this regard, Mr. Rodier added that *“while we appreciate the political sensitivity of the topic, we need to acknowledge that solutions cannot be found in denial of this fact: migrations are here to stay.”* He concluded his statement calling upon Europe to *“take back its leading role in the defence of refugees’ rights”* in light of the decision of the US government to withdraw from the Global Compact on Migration.



In addition to these observations, **Ms. Goyer** observed that armed conflict, violence and sectarian strives have led to increasing levels of displacement across the Middle East and North Africa region. In relation to the efforts of UNHCR to address the plight of people on the move, Ms. Goyer noted that the world’s leading refugee agency has provided support to *inter alia* processing individual biometric registration for refugees, registration and documentation of births, enhancing national asylum legislation, access to livelihood opportunities and the establishment of community centres and mobile teams in the region in pursuit of sustainable protection responses.



In her statement, **Ms. Ionesco** stated that the adverse impact of drought, environmental degradation and ecological crises in the MENA region contribute to the rise of people on the move. The multicausality of migration – she said – must be recognised by decision-makers and reflected in migration policies to address the causes and consequences of displacement of people. In this regard, IOM has identified that drought, desertification, heat stress, rising sea levels and lack of water access will trigger forced population movements in the MENA region. These elements – she said – must be recognised by decision-makers in order to respond to the multidimensional factors that underpin forced climate migration.

Arab region and the West need to define a common agenda to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment

As part of the Geneva Centre’s efforts to address barriers and challenges impeding the realization of women’s rights and gender equality, a panel debate was held on 15 September 2017 at UNOG on the theme of *“Women’s rights in the Arab region: between myth and reality.”*

The debate was organized on the occasion of the 36th session to the United Nations Human Rights Council by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue – a think tank having special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) – and the Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to UN Geneva.

“Women’s rights in the Arab region: between myth and reality” offered an alternative narrative to the widespread misperception and stereotyping of Arab women as well as an objective assessment of the joint challenges faced by countries in the Arab region and in the West to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment. It also aimed to deconstruct the existing myths with regard to women in the Arab region, by giving voice to women and experts who can provide the audience with views that celebrate the progress achieved in the Arab countries.

Promotion of women's rights in the Arab region is moving in the right direction

Although challenges exist in the enhancement of women's empowerment and gender equality in the Arab region, the promotion and advancement of women's rights is gaining momentum in numerous Arab countries in the MENA region.



The **Chairman of the Geneva Centre Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim** indicated in his inaugural address that *"advancing women's rights and enhancing gender equality are the pillars of an inclusive and equal society."* Although he noted that significant challenges exist in promoting and advancing women's rights in the Arab region, he praised recent initiatives taken by Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates to advance the social, political and economic status of women in their respective societies.



In this regard, the **Minister of State for Justice of Sudan H. E. Tahani Ali Toor Eldba** stated that the political emancipation of women in Sudan is giving results. The Minister of State observed that women now hold 30% of the seats in the parliament of Sudan of which positions of Vice President are also held by women. She added that women are represented as head of political parties, in the diplomatic corps as well as in the judicial system, business and commerce and in international organizations. There were also women generals in the police and in the armed forces.



The **Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, H. E. Mr. Amr Ramadan**, noted in his opening speech that Egypt's recently adopted Constitution (2014) guarantees *"equal opportunities for women and prohibit discrimination against her."* The speaker observed that *"real enforcement of women enables her to liberate her potentials and allows her participation."* In an attempt to enhance the political empowerment of women in Egypt, Ambassador Ramadan underlined that Egypt's Constitution guarantees women 87 seats in the Egyptian Parliament. The vision to achieve *"sustainable development"* and a *"just society"* – he said – is in line with the *"2030 Vision of Egypt"* aiming at advancing gender equality and guaranteeing *"equal rights and opportunities"* for women.



The moderator of the debate – the **Geneva Centre's Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy** – stressed in his opening remarks that the panel debate's main objective is to enhance *"cooperation and exchange of best practice"* between Arab countries and the West as *"no region can claim to have achieved gender balance so far."* He added that *"significant achievements have been reached in terms of equity, but equality is still some way off in all regions of the world."* The Geneva Centre's Executive Director concluded his intervention stating that the debate *"responds to a larger need for more perceptive awareness of the situation of women and their rights worldwide."*



H. E. Ms. Hoda Al-Helaissi – Member of Saudi Arabia's Shura Council and former Vice-Chairperson at King Saud University – observed that women empowerment and addressing gender inequality are *"universal concerns"* of the global community. She remarked that

“a country’s true development, economic growth and international success can only come about when it uses its human resources to its fullest – male and female.” She called upon international decision-makers to recognise *“the change that takes place and supporting that change rather than merely repeating the static stereotyped image”* of women in the Arab region.



H. E. Ms. Naela Mohamed Gabr, member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, highlighted in her statement that the unprecedented rise of violence and conflict have exacerbated the status of women in the Arab region. She stated that *“the political situation in the region and the subsequent deteriorating security and economic conditions”* have become fertile ground *“for extremely negative outcomes for women, with a decline in interest in empowering them and enhancing their rights.”*



The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences - **H. E. Ms. Dubravka Šimonovic** – welcomed the recent steps taken by Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan to repeal discriminatory laws allowing rapists to escape justice if they would marry their victims. The political empowerment of women in Algeria – she said – stands out as an example in the MENA region as women occupy more than 30% of the parliamentary seats.

She further added that the adoption of the Abu Dhabi Declaration *“United for Shaping the Future, for a better world”* at the 2017 Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament in Abu Dhabi - organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the UAE Federal National Council – is a bold call to action to countries in the Arab region to eliminate all forms of

discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Islamophobia is becoming an issue of growing concern



The Director of Monash University’s Bachelor of Global Studies in Australia Dr. Susan Carland remarked that her recent book *“Fighting Hislam: Women, faith and sexism”* contradicted the view that Islam is a sexist religion purporting that Arab women *“see it as a crucial instrument in their fight against the sexism they face.”* She observed that women belonging to other religious faiths such as Buddhism, Christianity and Judaism have faced sexism and subjugation within their respective communities. Sexism, she noted, could therefore not be attributed as an issue solely belonging to Islam, but to the widespread influence of patriarchy across the world.



Ms. Sarah Zouak – The co-founder of the French association *Lallab* (based in Paris), organizer of the Women Sense Tour, writer and producer of the documentary *Women Sense Tour* – noted in her statement that women of Arab origin often witness stereotyping and discrimination in France owing to their religious and cultural backgrounds. She observed that racism in today’s society is a heritage from the colonial era. Ms. Zouak further added that media often contribute to the stigmatization and stereotyping of Muslim men as *“violent”* and Arab women as *“submissive, oppressed, victims, weak and deprived of free will.”* Media tend to raise the need to *“rescue”* Muslim women and they tend to seek the advice of middle-aged *“Orientalist”* male experts to provide the evidence rather than give a voice to young women of Arab origin themselves.

C: Statements of the Chairman on the occasion of International Commemorative Days of the UN



Civilians are increasingly bearing the burden of armed conflicts in the Arab region

On the occasion of the 2017 World Humanitarian Day observed on 19 August, the Chairman of the Geneva Centre said that armed conflict and violence in Syria, Iraq and Yemen have indiscriminately targeted civilians. Dr. Al Qassim noted that since the end of the Second World War, 60-90% of war-related deaths were primarily civilians. *“Civilians have become the primary casualties of war in the 21st century,”* he underlined in his statement. In order to respond to the need to provide protection to civilians in armed conflict, he appealed to decision-makers to end the illegal trade of arms and weapons fuelling the growth of violent and extremist groups. States need to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty – he said - and comply with its provisions so as to end the illicit arms trade. Dr. Al Qassim also called upon belligerents to comply with the provisions set forth in the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Read the full version of Dr. Al Qassim’s statement at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/civilians-are-increasingly-bearing-burden-armed-conflicts-arab-region>

Charities and relief organizations contribute to alleviate poverty in the Arab region

The Geneva Centre’s Chairman issued an op-ed on

the occasion of the 2017 World Charity Day observed on 5 September 2017. In his analysis on the efforts of charities and relief organizations to alleviate poverty, Dr. Al Qassim underlined that annual global charitable giving amounts are at approximately USD \$410.71 billion a year. He said that the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait were among the leading countries in the world to promote charitable causes. According to the Charities Aid Foundation World Giving Index for 2016, 81%, 79% and 78% of the respondents in Iraq, Libya, Kuwait respectively stated that they would commit themselves to help someone in need. In this regard, Dr Al Qassim stated that *“helping people in need is inherent to the spirit of the Arabs and is in line with the teachings of the Holy Quran in which Muslims are obliged to give Zakat – charity to the poor in specific amounts.”* He concluded his op-ed by calling upon charities, relief organizations and governments to work jointly to provide assistance and protection to address poverty worldwide.

