

MUSLIM GRASSROOTS IN THE WEST DISCUSS DEMOCRACY

AROUND 500 STATEMENTS FROM MUSLIMS IN THE WEST ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, ETC. - SPARKED OFF BY ALLEGATIONS OF A “CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS”.

The objective of this Report is to offer opinion-formers in the media, universities and politics, as well as mosques and churches, responses from the grassroots, where at present there have been none, to questions relevant to an alleged “clash of civilisations” between Islam and the West.

The views of lay Muslims living in the West were sought because they are familiar with western practicalities. Muslims taking part were professional and business people, their spouses and students, Sunni and Shia mixed. 38 roundtable discussion groups (involving 350-400 Muslims) were set up by local Anglican/Episcopalian clerics all over the US and Britain (and one in Mauritius). The Report, in over a hundred pages, sets out every Muslim statement in full, so that the reader is not given a selected view. However a section on “Key Statements” showing the full range of views is included for the convenience of the reader.

In addition, hyperlinks to quotations on Sensitive Issues are provided (see next page).

This Report originates from a sub-committee on Muslim dialogue through networks and contacts of the Advisory Council of the Anglican Observer to the United Nations. The Report aims to reflect various Muslim views objectively. The discussions were designed to explore different views, not to arrive at common positions. Though well-informed, those taking part had not previously discussed the subjects of democracy, human rights and rule of law in any formal context.

The publication of the results of these group discussions may help to facilitate further discussion extending from opinion-makers through to the grassroots level.

Project organiser and editor of Report: Amedee Turner

Disclaimer: The views expressed within are those of the Muslim participants, the comments on them are those of the Editor, and neither are those of the Advisory Council.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conflicting opinions of politicians and academics on the subject of integrating the Islamic tradition with the brand of democracy “owned” by the West has threatened to degenerate into a shouting match. This Report - a comprehensive overview of Muslim grass-roots opinion in the West on the subject of democracy – may offer an alternative. There are approximately four hundred voices represented here – a diverse catchment of respondents with respect to geographic spread, gender and occupational or faith experience, whose responses were protected by guaranteed anonymity and obtained within the stimulating “democratic” atmosphere of face-to-face meetings.

The principal conclusion to be drawn from this Report of opinions expressed by Muslims living in the West would be that democracy is acceptable as a pragmatic form of government which, despite its shortcomings, can coexist with Muslim principles in practice, though open to sharp criticism by many of the participants. No statement found democracy incompatible with Islam. However, it was widely asserted that, coupled with the acceptance of democracy, nothing shall be done contrary to the Qur’an. Thus there can be no expectation that secularism will become acceptable or that “moderates”, for whom adherence to the Qur'an is negotiable, could be hived off from "extremists". A politically realistic response to this bedrock adherence to the Qur’an would be to look for the acceptance of democratic constitutions and legislation in Muslim countries, tailored in each case to Islamic requirements as seen by their respective elected representatives.

- From the perspective of politicians and academics, these unmediated responses can represent an invaluable resource for assessing the “gut” feelings of their communities who might otherwise not have felt able to speak freely.
- For the press/media, this extensive compendium of statements has the genuine ring of the grass-roots voice which can be a rich vein of quotable material. The indexed hyperlinks to “Sensitive Quotations” are a user-friendly aid for quick reference.

Comments

Please email all comments, referring to relevant sections to rtd2007@googlemail.com

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PREFACE

1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT?

This is a report on a series of discussions with Muslims from the grassroots on democracy and other civic issues. The report is intended as an aid for readers to investigate the possibility of a “clash” (as has been put forward by Samuel Huntington) of civilisations between Islam and the West.

The report is intended to offer a spectrum of these grassroots Muslim views, as distinct from those of scholarly circles. It is hoped that it will help to generate other surveys of different voices and opinions out of which some effective conclusions might be formulated.

It is not a scientifically-based study of the opinions of Muslims living in the English-speaking western world. Rather, it is a sample of views illustrated in around 500 statements, expressed in meetings of between 350 and 400 randomly found Muslims living in Britain, the US and Mauritius, indicating their differing attitudes to eight ‘political’ subjects including democracy, human rights, rule of law, global justice, freedom, and materialism. The statements were made in 38 groups spread widely across Britain and the US and one in Mauritius. In some cases, the members of the groups were born in Muslim countries in Asia or Middle East and migrated to western countries. In others, they were first- or second-generation Muslims living in the US or Britain. A few were Afro-Americans or converts. The student groups were mostly Muslims brought up in the West.

It was the views of Muslims who had experienced life in the West which have been obtained by this exercise. Contacting Muslims in Britain and the US was an obvious first step for the advisory council given the substantial Anglican and Episcopalian (“A/E”) contacts with Muslims in these countries. By consulting Muslims who are already familiar with the West, their comments may point towards the outcome when contacts and familiarity between Islam and the West develop further on a global scale.

2. HOW THE GROUPS WERE FORMED

The Muslims were randomly brought together, not as a scientifically selected cross-section. They were those in each selected locality who were readily approachable in their community, and they were invited to attend by leading local Muslims who had been asked to organise a group. Muslims in the groups were composed of an unplanned mixture of Sunni and Shia. They came from all walks of life and both sexes. Sometimes spouses attended together. The younger groups were university students. The proportion of first and second generation American or British Muslims and those who migrated from the East varied from group to group.

PREFACE

The 38 locations were spread throughout the whole of US and Britain, with one in Mauritius.* In each location a local A/E cleric was able and willing to get together a team of his or her own parishioners, organise the meetings and contact local leading Muslims, often a mosque chairman who would find an equivalent Muslim team. Sixty widely-spread willing A/E clerics were approached for help based on personal contacts, but 22 were unable to sustain their initiative.

The Muslim participants were not from scholarly or political circles because the intention was to hear the views of ordinary people not 'experts' in politics, culture or religion. It is clear from the reports of the meetings that, though well-informed, those taking part had not previously discussed the subjects of democracy, human rights and rule of law in any formal context.

Except in a few cases where the participants were all Muslims, each round-table discussion comprised roughly one half Muslims and one half Christians. Each group knew it was one of a number, but none of the groups had knowledge of the opinions of other groups, or where they were and indeed there was no contact between them any of them.

The presence of the A/E teams at most of the meetings served to show local support and hospitality for the Muslims during a difficult time for them. However the Report is in no sense an interfaith statement, though it is the result of a significant number of grass-roots interfaith efforts. In view of the recent atmosphere, all participants were guaranteed anonymity. Despite this, two prospective groups in the US, Buffalo and a New York group, plus one in England, West Central London, felt they could not go ahead because of the general situation.

*where a personal contact existed with a member the Council.

3. OBTAINING THE STATEMENTS

Two reporters, one A/E and one Muslim in each meeting, recorded by hand all they could of what was said. It is important to note that the statements set out are not a selection but are all those made by the Muslims recorded during the group discussions. It is of particular importance to note that the groups were not asked to aim at arriving at agreement on the issues. It was stressed at the outset by the conveners of each discussion group that the object of the discussions was to hear the individual views of those taking part, and not to arrive at any kind of agreement. Their individual views were sought. The wording is unaltered and is exactly as recorded at the meetings. This must be remembered when the wording of some statements appears awkward or abbreviated.

Although all statements by Muslims and A/E are available, only those of Muslims are included in this Report because the views of the A/E on democracy etc., were, as would be expected, predictable and uniform and of little interest either to a Muslim reader living in the West or to an Anglo-American reader.

PREFACE

4. RUNNING THE DISCUSSIONS

The A/E convener was normally the host (however some meetings took place in Muslim premises), but the meetings were conducted jointly by the Muslim and A/E conveners.

Normally each group held three or four meetings, each lasting two hours or more, over a period of two months.

Various common Guidance Notes on the objectives, nature and running of the round-table discussions were used by the conveners (see Appendix I). In the first meeting of each round-table group the convener placed the discussions in the context of the contemporary debate on the possibility of a “clash of civilisations”. Despite this strong reference to the possibility of a clash, this topic is only reported as having been referred to three times in all the discussions; it would seem, therefore, that the subjects were discussed in concrete terms, and the focus was on every-day life and opinions.

An introductory note on each subject was read out before the relevant discussion so that the participants knew the full range of issues involved in it. This was done to ensure that no major aspects were overlooked (see Appendix II).

In the later stages of the project a number of individual lay Muslims wrote down their opinions without prior discussions because they were already in contact with a group which had intended to form a round-table discussion but which ultimately had not been convened. These written notes are identified as such.

5. THE STATUS OF THE REPORT

The views set out in the Report are those of the Muslim participants only in the discussions. The editorial notes are the responsibility solely of the editor, Amédée Turner. The editor also organized the project and identified and arranged the discussion groups. Amédée Turner is an Honorary Member of the European Parliament who was a member of the Advisory Council and chairman of the subcommittee on Muslim dialogue. Other members of the subcommittees were Archdeacon Michael Kendall and the Reverend Daniel Appleyard. Their support was invaluable. Gratitude is greatly owed to all the conveners of the round-table discussion groups and those who supported them. The editor was generously assisted in the preparation of the Report by Penelope Bridgers who donated her time.

The Report opens with a selection of Key Statements which inevitably imposes a subjective pattern. However, the Full Report, though it places the statements in a convenient order, makes no attempt to arrive at conclusions. Each reader can therefore form individual conclusions from perusing the full collection of statements.

1. OBJECTIVES

There have been numerous references to the possibility of a potential and inherent “clash of civilisations” between Islam and the West (as put forward by Samuel Huntington). It is essential to know whether in fact such a clash is inherent. However it is not easy to deal definitively with these allegations by citing Islamic religious or scholarly sources because there are a number of apparently conflicting views expressed in these circles. It was decided therefore to use the opportunities offered by the Advisory Council’s existing personal contacts with Anglican and Episcopalian (“A/E”) clerics throughout the US and England, and one personal contact which the Council had in Mauritius, to hold discussions with Muslims living in those areas. This constituted a bottom up approach in order to reflect grassroots opinion.

Muslims in these localities are not necessarily typical of all Muslims worldwide. However, because they have personal and practical experience of frequent contacts between Islam and the West, they can attest to the extent to which, in practical terms, the West and Islam can cohabit, and in what respects there may be difficulty.

2. ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

The Report consists of all the statements made by Muslim participants recorded during the discussions. They are set out as fully as recorded. The editing consists only in sorting the statements out according to subject in a convenient order. It will be clear to the reader when a recorded statement is a résumé made during the discussions of views common to a number of participants and when it is a direct report of an individual remark.

3. SUBJECTS DISCUSSED

The primary subject, which every group discussed fully, was democracy. It was stressed that the groups should avoid getting bogged down in a debate of the relative merits and de-merits of the specifics of the British and US systems of democracy. In the event none discussed British or US specifics except for a few passing criticisms, but considered democracy in general.

More than half of the statements reported concern democracy, reflecting presumably the general interest in and the significance of the subject. All the groups discussed democracy fully. Discussions on the other subjects (human rights, the rule of law, etc.,) were concluded more quickly and not all groups discussed each of them.

INTRODUCTION

The subjects discussed were: Democracy, Human Rights, Respect for Law and the Rule of Law, Globally Consistent Justice and Equity, Materialism, Cultural Specificity, Freedom and Self-Government and Civil Society.



KEY STATEMENTS

KEY STATEMENTS

Note on the nature of the selection: the following statements, about one fifth of the total, have been selected to show both typical extremes and typical median views on each of the subjects. These Key Statements can only offer an approximate perspective and can in no way be taken as a short-cut to conclusions, because the value of the statements is to be found in their completeness, as found in the Full Report.

As there was deliberately no attempt in the discussions to arrive at common conclusions, it must be remembered that contrary views and varying strengths of feeling will be found in each group.

1. IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? - KEY STATEMENTS

1.1 Essential reservation regarding democracy

At the start of the discussion on democracy an introductory note was read out so that the participants knew the full range of the issues to be involved. They were asked not to be distracted by peculiarities in British or US democratic practices, but to consider the essentials of democracy as consisting of: one person one vote; the government to comply with the majority opinion of the elected representatives; protection of minorities in countries where there was likely to be a permanent minority (whether racial, ethnic or religious); and, that an election by one person, one vote resulting in the elected representative body giving up its powers and admitting an undemocratic form of government (“one person, one vote, one time”) was not to be regarded as government by democratic processes for the purposes of the discussions.

The reservations in the statements below as to the sovereignty of Islam indicate that the practical working of the parliament of a predominantly Muslim country, which was democratic on all secular matters, would be circumscribed when an Islamic requirement is involved, so that such a parliament would not be permitted to alter Muslim tenets for citizens who accept the Muslim faith. This naturally, depending on the attitude of those concerned towards, for example the scope of Sharia, would involve varying degrees of limitation on an otherwise democratic parliamentary system. The issue however would appear to be a question of degree, not of principle. The US Congress, though in a very different context, is not sovereign because of the separation of powers established in the US Constitution.

There are some 38 statements from the discussions directly or indirectly indicating that democracy shall not lead to laws contrary to the Qur’an. These are found in the Full Report below. It is possible however, to indicate their significance and scope by selecting statements which are representative of the totality of statements.

Although attention may inevitably go to the more arresting statements, it should be noted that the largest section of statements from this category in the full Report covers those supportive of democracy.

Key Statements

“Nothing contrary to Islam shall happen.” (Leicester).

² *“Government not going against views of elected representatives means operating within the spirit of divine guidance of the Qur’an.” (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)*

³ *“Many Muslims feel that democracy is compatible with Islam provided the person in power implements God’s laws. Extremists are not representative of Islam. How would an*

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

Islamic country be governed? Religion would be used as a guideline and new laws enacted to deal with new problems.” (South London I). [return to index](#)

⁴ *“I look at democracy through my faith (Islam). I agree within the Muslim context. Laws should agree with the Constitution; the Constitution is the Qur’an which sets the legal tone. Islamic law is strict (Christians have more choice). Discipline, basic moral codes, respect. Democracy is an evolving thing and can be improved. Nomocracy.” (Dearborn I). [return to index](#)*

²⁵⁹ *“Democracy is part of Islam but principles are dictated in general in the Qur’an rather than written by people.” (Savannah). [return to index](#)*

^{6A} *“Democracy is not incompatible with Islam. Islam is not anti-democratic. Provided democracy is seen as a limited form of popular sovereignty, restricted and directed by God’s law, it is compatible with Islam. Secular western democracy is not compatible because it is based solely on the sovereignty of the people. Popular sovereignty is rejected completely because Islamic states should be based on consultation or Shura (interpretation of Sharia) and this is all-encompassing so humans cannot create their own legal system beyond the Qur’an and Sharia. Elections equate to blasphemy. When Muslim politicians and spiritual leader say “El-Islam-Howa-Al-Hal” they are saying that Islam is the solution to everything. To those who believe this, Islam is better than democracy. Yet the Qur’an does not offer an ideal political system. It praises collective decision-making for the common good (42:38), the Qur’an elevates collective decision-making from a recommendation to a requirement (3:159). [return to index](#)*

^{6B} *Thus if democracy provides a means by which to make decisions collectively then it appears to be compatible with Islam. Many Muslim scholars say that western democratic values are the same as traditional Islam, Justice (Adl), Right (Haqq), collective decision-making (Shura) and Equality (Musqwat). None of the Muslims at this discussion believe that secular rather than God-given laws were sinful.” (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)*

⁷ *“You cannot have true democracy without justice and justice is a fundamental concept in Islam. Democracy is the most contested concept in history and one person one vote cannot be the solution because if 60% agree on sex before marriage and 40% don’t, they become suicide bombers.” (Central London I). **Editor’s Note: This is the only statement advocating undemocratic responses to a democracy which exceeds the bounds of the Qur’an.** [return to index](#)*

⁸ *“The Qur’an is more than a religious text. It is a “code of life” defining limitations on behaviour in the affairs of men. In the west there are no limitations. In Islam as things change/evolve a group of people who know their religion decide how to adapt the rules extrapolating the Qur’an. This is a better form of democracy.” (Central London I). [return to index](#)*

⁹ *“Religious institutions with a prophetic voice are required particularly in a secular society, though they would not advocate the role of the ayatollah in Iran, and that where*

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

Islam is a minority religion, as in the UK, they want the Church of England to remain established to maintain the prophetic/spiritual voice.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)

One statement qualifies the above regarding religious authorities taking part in government.

“1-The formation of checks and balances to keep corruption low. 2- Recognizing minorities and having a national discussion on the importance of protecting and securing the minority rights.

3- Defining the role of religious authorities, and drawing the legal path for religious figures to become political figures. No one shall abuse their religious powers for personal and political gains. If you are going to be part of the public life, then we need to know your religious beliefs and biases and you may not use your religious influence to coerce the public to follow your will.” (Dearborn II).

1.2 Democracy in Practice: One Person, One Vote

Muslims were critical of the imperfections of one person, one vote in practice, and did not consider it as an ideal, but as a pragmatic solution to modern governance.

The Muslim participants stressed the place of consultation in the Qur’an as being the traditional method of governance employed by Mohammed and his immediate successors. (These statements in full are found in the Full Report below). Democracy with one person one vote could be regarded as a practical form of consultation, particularly in modern, large and complicated states.

Key Statements

Democracy is satisfactory

¹¹ *“All agreed on the introduction of democracy into Islamic countries. The only question being what is the ideological position of democracy in an Islamic state? Is it an ideal in itself or merely a pragmatic means of achieving better government? This should shape the way western governments presented democracy to the Islamic world.” (City of London, young office workers). [return to index](#)*

“Accountability has always been a key component of traditional Islamic government and democracy is the best means of achieving this, and therefore democracy could be ideologically compatible with Islam.” (City of London, young office workers).

¹³*“The prophetic system of government may be the only mode of government fundamentally compatible with Islamic ideology but it broke down so early that there is no ideal Islamic system that can be used as a model and therefore democracy could be ideologically compatible with Islam.” (City of London, young office workers). [return to index](#)*

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

¹⁴ “One person one vote is a practical means of achieving the opinion of the masses and also reflects the sanctity of the individual. This is relevant because Islam has no Community punishment. Everyone is accountable for himself.” (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)

“Democracy is an evolving thing, and agreed with within this context. Consultation is important, as are transparency and checks and balances. They would give an unqualified ‘yes’ for representation. It is important, but a qualified ‘yes’ for individual freedom.” (New York I).

“If democracy provides a means by which to make decisions collectively then it appears to be compatible with Islam. Many Muslims scholars say that western democratic values are the same as traditional Islam: justice (Adl), right (Haqq) collective decision-making (Shura) and equality (Musqwat).” (Boston II Students).

“If democracy provides a means by which to make decisions collectively then it appears to be compatible with Islam. Many Muslims scholars say that western democratic values are the same as traditional Islam: justice (Adl), right (Haqq) collective decision-making (Shura) and equality (Musqwat).” (Boston II Students).

“Everyone should have a voice in the political system, in the form of voting at the least (secret ballot) and more advanced political involvement.” (Dearborn II).

“When societies are small there is access to the ruler. In larger societies democracy functions because elections give a mandate to the government to act on behalf of the electorate for a specific period of time.” (Central London I).

¹⁸ “Consultation means you go to the leader and meet and discuss a problem.

²⁰ “For some places one person one vote works but cannot be applied in every country” (South London I). [return to index](#)

“There is not conflict between democracy and Islam provided it is a mechanism for ruling and checks and balances of government, and not an ideology that is a supremacist ideology.” (Bury St Edmunds).

“For some places one person one vote works but it cannot be applied in every country. We need a secular government to represent the large numbers of religions like India.” (South London I).

Democracy: not satisfactory in practice

The following statements object to democracy, as impracticable or ineffective.

²¹ “In theory democracy sounds good but in practice it has many flaws, it can be said to express the will of the people, but this is not what happens. We should question the whole political system.

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

¹⁵² *As Muslims we believe that Islam shows up the failure of democracy, of western democracy, MPs do not necessarily reflect the views of the people. As Muslims we believe that man has no right, God is sovereign, and democracies in western governments are good at creating myths, illusions.” (East London Students). [return to index](#)*

“Islam has global aspirations but we are not interested in detonating bombs. In the west to vote you have no real choice you have to choose between two evils, you don’t have a real alternative, there is no point in going for the lesser evil. But how much knowledge do voters actually have? The influence of the media is strong and decisions are easily manipulated. You have to choose between two evils.” Another said “We use our votes to change it.” (East London Students).

²³ *“As to one person one vote, all persons do not have the same value (as far as voting goes). Those with more knowledge have more weight concerning decisions. The way that governing should function under Islam is like a conciliation that might happen in a private company: seek out the appropriate people with knowledge and experience about an issue in order to make the right decision, using every available resource to get the best outcome. In the Qur’an those with authority are ordered to seek consultation to deliberate to get the right advice from the right advisers.” (Boston I). [return to index](#)*

²⁴ *“In most Muslim countries democracy would not work because there are no effective means of disseminating information. The fluidity of population means that an accurate census is virtually impossible, there are practical difficulties, for instance in Jordan there are no addresses on people’s houses so you cannot introduce any system of voting.” (Central London I). [return to index](#)*

²⁵ *“We need to find within the Qur’an a suitable system. Democracy is not suitable for several reasons. It is based on European ideas of the prime importance of the individual. In the M.E. the important thing is the community. The family, the clan, the tribe and on up. Historically it was the Qur’an that united warring tribes”. (Vermont II). [return to index](#)*

²⁶ *“There is a danger that votes are a sham. Votes lead to an elected dictatorship. The individual gets lost in a democratic bureaucracy. The representatives and the government they select may be selfish and not the best.*

²⁰⁷ *Groups, for example lobbies, can hijack democracies. In the US there is criticism of the close relationship between funding and campaigning and the undue influence of the rich.” (Leicester). [Return to index](#)*

“No Islamic country had had enough experience of democracy to be helpful to others in finding a workable, compatible structure congenial to a democratic government. There is not a political climate for debate and the free exchange of ideas in the Middle East. Opportunities for developing this stopped in the 13th Century. The electorate needs to be involved for a democracy to be effective; and that means heavy voter participation, education, through the school system and grass-roots organizations that produce leaders.

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

The elements working against a truly democratic government are poverty, illiteracy, dominant military, instability, imported structures, and greed.” (Louisville).

²⁸ *“Democracy represents the people who vote, only the silent majority do not participate, causing dissatisfaction with the election results and misrepresentation. The individual has responsibility for the nation to make his or her vote heard otherwise it is a fake democracy.” (Savannah). [return to index](#)*

Democracy should not be imposed

²⁹ *“Democracy is very much a western concept but we cannot accept it as a global concept because the US is not allowing democracy to flourish around the world. If the West actually honored democracy it would make a lot more sense.” (New York I). [return to index](#)*

³⁰ *“Democracy does not develop quickly or easily and the US should not try to impose its form of democracy on the world. Democracy comes from a western perspective; Muslims are not necessarily ‘anti-democratic’. The West created nation-states and now they say they must go: it puts you off democracy. This is a complaint about how the Arab world was carved up after the First World War.” (New York I). [return to index](#)*

“We do not need this type of system as the greatest setback to democracy is the supporting of dictatorship” (Minneapolis).

1.3 Protection of minorities

The participants were asked to consider the position of minorities, particularly in countries where there is an in-built majority for one group (political, ethnic or religious), and where express provisions for protection of the minority are required if democracy is to be acceptable. About half the groups reported opinions, all saying that the political system must uphold the rights of minorities.

Key Statements

“The party system is the only viable system but many Islamic countries are more ethnically diverse than Europe and there is a danger that minority rights will not be protected.” (City of London, young office workers).

²¹⁰ *“Rights of minorities: personal law according to religious preferences, criminal law the same for everyone. No suppression of freedom of religion. Proportional representation in government (note: not just in an election, but in the make-up of the government). Linguistic and cultural rights. Overall, Muslims are pessimistic of the role of the minority.” (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)*

³⁴ *“One participant spoke for us all in saying that, ‘Under the democracy, all minorities should be respected, and looked after and protected.’ We all recognised the right of the*

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

minority to express their views without suppression but nevertheless the need to accept the will of the majority.” (Oxford). [return to index](#)

“Clearly the opposition should be the next government. If this is unlikely, civil society should create counter-groups with a voice in the press. Proportional representation would help avoid the problem and one would need an independent person, for instance an Ombudsman.” (Mauritius).

1.4 Political parties

The introductory note to the discussion meetings noted that the existence of political parties could be a significant feature of a democratic system leading to a healthy change in government from time to time. A quarter of the groups commented on political parties.

Key Statements

“We have no fundamental opposition to government passing back and forth; it is an inherent part of the democratic system.” (City of London, young office workers).

“Attitudes based on political parties is good when parties are healthy. This does not conflict with Islamic principles and it means that accountability is built into the system.” (Minneapolis).

“The passing of power back and forth: without this how would one want to keep the government accountable, people questioning and holding government accountable by full participation in the process.” (Minneapolis).

“Attitudes based on political parties allow parties to crystallize around opinions and issues, discourage manipulation of the party in power. One party does not always meet an individual’s needs. Being able to move is important.” (Minneapolis).

“The more political parties the more democratic.” (Ossening, (NY.) II).

“Parties should reflect the mix of society. You should have more small parties in the US to guarantee their views are heard, and also when there is a change in the governing party changes in national politics and decision will be less drastic and more gradual. Secret ballots guarantee true elections and protect the vote of small parties. Electing multiple parties helps the government avoid continuing poor policies. It is always helpful to have someone else look at the issues from a different point of view.” (Savannah).

1.5 Existing Muslim Democracies

The relative success of democracy in some Muslim countries was referred to in a number of groups.

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

Key Statements

⁴² *“Indonesia is an example of democracy and Islam working together from autonomy to chaos to democracy. Elections free, equal and in good spirit. This puts to rest the idea that democracy and Islam will never coexist. Malaysia is an example. President Bush tried to get stability, democracy or freedom in militaristic government but got neither. Loses credibility without follow-through. Indonesia was kind of do-it yourself.”* (Chicago). [return to index](#)

⁴³ *“But at the end of the day in Islam they must come together somehow. Malaysia is a good example of a well-functioning Islamic state. It is not because religion is less important in Malaysia, religion is very important to the people from the top to the bottom.”*
^{204B} *Are democracy and pluralism inherently conflicted with Islam, not the Islamic religion but the Islamic state? Some thinkers in Iran are examining the concept of Islamic secularism. A central issue would be that the “wise one” need not be turbaned. This participant concluded. ‘We’ve got to do it.’ (ie., achieve democracy.)”* (Central London I). [return to index](#)

1.6 “One person one vote one time”

The concept of a democratic vote which terminates democracy by electing a representative institution which then dissolves itself giving way to an autocratic form of government, as happened in Germany under Hitler, was specifically highlighted in the introductory comments to the discussion groups. It was there stated that such a procedure should not be considered to be a form of democracy for the purpose of the discussions. In fact, only one group specifically referred to this point, but perhaps it may be presumed, when the reader studies all the statements, that by implication the groups excluded “one person one vote one time” from the concept of democracy. Certainly none suggested that such a vote would legalise a non-democratic government.

⁴⁴ *“‘One person one vote all agree’, and ‘one person one vote one time’ is unacceptable.”* (City of London, young office workers). [return to index](#)

⁴⁵ *“Some of our participants felt strongly that the West had both hindered the development of democracy, as in Iran, and rejected democratically elected governments if they claimed to be Islamic. The examples of Turkey and Algeria were given as places where democratically elected governments had been rejected by the West. It was suspected that western nations were fearful of what would happen if an elected Islamic government took over, in case this harmed western interests or led to the abolition of laws and civil rights. On the contrary, participants suggested that the regimes which preceded such governments were often oppressive dictatorships and should be replaced by elected civilian governments, even if they are not of the kind the West would like. It was felt that the experience of responsibility in government would help elected Islamic leaders to act in the interests of all their people, and that elected leaders would not destroy what they had won. Such governments should be allowed to flourish. The attitude of most Muslim*

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM? – KEY STATEMENTS

(and Christian) participants was summed up by the comment that in looking at the relationship between democratic western nations and the rest of the world, 'there is no fairness.'" (Leicester). **Editor's note: This is a case of an authoritarian government being replaced by a democratically elected Islamic government, the reverse of a one vote, one person, one time scenario. But because the election was annulled, the suspicion that the democratically elected Islamic successor government would betray the vote and become authoritarian could not be tested.** [return to index](#)

1.7 Consultation and consensus in Islam

The starting point for the Muslims in the meetings in considering government is the function of consultation in the Qur'an and also among Mohammed's immediate successors. The following statements show the strength of the influence of traditional consultation, with or without consensus, on attitudes to democracy.

Key Statements

⁴⁶ *"In Muslim politics there is a tradition of trying to achieve consensus after consultation in the community."* (Wimbledon). [Return to index](#)

⁴⁷ *"Islam is to do with how you get the sense of the people, how are their interests and needs represented, and all of them not just the majority."* (Boston I). [return to index](#)

⁴⁸ *"Stress importance of community and consultation persisting until a common policy is arrived at. This gives a greater sense of community."* (New York I). [return to index](#)

¹⁵⁹ *"Islam has the tradition of direct consultation. Before trying to organise democracy."* (South London I). [return to index](#)

"Consultation for a consensus." (Mauritius).

"Islamic legacy of governments is participatory and may be informal." (New York I).

"Christian members of the discussions call for one man one vote, power sharing, preference for the poor (liberal theology), separation of powers spiritual and temporal, local and regional representation to enable minorities to be represented, that MPs are representatives not delegates, accountability of elected representatives. The Muslim participants commented that all this takes note of the individual whereas the Muslim view takes more account of the community." (Leicester).

⁵³ *"There is a gap between ideal and reality and always has been with regard to Muslim principles of consultation."* (Bury St. Edmunds). [return to index](#)

2. HUMAN RIGHTS – KEY STATEMENTS

2.1 Introduction

Some of the Muslim comments are directed to Islamic personal and family law, and the exclusion from Human Rights of culturally specific matters, and others to Muslim conduct, or to concern about lapses of human rights in the US or Britain or the West as a whole.

Key Statements

2.2 General and compendious statements

“The record of human rights violation in Muslim states today is unbelievable as well as unprecedented. The abject poverty and hunger, the prevalence of disease and human suffering, the high levels of ignorance and disregard for human dignity, the political oppression by rulers and governments with unjust barbaric legal systems that permit inhuman torture of prisoners and the innocent, the extravagant waste of national resources by the privileged are all alien to Islamic practice and in direct contradiction to Qur’anic injunctions.” (South London III, individual written statement of Muslim relative of a participant).

“Golden rule: allow mosques in the Vatican, cathedrals in Mecca.” (Chicago).

⁵⁶ *“It is ethically intolerable to have starving in countries while other countries have no limit to their consumption.”* (Dearbon II). [return to index](#)

⁵⁷ *“Muslims are more concerned with poverty amid plenty than with gender equity.”* (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)

^{57A} *“The five basic Muslim principles which legitimize human rights are: the primacy of life and dignity of the human person, the protection against restraint in religion, the respect for the home, the right of asylum and the duty of care for others. In Islamic culture legal capacity has been determined by one’s religion. Only Muslims have been recognized as full citizens of the state. Sharia law allows a Muslim to be put to death for converting to another religion.”* (Boston II Students). [Return to index](#)

2.3 Freedom of thought and speech

⁵⁹ *“In the east there seems to be more awareness of the consequences of actions or of speech, so there is self-censorship.”* (Boston I). [return to index](#)

⁶⁰ *“Social pressure is higher in the east so that even when someone knows he is right, if this goes against the general public opinion, that person may withhold his thought or speech.”* (Boston I). [return to index](#)

HUMAN RIGHTS – KEY STATEMENTS

“If freedom of speech and belief are allowed, citizens would be more satisfied and productive, as a result there would be much less human rights abuse. The government should not have the right to censorship and in return the media should be more sensitive and, more importantly, honest in its reporting. It is the right of the citizen to discriminate between what is good and what is bad for himself.” (Savannah).

“Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is important. In Turkey people are not free to practice Islam, which is humiliating: girls cannot wear headscarves in college.” (South London II, Turkish Students).

⁶³ *“Freedom of opinion and expression are important but a bit more complicated. I am proud to be in a country with freedom of speech, but what about the National Front? It means they are allowed to spread offensive material.” (South London II, Turkish Students). [return to index](#)*

“Freedom: people need to be free to express their political, economic, religious, social, or other ideological opinions if done in an appropriate manner, and provided such expressions do not lead to threatening the public good.” (Dearborn II).

“Freedom of Speech and Expression: We recognized that democracy entails the right of any person to express their opinions, to agree or disagree with others and not be suppressed in any way, as long as those opinions are reasonable and not going to harm others. Hence democracy has to be manifested in freedom of speech and the freedom to assert the opinions we hold through public channels and the ballot box.” (Dearborn II).

2.4 Women and family

⁶⁶ *“Non-discrimination is high on the list. Often people are confused about the rights of women in Islam. They have strong rights. In a true Islamic community the poor are provided for. The family is important, you could argue that women in Islam have more rights; women have many rights, to work and inheritance, etc. They are equal but different. When some so-called Muslim countries oppress women it is more a matter of culture and unjust rulers.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

“Tolerance must be recognized between a man, a woman and family. Women have many rights in Islam; e.g. a woman has the choice of having employment, because Islamically it is the man’s obligation to provide for his family. Another example is that a Muslim’s woman does not have to change her last name to that of her husband’s family, as women are not identified as property.” (San Diego).

⁶⁸ *“Fundamental religions create one of the largest obstacles to gender equity.” (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)*

HUMAN RIGHTS – KEY STATEMENTS

⁶⁹ *“Women and children’s rights should be protected. It is not Islamic what is done to women in some Muslim countries. It is usually a matter of culture and tradition that we should not follow in the US.” (Savannah). [return to index](#)*

“The rights of women are protected by law. The problem is that we do not adhere completely to the laws. Women’s rights in some countries are violated by governments who do not respect human rights of all their citizens and have neither religious morals nor respect for the law.” (Savannah).

⁷¹ *“The question of polygamy and inheritance has become an emotional community and politically provocative issue. According to Muslim law you must abide by the laws of the country you are in unless they are blatantly oppressive or go against fundamental principles of Islam.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)*

⁷² *“In Islam there is room for women to do what they want to do, and the very element making the difference was education. Women in Egypt in the 1920s protested at wearing the veil, but have now largely gone back to it.” (Louisville). [return to index](#)*

“The right of children is abrogated by materialism. Because of economic pressure or desire children are often forced to work, both parents often work and therefore neglect their children who are therefore raised in an ethical vacuum.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

Social security should be available but rarely necessary. Families should be able to take care of their elderly. Because of economic pressure driven by materialism this is often not the case.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“Children working is important in any setting, working on their farms, as this is how they make a connexion to the family, bringing them up to feel loyal to them. Work also helps you develop because work matures you, begin to feel pride. It has always been true that children and young people work, and this has not been a problem; there have not been any lasting ill-effects. Someone who spent his childhood working on a farm still grew up to become a doctor.” (Boston I).

2.5 Human Rights and Punishment (See also “Respect for Law and the Rule of Law”)

⁷⁶ *“If someone steals in Islamic society the whole society looks at itself and asks why the poor haven’t been provided for.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

⁷⁷ *Punishments, e.g. amputations need a whole Sharia system for their implementation. If a person steals out of necessity they are not punished in this way. The punishment is atonement for the sin. Most of us would prefer to have punishment here rather than in the hereafter.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

HUMAN RIGHTS – KEY STATEMENTS

⁷⁸ *“Fundamental religions create one of the largest obstacles to gender equity. Islam prescribes extreme punishment for gay men and lesbians. Homosexuals should be split in two with a sword or burnt alive. There are not similar punishments for other offences.”* (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)



3. RESPECT FOR LAW AND THE RULE OF LAW – KEY STATEMENTS

Key Statements

3.1 Perceived weaknesses in the western rule of law

“Weaknesses in western national judicial proceedings are:

- *Judgments not based on general moral boundaries;*
- *Expensive; barriers to access;*
- *Law not the search for essential truth but based on evidence;*
- *Corruption, inherent not apparent;*
- *Appointed judiciary;*
- *Race and gender imbalance.” (Leicester).*

⁸⁰ *“Legal systems could be improved by minimizing the role of money and power, the ability of the rich and powerful to manipulate laws for their own purposes. The same improvements could be made in international laws.” (Ossening, (NY.) I). [return to index](#)*

3.2 Perceived weaknesses in the rule of law in Islam or in particular Muslim states

⁸¹ *“In the Muslim judicial system are the following weaknesses:*

- *It is subject to external economic pressures;*
- *Corruption is rife and apparent;*
- *Economic and class barriers to access;*
- *Lack of judicial accountability leading to inconsistency in judgment;*
- *Appointed judges;*
- *Lack of independence;*
- *Gender and race imbalance.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)*

⁸² *“An elementary form of justice is dispensed by Mullahs who apply 14th Century rules to modern times and with no popular representation and undeveloped legal structures. In these countries, such as Saudi Arabia, there is no protection for the individual and his rights.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)*

^{82A} *“No Islamic country has a pure Sharia system, though some parts are operated. The most notorious systems are not truly Sharia.” (North West London). [Return to index](#)*

⁸⁴ *“Weakness in Islamic law is not in the concept but in the application. Equal access is not working: wealthy vs. the poor and/or weak. The wealthy have better representation, counsel, etc.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

⁸⁵ *“Civil or criminal; again wealth, social-economic status and gender play a part in the application of the law.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)*

⁸⁶ *“Weaknesses: hand chopping, adultery stumping.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)*

RESPECT FOR LAW AND THE RULE OF LAW – KEY STATEMENTS

“Legal systems could be improved by minimizing the rule of money and power, the ability of the rich and powerful to manipulate laws for their own purposes.” (Ossening, (NY.) I). [return to index](#)

3.3 Explanations and comments on Sharia law

⁸⁸ *“People misunderstand the true Sharia law, they don’t realise that the physical punishment within it is rare and the last resort, and not as extreme as is often thought; for example you would not cut off someone’s hand, only the tip of their finger, and this would only be in a rare case.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

⁸⁹ *“In Islam when selecting people to be judges you select the most honest people. It is often hard to get people to agree to be a judge, because they feel inadequate: ‘I might make a mistake.’” (Boston I). [return to index](#)*

⁹⁰ *“Judges can consult anyone in order to find the truth. They are fully empowered, they have unlimited power to find the truth. They don’t have to rely merely on what the lawyers present.” (Boston I). [return to index](#)*

⁹¹ *“Concerning punishment, the Sharia tries to check serious crime, and this is right. Non-Muslims say ‘surely physical punishment is not civilized.’ In Islam we don’t believe in incarceration.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

⁹² *“Under Islam, there is no forced conversion; the rights of the conquered people are always respected.” (Boston I). [return to index](#)*

⁹³ *“In the Middle-East, law-school is not popular. People are more interested in becoming doctors, engineers, and teachers than lawyers. People don’t seek to make a living this way: it is seen as a profession of last resort. People don’t sue each other, most disputes are mediated before going to court.” (Boston I). [return to index](#)*

⁹⁴ *“A scholar system ensures that a lawyer cannot make a decision by himself.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

⁹⁵ *“Saudi Arabia implements total Islamic law, Shariat, which with many cases of crime, a severe punishment is presented, such as the cutting of the hand of the one who stole something. Yet a huge factor in this form of criminal justice is that a witness is always needed. Justice is used more with severe consequences for crime. Islam also has a strong foundation of “Divine Justice”. If a crime is not justified within this world, God will reward/punish in the hereafter.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

4. GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY – KEY STATEMENTS

4.1 Introduction

Justice is shown to be the paramount principle of Islam in relation to what the West calls governance. International justice is emphasized perhaps because of the current climate in world events, both political and economic.

Key Statements

4.2 Conceptions of Justice and Equity

⁹⁷ *“Muslims value justice as a thing held particularly dear, sacred, in the non-religious sense. It is the core value in Islam. It concerns the father and son relationship; it concerns dispute over land and fairness, because of the consequences in the next world.”* (Leicester). [return to index](#)

“The purpose of the Muslim life is to achieve justice; it can’t be achieved by mankind, only God can achieve it perfectly. Concerning God and man, God forgives and dispenses Justice. Concerning man and man, each one pays for past wrongs.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)

⁹⁹ *“Justice is tied to the psyche of Muslims because it is referenced repetitively in the Qur’an. Islam teaches equality of all humanity and everyone has a right to justice. Most Muslims live in the third world where there is misdistribution of wealth. Mercy is also very important to Muslims. Muslims cannot look at themselves as superior, they must apply justice equally.”* (Dearborn I). [return to index](#)

¹⁰⁰ *“Equal access to food, education, healthcare (the individual’s basic needs) based on the Qur’an should be equitable, not based on geographical boundaries.”* (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)

¹⁰¹ *“Attainment of equality for all human beings in all spheres of life (God, self, family, community, environment, Muslims, non-Muslims, society, nation, world).”* (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)

¹⁰² *“The priority of justice over equality.”* (New York I). [return to index](#)

¹⁰³ *“When fishing or hunting don’t take more than one needs.”* (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)

“One woman said: Equity is not necessarily justice. It is justice tempered with mercy.” (New York I).

GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY – KEY STATEMENTS

¹⁰⁵ “ *Economic equity is more important than equity of freedom.*” (Ossening, (NY.) I). [return to index](#)

¹⁰⁶ “ *Benevolent use of personal resources is the best means of redistribution of wealth rather than secular progressive tax structures.*” (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)

4.3 Criticisms of the West

“ *Other injustices in order of importance: global famine, food not linked to need, the European Common Agricultural Policy; Global trade: unfair political support by wealthy western nations and unfair trade practises.*” (Mauritius).

“ *Injustice: lack of clean drinking water.*” (Mauritius).

“ *Injustice: pollution/dumping of nuclear waste, poor countries are bribed to accept it.*” (Mauritius).

“ *During the first election of Bush, the Florida vote was rigged. If you can't even trust the system when you vote, there is a chain reaction.*” (North West London).

¹¹¹ “ *As Muslims we feel we are the target of injustice and this forms our opinion of what justice is. A clash of civilizations is manufactured.*” (North West London). [return to index](#)

“ *Democracy in US foreign policy (unilateral vs. multilateral) ‘with us or against us’ is very bothersome to Muslims. The universal idea of brotherhood is difficult to embrace when the brothers you aspire to, apply universal ideas but not universally (drop bombs, apply different views re: genocide (Bosnia, as an example). When Saudi Arabia is openly supported by the USA, the appeal of universal justice rings hollow for many Muslims. There is the belief that they are very much under western control / CIA payroll, etc. It is no longer colonial, but tyranny all the same. They did not allow for democracies that oppose the West, e.g. Morocco, Iran, Algeria, Brunei.*” (Chicago).