Dr. Al Qassim’s statement on the 2017 World Charity Day is available at <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/charities-and-relief-organizations-contribute-alleviate-poverty-arab-region>

Transformative Power of Literacy in Today’s Digitalized Society

Following the Chairman’s statement on the 2017 World Charity Day, Dr. Al Qassim analysed the transformative power of literacy in modern society. He said that

the digitalization of modern societies and access to technology is a prerequisite for a knowledge-based society. *“The introduction of digital technologies – against the backdrop of globalization – has brought peoples closer as communication and exchange of information have become seamless,”* he said. Despite this, the Geneva Centre Chairman averted against that the lack of skills, notably among youth, to critically analyse the validity of information available on the Internet could contribute to Internet radicalization. He appealed to decision-makers to provide *“supportive settings and safe learning environments fostering social inclusion, open-mindedness and equal citizenship rights”* to protect youth from falling prey to misguided ideologies.

Dr. Al Qassim’s statement entitled “Transformative Power of Literacy in Today’s Digitalized Society” can be accessed at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/transformative-power-literacy-today%E2%80%99s-digitalized-society>

Increased South-South trade cooperation is key to promote a sustainable and inclusive model of globalization

Dr. Al Qassim also commented on the importance of enhancing South-South trade cooperation on the occasion of the 2017 International Day for South-South Cooperation observed on 12 September. He noted that the potential to increase South-South trade and South-North trade is key maintain economic growth as 80% of the world population live in developing countries. The potential to enhance South-South trade – he said – could become *“a vector for economic growth and prosperity for a major world region whose potential has not been fully tapped during past decades.”* However, he noted that many countries in the Global South are raw material producers. Dr. Al Qassim appealed to governments to diversify their economies to avoid the *“Dutch disease”* and the raw material curse. He said that a global free trade agreement must be in place to boost trade and development. It was also recommended that unfair trade practices must be eliminated so as to promote an inclusive model of globalization *“that would serve the interest of the world society.”*

If interested in reading Dr. Al Qassim’s observations on this issue, please consult the following link <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/increased-south-south-trade-cooperation-key-promote-sustainable-and-inclusive-model>

The crisis of refugees and their sufferings call for a solution

In commemoration of the 2017 International Day of Peace observed on 21 September, the Geneva Centre’s Chairman noted that the refugee and migrant crisis have become the symbol of the world’s inability to live up to the ideals of the Founders of the UN to promote peace and justice worldwide. He said that foreign interventions and terrorist violence *“keep peace in*

jeopardy.” Civil wars and/or internal upheavals in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan and Iraq have resulted in the forced displacement of approximately 13 million people. Countries in the MENA region – he observed – provide refuge and protection to people on the move that may add up to 20% of its population. Dr. Al Qassim appealed to governments in the West to identify equitable burden - and responsibility-sharing mechanisms to provide adequate protection to people on the move fleeing armed conflict and violence.

The Chairman’s statement issued on the 2017 International Day for Peace can be downloaded at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-hanif-hassan-ali-al-qassim-crisis-refugees-and-their-sufferings-call-solution>

The world community must support the efforts of Bangladesh and the UN in offering temporary refuge and protection to the Rohingyas

In view of the alarming human rights situation of the Muslim Rohingya community in Myanmar, the Geneva Centre’s Chairman issued a statement in which he appealed to the world community to provide financial, technical and material assistance to Bangladesh to shelter 700,000 Rohingya refugees. This call to action was made on the occasion of the 2017 World Habitat Day observed on 2 October. Adequate shelter to refugees – he said – is upheld in Article 21 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and in Article 18 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Dr. Al Qassim was concerned about recent reports warning about the outbreak of diseases and hunger in refugee camps sheltering Rohingyas owing to lack of access to food, water and sanitation. He said that *“the deplorable situation of the Rohingyas could turn into a humanitarian tragedy if the world community continues to remain silent about, or fails to fully address, the plight of the Rohingya people.”*

Read his 2017 World Habitat Day statement at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-hanif-hassan-ali-al-qassim-%E2%80%9Cworld-community-must-support-efforts-bangladesh-and-un>

Non-violence and lasting peace are key to secure the long-term stability of the Arab region

In commemoration of the 2017 International Day of Non-Violence observed on 2 October 2017, Dr. Al Qassim called on the international community to address the surge of extremist violence exacerbating the volatile security situation in the Arab region. He said that the proliferation of local and international conflicts has given rise to internal upheavals in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. He said that extremist violence and related external military interventions in the Arab region which *“provide fertile ground for terrorist groups to spread and justify its heinous and deadly ideology in countries in the Middle East and North Africa.”* In order to address the volatile

security situation in the Arab region, Dr. Al Qassim appealed to “countries in the West and in the Arab region to work together to defeat all extremist and violent groups causing destruction and death in societies in the West, the Middle East and North Africa alike. All societies – regardless of religious beliefs and geographical location - are targets of the poisonous ideology of such extremist and violent groups.”

Read more about Dr. Al Qassim’s observation on non-violence in the Arab region at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-hanif-hassan-ali-al-qassim-%E2%80%9Cnon-violence-and-lasting-peace-are-key-secure-long-term>

Peace and stability must be restored in the Middle East and North Africa so as to alleviate poverty

On the occasion of the 2017 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the Chairman of the Geneva Centre observed that the unprecedented rise of violence and insecurity in the Arab region combined, breed poverty and societal decline. In this context, he stated that “the persistence of political and social unrest in the Arab region have become the main drivers of poverty. Approximately 2/3 of the population in Syria are now living below the poverty line. In Yemen, more than 50% of the population live in extreme poverty, whereas this malaise now affects around 1/3 of Libya’s population. Insecurity driven poverty and fragile societies - gripped by violence and conflict - have thrown Arab countries into chronic poverty and societal decline.” Combined with climate change, depletion of resources, desertification and water scarcity, it has “given rise to an ecological crisis affecting the livelihood of millions of people and forcing people to flee.” He concluded stating that addressing the multidimensional elements of poverty in the Arab region requires adopting a holistic approach addressing the root-causes of extreme poverty in the Arab region.

Read Dr. Al Qassim’s International Day for the Eradication of Poverty statement at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-hanif-hassan-ali-al-qassim-peace-and-stability-must-be-restored-middle-east-and-north>

The United Nations is needed more than ever before to promote peace and justice worldwide

In commemoration of the 2017 United Nations Day on 24 October 2017, the Chairman of the Geneva Centre called for enhancing the role of the United Nations to address issues related to the promotion of peace and security as a platform for collaboration and the advancement of human rights. He praised the efforts of the United Nations in bringing numerous issues of relevance to social and human development at the forefront of international decision-making. Dr. Al Qassim noted, however that the realization of human rights and peaceful relations between states continues to be an area of great concern. To enhance the role of the United Nations in dealing with such issues, he stated “the United Nations needs to

strengthen its efforts to accelerate disarmament, enhance peacebuilding and contribute to preventive diplomacy and mediation through dialogue, conflict prevention and dispute settlement.”