¹¹³ “ *The average American is far wealthier than most people in the world but does not feel obligated to share with those less fortunate who live in other countries. Americans have not been taught to feel they are part of the global community.*” (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)

¹¹⁴ “ *The problem is that security is now more fundamental than justice. After 9/11 a rebalance took place of human rights as against security. September 11th, traumatic. Equilibrium from early 1950's was disturbed: very dangerous. This government took it as an excuse to do what they wanted to do anyway. Now there is no real sense of justice with respect to people whose rights are being impaired, especially Muslims. We will probably not have the freedom to go back to the same equilibrium.*” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY – KEY STATEMENTS

¹¹⁶ *“If there is another military conflict we (Muslims in the US) could be under military control. There is fear, insecurity. If you don’t have security you don’t care about justice. If injustice goes so far that you are willing to risk your own life: revenge.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)*

¹¹⁷ *“Our discussion, however, highlighted deep dissatisfaction with the injustices which are created, allowed and perpetuated elsewhere in the world by western nations in the name of democracy. The West and its apparently democratic governments were criticised for supporting unjust regimes when they served western interests. The support of the United States of America for the regime in Pakistan was given as an example of the double standards applied by the West when their own economic or strategic interests were at stake. The regimes in the UAE and Saudi Arabia were also cited as examples of undemocratic governments supported by the West. One Muslim participant referred to ‘dictators put there by the West.’ A Christian participant rejected this view. While admitting that western nations do interfere in the process of government in other countries, including Islamic states, he believed that the idea that the West imposes dictators on other nations was a myth. Some of the participants, however, did not believe it was a myth and referred to the way in which America and Britain have supported the government of Saudi Arabia as a prime example of western double standards – attacking countries like Russia for being undemocratic while preventing democracy in other places.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)*

¹¹⁸ *“Our discussion also considered the way in which western nations had connived at corruption and injustice in the abuse of UN Aid for oil funding and felt deeply offended that powerful western nations can behave in such a self-interested way. Such failures within apparently democratic nations do not help other nations to welcome democracy. Some of our participants felt strongly that the West had both hindered the development of democracy, as in Iran, and rejected democratically elected governments if they claimed to be Islamic. The examples of Turkey and Algeria were given as places where democratically elected governments had been rejected by the West. It was suspected that western nations were fearful of what would happen if an elected Islamic government took over, in case this harmed western interests or led to the abolition of laws and civil rights.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)*

“On the contrary, participants suggested that the regimes which preceded such governments were often oppressive dictatorships and should be replaced by elected civilian governments, even if they are not of the kind the West would like. It was felt that the experience of responsibility in government would help elected Islamic leaders to act in the interests of all their people, and that elected leaders would not destroy what they had won. Such governments should be allowed to flourish. The attitude of most Muslim (and Christian) participants was summed up by the comment that in looking at the relationship between democratic western nations and the rest of the world, ‘there is no fairness.’” (Leicester). See section 9.7 for important considerations possibly indirectly relating to democracy in the last statement. [return to index](#)

5.1 Introduction

The character of materialism and its perceived identification with the West was discussed.

Key Statements

5.2 Nature of materialism

¹²¹ “All people of faith find materialism offensive in the US and outside the US.” (Dearborn I). [return to index](#)

¹²² “Muslims are offended by creating a want rather than addressing a need, by psychological manipulation.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)

“What are considered most shocking about western behaviour and attitudes is sexual morals, free sex (both heterosexual and homosexual) and the fact that this is formalised by legislation. Gay weddings are totally unacceptable.

³⁹⁹ Muslims are reassessing the consumerism that has crept into Dubai, Abu Dhabi and even Jeddah.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)

¹²⁴ “Advertising takes up so much mind-space; identifying with brands and popular culture.

“Poverty and despair”; people hope to have the same things as blond-haired people. How do you make them feel equal?” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

¹²⁵ “One should turn over wealth to society to help each other. One should oppose hedonism, it is never too late. Other civilizations have gone through high and low. Those who say it is too late go to the hills with Bin Laden.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

5.3 How materialism affects society

¹²⁶ “Western society has lost its guidelines and has become completely unchristianed. It has plunged wholeheartedly into materialism.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)

¹²⁷ “Muslims are offended by Christian proselytizers, handing out food with conversion as a part of the equation. Locally Christians tried to convert Muslims with a party. Halal hot dogs.” (Dearborn I). [return to index](#)

5.4 Global effects

“Bin Laden wants to represent the impoverished masses.” (ChiCago).

¹²⁹ “Bin Laden wants to identify materialism of the West as being evil.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

6. CULTURAL SPECIFICITY – KEY STATEMENTS

6.1 Introduction

This subject was introduced to enable views on the cultural aspects of human rights to be expressed, however the discussions were broader.

6.2 Key Statements

¹³⁰ *“Even in a more western setting as France, hijab is an issue, as the French government is wanting to bar wearing of the head scarf as it is a ‘symbol of religion.’ Yet what concerns Muslims is that (A) hijab is not a symbol but an act of worship (Khadija Mostafu) and (B) banning it would not stop Muslim women who do cover on a daily basis from wearing it. Hijab for Muslim women is a sign of respect and modesty. Why is it that when a women covers more she is perceived as oppressed, less when a woman is covered yet she is liberated?” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

“A second example: shaking hands in Islam between a woman and a man who are not related or married is extremely prohibited. In general women and men who are not related/married are not to touch AT ALL; this fact of Islam differs from other religions. The physical interaction between male and female is prohibited, as Muslims believe that it is not proper, and it may even lead to sinful acts; not to say a simple handshake is equal to sex, but in essence the intermingling has major effects, as many relationships begin in simple social settings. Dating in Islam is also prohibited for both genders. Marriage is the only formal and recognized form of companionship between Muslim males and females. The male and female should lower their gaze and ward off any sinful temptations.” (San Diego).

¹³² *“It is common practice in most Islamic communities today to make a convert to Islam feel as if he is changing his national identity to that of someone of a different tribe or nation. A Canadian convert recently was made to believe that his western dress was inappropriate for the ceremony of Shahad. But the Qur’an (49:13) states that the intention is to keep the identity of the convert intact.” (South London III, individual written statement by Muslim relative of a participant.) [return to index](#)*

¹³³ *“Political: in many Muslim-dominated countries culture and religion are narrowly defined even to the point where some people may try and use religion as a justification for culture. First and foremost as Muslims we have not the right nor can we introduce new laws into Islam.” It is a known thing in Islam to differentiate over culture between one’s religion and if one’s culture interferes with one’s way of life then it is no longer a consistent part of their culture, it is ruled out by religion. There is no cultural uniformity as Muslims cover many different ethnicities.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY – KEY STATEMENTS

⁴³⁵ “Among Muslims and Christians contraception, education and work for women are widely accepted. Besides the traditional role-sharing between the sexes is changing from patriarchal to a more consensual egalitarian pattern.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)

¹³⁶ “Double standards in Muslim life:

- Muslim boys take advantage of Christian girls not of Muslim girls. It is not right;
- Boy’s word taken over girl’s.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)

¹³⁷ “Islamic women at the beginning had more rights than any women in the world; however they have lost many of them.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)

¹³⁸ “This group senses that our religions are close, but the cultures may not be.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)

“The Qur’an talks about the right to life.” (New York I).

¹⁴⁰ “Culture is dress, genital mutilation, honor killing and most gender roles, Islamic law allows for local customs.” (New York I). [return to index](#)

¹⁴¹ “The Qur’an does affirm the full humanity of the female. It is not inherently paternalistic.” (New York I). [return to index](#)

7. FREEDOM AND SELF-GOVERNMENT – KEY STATEMENTS

7.1 Introduction

This subject was introduced to give the opportunity for views on colonialism and post-colonialism to be expressed. The subject is an aspect of global justice.

7.2 Key Statements

“Muslims felt they acted less actively in taking action and lobbying those in power, but Muslims have less freedom to speak out in Muslim countries.” (Leicester).

“Freedom from colonialism is now threatened by ‘economic colonization.’ Wealthy nations, including the G7, are imposing a new type of servitude on weaker countries. Powerful lobbies in developed countries are dictating policies that affect poorer nations. Much injustice is apparent in trade agreements. Those of the WTO as well as the European Common Agricultural Policy have further impoverished many nations. Powerful nations do not consider generosity towards weaker ones.” (Mauritius).

¹⁴⁴ *“Europe is more charitable giving towards Islamic development aid. US gives the least in foreign aid in terms of GNP, and it is tied to military aid. America’s role is military force. Feel we can never keep countries in line by making alliances with authoritarian regimes.*

US has become the lifeline of Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Tunisia.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

¹⁴⁵ *“With regard to Egypt:*

- Egypt is the heart and soul of the Muslim Arab world;*
- Arab nationalism and the Muslim world;*
- Civil societies, artists and Parliament, all stalled under martial law;*
- They have well-formed groups, but they are not allowed to meet;*
- Receives an enormous amount of dollars from the US;*
- Has leverage;*
- Civil groups in the US could make contact with groups in Egypt;*
- Whatever dollars come from the US do not trickle down to the society;*
- The middle class is living precariously and they have awareness but no opportunity- they get crushed.*
- The Muslim brotherhood is middle class and it has helped in Pakistan and Egypt.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)*

¹⁴⁶ *“ Christians as a whole should dispel the myth that there is NOT total support for Right-wing Religion (Editor’s Note: i.e. the religious Christian Right in the US. Presumably the intention of the statement is the reverse of its actual wording.). They*

FREEDOM AND SELF-GOVERNMENT – KEY STATEMENTS

should correct misunderstanding and marginalize the extremists on both sides.”
(Chicago). [return to index](#)

8. CIVIL SOCIETY – KEY STATEMENTS

8.1 Introduction

This subject was introduced to enable Muslims to comment on the non-political aspects of governance.

8.2 Key Statements

¹⁴⁷ *“In Islam you do not need conflict and pluralism in society, because you would be moving towards a common goal. Islam is a whole system, there are rules in Islam for the government, so the government and all organisations work according to the same religious guidelines. This would only work perfectly with a perfect leader. Otherwise there may be variances due to interpretation.”* (North West London). [return to index](#)

“Mauritius youth feel a bit frustrated with Muslim dignitaries whose ways of thinking and teaching religion are often outmoded, narrow-minded and irrelevant. The idea is to play down Islamic principles in the modern world, which would make it easier to establish bridges with other such associations or other groups and perhaps, have some common activities. It would be helpful if some government funding were made available to NGOs without any threat to their independence.” (Mauritius).

FULL REPORT - RECORD OF ALL STATEMENTS IN FULL

Note on order of statements

- 1) In each subject the categories into which the statements are sorted are different from those in the Key Statements because the statements are set out in full, and each often covers more than one subject.
- 2) It should be noted that the statements are exactly in the form reported by the group reporters. In some cases, statements and parts of them are repeated where relevant to more than one issue.
- 3) Statements also occurring in the summary are marked with a diamond (◆).

Nature of statements

As there was deliberately no attempt in the discussions to arrive at common conclusions, it must be remembered that contrary views and varying strengths of feeling will be found in each group.



9. IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM ?

9.1 Essential reservation regarding democracy

At the start of the discussion on democracy an introductory note was read out so that the participants knew the full range of the issues to be involved. They were asked not to get distracted by peculiarities in British or US democratic practices, but to consider the essentials of democracy as consisting of: one person one vote; the government to comply with the majority opinion of the elected representatives; protection of minorities in countries where there was likely to be a permanent minority, (whether racial, ethnic or religious) and, lastly, that an election by one person, one vote resulting in the elected representative body giving up its powers and admitting an undemocratic form of government (“one person, one vote, one time”) was not to be regarded as government by democratic processes for the purpose of the discussions.

The reservations in the statements below as to the sovereignty of Islam indicate that the practical working of the parliament of a predominantly Muslim country, which was democratic on all secular matters, would be limited when an Islamic requirement is involved. Such a parliament would not be permitted to alter Muslim tenets for citizens who accept the Muslim faith. The attitude of such citizens concerning, for example the scope of Sharia, would involve varying degrees of limitation on an otherwise democratic parliamentary system. The issue, however, would appear to be a question of degree, not of principle. The US Congress, though in a very different context, is not sovereign because of the separation of powers established in the US Constitution.

There are some 38 statements from the discussions directly or indirectly indicating that democracy shall not lead to laws contrary to the Qur’an. These are to be found throughout the statements set out below, sometimes expressed and at other times implied in the arguments put forward.

Although attention may inevitably go to the more arresting statements, it should be noted that the largest section of statements in this category covers those supportive of democracy.

Statements

◆ “Nothing contrary to Islam shall happen.” (Leicester).

¹⁴⁹ “A democratic constitution should enshrine Islamic fundamental belief, as in the west the US constitution does for belief for the West, and is open to change (as in the west; for example the right to private property) but like the West this is very unlikely, virtually impossible. This would safeguard key elements of Islamic belief.” (City of London young office workers). [return to index](#)

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM?

¹⁷² “To appoint a just leader what would need to happen? One man would have to divinely rule.” (South London I). [return to index](#)

◆ “Many Muslims feel that democracy is compatible with Islam provided the person in power implement’s God’s laws. Extremists are not representative of Islam. How would an Islamic country be governed? Religion would be used as a guideline and new laws enacted to deal with new problems.” (South London I).

◆ “Government not going against views of elected representatives means operating within the spirit of divine guidance of the Qur’an.” (Minneapolis).

◆ “I look at democracy through my faith (Islam). I agree within the Muslim context. Laws should agree with the Constitution; the Constitution is the Qur’an which sets the legal tone. Islamic law is strict (Christians have more choice). Discipline, basis moral codes, respect. Democracy is an evolving thing and can be improved. Nomocracy.” (Dearborn I).

¹⁵⁰ “Sharia is critically important. They did not expect Christians or secular friends to live according to Muslim standards or vice versa (this is in a college). Muslim religion is a way of life and hard to separate their religion from the surrounding country.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)

¹⁵¹ “The process of choosing one representative is in the belief that this person would be able to make the right decisions. Democracy is not the way. It invites room for corruption, changing and worsening generations making matters of taboo into passed laws, condoning bad behaviour of political and religious groups. Democracy moves its goals especially for politicians. Politics has grasped religion as an instrument of emotion to control the masses. Islam is an acceptance of different governments, Muslims have traditionally voted for the best man for the job after our Prophet.” (South London I). [return to index](#)

◆ “Democracy is part of Islam but principles are dictated in general in the Qur’an rather than written by people.” (Savannah).

^{151A} “As Muslims we believe that man has no rights, God is sovereign. Democracy and western governments are good at creating myths. In Islam everyone is subject to the Sharia. In western society everyone is allowed to pursue their own conception of the good.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)

◆ “Religious institutions with a prophetic voice are required particularly in a secular society, though they would not advocate the role of the Ayatollah in Iran, and that where Islam is a minority religion as in the UK they want the Church of England to remain established to maintain the prophetic/spiritual voice.” (Leicester).

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◆“Democracy is not incompatible with Islam. Islam is not anti-democratic. Provided democracy is seen as a limited form of popular sovereignty, restricted and directed by God’s law, it is compatible with Islam. Secular western democracy is not compatible because it is based solely on the sovereignty of the people. Popular sovereignty is rejected completely because Islamic states should be based on consultation or Shura (interpretation of Sharia) and this is all-encompassing so humans cannot create their own legal system beyond the Qur’an and Sharia. Elections equate to blasphemy. When Muslim politicians and spiritual leader say “El-Islam-Howa-Al-Hal” they are saying that Islam is the solution to everything. To those who believe this Islam is better than democracy. Yet the Qur’an does not offer an ideal political system. It praises collective decision-making for the common good (42:38), the Qur’an elevates collective decision-making from a recommendation to a requirement (3:159). Thus if democracy provides a means by which to make decisions collectively then it appears to be compatible with Islam. Many Muslim scholars say that western democratic values are the same as traditional Islam, Justice (Adl), Right (Haqq), collective decision-making (Shura) and Equality (Musqwat). None of the Muslims at this discussion believe that secular rather than God-given laws were sinful.” (Boston II Students).

◆“You cannot have true democracy without justice and justice is a fundamental concept in Islam. Democracy is the most contested concept in history and one person one vote cannot be the solution because if 60% agree on sex before marriage and 40% don’t, they become suicide bombers.” (Central London I). **Editor’s Note: This is the only statement advocating undemocratic responses to a democracy which exceeds the bounds of the Qur’an.**

◆“The government not going against the views of elected representatives means operating within the spirit of divine guidance of the Qur’an.” (Minneapolis).

“Laws should agree with the Constitution. The Constitution is the Qur’an which sets the legal tone.” (Dearborn I).

Editor’s Note: The statement below qualifies the above regarding religious authorities taking part in government.

◆“Defining the role of religious authorities, and drawing the legal path for religious figures to become political figures. No one shall abuse their religious powers for personal and political gains. If you are going to be part of the public life, then we need to know your religious beliefs and biases and you may not use your religious influence to coerce the public to follow your will.” (Dearborn II).

9.2 Governance and Islam

The starting point for Muslims in considering government seems to be, as seen from these discussion meetings, the place of consensus and/or consultation in the Qur’an and among Mohammed’s immediate successors. The following statements show the

IS DEMOCRACY COMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM?

strength of the influence of traditional consensus and consultation on attitudes to democracy.

Statements

The importance of consensus in Islam

◆ *“In Muslim politics there is a tradition of trying to achieve consensus after consultation in the community.” (Wimbledon).*

◆ *“Islam is to do with how you get the sense of the people, how are their interest and needs represented, and all of them not just the majority.” (Boston I).*

“The Qur’an does not offer all the integers for an ideal political system, hence the legitimacy of attempting to find the best solution, while praising collective decision for the common good (Qur’an 42:48). Hence the Qur’an elevates collective decision-making for the common good from a recommendation to a requirement (Qur’an 3:159).” (Boston II Students).

◆ *“Stress importance of community and consultation persisting until a common policy is arrived at. This gives a greater sense of community.” (New York I).*

◆ *“Consultation for a consensus.” (Mauritius).*

Relaxation of requirement for consensus

“As we really work at trying to create structures for society where we are up against some really tough things like where should we be making decisions on majority rule vs. consensus. So specifically I have a wish that we be able to continue talking about some of these things as we are beginning to trust each other and get to some harder topics.” (Delaware).

¹⁵⁵ *“Muslims decide by debate and discussion and the majority view prevails.” (Bury St. Edmunds). [return to index](#)*

¹⁵⁶ *“But in Islam we have a system. There has always been consultation throughout Islamic history and if scholars cannot decide on a ruling they go for the majority view. A consensus is reached by scholars. We need to refer to the learned ones.” (East London Students). [return to index](#)*

The importance of consultation in Islam

In other statements consultation without the necessity of consensus is called for.

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¹⁵⁷ *“The essential features in democracy: education, respect, inclusion, freedom, liberty, result of education, choice, responsibility, Shura that is consultation, a type of democracy in Islam.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

“Should take account of information which the people have.” (Leicester).

◆ *“Islamic legacy of governments is participatory and may be informal.” (New York I).*

¹⁵⁸ *“All should have the opportunity to pronounce on important subjects.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“Christian members of the discussions call for one man one vote, power sharing, preference for the poor (liberal theology), separation of powers spiritual and temporal, local and regional representation to enable minorities to be represented, that MPs are representatives not delegates, accountability of elected representatives. The Muslim participants commented that all this takes note of the individual whereas the Muslim view takes more account of the community.” (Leicester).*

◆ *“There is a gap between ideal and reality and always has been with regard to Muslim principles of consultation.” (Bury St. Edmunds).*

◆ *“Islam has the tradition of direct consultation. Before trying to organise democracy you must organise people into groups and discuss the family.” (South London I).*

“A potential system should take account of information which the people have, indicating that elections with universal suffrage do not necessarily answer all problems. The playing down of democracy in extreme.” (Chicago).

¹⁶¹ *“Islamic councils should “remind” rather than dictate important principles in Islam to give others the right to their point of view.” (Central London I). [return to index](#)*

³³³ *“Islam embraces consultation and is watchful for oppression of a minority.” (New York I). [return to index](#)*

“The model for governing in Islam keeps coming back to justice and consultation, working with others to get the right outcome.” (Boston I).

◆ *“Consultation means you go to the leader and meet and discuss a problem. For some places one person one vote works but cannot be applied in every country.” (South London I).*

¹⁶⁴ *“Muslims decline the position of parties and groups. The leader does not ask to lead, he is acknowledged and chosen by the people because of his honesty, religion and devotion to God. Things are done through the Shura. Democracy is western, consultation is Islamic. Education is an important part of a democratic country.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

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¹⁶⁵ “However another member of this somewhat extreme student group replied that the learned ones are ‘stooges’ of the western system. We should not listen to them.” (East London Students). [return to index](#)

◆“As to one person one vote, all persons do not have the same value (as far as voting goes). Those with more knowledge have more weight concerning decisions. The way that governing should function under Islam is like a conciliation that might happen in a private company: seek out the appropriate people with knowledge and experience about an issue in order to make the right decision, using every available resource to get the best outcome. In the Qur’an those with authority are ordered to seek consultation to deliberate to get the right advice from the right advisers.” (Boston I).

¹⁶⁶ “Moses was ruling by Islam: Implementing Islam. The word of God that never changes; Then the word of Mohamed, that tells how to rule. Islam is a complete way of life. The mutual consultation, this tells us how to rule people: People choose the leader, and then the leader and the people are all bound by the rules of God.” (Delaware). [return to index](#)

¹⁶⁷ “We don’t say a clergy said to kill this man. No, we say what God said, what is mandatory (prayers, fasting), forbidden (alcohol, murder, . . .) recommended (charity), detested (smoking) allowed or permitted (but this never goes against the first four).” (Delaware). [return to index](#)

Idealistic attitudes

¹⁶⁸ “Of Muslim forms of government it was said that ‘leadership is not for personal power and the leader’s motives are different from those in the West’.” (North West London). [return to index](#)

¹⁶⁹ “In normal Muslim society the corrupt do not get into power, it being immediately added that currently there is no true Islamic system operating anywhere.” (North West London). [return to index](#)

◆“The prophetic system of government may be the only mode of government fundamentally compatible with Islamic ideology but it broke down so early that there is no ideal Islamic system that can be used as a model and therefore democracy could be ideologically compatible with Islam.” (City of London, young office workers).

¹⁷⁰ “The ideal Islamic ruler would be decided by the majority and should be the most competent person.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)

¹⁷¹ “Islam does include different systems to represent the faith taking different forms of government. Islam is an acceptance of different governments. Muslims have traditionally voted for the best man for the job after our Prophet.” (South London I). [return to index](#)

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“To appoint a just leader what would to need happen? One man would have to divinely rule.” (South London I).

¹⁷³ *“But as Muslims say Islam ruled for 1000 years:
the human nature was there to submit to God: honesty was there.
God created all people with these values.
The ceiling the law of God is the same for all people.
In Islam we don't have any conflict, because we all have the Qu'ran.” (Delaware). [return to index](#)*

“Islam always is to hold to the concept of balance.” (New York I).

“Islam desires discipline, basic moral codes and respect.” (Dearborn I).

“The common good must be the aim of democracy.” (Mauritius).

◆ *“We need to find within the Qur'an a suitable system. Democracy is not suitable for several reasons. It is based on European ideas of the prime importance of the individual. In the M.E. the important thing is the community. The family, the clan, the tribe and on up. Historically it was the Qur'an that united warring tribes.” (Vermont II).*

“I did not say I was a Muslim [during the introductions] because I am your brother. I was raised with rules. If I obey God, God rewards us most generously. But if we disobey his way he tells us what is in store for us. I am to treat you better than myself. That is Democracy. That is the word from God how to live together.” (Delaware).

¹⁷⁸ *“Islam is to submit to God. There is no coercion, the truth stands out clear from error. We have to reject people who try to coerce towards change.” (Delaware). [return to index](#)*

“Our group discussed inconclusively whether there should be more focus on moving away from electing people to appointing them in the platonic style.” (Leicester).

◆ *“The Qur'an is more than a religious text. It is a “code of life” defining limitations on behaviour in the affairs of men. In the west there are no limitations. In Islam as things change/evolve a group of people who know their religion decide how to adapt the rules extrapolating the Qur'an. This is a better form of democracy.” (Central London I).*

9.3 Democracy through one person one vote

The following sections set out the full statements on democracy by one person one vote. It should be noted that the statements least supportive of one person one vote have been put first followed by more supportive statements.

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Statements

Negative towards democracy

Statements referring to democracy which, in varying degrees are negative as to democracy, but it might be concluded, only on pragmatic grounds.

◆ *“Democracy is very much a western concept but we cannot accept it as a global concept because the US is not allowing democracy to flourish around the world. If the West actually honored democracy it would make a lot more sense.” (New York I).*

“Before trying to organise democracy you must organise people into groups and discuss. The family is the nucleus and key determining society, if it is strongly based on culture and religion. But today religion has no influence. Democracy without religion is anarchy. There is also corruption in western democratic countries e.g. Switzerland. Democracy can also be a tool to work against religion e.g. the ban on religious symbols at school. The democratic leader has a lot of control depending on the faith and belief and guidance of the leader.” (South London I).

◆ *“There is a danger that votes are a sham. Votes lead to an elected dictatorship. The individual gets lost in a democratic bureaucracy. The representatives and the government they select may be selfish and not the best. Groups, for example lobbies, can hijack democracies. In the US there is criticism of the close relationship between funding and campaigning and the undue influence of the rich.” (Leicester).*

“A more subtle approach than in Iraq must be pursued. It is impossible to do away with an ideology by force of weapons. Democracy cannot be implemented from outside nor by subversive means. It is quite possible that the western model of democracy may not be, and most likely is not applicable to the Islamic world.” (Central London II, written statement).

◆ *“Democracy does not develop quickly or easily and the US should not try to impose its form of democracy on the world. Democracy comes from a western perspective; Muslims are not necessarily ‘anti-democratic’. The West created nation states and now they say they must go: it puts you off democracy. This is a complaint about how the Arab world was carved up after the First World War.” (New York I).*

“There is no existing model US or western European as a model for all others to follow. Each system has strengths and weaknesses. Greed for power and wealth especially in the US is a powerful deterrent to a truly democratic state. No Islamic country has had enough experience of democracy to be helpful to others in finding a workable compatible structure congenial to a democratic government.” (Louisville).

◆ *“In theory democracy sounds good but in practice it has many flaws, it can be said to express the will of the people, but this is not what happens. We should question the whole political system. As Muslims we believe that Islam shows up the failure of democracy, of*

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western democracy, MPs do not necessarily reflect the views of the people. As Muslims we believe that man has no right, God is sovereign, democracies in western governments are good at creating myths, illusions.” (East London Students).

“Democracy is more like propaganda. In US it is a lie, it is propaganda. If you have money and power you control. The common people cannot get their voice heard. It is against human nature. Man will see himself as the oppressor when he sees himself as self-sufficient.” (Delaware).

♦ *“Islam has global aspirations but we are not interested in detonating bombs. In the west to vote you have no real choice you have to choose between two evils, you don’t have a real alternative, there is no point of going for the lesser evil. But how much knowledge do voters actually have? The influence of the media is strong and decisions are easily manipulated. You have to choose between two evils.” Another replied: “Muslims should respect the law of the land and use our votes to change it.” (East London Students).*

“What shall I do when I don’t know right and wrong? Go with the majority or go with the word of God?” (Delaware).

¹⁸⁶ *“Democracy, demo, demon (devil), guided by devils. The west is master of democracy today but they are liars, there is not real democracy.” (South London I). [return to index](#)*

¹⁸⁷ *“In Islam you settle your affairs by counselling among yourselves, a body of people decides interpolation (**sic**) while in western democracy it is an elected dictatorship. We do not need this type of system as the greatest setback to democracy is the supporting of dictatorship.” (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)*

Neutral to democracy

“For some places one person one vote works but it cannot be applied in every country. We need a secular government to represent more fully the numbers of religions like in India.” (South London I).

♦ *“What is the ideological position of democracy in an Islamic state? Is it an ideal in itself or merely a pragmatic means of achieving better government? This should shape the way western governments presented democracy to the Islamic world.” (City of London, young office workers).*

“There is not a political climate for debate and the free exchange of ideas in the Middle East. Opportunities for developing this stopped in the 13th Century. The electorate needs to be involved for a democracy to be effective; and that means heavy voter participation, education, through the school system and grass-roots organizations that produce leaders. The elements working against a truly democratic government are poverty, illiteracy, dominant military, instability, imported structures, and greed.” (Louisville).

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“The process of choosing one representative is in the belief that this person would be able to make the right decisions. Democracy is not the way. It invites room for corruption, changing and worsening generations making matters of taboo into passed laws, condoning bad behaviour of political and religious groups. Democracy moves its goals especially for politicians. Politics has grasped religion as an instrument of emotion to control the masses. Islam is an acceptance of different governments, Muslims have traditionally voted for the best man for the job after our Prophet.

◆ *“Many Muslims feel that democracy is compatible with Islam provided the person in power implements God’s laws. Extremists are not representative of Islam. How would an Islamic country be governed? Religion would be used as a guideline and new laws enacted to deal with new problems.” (South London I).*

“One member asked whether democracy is the way to decide in regard to the Iraq war, e.g., where there is strong opposition.” (South London I).

“The need to promote constructive ideas and street level understanding; there is concern at some of the media. In Muslim polity there is a tradition of trying to achieve consensus after consultation in the community. Islamic countries are evolving and this natural process must be allowed. However one of the participants said what is the point of voting and another added one needs NGOs, civil society as well as democracy.” (Wimbledon).

“Is it possible to see Democracy as an ideal or only as we see it today?” (Delaware).

◆ *“Religious institutions with a prophetic voice are required particularly in a secular society, though they would not advocate the role of the ayatollah in Iran, and that where Islam is a minority religion, as in the UK, they want the Church of England to remain established to maintain the prophetic/spiritual voice.” (Leicester).*

Cautious Statements concerning the merits and acceptability of democracy

¹⁹⁴ *“There was a call to get people involved in the democratic process and to encourage respect for elected representatives which indicated a sense that ‘one person one vote’ does not provide an automatic answer to the issue of good government.” (Leicester).*
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◆ *“There is no conflict between democracy and Islam provided it is a mechanism for ruling and checks and balances on governments and not an ideology, that is a supremacist ideology.” (Bury St. Edmunds).*

¹⁹⁶ *“One person one vote is best by default of other solutions, with room for improvement.” (Chicago).* [return to index](#)

“The limitations on democracy should not be an excuse for not allowing democratic government.” (Mauritius).

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“Linking Islam to authoritarianism creates the false impression that Islam and democracy are incompatible, colonialism may have been a major cause of the ability of authoritarianism to take root in the Middle East but this does not mean that a movement from within cannot put it right by the immense collective powers which the citizens of the Middle East possess.” (New York III, written statement).

^{198A} ♦ *“One person one vote is an imperfect system but we all feel we had a positive experience with it. Education is essential to be able to act on one’s right to participate. However others with money have an amplified voice.” (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)*

“I look at democracy through my faith and agree within the Muslim context.” (Dearborn I).

“Islamic law is strict while Christians have more choice. Discipline, basic moral codes, respect, democracy is an evolving thing and can be improved.” (Dearborn I).

“The government should not go against the views of elected representatives operating within the spirit of divine guidance of the Qur’an.” (Minneapolis).

♦ *“Democracy represents the people who vote, only the silent majority do not participate, causing dissatisfaction with the election results and misrepresentation. The individual has responsibility for the nation to make his or her vote heard otherwise it is a fake democracy.” (Savannah)*

“We need a vehicle, but at the same time, we (the US) have evolved.

Maybe when our country first started those things were more true. We need a vehicle but at the same time we have evolved to a state where we think democracy is the best model. Now we offer democracy to others whether they like it or not. We are not going to teach them. If we go and assimilate side by side, eat with them, show respect for elders, women folk, then they begin to start learning.” (Delaware).

“Freedom of speech, especially for minorities and the ease of voting access is essential to have more participation and hence better representation for the populace.” (Savannah).

²⁰⁴ *“There is no clash between Islam and democracy as long as there is a separation between religion and the state. There is a clash because of the notion of sovereignty in Islam, what is right is defined by God and the Qur’an. The democratic idea is that sovereignty is defined by the majority of the people. This is a fundamental clash with Islamic principles. Islam is a better and a more real form of democracy than exists in the west where democracy is really an elected dictatorship.” (Central London I). [return to index](#)*

♦ *“The Qur’an is more than a religious text, it is a code for life defining limitations on behaviour in their affairs of men. In the west there are no limitations. In Islam things change or evolve. A group of people who know their religion decide how to adapt the rules extrapolating the Qur’an; this is a better form of democracy.*

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^{204A} *Can Islam be separated from Government? Islam is a way of life not just a religion, the Qur'an providing a kind of Constitution. Using the Qur'an it is very hard to come up with a single unified political system. It is in Arabic and most of us are not Arabic speakers. Even for Arabic speakers the Qur'an is difficult to read. It is possible to have a successful functioning state under Islam. For centuries the Islamic world was the civilized world. Maybe it is possible to have different spheres of influence; the state is responsible for finances and Islamic authorities for other areas. But at the end of the day in Islam they must come together somehow. Malaysia is a good example of a well-functioning Islamic state. It is not because religion is less important in Malaysia, religion is very important to the people from the top to the bottom. [return to index](#)*

Are democracy and pluralism inherently conflicted with Islam, not the Islamic religion but the Islamic state? Some thinkers in Iran are examining the concept of Islamic secularism. A central issue would be that the 'wise one' need not be turbaned. This participant concluded. 'We've got to do it.' (i.e., achieve democracy)." (Central London I).

"Awareness for instance is shown that the individual can get lost in the democratic bureaucracy because it was so large." (Leicester).

Pragmatic acceptance of or support for democracy

²⁰⁶ *"They were faithful and in their faithfulness live in a democracy, fully aware of its excesses and problems as well as opportunities."* (San Diego). [return to index](#)

"Groups can hijack democracy i.e. lobbies. Is one person one vote a sham? Essential features of the sort of democratic government Muslims would accept in order of preference are: ability to challenge the ruler, ability to remove the ruler, ♦nothing contrary to Islam to happen, each person to have a voice, division of power of the government from the judiciary." (Leicester).

"In the 1920's Muslims began to have some consensus that there should be more democracy, there will never be complete consensus, always have the different sets but they must have some way to agree." (Chicago).

"Iran is not a democracy because theocratic rule on top. Ditto Turkey (the Army on top)." (Central London II, individual written statement).

"Rights of minorities: personal law according to religious preferences, criminal law the same for everyone. No suppression of freedom of religion. Proportional representation in government (note: not just in an election, but in the make-up of the government). Linguistic and cultural rights. Overall, Muslims are pessimistic of the role of the minority." (Minneapolis).

Statements supportive of democracy

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◆“One person one vote is a practical means of achieving the opinion of the masses and also reflects the sanctity of the individual. This is relevant because Islam has no Community punishment. Everyone is accountable for himself.” (Minneapolis).

²¹¹ “Democracy according to its western definition can be adopted and applied to Muslim countries. The Islamic concepts and principles of the system of government as declared in the Sunnah have no objections whatsoever as far as justice, people’s freedom, speech, belief and practice and equality of all people.” (Savannah). [return to index](#)

“Muslims say yes we are in agreement with democracy, but with individual freedom come individual responsibility and restraint.” (Dearborn I).

²¹² “A Sunni woman said: there is no conflict of democracy and Islam. You do not see democracy in Muslim countries but Mohammad said that if you see something wrong put it right, which is what democracy is supposed to do.” (Bury St. Edmunds). [return to index](#)

“Service should be before self in relation to democracy.” (Mauritius).

◆“When societies are small there is access to the ruler. In larger societies democracy functions because elections give a mandate to the government to act on behalf of the electorate for a specific period of time.” (Central London I).

²¹³ “Democracy is the best guarantee against totalitarianism.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

²¹⁴ “Democracy provides the most efficient way of removing corruption and self-serving governments and the best way to maintain the interest of the people.” (City of London, young office workers). [return to index](#)

◆“Accountability has always been a key component of traditional Islamic government and democracy is the best means of achieving this, and therefore democracy could be ideologically compatible with Islam.” (City of London, young office workers).

²¹⁵ “10% of the followers of Mohammed should have accepted the decision of the 90%, and the Shia has been undemocratic ever since. The 90% of Muslims always believed in democracy.” (Central London II, individual written statement). [return to index](#)

“There is no single answer, no single right form of government nor single right form of democracy.” (Bury St. Edmunds).

◆“Democracy is an evolving thing, and agreed with this within this context. Consultation is important as are transparency and checks and balances. They would give an unqualified ‘yes’ for representation.” It is important, but a qualified ‘yes’ for individual freedom.” (New York I).

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“So Democracy was 'a western idea that should not be forced on the Muslim world' but something everyone in Muslim countries wants but is suppressed by the current regimes which are not really Muslim.” (Bury St. Edmunds).

“Each generation is changing opinions and behaviour and democracy is opening up new understanding and respect.” (South London I).

²¹⁹ *“Beyond that, their ideal is the fusion of the sacred and secular with an Islamic way of life re-instated as the presiding model. The younger Muslim would like to see 'one man one vote' but deferred to his elders for a representative model.” (Vermont I, discussions with a Muslim family). [return to index](#)*

“Clearly the opposition should be the next government. If this is unlikely, civil society should create counter-groups with a voice in the press. Proportional representation would help avoid the problem and one would need an independent person for instance an Ombudsman.” (Mauritius).

“It is up to the people to impeach their representatives and governors if they do not keep their promises to the people. The representatives and the governor in Islam should be given ample time to correct problems, but they should not be re-elected if they are defective.” (Savannah).

“One person one vote and more than one candidate is the most important feature of democracy. There must be a fair process not rigged either by power or money. The two key abuses of our age or any age.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

^{262B} *“An Iranian said: ‘There is no consensus on democracy in Islam yet. There are functioning democracies in the Muslim world, Malaysia, Turkey, Bangladesh. People want to have more freedom. Any scholar can say what the will of God is if he has enough following. The mechanism for coming to consensus may not look like US democracy. Iran has some hierarchy of religious leaders (the religious Council has to pass the laws), one would not see this in a Sunni country.’” (Chicago). [return to index](#)*

“The government cannot go against the views of the elected representatives of the people, which equals a veto power.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“If democracy provides a means by which to make decisions collectively then it appears to be compatible with Islam. Many Muslims scholars say that western democratic values are the same as traditional Islam: justice (Adl), right (Haqq)) collective decision-making (Shura) and equality (Musqwat).” (Boston II Students).

“One person one vote with the largest possible community in mind.” (Ossening, (NY.) II).

“The executive should be separated from the legislative and should have a majority in Parliament.” (Mauritius).

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“The relationship between Church and State seems to work all right in the UK where there is not a conflict between democracy and Islam provided it is a mechanism for ruling and checks and balances of government not an ideology i.e. a supremacist ideology.” (Bury St. Edmunds).

◆ *“‘One person one vote’ all agree, and ‘one person one vote one time’ is unacceptable.” (City of London, young office workers).*

“Parliaments should reflect the wish of the people.” (Mauritius).

◆ *“Accountability has always been a key component of traditional Islamic government and democracy is the best means of achieving this.” (City of London, young office workers).*

“There must be accountability of elected representatives.” (Leicester).

“Monitoring is essential to ensure free and fair elections.” (Mauritius).

“Election fairness is essential (laughter). This needs judges.” (Ossening, (NY.), I).

“Monitoring elections is essential.” (Central London I).

“There is a need for proportional representation.” (Mauritius).

“However we are ruled, we have to look at the results whether the populace is harmed or whether they are happy. Democracy allows people to express their beliefs; to be able to have a change of government is important. You must never leave God out of anything. To desire to vote for someone to control your lifestyle can lead to believing in God. God always does justice for people. Have you ever seen a democracy run properly? People are never completely satisfied. A democratically elected government is important but you need to have a proper choice, and opposition party. Christians would argue less if they had more faith in God. He gives the ultimate judgment and there is no need to argue. I do not mind secularity, but don't want anti-religion.” (South London II, Turkish Students).

²³⁵ *“I did have a brief conversation with several Turkish Muslims in Queens yesterday, and described the list of topics. I think it is fair to say that they come down very strongly on this position: that it is very important to work together on our definitions of terms. They have been living and working in the NYC area for 3 to 22 years. They all affirm that there is no conflict between their rather mysticism-oriented style of Sunni Islam and traditional American political doctrine.” (New York II). [return to index](#)*

“Democracy does not necessarily mean elections and voting, and they recognized democracy as advancing so long as the government represents what people want. Democracy was the best thing and electing a government is the best way. However they are ruled, they have to look at results whether the people are harmed or whether they are happy. To be able to have a change of government is important and democracy allows

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people to express their beliefs. In Turkey education improves but traditional values disappear. Individually democracy is OK but we need targets of peace in the world as well. Democracy is not enough.” (South London II, Turkish Students).

◆ *“Everyone should have a voice in the political system, in the form of voting at the least (secret ballot) and more advanced political involvement.” (Dearborn II).*

“Limiting power of the government: the government should not override that which is in the interest of the public.” (Dearborn II).

“1- Fair representation of the population. 2- Equal access to government positions. 3- Public opinion has to make a difference. 4- A no-tolerance policy towards corruption. 5- Public education and awareness about their rights and involvement in the democratic process. 6- International cooperation rather than one nation dominating and interfering with other nations. 7- Strong economies that are designed for the well-being of the public not just the wealthy individuals who have all power. 8- Clear separation between personal and public interests. Government officials CAN NEVER benefit from public assets. 9- A culture change in the definition of a ruling system. The government and the President shall serve the public not the other way around. President can serve one and only one term. Elections have to be fair by regulating campaign financing. 10- The army and police shall protect the constitution and the law, not their bosses and interests.” (Dearborn II).

◆ *“1- The formation of checks and balances to keep corruption low. 2- Recognizing minorities and having a national discussion on the importance of protecting and securing the minority rights. 3- Defining the role of religious authorities, and drawing the legal path for religious figures to become political figures. No one shall abuse their religious powers for personal and political gains. If you are going to be part of the public life, then we need to know your religious beliefs and biases and you may not use your religious influence to coerce the public to follow your will. (Dearborn II).*

“We recognized that ‘One person, one vote’ is fundamental to any system which calls itself democratic. One of the consequences of this is the need to accept things which you do not necessarily agree with, especially when you are in a minority.” (Dearborn II).

“Freedom of Speech and Expression: We recognized that democracy entails the right of any person to express their opinions, to agree or disagree with others and not be suppressed in any way as long as those opinions are reasonable and not going to harm others. Hence democracy has to be manifested in freedom of speech and the freedom to assert the opinions we hold through public channels and the ballot box.” (Dearborn II).

“Equality of Rights: We recognized that we all value democracy because it grants us equal rights. In safeguarding those rights it protects us against tyranny and its consequences, enabling us to force governments which are not respecting the equal rights of the people to step aside. One participant described it as, ‘an efficient way of replacing

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people when they have been in long enough that power has corrupted them.” (Dearborn II).