Read Dr. Al Qassim’s reflections on the 2017 United Nations Day at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-hanif-hassan-ali-al-qassim-%E2%80%9Cunited-nations-needed-more-ever-promote-peace-and-justice>

Rejoicing in the Other and celebrating diversity are needed more than ever to address the root-causes of intolerance

In view of the rise of xenophobia, bigotry and racism worldwide, Dr. Al Qassim used the 2017 International Day for Tolerance - observed on 16 November - to avert against the rise of populist movements and right-wing parties. He said that the exclusion and marginalization of displaced people exacerbate xenophobia, bigotry and racism. “Differences related to cultures and to religions are presented as obstacles and as being damaging to modern societies. This explains the rise of social exclusion which leaves the impression that cultural diversity is a threat, and not a source of richness,” stated the Chairman of the Geneva Centre. To address these issues, Dr. Al Qassim called for enhanced “dialogue between and within societies, civilizations and cultures”. “We need to learn more about one another and to break down the walls of ignorance and prejudice that have insulated societies,” highlighted Dr. Al. Qassim.

Read our Chairman’s 2017 International Day for Tolerance statement at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-al-qassim-%E2%80%9Crejoicing-other-and-celebrating-diversity-are-needed-more-ever-address-root>

The illegal occupation of Palestine must come to an end

The observation of the 2017 International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was marked by the Geneva Centre’s Chairman who issued a statement to express his profound solidarity with the Palestinians. Dr. Al Qassim stated that the enduring occupation of Palestinian land is becoming the “symbol of the world’s inability to redress the great injustice that is being inflicted on the Palestinian people. This denial of the basic human rights of the Palestinian people is deplorable. Yet the occupation and the colonization of Palestinian land continue unabated. The illegal occupation of Palestine must come to an end”, he asserted emphatically. In order to find lasting peace in the Middle East, the Geneva Centre’s Chairman recalled the Arab Peace Initiative that requires full implementation. He concluded his statement by welcoming the efforts of the Palestinian political leaders and factions to speak with one voice and encouraged them to pursue effective action towards complete reconciliation to better serve the aspirations of its emblematic people.

Dr. Al Qassim's statement on the 2017 International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is accessible at <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-al-qassim-%E2%80%9C-illegal-occupation-palestine-must-come-end%E2%80%9D>

Chairman of the Geneva Centre appeals to UN member States to sign and ratify the 1948 Genocide Convention and to end all forms of genocide

In relation to the 2017 International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime - observed on 9 December – Dr. Al Qassim appealed to governments worldwide to ratify the 1948 Genocide Convention. He said that the unanimous ratification of the Genocide Convention “*would be a symbolic move to end all forms of genocide and grave human rights abuses.*” He noted that the “*ratification of the 1948 Genocide Convention by all UN member States would be a symbolic act of the world society to stand united in prohibiting all forms of genocide and in bringing perpetrators of such crimes to justice. Genocide constitutes the worst form of crime against humanity and must be prevented all over the world,*” said Dr. Al Qassim. The Chairman of the Geneva Centre concluded his statement noting that perpetrators of all forms of genocide and crimes against humanity “*must be brought to justice.*”

Read more about the Chairman's reflections on the elimination of all forms of genocide at <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-appeals-un-member-states-sign-and-ratify-1948-genocide-convention-and>

The refugee and migrant crisis has become the symbol of the world's inability to live up to the ideals of the Founders of the UN

The Geneva Centre also marked the 2017 International Human Rights Day which was observed worldwide on 10 December. In his statement, he said that the “*refugee and migrant crisis have become the symbol of the world's inability to live up to the ideals of the Founders of the UN and the Signatories of the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights to promote peace and justice worldwide.*” The forced displacement of people from the MENA region calls for concerted efforts – *underlined Dr. Al Qassim - to reduce the instability and turmoil which spreads across borders forcing people to be on the move. He appealed to decision-makers in the Arab region and in Europe must work jointly to address the root-causes of forced displacement. Dr. Al Qassim concluded his statement highlighting that “people on the move are entitled to have their human rights protected and restored. They cannot be denied both the right to life in their country of origin and the right to be migrants and refugees.”*

Read the full version of Dr. Al Qassim's statement

at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-al-qassim-%E2%80%9C-refugee-and-migrant-crisis-has-become-symbol-world%E2%80%99s-inability-live-ideals>

The promotion of Arabic language and culture is key to enhance cultural diversity and promote peaceful relations between peoples

As part of the Geneva Centre's efforts to promote civilizational dialogue, Dr. Al Qassim issued a statement in relation to the 2017 World Arabic Language Day observed on 18 December 2017. Dr. Al Qassim noted that the Arabic language is spoken in more than 20 countries and is the mother tongue of approximately 400 million people. It is also recognised as one of the six official languages of the United Nations thus belonging to the common heritage of mankind. The Geneva Centre's Chairman highlighted likewise that Arabic literary scripts during the Islamic medieval age contributed greatly to the social, cultural and civic evolution of today's modern societies. Arabic mathematicians – he noted – flourished in the medieval age in which disciplines such as algebra and the very notion of algorithms emerged and laid the foundation for *inter alia* geometry, computer sciences and other related disciplines. Dr. Al Qassim stated that the increased use of Arabic language has the potential to transmit Arabic culture, literature and art to a wider audience and contribute to alleviating the rise of xenophobia, bigotry and racism. “*The promotion of Arabic language and culture is key to enhancing cultural diversity and uniting spirits and minds in calling forth a more peaceful world,*” concluded Dr. Al Qassim.

Dr. Al Qassim's 2017 World Arabic Language Day statement is available at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-al-qassim-%E2%80%9C-promotion-arabic-language-and-culture-key-enhance-cultural-diversity-and>

It is our moral responsibility to stand in solidarity with the Rohingya minority in Myanmar

In response to the dire human rights and humanitarian situation of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar, the Geneva Centre's Chairman appealed to the international community to stand in solidarity with the Rohingya community. This call to action was made in commemoration of the 2017 International Day of Human Solidarity observed on 20 December. The Geneva Centre's Chairman emphasized that the forcible expulsion of 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh has contributed to aggravate the dire human rights and humanitarian situation in Rakhine State. In this context, he recalled *inter alia* that international decision-makers, members States of the United Nations and NGOs have a “*moral responsibility to stand in solidarity with the Rohingya minority in Myanmar and other persecuted people worldwide.*” In conclusion, the Geneva Centre's Chairman added that perpetrators of crimes against humanity must

be brought to justice. Strengthening accountability and transitional justice in post-conflict Myanmar are imperative to end impunity and bring peace and stability to the region.

Read our Chairman's thoughtful analysis on the situation in Myanmar at <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/dr-al-qassim-%E2%80%9Ccit-our-moral-responsibility-stand-solidarity-rohingya-minority-myanmar%E2%80%9D>

Refugee and migrant crisis must not become the symbol of denial of social justice to people on the move

In commemoration of the 2018 World Day of Social Justice observed on 20 February 2018, Dr. Al Qassim called upon decision-makers to adapt to global human mobility and advance social justice through the empowerment of migrants. He said that modern societies *must adapt to contemporary patterns of global human mobility. "It is in many destination countries' interest to unleash the potential of migrants, most of whom are productive, young and eager, to share the burden of an ageing population in advanced and developed societies,"* Dr. Al Qassim observed. He expressed disappointment with the attempts by decision-makers to erect walls and fences, seal off borders and deny global human mobility to migrants. The criminalization of people on the move – he stated – contradict the logic of globalization hailed as the panacea to the world's problems until recently. In conclusion, Dr. Al Qassim said that decision-makers in the West and in the Arab region must resort to dialogue and alliance-building to find common grounds and mutually beneficial solutions.