“Human Flourishing: We recognized that democracy, while important, is not the ‘be all and end all’ and that other things in our societies are important for human flourishing. Other aspects of the state help to create an environment where people feel free and can make the most of their creative, physical and spiritual abilities. We expressed concern that in many places such conditions do not exist and that the gap between places where such flourishing can take place and where it is hampered by war, injustice or poverty seems to be increasing. This inequality of experience and opportunity is a hazard to all the world’s people. The need for democracy is only part of this problem.” (Dearborn II).

“Flawed and Failing Democracy: We agreed that ‘Nobody has found a perfect form of democracy – its always flawed in one way or another.’ At the same time we felt that ‘It’s more important to have imperfect democracy than no democracy.’ Our discussion recognized that western nations often have forms of democracy which are far from the ideal. In Britain the infrequency of parliamentary elections means in a sense that the country is only democratic on polling day, and their lack of a system of proportional representation means that many people will never be represented in parliament by the people or even the party they voted for. Clearly some people have more power in our system than others, which can seem and feel unjust. Most of all the role of the media and of financial power were criticized for distorting the democratic process in Britain and in the United States of America, putting leaders and governments in place who are then free to pursue the policies which are in the interests not of the people, but of benefit to themselves, their ideology and their friends. Muslim and Christian participants alike were highly critical of the way in which government in America and Britain had not listened to protests over the war against Iraq, leading to frustration and an increasing disillusionment with the voting system and with our forms of democracy, especially among young people. Despite the weaknesses in our systems however, it was still believed by our participants that democracy is the best form of government.” (Dearborn II).

²⁴³ *“The Inclusion of Women: Participants were asked whether a society which excludes women from the democratic process could still be called democratic. There was clear agreement that such a society was not democratic since democracy entails equal rights for all. One Muslim participant summed up by saying that, ‘If it’s a democracy then I think democracy means men and women, both of them, not just for one. And I think the vote should be for women as well, they should vote.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)*

“Cultural Specificity and Democracy: We considered the question of whether democracy has to be the same everywhere, or whether it must find unique cultural expressions in different countries. Our participants felt that it would inevitably vary from place to place depending on historical and cultural factors, including religion. Participants felt that despite universal features of democracy such as equal rights and ‘one person, one vote,’ it will mean different things to different people in different countries. The example of President Putin’s rebuke to President Bush for trying to instruct him about democracy highlights the fact that history, culture, traditions and expectations will shape the

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democratic institutions of each place. Religious traditions and beliefs, including Islamic faith and law will be part of this context and should be allowed to shape the institutions and embodiments of democracy. Another participant added sagely, 'Democracy will only come when people understand what it offers them. When they see those benefits it will come, surely it will come. It is not going to come while someone else is saying "it's got a very sweet root, if you eat this. Unless you have eaten the fruit, you could not take it from someone else."' (Dearborn II).

²⁴⁵ *"Democracy, Legitimate or Representative Government: Another participant pointed out that some Islamic countries have a form of democracy which is like that of Britain in the past, which is not yet 'one person, one vote.' In this system only some have the right to vote, and vote on behalf of others. There was broad agreement that this was not democracy, but could be considered representative and legitimate." (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)*

"The Qur'an presents a code of conduct with parameters for behaviour and within these parameters there is scope. There is a danger that once you get educated people you will move away from the very spirituality which is supposed to legitimize the leadership's right to government." (Central London II, individual written statement).

"Equality of Rights: We recognized that we all value democracy because it grants us equal rights. In safeguarding those rights it protects us against tyranny and its consequences, enabling us to force governments which are not respecting the equal rights of the people to step aside. One participant described it as, 'an efficient way of replacing people when they have been in long enough that power has corrupted them.'" (Dearborn II). [from discussion on Human Rights]

9.4 References to modern Muslim states

General

"The Imposition of Democracy.

²⁴⁷ *We considered whether democracy can be successfully imposed where it does not exist, and all agreed that there are great dangers in trying to make other people take on a system like our own. We reflected on the possibility that in young democracies a leader could move the country towards dictatorship and oppression as has happened in Zimbabwe. The situation there has interesting parallels to other young democracies, as democracy was imposed in Zimbabwe upon a society which had no history of democratic processes. The gradual development and adjustment of our own system of democracy was given as a reason to allow other countries to find their own route to democracy. Participants strongly believed that democracy which is imposed on people who have not already come to want it can only fail. One participant commented that 'it is not a freedom if you are going to impose a system, its not a freedom then, and I think these are the problems which are being faced in Iraq.' Another said, 'I think other religions, other cultures, they should build on their own democracy and say 'if we did not allow women to*

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vote in the past, then now is the time to bring them back in'--- but they have to do it in their own way, not imposed on them like has been done Iraq.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)

“In Islam there is election at the lowest level and the representatives are elected upwards.” (North West London).

“Muslims have not practised democracy.” (Bury St. Edmunds).

²⁵⁰ *“It was conceded that tribal mullahs now have limited autonomy only within their geographic areas and at present, there are no functioning models for the Muslim ideal. The countries that are closest to the evolution of this model are Palestine and Iran, and if left alone to thrash out the mechanisms, will move toward this system of Islamic governance. There was anger towards western colonialism. It is not an historical fact but a continuing insult. Colonialization was responsible for the destruction of - and remains an obstacle to - the re-instatement of the 'Islamic' system of governance”. (Vermont II). [return to index](#)*

²⁵² *“There is a need to control rulers because Islam is marred by widespread illegitimacy and authoritarianism.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)*

²⁵³ *“Within Islam there is ‘Shura’. Shura means discussion; this has been councils, could also be parliaments. But it is based on community. Community councils make decisions and it is they at local levels and on up through levels of government who represent the people and ensure fairness and protect minority interests. Shura decides who will be mayor, president. At each level the council chooses its leaders and they lead consulting with the councils.” (Vermont II). [return to index](#)*

^{253A} *“They would use the tribal system of tiered representation. Family/tribal 'Mullahs' represent the people. The tribal leaders hold regional councils to decide on issues to be brought before a smaller Shura's council. The decisions of that council are voiced by an executive leader whose powers are limited by the 'Shura' council. This ensures that all factions have a say and that minority rights are voiced and respected if not necessarily followed. The issue of 'fairness' is relevant only in the discussions taking place at the tribal level. Issues between opposing groups are resolved largely by the ascendancy of one tribal/family mullah over another. Acceptance of the tribal system and confidence in Sharia law allows for consent of the governed. This is the way tribal villages in which I have lived in function today, except that there are no links between the tribal leaders and the 'Shura' courts and the courts and the executive.” (Vermont II). [return to index](#)*

²⁵⁵ *“The critical point made was that regardless of model used for governance (and theirs was close to the British model) the vocabulary should be shifted to the use of indigenous terms. The use of the term 'democracy' implies the imposition of a 'western' model for governance which will be rejected outright before any discussion can begin.”(Vermont II), [return to index](#)*

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“Islamic countries are evolving and this natural process must be allowed.”(South London I).

“Defending separation of church and state because they saw threats to that particular aspect of the constitution. Theocracy is our anticipation and would be ideal. Leaders were without fault in being spokesmen for God. But there have been many abuses all over the world. These conflicts put Islam on the cross with political leaders valuing self-interest.” (Delaware).

²⁵⁸ *“The main thing is we have to get the religion out of the Government because there are too many people who don’t believe the way you do.” (Delaware). [return to index](#)*

“Democracy is part of Islam but the principles are dictated in general in the Qur’an rather than written by people. The Qur’an does not specify a particular pattern of government but allows people to choose their government’s style and structure according to different times and circumstances that people live in. Islam dictates many laws but leaves to people the details of laws and regulations. But people will choose their representatives (imams, judges, etc.) without the well-organized voting we see in present elections. Voting is not organized in Islam and is somewhat similar to the old world (Greek, Roman) voting procedure. Imams and mujahid (law interpreters and advisers) who are agreed on by the neighbourhood and towns in general consensus, and when qualifications are equal people supported the older and wiser person.” (Savannah).

²⁶⁰ *“The word democracy started being used in Muslim countries only recently. Islam and Muslims use the name ‘consultation’ to refer to heads of states, political decision-making powers with discussions among various chiefs of tribes so an appropriate decision can be made. The consultation principle is an order from God to be followed.” (Savannah). [return to index](#)*

Malaysia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran and Turkey

“In Malaysia, by many measures it works, high standard of living, widespread education, no prison torture, why? (a) because of a stable political system based on constitutional monarchy, (b) hard work (eastern culture, Chinese), (c) it has oil. It is a secular government with freedom; seeing women in veils walking next to men, and still religion is important. So that you can have church/state separation in a Muslim country if the leaders are respectful.” (Central London I).

^{262A} *“An Iranian said: ‘religious scholars should rule, they are best suited by moral authority, not democracy. People can be led astray, too liberal. After that there is no consensus people are rebelling, there needs to be accountable leadership with tolerance. Prevent conflict with tolerance. There is growing understanding of this, a warning of too hasty democracy leads to hatred. There is no consensus on democracy in Islam yet. There are functioning democracies in the Muslim world, Malaysia, Turkey, Bangladesh. People want to have more freedom. Any scholar can say what the will of God is if he has enough following. The mechanism for coming to consensus may not look like US*

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democracy. Iran has some hierarchy of religious leaders (the religious Council has to pass the laws), one would not see this in a Sunni country.’’ (Chicago). [return to index](#)

“Education is needed for democracy for an informed choice, for democracy to work. But give Muslims the vote now and then bring education as in India where democracy has become better and better. In 2004 a stable government was thrown out by a democratic vote; therefore don’t hold back till you have education. Bangladesh is a democracy and that is better than dictatorship and it will be as good as India in 50 years. Malaysia is the best example of democracy. In Indonesia there have been too many upheavals and it is too soon to comment. We cannot tell if it will succeed as they have only had two elections.” (Central London II, individual written statement).

◆ *“But at the end of the day in Islam they must come together somehow. Malaysia is a good example of a well-functioning Islamic state. It is not because religion is less important in Malaysia, religion is very important to the people from the top to the bottom. Are democracy and pluralism inherently conflicted with Islam, not the Islamic religion but the Islamic state? Some thinkers in Iran are examining the concept of Islamic secularism. A central issue would be that the ‘wise one’ need not be turbaned. This participant then immediately after concluded. ‘We’ve got to do it.’(i.e., achieve democracy).” (Central London I).*

“Some historic manifestations: Ayatollah Khomeini; the brand of Islam he was presenting was a theocracy.” (Delaware).

²⁶⁵ *“Most people in the west have the belief that the opposite of democracy is theocracy. People got out of the yoke of the church in the west. Khomeini believed that leadership is inherited, but the prophet told us we choose our leaders.” (Delaware). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“Indonesia is an example of democracy and Islam working together from autonomy to chaos to democracy. Elections free, equal and in good spirit. This puts to rest the idea that democracy and Islam will never coexist. Malaysia is an example. President Bush tried to get stability, democracy or freedom in militaristic government but got neither. Loses credibility without follow-through. Indonesia was kind of do-it yourself.” (Chicago).*

²⁶⁶ *“Turkey is the only country where democracy and Islam are together. Elected government is best but not enough on its own, it has to be a target, a commitment for improving proper happiness and peace. The younger generation in Turkey are very keen on democracy.” (South London II, Turkish Students). [return to index](#)*

“Failed States. One Christian participant accused most Muslim states of being ‘failed’ states and undemocratic, despite the presence of certain good leaders. Others responded that there were examples of Islamic states which are certainly not failed, such as Indonesia, and most especially Malaysia. A lively exchange of views took place over the government of Iran. One participant described the way the revolution in Iran in 1979 led

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to elections and the democratic choice of an Islamic republic as their form of government. He described the creation of the constitution and the way in which elections have been held every four years for the parliament and presidency. Another participant described this as a sham democracy, but the first responded by comparing the fair and effective elections in Iran with the election of George Bush as President in the USA, which generated considerable laughter. Both agreed that people in Iran were unhappy, and the first participant suggested that this was because of poverty, and the desire for the decadent liberalism in UAE, which is broadcast on Arab TV, rather than a lack of democracy.” (Dearborn II).

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Syria, UAE, Jordan and Pakistan

“The second objection is that Democracy is tainted by colonialism. It was imposed on colonized, occupied peoples. And in those countries in the ME which claim to be democracies, ‘it is corrupt’. Look at Algeria, Egypt, Syria. Denial of access to vote, banning of Muslim parties, 20 + years in power, passing power from father to son.

⁴⁶¹ Even the word democracy is negative because it is foreign. We need Shura to be the word.” (Vermont II). [return to index](#)

♦ “In most Muslim countries democracy would not work because there are no effective means of disseminating information. The fluidity of population means that an accurate census is virtually impossible, there are practical difficulties, for instance in Jordan there are no addresses on people’s houses so you cannot introduce any system of voting.” (Central London I).

“Our discussion, however, highlighted deep dissatisfaction with the injustices which are created, allowed and perpetuated elsewhere in the world by western nations in the name of democracy. The West and its apparently democratic governments was criticised for supporting unjust regimes when they served western interests. The support of the United States of America for the regime in Pakistan was an example of the double standards applied by the West when their own economic or strategic interests were at stake. The regimes in UAE and Saudi Arabia were also cited as examples of undemocratic governments supported by the West. One Muslim participant referred to ‘dictators...put there by the West.’ A Christian participant rejected this view. While admitting that western nations do interfere in the process of government in other countries, including Islamic states, he believed that the idea that the West imposes dictators on other nations was a myth. Some of the participants, however, did not believe it was a myth and referred to the way in which America and Britain have supported the government of Saudi Arabia as a prime example of western double standards – attacking countries like Russia for being undemocratic while preventing democracy in other places.” (Leicester).

“Our discussion also considered the way in which western nations had connived at corruption and injustice in the abuse of UN Aid for Oil funding and felt deeply offended that powerful western nations can behave in such a self-interested way. Such failures within apparently democratic nations do not help other nations to welcome democracy.

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♦ *Some of our participants felt strongly that the West had both hindered the development of democracy, as in Iran, and rejected democratically elected governments if they claimed to be Islamic. The examples of Turkey and Algeria were given as places where democratically elected governments had been rejected by the West. It was suspected that western nations were fearful of what would happen if an elected Islamic government took over, in case this harmed western interests or led to the abolition of laws and civil rights. On the contrary, participants suggested that the regimes which preceded such governments were often oppressive dictatorships and should be replaced by elected civilian governments, even if they are not of the kind the West would like. It was felt that the experience of responsibility in government would help elected Islamic leaders to act in the interests of all their people, and that elected leaders would not destroy what they had won. Such governments should be allowed to flourish. The attitude of most Muslim and Christian participants was summed up by the comment that in looking at the relationship between democratic western nations and the rest of the world, 'there is no fairness'.* (Leicester).

9.5 Minorities

The notes provided for the discussions pointed out that in both Britain and the US government swings from one party to the other main party at fairly regular intervals, but in countries where there is likely to be a permanent majority of one party or religious, ethnic or other group there would be a need to ensure the rights of the minority by express provisions. The discussions show that the minority issue was well to the fore of Muslim responses, being referred to by one third of the groups, notably in Leicester, two in New York, two in Ossening, (NY.), Mauritius, two in South London, Boston, Minneapolis, Savannah, two in Central London and City of London. In each these were statements simply that the political system must respect and uphold the right of minorities, without further elaboration. As they are uniform, these are the only statements made during the round-table discussions which are not set out in full in this Report. There follow the few statements on minorities where the issue is enlarged on.

♦ *"The party system is the only viable system but many Islamic countries are more ethnically diverse than Europe and there is a danger that minority rights will not be protected."* (City of London, young office workers).

"Some governments reserve particular seats for minorities, women or Christians." (Boston I).

♦ *"Rights of minorities: personal law according to religious preferences, criminal law the same for everyone. No suppression of freedom of religion. Proportional representation in government (note: not just in an election, but in the make-up of the government). Linguistic and cultural rights. Overall, Muslims are pessimistic of the role of the minority."* (Minneapolis).

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“We discussed the dangers faced by minorities within a democratic system and the possibility that elected leaders may fail to respect the rights, faith or custom of part of their population. We recognised that minorities are vulnerable even under democratic rule unless measures such as written rights are built into a constitution to safeguard their interests. The Pakistani constitution was offered as an example of how minority rights could be protected in law. The constitution there, it was suggested, contained safeguards which were designed to be changed later as circumstances allowed.” (Oxford).

◆ *“One participant spoke for us all in saying that, ‘Under the democracy, all minorities should be respected, and looked after and protected.’ We all recognised the right of the minority to express their views without suppression but nevertheless the need to accept the will of the majority.” (Oxford).*

◆ *“1-The formation of checks and balances to keep corruption low. 2- Recognizing minorities and having a national discussion on the importance of protecting and securing the minority rights. 3- Defining the role of religious authorities, and drawing the legal path for religious figures to become political figures. No one shall abuse their religious powers for personal and political gains. If you are going to be part of the public life, then we need to know your religious beliefs and biases and you may not use your religious influence to coerce the public to follow your will.” (Dearborn II).*

“The West had intervened - though very belatedly - to protect Muslims in the Balkans. Democracy or majority rule was important because it placed the Muslims of Bosnia and more especially Kosovo in a strong position. When the Turks had ruled this part of Europe they had tolerated and protected the different religious communities; it was the contemporary ‘Christian’ rulers who wanted ethnically and religiously pure states and refused to recognise that their fellow countrymen might have chosen Islam [a reference to the practice of non-Muslims in ex-Yugoslavia to call Muslim fellow Slavs ‘Turks’].” (North West London).

9.6 Political Parties

The notes for reading out at the start of the discussion noted that political parties could be a significant feature of a democratic system and that when swings in support represent shifts in public opinion this should lead to government going back and forth between parties.

Most comments show support for the presence of political parties

◆ *“Clearly the opposition should be the next government. If this is unlikely civil society should create counter-groups with a voice in the press. Proportional representation would help avoid the problem and one would need an independent person - for instance an Ombudsman.” (Mauritius).*

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“The party system is the only viable system, but many Islamic countries are more ethnically diverse than European countries and there is a danger that minority rights would not be protected.” (City of London, young office workers).

◆ *“We have no fundamental opposition to government passing back and forth, it is an inherent part of the democratic system.” (City of London, young office workers).*

◆ *“Attitudes based on political parties is good when parties are healthy. This does not conflict with Islamic principles and it means that accountability is built into the system.” (Minneapolis).*

◆ *“The passing of power back and forth: without this how would one work to keep the government accountable, people questioning and holding government accountable by full participation in the process.” (Minneapolis).*

◆ *“Attitudes based on political parties allow parties to crystallize around opinions and issues, discourage manipulation of the party in power. One party does not always meet an individual’s needs. Being able to move is important.” (Minneapolis).*

◆ *“The more political parties the more democratic.” (Ossening, (NY.) II).*

◆ *“Parties should reflect the mix of society. You should have more small parties in the US to guarantee their views are heard, and also when there is a change in the governing party changes in national politics and decision will be less drastic and more gradual. Secret ballots guarantee true elections and protect the vote of small parties. Electing multiple parties helps the government avoid continuing poor policies. It is always helpful to have someone else look at the issues from a different point of view.” (Savannah).*

“Should or do people stay loyal to one party?” (Leicester).

Two statements disagree the above views:-

²⁷⁶ *“Muslims decline the position of parties and groups. The leader does not ask to lead. He is acknowledged and chosen by the people.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

“Votes should be based on conscience rather than on the party line.” (Mauritius).

9.7 “One person one vote one time”

The concept of a democratic vote which terminates democracy by electing a representative institution which then dissolves itself giving way to an autocratic form of government, as happened in Germany under Hitler, was specifically highlighted in the introductory comments to the discussion groups. It was there stated that such a procedure should not be considered to be a form of democracy for the purpose of the discussions. In fact, only one group specifically referred to this point, but perhaps it may be presumed, when the reader studies all the statements,

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that by implication the groups excluded “one person one vote one time” from the concept of democracy. Certainly none suggested that such a vote would legalise a non-democratic government.

◆ “‘One person one vote all agree’, and ‘one person one vote one time’ is unacceptable.”
(City of London, young office workers).

◆ “Some of our participants felt strongly that the West had both hindered the development of democracy, as in Iran, and rejected democratically elected governments if they claimed to be Islamic. The examples of Turkey and Algeria were given as places where democratically elected governments had been rejected by the West. It was suspected that western nations were fearful of what would happen if an elected Islamic government took over, in case this harmed western interests or led to the abolition of laws and civil rights. On the contrary, participants suggested that the regimes which preceded such governments were often oppressive dictatorships and should be replaced by elected civilian governments, even if they are not of the kind the West would like. It was felt that the experience of responsibility in government would help elected Islamic leaders to act in the interests of all their people, and that elected leaders would not destroy what they had won. Such governments should be allowed to flourish. The attitude of most Muslim (and Christian) participants was summed up by the comment that in looking at the relationship between democratic western nations and the rest of the world, ‘there is no fairness.’” (Leicester).

Editor’s note: This is a case of an authoritarian government being replaced by a democratically elected Islamic government, the reverse of a one vote, one person, one time scenario. But because the election was annulled, the suspicion that the democratically elected Islamic successor government would betray the vote and become authoritarian could not be tested.



10. HUMAN RIGHTS

10.1 Introduction

Some of the Muslim comments are directed to Islamic personal and family law, and the exclusion from Human Rights of culturally specific matters, and others to Muslim conduct, or to concern about lapses of human rights in the US or Britain or the West as a whole.