Dr. Al Qassim's statement is available at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-%E2%80%9Crefugee-and-migrant-crisis-must-not-become-symbol-denial-social>

We can no longer accept discrimination of half of the world's population

On the occasion of International Women's Day 2018, celebrated on the 8th of March, the Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim reiterated the importance of empowering and giving a voice to women worldwide so as to achieve gender equality. 2018 – he said – is therefore the year of women activists who, propelled by a mounting determination for change, are striving for their rights and for their place in societies worldwide. In conclusion, the

Geneva Centre's Chairman noted that International Women's Day *"should represent a stepping stone for transforming momentum into action, and for working together to empower women worldwide, to improve their livelihoods and to offer them equal opportunities for a better future. Gender parity cannot happen overnight, but if we join forces and work together across cultures, we can move forward together towards equality at a faster pace. As echoed in this year's International Women's Day theme – the time is now."*

Read the full version of Dr. Al Qassim's statement at: <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-international-women%E2%80%99s-day-%E2%80%9Cwe-can-no-longer-accept-discrimination>

Enjoyment of equal citizenship rights is a prerequisite for the elimination of racial discrimination and intolerance

The Geneva Centre likewise commemorated the 2018 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination observed on 21 March 2018. The Geneva Centre's Chairman said the surge of racial discrimination in advanced and modern societies as well as the rise of violence and armed conflict in the MENA region have contributed to the marginalization and repression of marginalized groups and ethnic or religious minorities worldwide. Dr. Al Qassim recalled that Islam places strong emphasis on equality, proclaiming that all human beings are borne free and equal. He quoted Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who said to his followers that *"an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety."* The right to equality – he said – is also emphasised in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and by other mainstream creeds and value-systems. In this regard, the Geneva Centre's Chairman said the convergence of religions, creeds and value-systems in the pursuit of equal citizenship rights *"should become the starting-point for the enjoyment of equal citizenship rights as a prerequisite for the elimination of racial discrimination and intolerance."*

Read the full version of Dr. Al Qassim's statement at <https://www.gchragd.org/en/article/chairman-geneva-centre-%E2%80%9Cenjoyment-equal-citizenship-rights-prerequisite-elimination-racial>

D: Lectures delivered by the Geneva Centre's Executive Director

Lecture at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies regarding the human rights situation of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar (November 2017)



On 10 November 2017, Ambassador Jazairy was invited by the world-renowned Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies to deliver a lecture on the human rights situation of the Rohingya population in Myanmar. During his lecture, the Geneva Centre's Executive Director highlighted that the denial of equal citizenship rights to the Rohingya population is breeding radicalization and inter-communal violence in Myanmar.

Although Myanmar's recent political reforms and "opening to the world" have brought welcome change and transformation to the country, the Muslim population in the State of Rakhine continues to be denied access to basic human rights as the "1982 nationality code was not changed" stated Ambassador Jazairy in his statement.

The Geneva Centre's Executive Director likewise recalled that promises to end the outflow of Rohingya

refugees heading towards neighbouring Bangladesh have not been met, despite Myanmar's State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi pledge to redress the situation by 5 September 2017 and to provide unfettered access to the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar.

He concluded his intervention stating that: "The crisis situation of the Rohingyas in Myanmar is a reminder that diversity in modern times cannot be stamped out. Like a pressure cooker on a hot plate, it needs a safety valve or it explodes. This is also a reminder that ethnic cleansing under any form is not an alternative to, but is also a harbinger of violence."

Lecture in Nîmes (France) regarding the spiritual legacy of Emir Abdelkader (October 2017)



During a seminar organized by Arc Méditerranéen in Nîmes (France) on 16 October 2017 on the theme of "From one shore to another of the Western Mediterranean: Yesterday, today and tomorrow", the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre emphasized in his lecture that the spiritual legacy and vision of the founder of contemporary Algeria – Emir Abd el Qader el Jazairy – is key to promoting harmony in diversity in the Mediterranean region and to address tensions that are being played out between Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Middle East, North Africa and in Europe.

This "chain of violence" affecting these regions, he said, was characterized by military invasions "destroying societies in the Middle East" which has led to "a rise in extremes on both sides: the rise of xenophobic populism on the one hand and the rise of a criminal ideology on the other" observed the Geneva Centre's Executive Director.

To address these obstacles, he noted that the vision of

Emir Abd el Qader can serve as a source of inspiration particularly for younger generation - on either sides of the Mediterranean - to help them rediscover their common values and aspirations, and contribute to the promotion of peace, social justice and inter-religious harmony between Muslims and Christians.

In this regard, the Geneva Centre's Executive Director stated that identifying common values between the Abrahamic faiths would enable identifying "symbioses on which future generations of the northern and

southern shores of the Mediterranean" can pin their faith to promote solidarity and protect themselves from the ideologies of xenophobia and exclusion.

"The legacy of the Emir can be used as an Ariadne's thread to lead us out of the maze of contemporary misconceptions, misunderstandings, misinterpretations and manipulation of diversity," concluded Ambassador Jazairy.

E: Partnerships

The Geneva Centre signs MoU with the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies



On 10 November 2017, the Geneva Centre signed a MoU with the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. The agreement was signed by the Geneva Centre's Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy and the founder Director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies Dr. Farhan Nizami. The signature ceremony was held at the premises of the Oxford Centre in the presence of the Geneva Centre's Chairman Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim.

The Memorandum of Understanding lays the foundation for a collaborative partnership between both Centres in the holding of joint panel debates at the United Nations Office in Geneva or at Oxford University on issues related to the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The partnership between the Geneva Centre and the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies marks a step forward in the development of both Centres' ambitions to promote a value-driven human rights system and to address prevailing misunderstandings affecting Muslim-Christian relations through the advancement of equal and inclusive citizenship rights worldwide.

MoU agreed between the Geneva Centre and the EU Business School



Another MoU was signed between the Geneva Centre and the EU Business School on 7 November 2017. The agreement was signed by Mr. Idriss Jazairy, the Geneva Centre's Executive Director and Ambassador, and Mr. Luc Craen, Vice-President and Managing Director of EU Business School, on the premises of the Geneva Centre.

With the signing of the agreement, both organizations pledge to work closely together to promote human rights in the Arab region through the development and execution of advanced educational programs. The commitment includes the organization of joint panel discussions at the United Nations Office in Geneva, the development and execution of joint training programs and the launch of research projects of mutual interest to both parties.

| 4. Independent views on human rights issues in the Arab region by guest writers

Religion: Between 'Power' and 'Force'



By: Dr. Azza Karam

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Member of the Sponsoring Committee of the World Conference "Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights" initiated by the Geneva Centre*

In 1994, Dr. David R. Hawkins wrote a book positing the difference between power and force (Power vs. Force: *The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior* – the latest revised version came out in 2014).

Basing his hypothesis on the science of kinetics, Dr. Hawkins made a case for how human consciousness – and the physical body – can tell the difference between power, which is positive, and force, which is not. An example of power over force is illustrated as Gandhi's non-violent resistance to the force of British colonialism.

Power is slow, steady, and long lasting, whereas force is moving, fast, and tends to both create counter-force, and eventually exhaust itself. Dr. Hawkins' argument, often labeled as 'spiritual', lays the groundwork for how faith, or belief, is a source of power, and, to coin a phrase, it's all good.

Historically, from the first century's Lucretius, to 16th Century Machiavelli, to 18th Century's Voltaire and David Hume, through to modern day Richard Dawkins and others among the New Atheists, it has long been argued, in different ways, that religion — particularly as manifested through religious institutions — is, in Hawkins' terms, more pertinent to the realm of 'force'.

And yet, it is still largely towards these religious leaders, and religious institutions, that the international community (now increasingly shepherded by many governments) is looking, as a means to (re)solve a myriad of human development and humanitarian challenges.

These challenges include poverty, migration, environmental degradation, children's rights, harmful social practices, 'violent extremism' (often narrowed down only to the religious variety), and even armed conflict. Religious leaders, and occasionally faith-based organizations, are posited as the panacea to all these, and more.

The notion of partnering with religious actors as one of the means to mobilise communities (socially, economically and even politically), to seek to (re)solve longstanding human development challenges, has evolved significantly inside the United Nations system over the last decade. But the intent of the outreach

from largely secular institutions towards religious ones, has changed in the last couple of years.

The rationale for partnership, as argued by the diverse members of the *United Nations Interagency Task Force on Partnership with Religious Actors for Sustainable Development* (or the UN Task Force on Religion, for short) in 2009, was based on certain facts: that religious NGOs are part of the fabric of each civil society, and therefore bridging between the secular and religious civic space is key to strong advocacy and action for human rights (think the Civil Rights Movement in the USA); that religious institutions are the oldest and most long-standing mechanisms of social service provision (read development including health, education, sanitation, nutrition, etc.); and that some religious leaders are strong influencers (if not gatekeepers) of certain social norms – including especially some of the harmful social practices that hurt girls and women.

Thus, the UN Interagency Task Force developed guidelines for engagement with religious actors, based on a decade of learning, consultations and actual engagement among 17 diverse UN entities and almost 500 faith-based NGOs. These guidelines stipulate, among other aspects, engagement with those who are committed to all human rights. Thus, there is to be no room for cherry-picking, or so-called 'strategic' selectivity about which rights to honour, and which to conveniently turn a blind eye to.

When the specific religious actors who are committed to all human rights, are convened, even around one development or humanitarian issue, the 'power' in the convening space is palpable, and the discourse can – and does – move hearts and minds. This was evident as far back as 2005 when UNDP started convening Arab faith leaders around the spread of HIV.

Some of the very same religious leaders who held that HIV was a 'just punishment for sexual promiscuity', when confronted with the scientific realities of the spread of the disease, and its very human consequences on all ages and all social strata, signed on to a statement which remains one of the most 'progressive' (relatively speaking) in religious discourse of the time, and some went so far as to ask for forgiveness from those living with HIV among them.

The ‘power’ of religious actors who are systematically convened together for the human rights of all, at all times, was repeatedly witnessed over the course of several UN initiatives over the years, in different countries, and at the global level. Notably, UNFPA and UNICEF convened religious leaders with other human rights actors, to effect a social transformation as witnessed in a number of communities committed to stopping the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in several sub-Saharan African countries.

The latest event took place as 2017 wound to an end, in December, when the UN Office for the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, after two years of convening religious actors – using the UN systems vetted partners and its Guidelines — as gatekeepers against hate speech, responded to a request from

some of the religious leaders themselves, to come together from several South Asian countries (including Myanmar, Thailand, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka).

Sharing respective experiences of protecting religious minorities and standing in solidarity with the rights of all, across religions and national boundaries, created a sense of shared purpose, and above all, of possibility, hope – and yes, of power. Not a minor achievement in a time of a great deal of general confusion and sense of instability around, and with, religion.

Can the same be said of convening religious actors who are prepared to uphold a particular set of rights, even at the expense of ignoring other rights, ostensibly for the ‘greater good’? Or are we then, very possibly, inadvertently mobilising the ‘force’ of religion?

The clash of perceptions: illegal migration as a quest for security



By: Dr. Ibrahima Guissé

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While cross-border movement for trade, commerce, agriculture and herding has always been the reality for the peoples of the Sahel, since the 2000s a new form of migration has been added to the circulatory networks at work in the vast Saharan-Saharan area. This new form is the so-called clandestine migration of young Saharan people who idealize the countries of final destination – in this case in Europe – which they imagine as Eldorado.

1. Illegal migration and the internalization of risk

While there are regular emigrations among young people (for family reunification, further education and training etc.), some young sub-Saharaners for various reasons, resort to illegal migration, by land routes or by sea. In West Africa, particularly in Senegal and Mauritania, young people increasingly see illegal migration as an adventurous way to reach the international labor market and ‘get one’s relatives out of poverty’ and this overshadows the risks of migration. To get through the physical challenges involved in illegal migration (“I know the forests of Morocco. We know how to bypass the border guards and even how

to dupe them...”), an illegal migrant is required to conceal their body, but also their identity and history. This makes the process clandestine, both internally and in reality. Out of fear of revealing who one really is, this internalized clandestinity can bring the migrant to hide all or part of their life, temporarily or permanently.

2. The myth of Eldorado: its necessity and its socio-cultural context

The phenomenon of illegal migration to the Canary Islands began in the 2000s and was extensively covered by the media. The route is known, in Senegal, as “Barça or Barzagh” which can be translated as “Barcelona or beyond”. Senegalese migration along this route has a long history: far-ranging traditional fishermen were accustomed to sailing as far as the rich waters of Mauritania, Western Sahara and, sometimes, even ventured to the Canary Islands, where some would remain. In modern times, the practice has gained momentum and experienced diversification, even if it remains poorly quantified and overestimated in comparison with South-South migration flows.

The myths around travel and migration have strong

religious references, particularly in Islam – the religion shared by the Sahelian countries, and which informs and structures most of the cultural conduct of the region's people. Islam states that the prophet Mohammed, faced with enemies and adversity, left Mecca for the town of Yathrib (which became Medina). This founding moment, marked by the displacement of the first Muslims, is called the Hegira (hijra), Arabic for “emigration”. In the Senegal River Valley, inhabited by the Peul/Tukulor/Fulani (a pastoralist ethnic group found in all Sahelian countries), migration is seen as the route to success. According to legend, the great 19th century Marabout of the Toucouleur, El Hadj Omar Tall, leaving for the former French Sudan to Islamise its people and fight the colonial power, proclaimed, “*Foutankobé, péréendarjon*”, meaning “*O people of the Fouta, migrate to succeed!*” The citizens of this northern region of Senegal – the Toucouleurs – who also constitute a significant indigenous population in southern Mauritania, are known to have been a precursor for later Senegalese emigration, first towards African countries and then to Europe.

3. Transnational factors of illegal migration to Europe

A complexity of push and pull factors exist to explain migration which challenges, or does not fit into, an established regulatory framework. Most of the work done on this issue shows that the difficulty of obtaining a visa is the main reason why young people opt for illegal channels. It is a forced choice. Legal emigration assumes one has sufficient material and financial resources to apply for a visa with the relevant embassies. It may also assume connections to religious or artistic networks which are powerful ramps for emigration used by migrants. The restrictive migration policies of European states rarely allow the legal arrival of African workers into the Schengen area, thus leaving little choice in entry methods. The political dimension of migration is most significant here: one could see illegal immigration as a component of a ‘culture of opposition’ and a refusal of the established order by which young people feel excluded. It would, thus, appear to be a phenomenon of adaptation for large sections of the working class – young people with few or no qualifications – excluded de facto by a dominant system.

The globalization of trade as well as the construction of the European Union and trade liberalization have produced a frantic search for competitiveness and productivity. This has created a need for cheap labour, particularly in sectors that require high-value but low-skilled manual labourers such as the agricultural sector. Despite these structural factors (which attract migrants to jobs that nationals do not want to occupy), and despite the aging of the population in Europe, there continues to be a hardening towards immigration and of reception conditions.

4. The overlap and independence of migratory routes and zones of violent extremists

The Saharan-Sahelian region has always been a mysterious place, intensively traversed by state and non-state actors, merchants and adventurers. The double border of land and sea, and the peripheral location of some of the great cities of the Sahel, also favour the entry and exit of all kinds of material and non-material goods. From this point of view, the routes taken by illegal migration are an update of the Saharan-Sahelian trans-border routes traced long ago.

However, this overlapping of migration routes and cross-border areas where violent extremism develops should not overshadow the important fact that migrants (and civil society actors in the countries of departure) consider, and experience, illegal migration as a quest for security and wellbeing. The likelihood, then, of sub-Saharan migrants falling into jihadist networks appears weak, particularly because of the significance of the life goals structuring their migration goal. As mentioned earlier in this report, the decision to migrate unfolds in a social setting where mythic, cultural and economic reasons are all at work. These appear to be the meta-social guarantors which inform the migratory paths of these young people and which are capable of reducing, or preventing, the risk of ideological instability of the jihadist type. The comments below, from an Ivorian migrant living in Nouakchott, seem to describe emblematically the mythical-political-security context in which the migratory reality unfolds:

“... Frankly, it is ignoring reality to think that these young people will fall into terrorism. What motivates me – and I can say that it applies to all the migrants with whom I have been through a lot – is a successful life, earning a living. We do not take all these crazy paths, the forest, the bush, the ocean, the desert, endure hunger and thirst, fall ill and recover with no medical treatment ... in order to place a bomb to kill innocents. If you spend all your time in the forest, you suffer everything, you play cat and mouse with the police and customs, so if you get the chance to get to Europe, you will do anything to find work ... We are deaf to the arguments of terrorists who do not believe in the pleasures of this world. I’m tired of moving, I have been in the north of Mali, in Kidal, in Algeria and in Morocco which plays a lot with security to please Europe.... And now I have come back here to Nouakchott, where I have decided to earn my living.”