Statements

10.2 General and compendious statements

“Human rights in order of importance:

- *Freedom of thought, expression, opinion, association, conscience and religion;*
- *Equal treatment of all people;*
- *Social rights, social collective rights;*
- *Right to survival and livelihood;*
- *Right to global equilibrium;*
- *Freedom of subsistence without preconditions;*
- *Clarifications: for example poor countries should not be held poor by rich countries;*
- *Subsistence/dignity;*
- ◆ *It is ethically intolerable to have starving in countries while other countries have no limit to their consumption;*
- *Social rights: e.g. equal pay for equal work;*
- *Collective success: all individuals need to be at the dignity level for all to be successful;*
- *Wealth is a serious responsibility.” (Dearborn II).*

◆ *“The record of human rights violation in Muslim states today is unbelievable as well as unprecedented. The abject poverty and hunger, the prevalence of disease and human suffering, the high levels of ignorance and disregard for human dignity, the political oppression by rulers and governments with unjust barbaric legal systems that permit inhuman torture of prisoners and the innocent, the extravagant waste of national resources by the privileged are all alien to Islamic practice and in direct contradiction to Qur’anic injunctions”. (South London III, individual written statement of a Muslim relative of a participant).*

“Equal treatment is essential because all people have equal dignity. Including equal treatment of oneself (must not sell oneself into slavery).” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“Importance of harmony: all people since they are different must be accepted as who or what they are, leading to coexistence with mutual respect.”(Ossening, (NY.) I).

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“It is hard for Muslims to accept different things, the Prophet said in a Hadith that “difference is not a curse, it is a mercy”. It is not a human right but a human gift to enjoy differences.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“Economics within a country have a lot to do with how many rights can be guaranteed. Problems of race are very real for those living in the US.” (Louisville).

◆ *“The five basic Muslim principles which legitimize human rights are: the primacy of life and dignity of the human person, the protection against restraint in religion, the respect for the home, the right of asylum and the duty of care for others. In Islamic culture legal capacity has been determined by one’s religion. Only Muslims have been recognized as full citizens of the state. Sharia law allows a Muslim to be put to death for converting to another religion.” (Boston II Students).*

◆ *“Golden rule: allow mosques in the Vatican, cathedrals in Mecca.” (Chicago).*

“Rights: life, food, survival, bear arms, defend self, gain freedom.” (Chicago).

“Human rights have become complicated by various cultural issues: the right to make good things better; the right to thinking revolutionary opinions; are we willing to take from the rich to pay for food for the poor?” (Chicago).

“Especially minorities are made to feel inferior vs. the individual.” (Chicago).

“Each individual decides what makes them happy, this becomes problematical when there is conflict over what is good for the larger community. Individual rights to take drugs/alcohol so long as you do not hurt someone else.” (Chicago).

“Family, marriage, gender, sexuality, they don’t prevent those who do not agree to this understanding to be coercive or violent.” (Chicago).

“Traditional Muslim cultural matters: dress.” (Chicago).

10.3 Women and family

◆ *“Muslims are more concerned with poverty amid plenty than with gender equity.” Boston II Students).*

◆ *“Fundamental religions create one of the largest obstacles to gender equity.” (Boston II Students).*

“The right to education and a peaceful and orderly society, the rule of law and freedom from insecurity and arbitrary arrest. Freedom from all forms of discrimination against women. There should be positive discrimination in favour of the poor and the old. Apparent discrimination in Islamic law between males and females with regard to

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unequal distribution of inheritance is explained by the fact that men are given responsibility of looking after old parents and sisters.” (Mauritius).

◆ *“Non-discrimination is high on the list. Often people are confused about the rights of women in Islam. They have strong rights. In a true Islamic community the poor are provided for. The family is important, you could argue that women in Islam have more rights; women have many rights, to work and inheritance, etc. They are equal but different.”(North West London).*

◆ *“When some so-called Muslim countries oppress women it is more a matter of culture and unjust rulers.”(North West London).*

◆ *“Women and children’s rights should be protected. It is not Islamic what is done to women in some Muslim countries. It is usually a matter of culture and tradition that we should not follow in the US.” (Savannah).*

◆ *“Children working is important in any setting, working on their farms, as this is how they make a connection to the family, bringing them up to feel loyal to them. Work also helps you develop because work matures you, begin to feel pride. It has always been true that children and young people work, and this has not been a problem; there have not been any lasting ill-effects. Someone who spent his childhood working on a farm still grew up to become a doctor.” (Boston I).*

◆ *“The rights of women are protected by law. The problem is that we do not adhere completely to the laws. Women’s rights in some countries are violated by governments who do not respect human rights of all their citizens and have neither religious morals nor respect for the law.” (Savannah).*

“It is important for parents who can afford education to provide it for their children as well as health. It is an obligation as a Muslim to take care of not only their family i.e. children, wife, husband but also it is mandatory as a Muslim to take care for the elderly, financially disabled as well as physically and mentally disabled.” (Savannah).

“It is a very important duty to take care of our neighbor; this is acknowledged by many Muslims as it is a strong Sunnah.” (San Diego).

◆ *“In Islam there is room for women to do what they want to do, and the very element making the difference was education. Women in Egypt in the 1920s protested at wearing the veil, but have now largely gone back to it.” (Louisville).*

“Divorce is mostly a prerogative of Muslim men until recently, in Egypt at least. A woman may request a divorce but a man has a right to one.” (Louisville).

“Things that can be altered: women’s role in employment, as doctors, lawyers and teachers.” (Chicago).

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◆ *“Tolerance must be recognized between a man, a woman and family. Women have many rights in Islam; e.g. a woman has the choice of having employment, because islamically it is the man’s obligation to provide for his family. Another example is that a Muslim’s woman does not have to change her last name to that of her husband’s family, as women are not identified as property.” (San Diego).*

◆ *“The question of polygamy and inheritance has become an emotional community and politically provocative issue. According to Muslim law you must abide by the laws of the country you are in unless they are blatantly oppressive or go against fundamental principles of Islam.” (Mauritius).*

◆ *“The right of children is abrogated by materialism. Because of economic pressure or desire children are often forced to work, both parents often work and therefore neglect their children who are therefore raised in an ethical vacuum.”(Ossening, (NY.) I).*

◆ *“Social security should be available but rarely necessary. Families should be able to take care of their elderly. Because of economic pressure driven by materialism this is often not the case.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).*

“Work is not a right but an obligation.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“We add the right to education and the right to environment for all its creatures.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

10.4 Freedom of thought and belief

“Most important for Muslims is freedom of thought and equal treatment of all persons which are vital, with no geographical boundaries. Other rights follow from these for example issues to do with faith, family, wealth are all-important in Islam but in the context of equality the core value connected with them is human dignity rather than “rights”. The Muslim overview of rights is to consider people first as human beings, secondly religion and thirdly as citizens. All people should be treated equally in a country, non-citizens, citizens and refugees.” (Leicester).

“Muslims are not different from any other religion in respect to human rights. Equality in the eyes of the law is the base of human rights. Religious persecution should not be tolerated. Separation of state and religion help the government maintains good judgement, fair mindedness and a willingness to disentangle moral values from the law.” (Savannah).

“As a minority religion in the US we understand how minorities feel in other countries. It is very important to allow freedom of thought and to practise your religion so long as it does not restrict other people’s freedom.” (Savannah).

“Equality and freedom of belief are essential parts of democracy.

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In any society there are extremists. Extremists are usually the product of dictatorship and theocracy. By allowing people to express themselves and, more importantly, by treating people equally we reduce hardship and therefore hatred among people of different religions and beliefs. This will reflect positively on the security of the citizen as well as that of the country.” (Savannah).

◆ *“Freedom of thought, conscience and religion is important. In Turkey people are not free to practice Islam, which is humiliating: girls cannot wear headscarves in college.” (South London II, Turkish Students).*

10.5 Freedom of speech

◆ *“Freedom: people need to be free to express their political, economic, religious, social, or other ideological opinions if done in an appropriate manner, and provided such expressions do not lead to threatening the public good.” (Dearborn II).*

◆ *“In the east there seems to be more awareness of the consequences of actions or of speech, so there is self-censorship.” (Boston I).*

◆ *“Social pressure is higher in the east so that even when someone knows he is right, if this goes against the general public opinion, that person may withhold his thought or speech.” (Boston I).*

◆ *“If freedom of speech and belief are allowed, citizens would be more satisfied and productive as a result there would be much less human rights abuse. The government should not have the right to censorship and in return the media should be more sensitive and, more importantly, honest in its reporting. It is the right of the citizen to discriminate between what is good and what is bad for himself.” (Savannah).*

◆ *“Freedom of opinion and expression are important but a bit more complicated. I am proud to be in a country with freedom of speech, but what about the National Front? It means they are allowed to spread offensive material.” (South London II, Turkish Students).*

◆ *“Freedom of Speech and Expression: We recognized that democracy entails the right of any person to express their opinions, to agree or disagree with others and not be suppressed in any way, as long as those opinions are reasonable and not going to harm others. Hence democracy has to be manifested in freedom of speech and the freedom to assert the opinions we hold through public channels and the ballot box.” (Dearborn II).*

10.6 Equal Treatment

“Freedom of thought, expression, opinion, association, conscience, religion, equal treatment of all people.” (Dearborn II).

“Poor countries should not be held poor by rich countries.” (Dearborn II).

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“Equality of Rights: We recognized that we all value democracy because it grants us equal rights. In safeguarding those rights it protects us against tyranny and its consequences, enabling us to force governments which are not respecting the equal rights of the people to step aside. One participant described it as, ‘an efficient way of replacing people when they have been in long enough that power has corrupted them.’” (Dearborn II).

“Muslims should enact those verses of the Qur’an previously not made the source of legally binding rules, that is the verses emphasizing freedom of choice and individual responsibility for such choice before God, these should be the basis of modern Islamic law.” (Dearborn II).

“Equal rights/human rights- everyone has basic rights that should not be infringed upon, even if one is part of a minority group.” (Dearborn II).

“Social security and employment should be independent from color and religious belief. Is that not the point of human rights? Discrimination is a violation of human rights.” (Savannah).

“We all agree that discrimination is a violation of human rights. Equal treatment by government and the private sector are part of human rights which are protected by freedom of speech and beliefs.” (Savannah).

“Equal treatment for all persons: is important but still does not happen in this country where class discrimination is still active as well as racism. Things are getting better. Freedom of desire leads to imprisonment by your desire.”(South London II, Turkish Students).

“Islam believes in equal and adequate treatment and education as well as access to education and necessities such as health. Obtaining and enforcing these qualities as well as obligations leads the Muslims to their ultimate goal: heaven.” (San Diego).

10.7 Human Rights and Punishment (See also “Respect for Law and the Rule of Law.”)

◆ *“If someone steals in Islamic society the whole society looks at itself and asks why the poor haven’t been provided for.” (North West London).*

◆ *“Punishments, e.g. amputations need a whole Sharia system for their implementation. If a person steals out of necessity they are not punished in this way. The punishment is atonement for the sin. Most of us would prefer to have punishment here rather than in the hereafter.” (North West London).*

◆ *“Fundamental religions create one of the largest obstacles to gender equity. Islam prescribes extreme punishment for gay men and lesbians. Homosexuals should be split in*

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two with a sword or burnt alive. There are not similar punishments for other offences.”
(Boston II Students).

“The only time certain rights may be taken away is if one commits an offense, and even then a judicial system is in place to ensure proof is available and punishment is appropriate.” *(Dearborn II).*



11. RESPECT FOR LAW AND RULE OF LAW

11.1 Perceived weaknesses in western rule of law

- ◆ “Weaknesses in western national judicial proceedings are:
- Judgments not based on general moral boundaries;
 - Expensive; barriers to access;
 - Law not the search for essential truth but based on evidence;
 - Certifies immunity from prosecution;
 - Corruption inherent not apparent;
 - Appointed judiciary’
 - Race and gender imbalance.” (Leicester).

- “What improvement should be arrived at in the US/British systems:
- Legal aid should be back and means tested;
 - Closer links between the judiciary and those affected;
 - Independent commission to consider immunity;
 - Locally elected or appointed judiciary.” (Leicester).

³¹¹ “Perversions have crept into the rule of law.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)

“Weakness of western national judicial procedures:-
You are at the mercy of your representation and this comes down to money. The legal aid system should ensure that all can be represented.
Media creates prejudice in minds, prior to trial.
UK law is continually improving and trying to improve.” (North West London).

“British and US constitutions are not applied e.g. invasion of Iraq, the detention without trial at Guantanamo Bay, the British decree that Chagos Islanders could not return to Chagos despite the verdict of British courts. But Britain insists that a country must practice the rule of law before assistance can be given.” (Mauritius).

◆ “Legal systems could be improved by minimizing the role of money and power, the ability of the rich and powerful to manipulate laws for their own purposes. The same improvements could be made in international laws.” (Ossening,(NY.) I).

11.2 Perceived weaknesses in the law and the rule of law in Islam or in particular Muslim states

- ◆ “In the Muslim judicial system are the following weaknesses:
- It is subject to external economic pressures;
 - Corruption is rife and apparent;
 - Economic and class barriers to access;
 - Lack of judicial accountability leading to inconsistency in judgment;

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- *Appointed judges;*
- *Lack of independence;*
- *Gender and race imbalance;*

Improvements needed in Muslim countries:

- *The need to contextualise Muslim laws with contemporary world realities;*
- *Need democratic change;*
- *Raising economic and cultural standards.” (Leicester).*

“There is not a single real democracy in the Muslim world except perhaps Malaysia. Any legal system requires social stability over a period of time to evolve. Muslim countries have never benefited from this, as they have been colonies until only a few decades ago.” (Mauritius).

“Turkey is not an Islamic state and is making efforts to develop its legal system along western lines.” (Mauritius).

“I can’t think of a Muslim country applying Islamic Sharia fully. This is laid down by God in the Qur’an and further explained by the prophets. There is a need to look at the person giving the Sharia law and are they just.” (North West London).

◆ *“An elementary form of justice is dispensed by Mullahs who apply 14th Century rules to modern times and with no popular representation and undeveloped legal structures. In these countries, such as Saudi Arabia there is no protection for the individual and his rights.” (Mauritius).*

◆ *“No Islamic country has a pure Sharia system, though some parts are operated. The most notorious systems are not truly Sharia.” (North West London).*

◆ *“Civil or criminal; again wealth, social-economic status and gender play a part in the application of the law.” (Dearborn II).*

◆ *“Weakness in Islamic law is not in the concept but in the application. Equal access is not working: wealthy vs. the poor and/or weak. The wealthy have better representation, counsel, etc.” (North West London).*

◆ *“Weaknesses: hand chopping, adultery stomping.” (Dearborn II).*

“Rulings by a judge may or may not be right, it often depends on the quality of the lawyers.” (Boston I).

◆ *“Legal systems could be improved by minimizing the rule of money and power, the ability of the rich and powerful to manipulate laws for their own purposes.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).*

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“Corruption among Palestinian leaders is resented, but becomes a back-burner issue in the light of the external power of Israel.” (Boston I).

11.3 Muslims in some groups commented on international law

“A fully functional and international court of law is required.” (Leicester).

“The UN needs to be autonomous.” (Leicester).

“With respect to international law, the question seems always to be: how does it fit into the economic needs of a country? It is never just what is right or wrong, it also appears that the wrong becomes right over time: Israel’s occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank, now seen as acceptable.” (Boston I).

“There is a need to address legal black holes, e.g. Guantanamo.” (Leicester).

“The same improvements (as Ossening, (NY.) I set out for Muslim courts above) could be made in international law where the system is manipulated by rich and powerful countries.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

11.4 Explanations of and comments on Sharia

◆ *“People misunderstand the true Sharia law, they don’t realise that the physical punishment within it is rare and the last resort, and not as extreme as is often thought; for example you would not cut off someone’s hand, only the tip of their finger, and this would only be in a rare case.” (North West London).*

“The law is in the Qur’an and judgments are made by consultation.” (North West London).

◆ *“Concerning punishment, the Sharia tries to check serious crime, and this is right. Non-Muslims say ‘surely physical punishment is not civilized.’ In Islam we don’t believe in incarceration.” (North West London).*

^{326A} *“Sharia law has developed but injunctions are in the Qur’an and sayings of Mohammad, they are therefore ‘taken as given.’ But where it is not obvious how a case comes under the Sharia, a judgment can be made.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

³²⁶ *“Before the Prophet, if the powerful committed a crime it was often forgiven, and when the poor committed a crime it was often prosecuted. For Muslims, it is all about the here-after, everything goes to God on Judgment Day.” (Boston I). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“In Islam when selecting people to be judges you select the most honest people. It is often hard to get people to agree to be a judge, because they feel inadequate ‘I might make a mistake.’” (Boston I).*

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◆ *“A scholar system ensures that a lawyer cannot make a decision by himself.” (North West London).*

“There are at least five schools of Islamic law. This accounts for some of the variations.” (Dearborn II).

“People are born free, this is Islam’s understanding.” (Boston I).

◆ *“Judges can consult anyone in order to find the truth. They are fully empowered, they have unlimited power to find the truth. They don’t have to rely merely on what the lawyers present.” (Boston I).*

“Military courts take security cases even if not involving the military. So if anyone is politically active, a trouble-maker is seen as a security threat, they are tried by the military.” (Boston).

“Justice is taken with severe measures.” (San Diego).

◆ *“Under Islam, there is no forced conversion; the rights of the conquered people are always respected.” (Boston).*

◆ *“In the Middle-East, law school is not popular. People are more interested in becoming doctors, engineers and teachers than lawyers. People don’t seek to make a living this way: it is seen as a profession of last resort. People don’t sue each other, most disputes are mediated before going to court.” (Boston I).*

◆ *“Saudi Arabia implements total Islamic law, Shariat, which with many cases of crime, a severe punishment is presented, such as the cutting of the hand of the one who stole something. Yet a huge factor in this form of criminal justice is that a witness is always needed. Justice is used more with severe consequences for crime. Islam also has a strong foundation of “Divine Justice”. If a crime is not justified within this world, God will reward/punish in the hereafter.” (San Diego).*

“In Arabia, pre-Islam, they established international laws, as many merchants would come and meet in Mecca, a central location for business. This was formed to establish a balanced way of implementing law with foreigners as a non-discriminatory act.” (San Diego).

“Islam recognizes the death penalty, for example a person who is killed has the right to have the death justified by having the murderer killed.” (San Diego).

“Islam embraces innocence until proven guilty.” (New York I).

RESPECT FOR LAW AND RULE OF LAW

^{341A} “We know that Sharia law experienced a phenomenal growth and development during the first six centuries. The stagnation we have today has existed from that time when the door of Ijtihad (development of the law) was virtually closed. The full and proper use of Islamic principle, such as will certainly ensure the ongoing process of fresh thinking, and influence some creative and desirable adjustment to that body of laws.” (South London III, written statement by relative of a participant). [return to index](#)

“Islam implements rules of hospitality. The Islamic system of respect and rule of law is based on implementing more extreme laws to have, as a result, less crime committed. There is a lack of checks and balances.” (San Diego).

“The Qur’an is a living source of jurisprudence and as such provides for changes. That will keep it relevant and alive. The old interpretations of legal theories in many areas of Muslim life, though obsolete, are still being used by some contemporary scholars to deliver fatwas that create greater hardships and quite often embarrassment to the believer.” (South London III, individual written statement by Muslim relative of a participant).

“Muslims must not remain silent and be condemned to live under rules that were established in the 8th and the 9th centuries.” (South London III, written statement by relative of a participant).

“One is innocent until proven guilty.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“One has representation in court.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“Judicial independence and impartiality.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

³⁴¹ “Muslims address the burden of proof.” (Ossening, (NY.) I). [return to index](#)

“The need to tell the truth and the necessity of not lying.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

12. GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY

12.1 Introduction

Justice is shown to be the paramount principle of Islam in relation to what the West calls governance. International justice is emphasized perhaps because of the current climate in world events, both political and economic.

Key Statements

12.2 Concepts of justice and equity

♦ *“Muslims value justice as a thing held particularly dear, sacred, in the non-religious sense. It is the core value in Islam. It concerns the father and son relationship; it concerns dispute over land and fairness, because of the consequences in the next world.” (Leicester).*

♦ *“The purpose of the Muslim life is to achieve justice; it can't be achieved by mankind, only God can achieve it perfectly. Concerning God and man, God forgives and dispenses Justice. Concerning man and man, each one pays for past wrongs.” (Leicester).*

³⁴³ *“Justice is very important with regard to God in the hereafter, just as love is very important to Christians. For Muslims justice is logical and from the mind (in contrast to love). Flexibility leads to confusion and acrimony.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)*

“Muslims consider that Christians should be more vocal about world injustice and that Christianity is unable to challenge the ethics of the western world, political justice, trade and economic justice.” (Leicester).

♦ *“Our discussion, however, highlighted deep dissatisfaction with the injustices which are created, allowed and perpetuated elsewhere in the world by western nations in the name of democracy. The West and its apparently democratic governments were criticised for supporting unjust regimes when they served western interests. The support of the United States of America for the regime in Pakistan was given as an example of the double standards applied by the West when their own economic or strategic interests were at stake. The regimes in the UAE and Saudi Arabia were also cited as examples of undemocratic governments supported by the West. One Muslim participant referred to ‘dictators put there by the West.’ A Christian participant rejected this view. While admitting that western nations do interfere in the process of government in other countries, including Islamic states, he believed that the idea that the West imposes dictators on other nations was a myth. Some of the participants, however, did not believe it was a myth and referred to the way in which America and Britain have supported the government of Saudi Arabia as a prime example of western double standards – attacking*

GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY

countries like Russia for being undemocratic while preventing democracy in other places.” (Leicester).