Indeed, these migrants have a clear awareness of their place in the geo-strategic and political issues beyond them. They are also witnesses of the political use being made of their illegal status by some countries of the south and aware that the north uses them as scarecrows to counter the threat of terrorism. Nevertheless, the symbolic moral arguments permeating their remarks (“*fear of failure*”, “*succeed like others*”, “*shaming the family*”, “*social security*” etc.) reflect an unwavering

commitment to their initial reasons for departure.

5. Perceptions of respondents on migration, insecurity and violent extremism

A Nigerian national based in Nouakchott notes the danger facing the Niger: *“... if the country explodes, it will be worse than other countries because of the Hausa, the Kamdi and Tubu”*. According to him, radicalization is often related to the fact *“that we often wrongly accuse some groups of people of being terrorists, and they are tortured to death. You see a child who sees his mother or father tortured and even killed, that’s why he becomes jihadist”*.

As for insecurity and the risk of being recruited by jihadist networks, the interviewee is clear:

“No, why? We left home to escape insecurity, unemployment, to earn an honest living. What I also want to add is that, here in Mauritania, there are many important Tuaregs. If Mauritania supports a country or the West, these Tuaregs can do some damage. There are a lot of dormant terrorists here, and Mauritania knows it. That is why the country refuses to take tough positions against terrorists and does not dare to openly support the West.”

This comment by the migrant from Niger coincides with the remark made by the migrant from the Ivory Coast quoted above: *“... We are deaf to the arguments of terrorists who do not believe in the pleasures of this world”*. It is also closer to the position of a historic Mauritanian leader who fought against slavery, a leader in the human rights movement in Mauritania. For this actor in Mauritanian civil society, migrants are in search of safety:

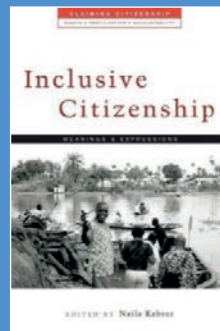
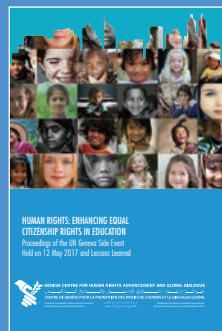
“Violent extremism and jihadism, actual or potential, both search for vulnerable locals, people who are discriminated against, from poor and marginalized communities, from the Sebha neighbourhoods, for example. The Islamist arguments may seem open and egalitarian to the youth of these neighborhoods, entirely populated by black Africans. Extremism dangles equality before their eyes. It conjures up all the values of Islam. So, there is, in Mauritania, a real danger of confrontation between communities. The failure of citizenship, then, is the legitimate son of terrorism in this country.”

As this argument suggests, as a result of internal factors specific to their country, local citizens are more vulnerable than migrants to the calls of violent extremism. From this perspective, it could be inferred that the illegal migration of young sub-Saharanans is an attempt to leave behind the resentment of a state unable to meet the needs of its citizens. It is at this level of analysis, this report suggests, that considering the mobility of young people as a ‘front’ or ‘culture of opposition’ takes its full meaning. Moreover, one could even read the migration of young people across borders as the expression of a form of transnationalism from below, which reveals the limits of the political institutions in their own countries to build and maintain a society for citizens which avoids disillusionment with, and detachment from, their country.

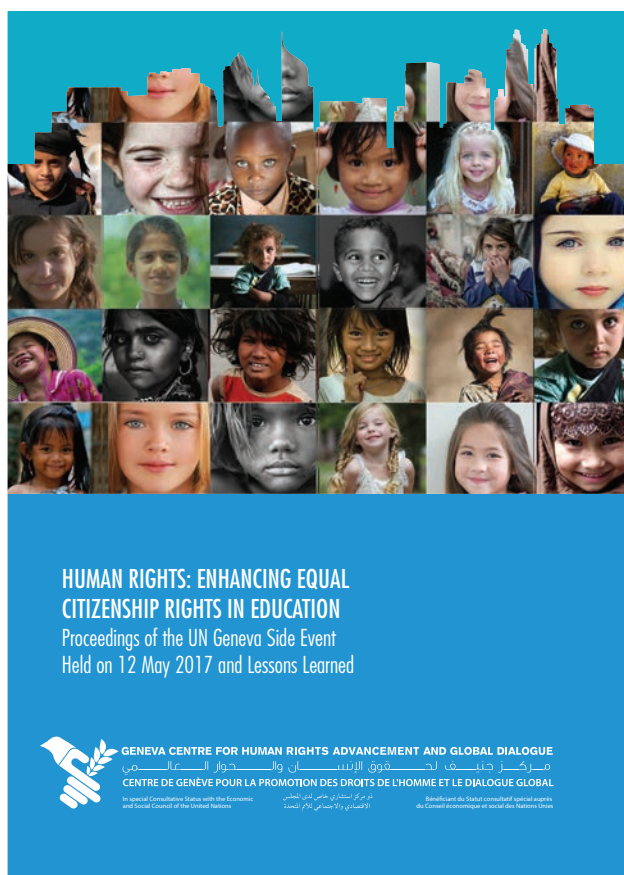
Conclusion: from the myth of Eldorado to the myth of security

The existence of a relationship between myth and the migration phenomenon seems to have been established. This report has shown that the myth of ‘over there’ – which is as much an idealized way out of crisis as it is a preferred means of social promotion – helps produce the migratory phenomenon. It has also shown that what, is generally thought of as a risky, insecure undertaking is, to the migrants themselves, a necessary and sure path to safety and wellbeing. The report has also shown how this entrenched belief grows in difficult and tormented contexts within broken economies in de-territorialized spaces. Other studies have shown that the “phenomena of mythical acceleration” occur when institutions are overwhelmed, when they are no longer able to provide a credible alternative. This inability has, for most of the state institutions in the Sahel region, a political and economic dimension insofar as they have not been able to offer ‘social security’ to the thousands of young people crossing ocean and desert, nor offer them prospects of a future that could be built locally.

I 5. Book reviews



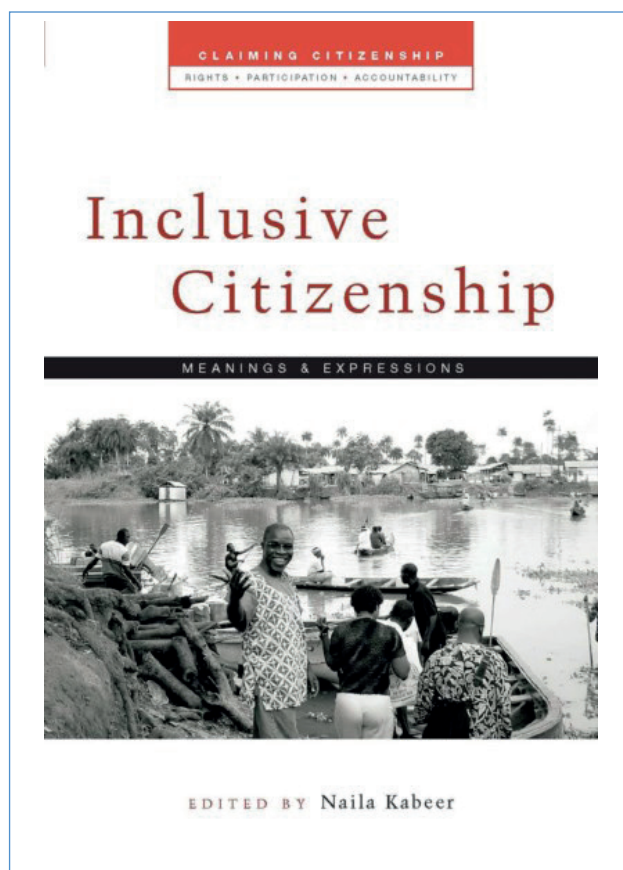
Human rights: Enhancing equal citizenship rights in education



“Human rights: Enhancing equal citizenship rights in education” reviews the panel proceedings and the deliberations that were delivered by representatives from the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the UNESCO Liaison office in Geneva, IBE-UNESCO, the Finnish National Agency of Education, the El Hassan Youth Award (Jordan) and academics from University of Los Andes (Colombia) and University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka). The debate was moderated by the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre Ambassador Idriss Jazairy. It also includes an intellectual think piece prepared by staff of the Geneva Centre on the lessons learned from the panel debate and the interplay between human rights and equal citizenship rights.

The goal of the panel debate was to assess the impact of education in rebuilding societies affected by inter-communal violence in the broader context of human rights. Drawing upon the experiences of UNESCO and IBE-UNESCO, the debate approached the educational frameworks of three countries, namely Bahrain, Colombia and Sri Lanka. The common thread between these case studies is their attempt to integrate human rights and citizenship education within their curricula, at various stages of the educational cycle, to restore harmony. The panel discussion was guided by the achievements of Finland in enhancing equal citizenship rights through education.

Inclusive Citizenship – Meanings & Expression, edited by Naila Kabeer



Notwithstanding the formal recognition of equal citizenship, its practical implementation is still a matter of discussion. *“Citizenship (...) is a highly contested term, with differing meanings ascribed by different cultures, interests and ideologies.”* – So states John Gaventa, in the foreword to *“Inclusive Citizenship – Meanings & Expression”*, edited by Naila Kabeer.

Naila Kabeer is Professor of Gender and Development at the Departments of Gender Studies and of International Development of the *London School of Economics and Political Science*, and *President-Elect of the International Association for Feminist Economics*. Passionate about the issues of empowerment and social action, in her *“Inclusive Citizenship – Meanings & Expression”*, she wisely collects a series of case studies documenting struggles for more inclusive forms of citizenship and participatory democracy in everyday life. The leitmotif of this work is the idea that, regardless of the context and nature of the exclusion, aspirations for citizenship are usually embedded in common core values. This set of values includes: a claim for social justice; a demand for recognition of, and respect for, differences; self-determination, namely people’s ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives; and a sense of horizontal solidarity, that is to say the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them in their claims for justice and recognition.

By means of a multi-dimensional approach, this compilation of case studies effectively contributes to the overall debate on citizenship and identity, by offering a cogent comparative perspective on the various meanings and expressions of citizenship. It does so by providing far-ranging empirical examples grounded in different countries, from the South to the North (*inter alia*, Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, South Africa, the UK and the United States). This collection of essays revolves around four main building blocks, each analysing the different features and implications of citizenship, and founded on the aforementioned common core values: (1) citizenship and rights; (2) citizenship and identity; (3) citizenship and struggle; and (4) citizenship and policy.

The authors of these essays come from a wide range of academic backgrounds, as well as from various societal contexts. The narratives in this book challenge, directly or indirectly, the “liberal model” of equal citizenship, which is based on a difference-blind approach seeing the community as a collection of similar individuals, who, as such, are entitled to the same civil and political rights, regardless of their differences. The privileged status granted by mainstream liberal theorists to civil and political rights over economic, social and cultural rights, furthermore, is rejected, giving way to the indivisibility of such rights.

Finally yet importantly, the contributions present in this book bring about a horizontal view of citizenship, attaching equal importance to both the relationship between the state and the individual, and the relationship between citizens themselves. By virtue of a bottom-up, actor-oriented and rights-based approach valuing the needs and voices of groups who have been assigned a marginal status within their societies, this book advocates their perception and interpretation of citizenship, as well as the rights attached thereto, moving from the formal constitutional debate to action needed for making it happen in the real, diverse world we live in.

Convergences between Susan Carland’s “*Fighting Hislam*” and Malika Hamidi’s “*A Muslim feminism – why not?*”¹

On Muslim feminism, deconstructing stereotypes and empowering Muslim women

Dr. Susan Carland is a lecturer and researcher at Monash University in Australia. She was listed as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the World and as a “Muslim Leader of Tomorrow” by the UN Alliance of Civilisations. Published at Melbourne University Press in 2017, “*Fighting Hislam: women, faith and sexism*” is the result of Carland’s lengthy research on Muslim women fighting sexism through their Islamic faith.

Malika Hamidi is a renowned feminist activist with a PhD in sociology at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) Paris, author of numerous publications on gender, feminism and Islam. Just as Susan Carland, but with a more Eurocentric/francophone focus, Malika Hamidi explores in “*A Muslim feminism – why not?*”, published in 2017 at L’Aube Editions, the historical and ideological background of Muslim feminism.

Combating stereotypes and giving a voice to Muslim women activists

The premise of these publications is to give women a voice and an opportunity to showcase their work, because, according to the Dr. Carland, “*Muslim women are always spoken about and over, but never with.*” In “*Fighting Hislam*”, Dr. Carland interviews twenty-three Muslim women - theologians, activists, writers and bloggers from North America and Australia, who challenge sexism using classic Islamic teachings with a view to demonstrate that feminism and Islam can be complementary.

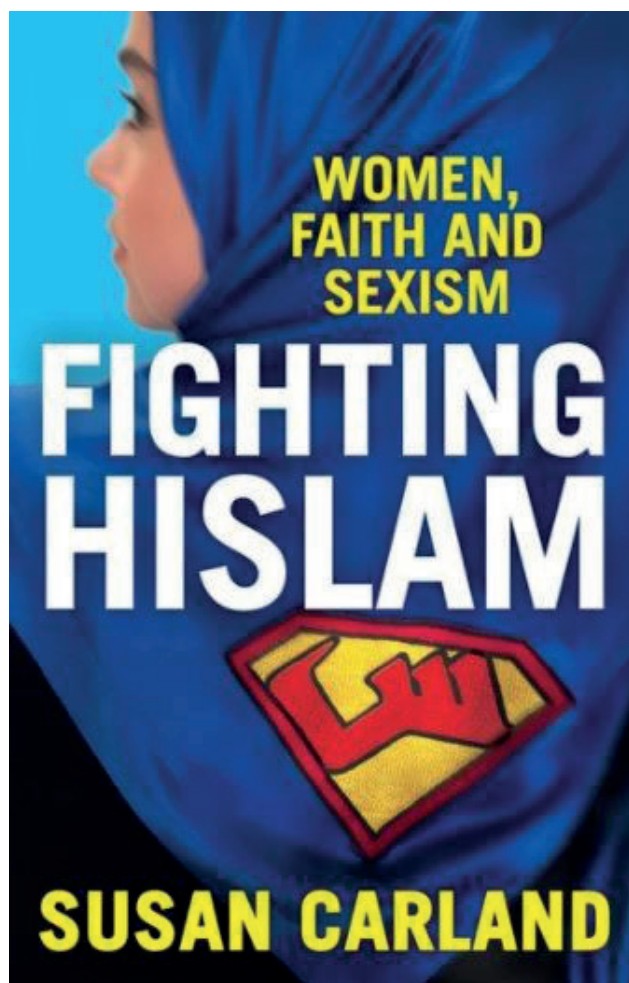
Dr. Carland denounces the reductive, pervasive Western stereotype, entrenched in Islamophobia, which advertises “*a dubious desire to free the Muslim woman from herself*”: “*The idea that Muslim women need rescuing from their woefully sexist predicament is alive and well, if only because there is a complete lack of belief that any woman would be Muslim if given another option*”.²

In her work, Dr. Hamidi also aims at counteracting misconceptions that wrongfully depict Islam and feminist ideology as divergent and at showing that Muslim women of Islamic confession are active in denouncing gender injustice and in fighting for their rights.