◆ *“Our discussion also considered the way in which western nations had connived at corruption and injustice in the abuse of UN Aid for oil funding and felt deeply offended that powerful western nations can behave in such a self-interested way. Such failures within apparently democratic nations do not help other nations to welcome democracy. Some of our participants felt strongly that the West had both hindered the development of democracy, as in Iran, and rejected democratically elected governments if they claimed to be Islamic. The examples of Turkey and Algeria were given as places where democratically elected governments had been rejected by the West. It was suspected that western nations were fearful of what would happen if an elected Islamic government took over, in case this harmed western interests or led to the abolition of laws and civil rights.” (Leicester).*

◆ *“On the contrary, participants suggested that the regimes which preceded such governments were often oppressive dictatorships and should be replaced by elected civilian governments, even if they are not of the kind the West would like. It was felt that the experience of responsibility in government would help elected Islamic leaders to act in the interests of all their people, and that elected leaders would not destroy what they had won. Such governments should be allowed to flourish. The attitude of most Muslim (and Christian) participants was summed up by the comment that in looking at the relationship between democratic western nations and the rest of the world, ‘there is no fairness.’” (Leicester). See section 9.7 for important considerations indirectly possibly relating to democracy in the last statement.*

³⁴⁵ *“Justice in the Qur’an includes returning a kindness and doing a kindness when none is received. Justice concerns the welfare of the human race as a whole.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)*

³⁴⁶ *“Justice islamically underpins social, political and economic areas, all areas. For some Muslims the Palestine issue generates a great deal of hostility, but I do not agree with the violent responses of some because Islam gives us many ways to fight back.” (North West London). [return to index](#)*

“The saving of life is a priority. Killing one person is an affront to the whole of humanity. Justice should be applied to everyone and all religions.” (Mauritius).

“The Saudi Arabian regime does not represent all Muslims. The issue will not be resolved until there is re-education in the ways of the great prophets, e.g. Mohammed and Jesus. People should be dealt with equally. It should not be a matter of who has money. Justice is not seen in terms of blame, instead, equity, tolerance and common teachings. Only with this we will get peace in the Middle East.” (North West London).

◆ *“Justice is tied to the psyche of Muslims because it is referenced repetitively in the Qur’an. Islam teaches equality of all humanity and everyone has a right to justice. Most*

GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY

Muslims live in the third world where there is misdistribution of wealth. Mercy is also very important to Muslims. Muslims cannot look at themselves as superior; they must apply justice equally.” (Dearborn I).

³⁴⁹ *“To be poor does not mean injustice from the Islamic perspective. We don’t have the luxury to keep responsible only at the individual level; we need to look at the world around us.” (Dearborn I). [return to index](#)*

³⁵⁰ *“Compassion and love leads to justice.” (Dearborn I). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“Equal access to food, education, healthcare (the individual’s basic needs) based on the Qur’an should be equitable, not based on geographical boundaries.” (Minneapolis).*

“Equity is accessibility and availability to basic human needs including information services and natural resources.” (Minneapolis).

“Everyone has an equal right to justice”. (Dearborn I).

“Unjust rulers will be punished by God.” (Dearborn I).

³⁵⁴ *“The importance of justice to Islam was the key reason why she (the speaker) was drawn to that faith.” (Dearborn I). [return to index](#)*

“One of the names of God is Justice; Justice is the preservation of person, family, property and religious faith.” (Minneapolis).

³⁵⁶ *“Mercy is above justice.” (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)*

³⁵⁷ *“Justice involves the basic needs of everyone, vigilant for the whole.” (Minneapolis). [return to index](#)*

“There is no difference in justice toward people you hate and people you love or justice for rich people and justice for those with no resources or power; whether you are Muslim or non-Muslim.” (Boston I).

“An example of injustice had to do with the continuing birth defects suffered by the Vietnamese as an aftermath of the war, and the lack of acknowledgment or apology on the part of the US for its responsibility in this.” (Boston I).

“If it is customary don’t change it unless it is not useful.” (Minneapolis).

◆ *“Attainment of equality for all human beings in all spheres of life (God,self, family, community, environment, Muslims, non-Muslims, society, nation, world).” (Minneapolis).*

◆ *“When fishing or hunting don’t take more than one needs.” (Minneapolis).*

GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY

“When people who perpetuated injustice define justice there is a problem,” (Boston I).

“Justice comes with rights and responsibilities, and starts with individuals. Each person has to act justly and each person has the right to be treated justly.” (Boston I).

³⁶³ *“On Justice there is not a clash of civilizations but a dialogue of civilizations.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“One woman said :Equity is not necessarily justice. It is justice tempered with mercy.” (New York I).*

“If we speak of justice is there inherent in it a notion of tolerance?” (Chicago).

“Toleration of different beliefs is essential to get along.” (Chicago).

“Is it possible to be intolerant if you believe you have the truth. If you have the truth why give the people freedom, because they will only ruin their soul.” (Chicago).

“Tolerance is important west and east.” (Chicago).

◆ *“The priority of justice over equality.” (New York I).*

◆ *“Economic equity is more important than equity of freedom.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).*

“There is concern at the inclination of nations to use perceived injustices as rationalizations for the defense of what are in fact economic/political interests.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“Equity comprises equal distribution of resources without disallowing for individual initiative.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

“Wealth distribution and gender equality are unbalanced and causes of social disharmony.” (Boston II Students).

“Remedying injustice on a global level requires taking personal responsibility for those in need.” (Ossening, (NY.) I).

◆ *“Benevolent use of personal resources is the best means of redistribution of wealth rather than secular progressive tax structures.” (Boston II Students).*

“To understand how God works with us, if your faith is right, you move on it. Yes we have those documents of the Founding Father, they were based on the Fathers of our Faith, on prophets. So those of us who believe in God have a mighty power.” (Delaware).

³⁷³ *“The West has lost its moral bearings and the rest of the world is suffering the consequences.” (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)*

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“The society is only as good as whoever speaks truth, speaks out. Our society spent 3—million \$ on aid and 87 billion to the war. I say reverse it because we CAN change the people and be of the people, but only righteous people, not all people.” (Delaware).

“I desire and long for and pray for a time when I can be a citizen in a world where it really is true that no child is left behind and no poor is left behind.” (Delaware).

“I don’t, disagree with any of these big issues. But I am reminded of the saying ‘think globally.’ We have the opportunity to create a situation in this community where everyone can trust and depend on one another and address the needs right here and be a model of what we want to see in the world.” (Delaware).

12.3 Criticisms of the West

“Individual injustices: double standards in the West, e.g. Israel/Palestine, a great source of discontent.” (Mauritius).

“Unilateralist policy of the US in Iraq.” (Mauritius).

◆ *“Other injustices in order of importance: global famine, food not linked to need, the European Common Agricultural Policy; Global trade: unfair political support by wealthy western nations and unfair trade practises.” (Mauritius).*

◆ *“Injustice: lack of clean drinking water.” (Mauritius).*

◆ *“Injustice: pollution/dumping of nuclear waste, poor countries are bribed to accept it.” (Mauritius).*

“EU trade relations with some others are unjust, e.g. tariffs on some goods. Certain people are kept in poverty and the money kept in the EU.” (North West London).

“Solving the Palestine problem would not end terrorism because now other problems have been created.” (North West London).

“Equity in distribution of wealth, proper education, good administration and justice, meritorious promotions equal for all, equal access to credit for the poor.” (Mauritius).

“We would have problems anyway due to the USA’s domination.” (North West London).

◆ *“During the first election of Bush, the Florida vote was rigged. If you can’t even trust the system when you vote, there is a chain reaction.” (North West London).*

◆ *“As Muslims we feel we are the target of injustice and this forms our opinion of what justice is. A clash of civilisations is manufactured.” (North West London).*

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“Need to sort out the sovereignty in Palestine and Iraq before we can look further at justice.” (North West London).

“In the UN there is often not timely action on the part of the UN, so that resolutions are passed but often nothing is done, but when US sponsored resolutions (e.g. on Iraq) are passed there is often action right away. When powerful interests are affected by these resolutions, the resolutions are enacted.” (Boston I).

◆ *“Democracy in US foreign policy (unilateral vs. multilateral) “with us or against us” is very bothersome to Muslims. The universal idea of brotherhood is difficult to embrace when the brothers you aspire to, apply universal ideas but not universally (drop bombs, apply different views re: genocide (Bosnia, as an example). When Saudi Arabia is openly supported by the USA, the appeal of universal justice rings hollow for many Muslims. There is the belief that they are very much under western control / CIA payroll, etc. It is no longer colonial, but tyranny all the same. They did not allow for democracies that oppose the West, e.g. Morocco, Iran, Algeria, Brunei.” ((Chicago).*

◆ *“The problem is that security is now more fundamental than justice. After 9/11 a rebalance took place of human rights as against security. September 11th, traumatic. Equilibrium from early 1950’s was disturbed: very dangerous. This government took it as an excuse to do what they wanted to do anyway. Now there is no real sense of justice with respect to people whose rights are being impaired, especially Muslims. We will probably not have the freedom to go back to the same equilibrium.” (Chicago).*

“The large amount of US arms being channelled to Egypt and elsewhere must be acknowledged and reduced.” (New York I).

“The Israel/Palestine conflict is the key global issue that needs to be solved. This and Iraq have reduced faith in the US and international institutions such as the UN.” (New York I).

“Concrete recommendations: how to create mechanisms within each society to discuss the issues.” (Chicago).

◆ *“If there is another military conflict we (Muslims in the US) could be under military control. There is fear, insecurity. If you don’t have security you don’t care about justice. If injustice goes so far that you are willing to risk your own life: revenge.” (Chicago).*

“Global justice issues are typically handled by international organizations (UN, World Bank, etc.) whose discussions are more influenced by political/economic drives, particularly the interests of its more powerful members. Thus these organizations seem often to become instead tools of inequity/injustice.” (New York I).

“Muslims are relatively poor under-developed nations and are unjustly dealt with by western states e.g. Bangladesh and several African states.” (Boston II Students).

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“Justice loses meaning when those organizations do not have power to hold their powerful members accountable to their rules of law, further rendering moot the notion of consultation.” (New York I).

◆ *“The average American is far wealthier than most people in the world but does not feel obligated to share with those less fortunate who live in other countries. Americans have not been taught to feel they are part of the global community.” (Boston II Students).*

12.4 Criticisms of particular Muslim states

“Darfur/Khartoum governments manipulating the situation.” (Mauritius).

“Saudi Arabia an unjust country, wealth is accumulated in the hands of the ruling family.” (Mauritius).

“Jordan and Syria are unjust.” (Mauritius).

12.5 Solutions to injustice

“Iraq/Afghan wars reinforce UN status as a world power. International law must be acted on.” (Mauritius).

13. MATERIALISM

13.1 Introduction

The character of materialism and its perceived identification with the West was discussed.

13.2 General statements on the nature of materialism

³⁹⁵ *“There is a religious solution to materialism (i.e. the belief that goods and services can fulfil the ultimate good of personal life). Materialism is the sin of modern western civilisation and the western consumer society wastes natural resources to produce disposable goods.” (Boston II Students). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“What is considered most shocking about western behaviour and attitudes is sexual morals, free sex (both heterosexual and homosexual) and the fact that this is formalised by legislation. Gay weddings are totally unacceptable.” (Mauritius).*

“The basic problem with western society is that the dimension of their souls’ eternity and life after death has been relegated to the background as well as the fundamental principle of accountability for deeds.” (Mauritius).

◆ *“All people of faith find materialism offensive in the US and outside the US.” (Dearborn II).*

◆ *“Muslims are offended by creating a want rather than addressing a need, by psychological manipulation.” (Leicester).*

“Greater importance should be given to prayer and spiritual meditation through silence. Globalisation should be reinvented through religion, and global solidarity and understanding promoted.” (Mauritius).

“Most participants felt that there is hope for the future as after every period of decline truth regains its position.” (Mauritius).

“Muslims are reassessing the consumerism that has crept into Dubai, Abu Dhabi and even Jeddah.” (Mauritius).

“In Islam it is an unforgiven sin to worship other than God.” (North West London).

“Materialism is a worship of money and goods.” (North West London).

“Western marketing offends the Muslim world, it is aggressive. Is the role of the women the object in advertizing voyeurism?” (Chicago).

MATERIALISM

◆ “Advertizing takes up so much mind-space; identifying with brands and popular culture. “Poverty and despair; people hope to have the same things as blond-haired people. How do you make them feel equal?” (Chicago).

⁴⁰³ “Psychological and social content is there to tame discontent. Al-Jazeera’s use of good-looking women dressed in western clothing selling the latest luxury item.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

⁴⁰⁴ “The goal for a Muslim is freedom. Not freedom to drink but freedom to worship. So any society who gives us freedom to worship that is fine with us.” (Delaware). [return to index](#)

⁴⁰⁵ “Istanbul, a great city of the world, materialism has affected the growth and made it more western, but culturally Turkish people are of eastern culture, and live on a first name basis.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

⁴⁰⁶ “Muslims should be humble in their wealth and financial dealings.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)

“Notions of generosity, notion of a lack of hospitality. In the Muslim world the host would put out all the best, would not consider accepting dollars or taking dollars.” (Chicago).

“It is mandatory for each Muslim to pay a portion of their income to charity in order to take care of the poor and financially disadvantaged people.” (San Diego).

◆ “One should turn over wealth to society to help each other. One should oppose hedonism, it is never too late. Other civilizations have gone through high and low. Those who say it is too late go to the hills with Bin Laden.” (Chicago).

“It is important for the Muslim to acknowledge that wealth and success in this world are temporary and that true success is for the believer who will be rewarded with heaven.” (San Diego).

“Material desire is considered a sin, and, though it is part of everyone, Muslims should try to fight wanting more, of having too much, because everything is accounted for in this world, and the way they spend their wealth is extremely important.” (San Diego).

⁴¹¹ “Even if that culture has things we do not believe in, like prostitution, we are ok with it as long as we are free to worship.” (Delaware). [return to index](#)

“My wish: destruction of capitalism and greed.” (Delaware).

13.3 How materialism affects society

MATERIALISM

“A form of exploitation by people is commercially influencing others to focus their lives on obtaining goods, keeping them away from the spiritual aspect and the self.” (North West London).

“Exploitation of labour to meet wants.” (Leicester).

“Growth of indecency and nudity in the media. The media are responsible for a general degradation of morality.” (Mauritius).

“Immorality and dishonesty in business practices.” (Mauritius).

“Money-men putting people into debt to satisfy their wants, creating a cultural borrowing and dependency in an interest-led economy (usury).” (Leicester).

“Speed of acquisition of commodities, giving a false impression of “quick fixings” like taking drugs.” (Leicester).

◆ *“Western society has lost its guidelines and has become completely unchristianed. It has plunged wholeheartedly into materialism.” (Mauritius).*

“Muslims are annoyed by USA’s patronizing attitude. They tell other countries not to be materialistic while they are themselves.” (North West London).

*“It is felt that French secularism has an anti-religious component and excessive measures have been introduced, such as the banning of overt religious signs in schools.” (Mauritius). **(Editor’s note: this comment is not directed to materialism, though it was reported in a discussion on this subject).***

◆ *“Muslims are offended by Christian proselytizers, handing out food with conversion as a part of the equation. Locally Christians tried to convert Muslims with a party. Halal hot dogs.” (Dearborn II).*

“‘The overworked American:’ people work longer: more \$\$\$ to spend. They are very tired, do not have time for meaningful activities; they reward themselves with something materialistic. The line is blurred between work and home, one never escapes from all cell phones. Two-income couples become standard, women in the 1970’s with young children went to work, there was a decline in the number of children.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)

“The role of house-wife declined, it did not occupy all existence.” (Chicago).

“Two incomes adds to income, adds to materialism, two cars and child carers.” (Chicago).

“Until Muslims are people of wealth, instead of third world states, there will be no respect from the rest of the world.” (Dearborn II).

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“Critique of materialism – it is a ceaseless quest for pleasure, hedonism.” (Chicago).

“Britney Spears and Madonna want to dabble in religion to show they have a mind as well as a body.” (Chicago).

⁴²⁷ *“The elites in developing countries are subject to materialism.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)*

“The growth of consumerism results in excess which in turn robs the poor of their share leading to famine. Consumerism denies poorer people in less developed countries human food (e.g. soy beans) in favour of using it to feed cattle for the western market.” (Mauritius).

“Religious purists: Afghanistan, the Islamic tradition adheres to the purist tradition of poverty; take a salary but give it away. The Shah (Iran) for his ‘4,000 Year’ party flew in food from Maxim’s; nothing was from Iran. No Iranians were invited. Don’t mention poverty to the Shah, he does not want to know about it.” (Chicago).

⁴³⁰ *“The Taliban is the opposite extreme, literature, music, art, any leisure equals guilt; there is an absolute pursuit of virtue, a ban on kite flying.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)*

⁴³¹ *“Turkey has a more secular and western majority, one misses the religious aspects within the government. Some rebel against that now. They worry about becoming too western. They are training children to be less westernized in regard to materialism.” (Chicago). [return to index](#)*

13.4 Global effects

“The long-term impact of debt on third-world countries is highlighted by Jubilee 2000 and the IMF.” (Leicester).

“The exploitation of global resources due to western materialism has its direct impact on politics, e.g. oil.” (Leicester).

“Rulers are propped up so that they can satisfy the requirements of the west even though the rights of the people of those countries are trodden on.” (Leicester).

◆ *“Bin Laden wants to represent the impoverished masses.” (Chicago).*

◆ *“Bin Laden wants to identify materialism of the West as being evil.” (Chicago).*

14. CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

14.1 Introduction

This subject was introduced to enable views on the cultural aspects of human rights to be expressed, however the discussions were broader.

14.2 General statements by Muslims on culture

“One can’t define “Muslim society” because Islam accepts cultural norms wherever they are so long as they don’t contravene Islamic laws. So Islam does not have culturally specific norms wherever they are.” (Mauritius).

“Religion and culture should not be confused, as people having varying customs may share a common religion. Within the same religion there are a wide variety of accepted modes of dress, behaviour, eating, habits and social morals.” (Mauritius).

♦ *“Political: in many Muslim-dominated countries culture and religion are narrowly defined even to the point where some people may try and use religion as a justification for culture. First and foremost as Muslims we have not the right nor can we introduce new laws into Islam. It is a known thing in Islam to differentiate over culture between one’s religion and if one’s culture interferes with one’s way of life then it is no longer a consistent part of their culture, it is ruled out by religion. There is no cultural uniformity as Muslims cover many different ethnicities.” (San Diego).*

“After an hour of discussion participants felt that the theme proved difficult to handle. In some cases (as for youth at school or university) Islam is the initial assumption about other groups and causes one to believe differently initially with people of different cultural backgrounds. As one gets to know the others, the attitude automatically changes.” (Mauritius).

“The devotee is not called upon to alter his appearance or change his identity and dress, cultural customs and language except in cases where they patently offend the basic principles on which the pillars of Islam are founded.” (South London III, individual written statement by Muslim relative of a participant).

⁴³⁸ *“A variety of dress codes coexists and basically people must be allowed to adopt the mode they want. Some Muslim participants said that Islam only requires women to be decent and modest. A Muslim lady said it is an Islamic injunction that a woman should cover her head, but she (the speaker) chooses freely not to adhere to this.” (Mauritius).*

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♦ *“It is common practice in most Islamic communities today to make a convert to Islam feel as if he is changing his national identity to that of someone of a different tribe or nation. A Canadian convert recently was made to believe that his western dress was*

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inappropriate for the ceremony of Shahad. But the Qur'an (49:13) states that the intention is to keep the identity of the convert intact.” (South London III, individual written statement by Muslim relative of a participant).

“Today Muslims are faced with the dilemma of being caught unprepared to confront the new social paradigm in the West. To escape and avoid the challenge Muslims are encouraged to return to the practice of Islam of the 7th and 8th centuries to reject the reality of the environment in which we live now. They are busy struggling with insignificant issues of the Hijab, and the right to polygamy.”(South London III, individual written statement by Muslim relative of a participant).

“It is ironic to have so many Muslims scholars and leaders to be engaged busily propagating and recommending the return of early practises in Islam. Living in the past is not what Mohammed recommended.” (South London III, individual written statement by relative of a Muslim participant).

“Concern is felt about the use of religious texts to support entrenched discriminatory socio-cultural attitudes particularly in the spheres of sex, race and religion. Broad-based education should form the bedrock of society which must promote inclusion and social integration. The fundamental objectives of the Islamic social policy call for the affirmation and consolidation of the integrity and dignity of the individual protecting and strengthening the family unit and ensuring that women enjoy the full legal, social, cultural and economic, educational and political rights guaranteed to them in Islam. Culture is an argument often put by governments to excuse themselves from the need to know the rights and responsibility taught by our religion. Human rights are universal.” (South London III, written statement by Muslim relative of a participant).