1. Original title : *Un féminisme musulman, et pourquoi pas ?*

2. *Fighting Hislam: women, faith and sexism*, Susan Carland, Melbourne University Press, 2017, page 14

Embracing faith in the fight against sexism and discrimination



The most evident convergence between these two publications is their common objective, which is to make the case for Muslim feminism whilst showing that Islam and feminist values are not mutually exclusive: *“Muslim feminists do not perceive their feminist fight as a fight against Islam, on the contrary, they consolidate their arguments by referencing verses from the Qur’an, they accurately discuss the principles of the sharia so as not to counteract the monopoly of traditionalist interpretations on the issue of women in Islam, because it is important to recall that the difficulties of Muslim women today do not derive from Islam itself, but from a socio-economic causality due to the absence of democracy in the Arab-Muslim world.”*³ This democratic deficit is extending to countries where women and girls wearing headscarves are being denied access to schooling and to employment.

Both Dr. Carland and Dr. Hamidi condemn a vision of feminism that is inexorably anchored in secularism. Islamic or Muslim feminism is, as pointed out by Dr. Hamidi, a concept that started burgeoning at the beginning of the 1990s, built around the idea of reinterpreting religious texts that have been dominated for too long by a strictly masculine, patriarchal reading. Just like the women activists interviewed in Susan Carland’s research, Muslim feminism has its roots in, and feeds on, the Islamic faith. Rather than being discordant and incompatible, faith and feminism are depicted by both authors as symbiotic.

Reinterpreting sacred texts from a feminine perspective: Islam as a means for fighting for gender equality

An important aspect underscored in both publications is the resort to faith and Islamic teachings of Muslim women fighting sexism. Dr. Carland notes that women are subscribing to a *“faith-positive and faith-grounded approach”* because of their devotion and faith, but also for more pragmatic reasons: *“a faith-centred and Islamically authentic approach to tackling sexism within Muslim communities is much more likely to be effective than any exogenous means”*⁴ The women in Susan Carland’s book are *“tackling gender injustice through religious sources that for so long have been used for patriarchal ends”* which does not *“equate to disregarding these sources, but approaching them with the intention of reinterpreting them”*.⁵

Amina Wadud, one of the best known theologians and activists for Muslim women’s rights, author of a ground-breaking publication from 1993 entitled *“Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman’s perspective”*, was interviewed by Carland for her publication. She is also repeatedly quoted in Dr. Hamidi’s book, particularly in her second chapter on the *“Emergence of an Islamic feminist thinking in the West”*. Amina Wadud, who among other Muslim intellectuals, engage in a *“textual activism”*⁶, represents for both authors a model for the reinterpretation of sacred texts from a feminine standpoint.⁷

3. *A Muslim feminism – why not?*, Malika Hamidi, L’Aube Editions, 2017, page 148

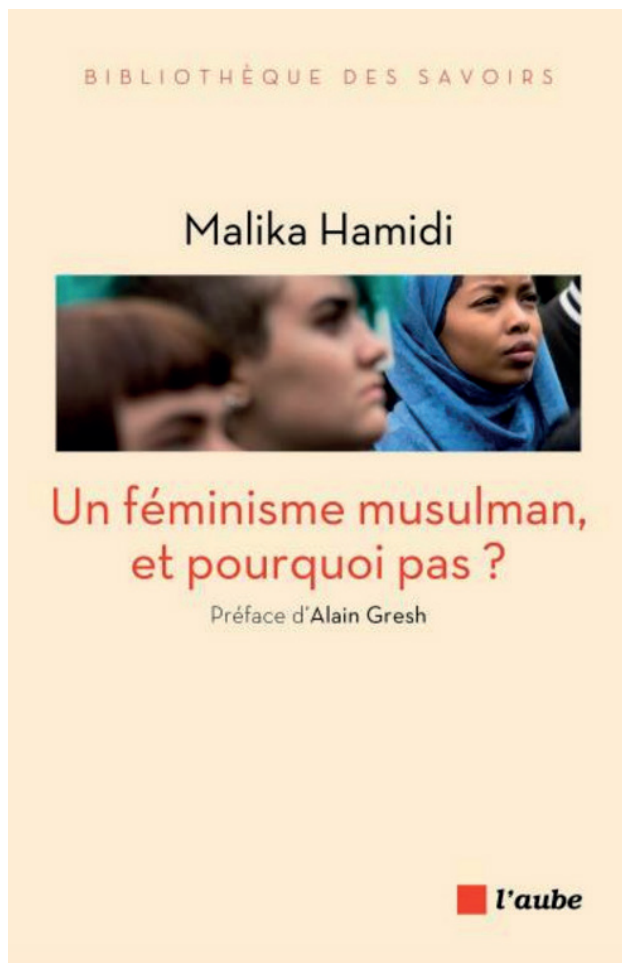
4. *Fighting Hislam: women, faith and sexism*, Susan Carland, Melbourne University Press, 2017, page 131

5. *Ibid.*, page 133

6. *A Muslim feminism – why not?*, Malika Hamidi, L’Aube Editions, 2017, page 80

7. *Ibid.*, page 84

The “double bind”: on the twofold pressure faced by Muslim women activists in their fight for gender equality



Finally, another noteworthy point of convergence for both Dr. Susan Carland and Dr. Malika Hamidi lays in the double pressure faced by Muslim women who engage in fighting sexism or who define themselves as feminists. In this regard, both authors underscore that prejudice against Muslim feminists comes from two sources: from outside the Muslim community, and from within the Muslim community itself. According to Dr. Carland, on the one hand, in the West, the realities of Muslim women activists “have often been rendered invisible or obscured by stereotyped representations. (...) Muslim women are too often seen as passive victims, even by Western feminists, rather than as agents who are actively engaged in efforts to reshape their individual selves, their cultures, and their societies.”⁸ On the other hand, Muslim women activists are at times condemned by some within their own community because their speaking out can be seen as damaging to their image and to Islam itself – conceivably contributing to fuelling stereotypes in the West or “giving ammunition to Islamophobes”:

8. *Fighting Islam: women, faith and sexism*, Susan Carland, Melbourne University Press, 2017, page 39

“The words “feminism” and “gender equality” and “sexism” are imbued with some heavy assumptions, and so this work often gets mixed reviews. Some Muslims feel so under siege in predominantly non-Muslim countries that they think we’re contributing to “airing our dirty laundry” or making the community look bad (...) [testimony by Ghayda].”⁹

Dr. Carland develops in this regard the concept of the “double bind”, referring to the twofold prejudices that women activists were facing in their work: “These prejudices created a near-constant tension for many of my participants, as they regularly re-evaluated what they were doing and saying, who their audience was, and the potential cost-benefit of any statement”.¹⁰ As mentioned by Dr. Carland, a similar issue was experienced in the midst of feminist and civil rights movement in the 1970s by black women activists.¹¹

Dr. Hamidi develops the concept of the double constraint that renders the fight for women’s status and rights even more challenging for Muslim women, in the third part of her book, “*The Islamic headscarf and feminism: a divisive debate*.” According to her, a new wave of Muslim feminist associations is evolving, which “fights against intracommunity discriminations, aspiring to law and justice for equal citizenship and gender justice.”¹² These Muslim feminists are often faced with the reticence of some members of the community who support an “anti-western rhetoric” and reinforce internal divisions. At the same time, they face the pressure from outside the community, by being “taken hostage in socio-political debates by a certain secularist, anticlerical movement which develops an “exclusive” interpretation of secularism. This approach refutes any affirmation of identity by means of a religious symbol in the public space.”¹³ As a result, when Muslim women attempt to join civil society organizations, they are often confronted with institutions that are « sceptical and hostile to the presence of Muslim feminists ».

In conclusion, challenging the “longstanding dichotomies of the religious Muslim woman and secular feminism”, Dr. Susan Carland and Dr. Malika Hamidi reveal the work of Muslim women activists that “embody a new type of feminism (...) one that embraces passionate religious attachment and conviction, while at the same time challenging sexism in ways that have coherence and currency in a modern, plural Western context.”¹⁴

9. *Ibid.*, page 85

10. *Ibid.*, page 108

11. *Ibid.*, page 113

12. *A Muslim feminism – why not?*, Malika Hamidi, L’Aube Editions, 2017, page 119

13. *Ibid.*, page 119

14. *Fighting Islam: women, faith and sexism*, Susan Carland, Melbourne University Press, 2017, page 143



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