14.3 Lists and descriptions of cultural conduct

⁴⁴¹ *“Today there are many situations when the controversy over covering is seen globally, as in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, where many stereotypes come from, as women in these Middle Eastern countries are seen wearing full clothing or even hijab, leading many people uneducated on the subject of covering into a negative point of view and leading to malicious acts of hate crimes.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“Even in a more westerned setting as France, hijab is an issue, as the French government is wanting to bar wearing of the head scarf as it is a “symbol of religion”. Yet what concerns Muslims is that (A) hijab is not a symbol but an act of worship (Khadija Mostafu) and (B) banning it would not stop Muslim women who do cover on a daily basis from wearing it. Hijab for Muslim women is a sign of respect and modesty. Why is it that when a women covers more she is perceived as oppressed, yet when a woman is covered yet she is liberated?” (San Diego).*

⁴⁴² *“The position accrued to women in many Muslim societies sprang from local traditions and were not ordained by Islam. Islam never forbids women to work outside*

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the home but gave priority to her role as wife and mother. Similarly Islam did not forbid women to pray in mosques. This is a measure taken by the second Caliph Omar for various practical reasons, most Muslim participants express the view that this tradition is worthy of modification.” (Mauritius). [return to index](#)

¹³¹ ♦ *“A second example: shaking hands in Islam between a woman and a man who are not related or married is extremely prohibited. In general women and men who are not related/married are not to touch AT ALL; this fact of Islam differs from other religions. The physical interaction between male and female is prohibited, as Muslims believe that it is not proper, and it may even lead to sinful acts; not to say a simple handshake is equal to sex, but in essence the intermingling has major effects, as many relationships begin in simple social settings. Dating in Islam is also prohibited for both genders. Marriage is the only formal and recognised form of companionship between Muslim males and females. The male and female should lower their gaze and ward off any sinful temptations.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

⁴⁴³ *“Forced, arranged marriages, equality between men and women and the ritual of female circumcision are cultural issues not specific to Islam.” (Leicester). [return to index](#)*

♦ *“Among Muslims and Christians contraception, education and work for women are widely accepted. Besides the traditional role-sharing between the sexes is changing from patriarchal to a more consensual egalitarian pattern.” (Mauritius).*

“Differences are cultural in Arabic life, often more cultural than religious.” (Dearborn II).

“Women’s first priority is the family and the house.” (Dearborn II).

⁴⁴⁶ *“Unquestioning acceptance of authority of the elder.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)*

“Dress modest.” (Dearborn II).

⁴⁴⁸ *“Education; Islam requires women to be educated.” (Dearborn II). [return to index](#)*

“Culturally specific aspects of traditional Muslim society: congregational prayer, daily prayer, neighbour and family, sense of community, charity, avoidance of financial exploitation, usury, dress code, diet, the month of Ramadan, reflecting on God, propriety in dealings between men and women, burial laws. We would not modify any.” (North West London).

♦ *“Double standards in Muslim life:*

- *Muslim boys take advantage of Christian girls not of Muslim girls. It is not right;*
- *Boy’s word taken over girl’s.” (Dearborn II).*

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

◆ *“Islamic women at the beginning had more rights than any women in the world; however they have lost many of them.” (Dearborn II).*

“The Qur’an talks about the right to life.” (New York I).

◆ *“This group senses that our religions are close, but the cultures may not be.” (Dearborn II).*

^{450A} *“The Hijab or head scarf is many times negatively portrayed through the media, causing a mass misconception on it and Muslim women. The Hijab is not worn as a symbol of religion such as the cross in Christianity, it is obligatory for every believing Muslim woman to wear it. It is not worn for a man because of oppression; on the contrary many Muslims view it as liberating.” (San Diego). [return to index](#)*

◆ *“Culture is dress, genital mutilation, honour killing and most gender roles. Islamic law allows for local custom.” (New York I).*

◆ *“The Qur’an does affirm the full humanity of the female. It is not inherently paternalistic.” (New York I).*

15. FREEDOM AND SELF - GOVERNMENT

15.1 Introduction

This subject was introduced to give the opportunity for views on colonialism and post-colonialism to be expressed. The subject is an aspect of global justice, however the subject was treated more broadly.

15.2 General statements

♦ *“Muslims felt they acted less actively in taking action and lobbying those in power, but Muslims have less freedom to speak out in Muslim countries.”(Leicester).*

“The ‘home situation’ was identified as one the root causes of global and intercountry abuses. A country where politics, the economically and military powerful, abuse the poor and the weak, is more likely to oppress other countries.” (Mauritius).

“People aren’t ready for democracy. Women are not educated, it won’t happen until a chance to vote and democracy happens.”(Chicago).

“On Tunisia: now we can’t afford reforms because the US with the guns will come. US needs to show consistency in dealing with leaders.” (Chicago).

♦ *“Freedom from colonialism is now threatened by ‘economic colonisation’. Wealthy nations, including the G7, are imposing a new type of servitude on weaker countries. Powerful lobbies in developed countries are dictating policies that affect poorer nations. Much injustice is apparent in trade agreements. Those of the WTO as well as the European Common Agricultural Policy have further impoverished many nations. Powerful nations do not consider generosity towards weaker ones.”(Mauritius).*

“Change is needed in the Islamic world, representative government and economic justice.”(Chicago).

15.3 Aspects of freedom and self-government of concern to Muslims

“Concerns in order of importance:

- *Economic pressure is the biggest issue e.g. ownership of scarce resources, dumping surplus resources;*
- *Technological differences;*
- *Political differences;*
- *Social and ethnic differences.” (Leicester).*

♦ *“Europe is more charitable giving towards Islamic development aid. US gives the least in foreign aid in terms of GNP, and it is tied to military aid. America’s role is military*

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force. *Feel we can never keep countries in line by making alliances with authoritarian regimes.*" (Chicago).

◆ *"US has become their lifeline of Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Tunisia."* (Chicago).

15.4 Muslim action

"Agencies outside governments should be more accountable in global activities in different countries, more transparency in their activities, a universal moral/ethical code." (Mauritius).

"UN development should provide equal and just access to the big stick against the country going against the code." (Mauritius).

"Muslims differ from Christians on how economies should be run, e.g. capitalism and no interest on debt." (Mauritius). **Note: this is not directed to the subject.**

◆ *"With regard to Egypt:*

- *Egypt is the heart and soul of the Muslim Arab world;*
- *Arab nationalism and the Muslim world;*
- *Civil societies, artists and Parliament, all stalled under martial law;*
- *They have well-formed groups, but they are not allowed to meet;*
- *Receives an enormous amount of dollars from the US;*
- *Has leverage;*
- *Civil groups in the US could make contact with groups in Egypt;*
- *Whatever dollars come from the US do not trickle down to the society;*
- *The Middle class is living precariously and they have awareness but no opportunity: they get crushed;*
- *The Muslim brotherhood is Middle Class and it has helped in Pakistan and Egypt."* (Chicago).

◆ *"Christians as a whole should dispel the myth that there is NOT total support for Right-Wing Religion (i.e. the religious Christian Right in the US). Presumably the intention of the statement is the reverse of its actual wording. They should correct misunderstanding and marginalize the extremists on both sides."* (Chicago).

⁴⁶⁰ *"Democracy is tainted by colonialism. It was imposed on colonized, occupied peoples. And in those countries in the ME which claim to be democracies, it is corrupt. Look at Algeria, Egypt, Syria. Denial of access to vote, the banning of Muslim parties, rulers, twenty+ years in power, passing power from father to son."* (Vermont II). [return to index](#)

"Even the word democracy is negative because it is foreign. We need Shura to be the word." (Vermont II).

16. CIVIL SOCIETY

16.1 Introduction

This subject was introduced to enable Muslims to comment on the non-political aspects of governance.

16.2 Comments on civil society

“Civil society is flourishing in a society like Britain.” (Leicester).

“It would be a good thing if government funded political parties. This would ensure independence from donors.” (Mauritius).

◆ *“In Islam you do not need conflict and pluralism in society, because you would be moving towards a common goal. Islam is a whole system, there are rules in Islam for the government, so the government and all organisations work according to the same religious guidelines. This would only work perfectly with a perfect leader. Otherwise there may be variances due to interpretation.” (North West London).*

*“In Islamic society you would not all have to be Muslims. Islam is tolerant.” (North West London). **Note: This is not directly relevant to the subject.***

16.3 Order of priority in the institutions of civil government

“Most important institutions are:

- *Independent judiciary;*
- *Accountability of elected representatives;*
- *Functional watchdogs e.g. commission on the press association;*
- *Religious institutions with a “prophetic voice” especially regarding security; Though one would not advocate the role of the Ayatollah in Iran;*
- *Must maintain the establishment of the Church of England to maintain the prophetic and spiritual voice (in Britain);*
- *Education and access to it for all.;*

Independent organisations e.g. charities and action groups.” (Leicester).

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16.4 Activities of the institutions of civil society

“NGO attempts to sustain a deep dialogue with Muslim society and in a parallel approach to tell American policy-makers how much this affects our whole relationship with other parts of the world.” (Chicago).

CIVIL SOCIETY

“4- Putting social issues on the national agenda. Poverty, literacy, crime, marriage and other social issues should be addressed through civil organizations that can compete for funding by the government. Such non-profit organizations can have a vital role in improving the quality of life of the public. 5- Rejecting all forms of discrimination based on religion, color or ethnicity. 6- Defining the true identity of the nation, and planting the seeds of national loyalty. Stable nations and cultures should not feel threatened by other cultures. But if a nation is unsure about its true identity then it will react negatively to other ideas and prefer isolation.” (Dearborn II).

“The only people who get invited (in Washington DC to advise on civil society needs in the third world) are ‘crazy Right Wingers’, they have organizations and power and the ear of the people in position.” (Chicago).

◆ *“Mauritius youth feel a bit frustrated with Muslims dignitaries whose ways of thinking and teaching religion are often outmoded, narrow-minded and irrelevant. The idea is to rely less on Islamic principles in the modern world, which would make it easier to establish bridges with other such associations or other groups and perhaps, have some common activities.” (Mauritius).*

“The Evangelical Lutheran church in America is becoming more persistent, pushing for positions and having people behind them.

Lutherans are organizers and providers of international aid, but with controversy their relief could be cut off immediately.

The Government gives funds, but works through church organizations; the largest is the Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran World Relief.” (Chicago).

“It would be helpful if some government funding were made available to NGOs without any threat to their independence.” (Mauritius).

“Wherever there is resettlement of people the government has no mechanism to provide for them and turns to church organizations.” (Chicago).

“NGO’s are becoming more assertive but walk a fine line of which threatens their abilities to provide aid.” (Chicago).

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Note: Below are the guidance notes sent to conveners of roundtable discussions. Although it was intended that these should be read out at the start of the meetings, there is no doubt from communications with the conveners over the course of the project, that normally they were shortened and para-phrased to different extents. This was particularly true of the second part of the note on democracy.

APPENDIX 1

GUIDANCE AGENDA / FLOW-CHART FOR ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSIONS ON GOVERNANCE AND THE CITIZEN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

AGENDA FOR THE FIRST MEETING

- 1. Welcome by Episcopalian/Anglican Convener or Facilitator and a short description of the purpose of the Round-Table Discussions to read out as follows.**
 - i)Guidance has been asked for from Muslims and Episcopalians/Anglicans (called E/A below) on Muslim attitudes to certain issues of governance and the citizen.
 - ii) Round-Table Discussions (RTDs) have been and are being set up in.... I am our local contact
 - iii) It could be that the results will be sufficiently valuable that they would be published, but in any case, all opinions will be anonymous and the names of the members of the RTDs will not be disclosed unless each member expressly agrees. No press releases or other forms of information or publicity will be released, unless we all feel we want it.
 - iv) The reason for keeping the RTDs personally private is to ensure that we all feel free to say what we think and to modify our views as discussions progress, if and when we want to, without embarrassment.
 - v) We have a note for each subject to provide a logical flow for the order of discussions, although of course, we can come back to any issue later if any of us want to discuss it further.
 - vi) We will need two Joint-Chairmen, one Muslim and one E/A, and although we will be totally informal, they should keep discussion proceeding from point to point, ensure that the questions set out are answered and make proposals for agreed points to form a Report We must also appoint two Reporters, Muslim and E/A, to note down

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- points made and help the Chairmen minute conclusions reached between the members. **(Editor's note: in fact this was not done and in all cases the raw notes of the reporters were forwarded to the organizer.)**
- vii) One motive giving rise to the RTDs is the need to prevent unthinking acceptance of the concept of the 'clash of civilisations' which is being much talked about in the press, academic and political circles at the moment. Eight subjects of importance to 'governance and the citizen' have been selected.... On some only a little time may be needed, but others are more complicated. We do not want to rush to arrive at conclusions, but if we get bogged down on an issue or an aspect of an issue, then it may be best to record interim opinions and come back to the subject later. **(Editor's note: in fact the reports' notes did not contain formal conclusions.)**
- viii) It is very important that the conclusions reached are quite detailed and specific so that all points agreed are actually put down on paper. In other words a statement that every one agrees on the importance of the Rule of Law can't be used.... One needs to be able to actually say which aspects of the Rule of Law are agreed and whether and to what extent there are complications or differences of opinion or emphasis, so that one can give a really living in-depth impression The points which will help are listed in the discussion notes for each subject as 'Cardinal Points'. It is very important that each Cardinal Point is fully commented on in the written reports.
- ix) The objective is NOT to try and find novel or unique solutions to existing problems.
- x) Some friction is created internationally by use of terminology which causes offence, therefore it is also important to express our conclusions in language which will be equally acceptable and congenial to Muslims and to E/A and not unwelcome to either. It will therefore be of great assistance if you give your conclusions in language which is totally acceptable to Muslims and E/A.
- xi) There have been, and are, plenty of dialogues on theology throughout the U.S. and Britain between Muslims and C/A in Interfaith meetings. And of course there are many discussions all over United States and Britain on local community relations and issues. The eight subjects we have on our agenda have not been discussed before in the current context. Deliberately none of us (except perhaps the Convenor) are clerics, theologians, academics or those coming ex-officio. We are politically aware and concerned by-standers (if the Convenor is a cleric he/she should add: 'and therefore I will not be taking a big part in the discussions').
- xii) There are eight subjects on governance and the citizen relevant It is important for us to remember that we are not discussing these subjects

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in the U.S. or British context, but in the global context The subjects are:

- Democracy
- Globally Consistent Justice and Equity
- Freedom and Self-government
- Civil Society
- Human Rights
- Cultural Specificity
- Respect for Law and the Rule of Law
- Materialism

We can always come back to subjects already discussed if we have further ideas. Nobody is committed to views they have stated if they want to modify them at any later stage.

2. **Short Self Introduction by each member.**
3. **Selection of the Muslim and the E/A Chairmen and Reporters.**
4. **Commencement of Discussion of Item 1**

APPENDIX 2

DEMOCRACY

Chairmen's Introduction. – Please read out

This introduction is rather longer than the others because there are many different types of democracy and the major alternatives should be kept in mind during the discussions.

We must also remember that no democratic system works as perfectly as it is supposed to. We must be realistic and give true weight to the imperfections that exist in practice whatever system of democracy is being used.

The requirements for successful democratic government (as mentioned above not fully achieved anywhere) are that the popularly elected representatives control government policy and that fairness in elections is monitored.

A Parliament does not have to be sovereign over the government (as it is in Britain), it can share power with the government with provisions for conciliation between parliament and government when there is disagreement (as is the case in the USA and the European Union). But in this case in general when the two bodies cannot agree, a new policy cannot be adopted by one over the objections of the other. In Iran at present if there is disagreement the Government view prevails.

‘One person/one vote’ is only accepted as meritorious if it leads to government based on reasonable respect by the government of the majority for the rights and opinions of

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the minority of voters. In practice this may have to be guaranteed by legal protection for minority opinions.

Equally, if one group uses its majority to terminate democratic government ('one person, one vote, one time') as Hitler did in Germany in 1933, this would be an abuse in Britain and the USA and clearly should not be considered to be democracy.

Democracy is considered to work best in practice if established political parties represent the shifting views of individuals, and if the majority of votes passes back and forth between parties creating alternating governments. If these voting swings occur this means that political policies are being looked at afresh and judged at each election. The value or sanctity of the individual means that people will be inclined to change parties when they change their views and they may support different parties from those which some of their friends, associates and family members support. In the USA and Britain the swing of the pendulum is quite extreme. On the Continent of Europe the swings are very much less (discussed below).

If one group always has the majority of votes this probably indicates that the parties are based on ethnic or religious differences and that one ethnic or religious group being bigger than the other, wins elections regardless of political policies. But having one party in power perpetually may not be the most healthy system. Malaysia having had a good record of democratic government but of one party in power lasting for 22 years, is an example of this.

It could be said that democracy may encourage divisions in society, but that is an inevitable characteristic arising out of the importance of the individual, though of course consultation may reduce divisions. Traditionally Muslims have tended to stress the primacy of consultation in the community, which should persist until a common policy is arrived at. This, they feel, gives a greater sense of unity. One could also ask: is there merit for Muslims in having specific religious representatives in a Parliament, as for example in the House of Lords in Britain where Anglican Bishops are members.

Optional additional note on practical details of democracy which can be read out if the group wishes: major differences existing between the U.S. and British system and those on continental Europe.

It is worth noting that both the USA and Britain differ from European democracies, and would be thought by continental Europeans as somewhat rough and ready, and thus it is a good idea to look at the continental Europeans as well. It is clear that when emphasizing the merits of democracy Americans and Britons do not sufficiently recognize the rough and ready nature of their own systems which European continental and others regard as a blemish. A feature in the practice of both U.S. and British democracy is that the election results often do not accurately reflect the voting figures. In the case of the USA this is partly because of the nature of the U.S. Electoral College. It is often thought that Nixon and not Kennedy won the 1962 election, while disputes over voting totals in Florida in the last presidential elections put that result in doubt. In fact potential disputes in a number of other States could also have altered the result, but it seems to have been generally felt that one doubtful result cancelled out another).

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In Britain the 'first past the post' system (the same as in America) whereby the highest vote in each constituency wins the seat is thought by many to be unfair because there are usually three major parties contesting each seat and the winner's vote is very often lower than the combination of the other two. This sometimes means in Britain that the winning party has a far bigger majority in Parliament than it 'deserves'.

On the other hand the US and British systems produce strong governments and they are not resented in either country because the majorities swing back and forth between the two leading parties, giving each reasonable innings.

On the European continent 'proportional representation' is favoured. In this system each party has a national list of candidates in order of precedence and the seats are allocated from their lists in accordance with the total vote for each party. This results in much more precise reflection in Parliament of the voting strengths of each party, but it encourages a proliferation of parties, often 6 to 10, and the need for coalition governments, because there is no overall majority. Coalitions result in weaker compromise governments, but this is thought to be a good thing on the European Continent.

For supporters of democracy perhaps the conclusion should be, as Winston Churchill said (probably when he lost an election!) democracy is a bad form of government but it is better than the rest.

Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

1. Please list the essential features and give them an order of importance. What difference of emphasis or reservations or different priorities came up in discussions? Please describe these as fully as possible with the reasons which lie behind any differences of emphasis or priority.
2. Please find terminology for describing these points which both Muslims and E/A are comfortable with.

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

- One person one vote
- One person one vote one time
- Attitudes to democratic systems based on political parties
- The government not to go against the views of the elected representatives of the voters
- The rights of minorities to be respected by the majority/to what extent and how?
- Monitoring of fairness of elections
- Attitudes to the government passing back and forth between opposing groups in elections, and where this is unlikely, how to prevent the government becoming too powerful and complacent of criticism

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GLOBALLY CONSISTENT JUSTICE AND EQUITY

Chairmen's Introduction – Please read out

The word 'justice' is very important in its religious significance in Islam. E/A would tend not to use the word in international affairs but confine it to its legalistic sense, while for Muslims it is highly important in international affairs, particularly the principle of equal justice for all nations, for instance in complying with U.N. resolutions. Social justice is also of great importance to Muslims. We are not only concerned with social justice between the people in one country, but equally or possibly more so as regards the difference of wealth and poverty between nations. This might be termed international economic justice.

Gender justice need not be considered here because it is considered under 'Human Rights'.

Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

1. In what context in global affairs is 'justice' used by Muslims, and in what context by E/A? Please give lists in order of importance. Please note any differences of priorities that exist.
2. List the priorities in domestic affairs where justice is important. Are there any differences of approach between Muslims and E/A?
3. As 'justice' is central in Muslims' attitudes but not often expressed by that particular word in E/A attitudes, what are the words E/A use for the same concept?
4. Does use of the word 'equity' add a different dimension in Muslim or E/A attitudes?
5. Summarize the remedies needed to deal with injustices in order of urgency and, when views differ, indicate what the differences are.

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

1. A list and description of individual injustices between members of the U.N. in order of importance, and what needs remedying in each case.
2. A list and description of the most important individual other political, social, economic and any other sort of injustice which need identifying and ranked according to urgency.
3. Description of any differences of emphasis between Muslims and E/A and also differences in terminology.

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FREEDOM AND SELF GOVERNMENT

Chairmen's Introduction. – Please read out

The heading of 'freedom and self-government' is usually taken to refer to the importance of people in a country ruling themselves and not being ruled by those of a second country unless they genuinely wish it. This is the classic case for the ending of colonialism. However 'freedom and self-government' are also often invoked to object to economic 'colonialism', and, in the light of the Iraq war, to military 'colonialism'.

Any new federation of countries will involve a loss of 'freedom and self-government' for the countries involved according to this definition, but the countries concerned may prefer to lose some freedom and self-government because they have confidence in the democratic rights which each individual and each political group will possess in the new federation (which is the rationale of the European Union).

However in recent history some people have been driven to obtain more 'freedom and self-government' by the break-up of larger state entities into smaller ones e.g. India broke down into India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and Pakistan later broke down into Pakistan and Bangladesh, Singapore separated from Malaysia and the United Arab Republic returned to Egypt and Syria.

Thus invoking 'freedom and self-government' generally means objecting to the present power situation either between two countries or groups or globally.

Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

1. List all the aspects of 'freedom and self-government' which are relevant to global and regional issues in order of importance noting fully any differences of emphasis or opinion.
2. Describe the actions required to improve the present situation.
3. List any points relating to individual countries that you feel are of general importance.

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

List and description of individual abuses needing remedying and the proposed remedies in each case, identifying differences of opinion or emphasis between Muslims and E/A.

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CIVIL SOCIETY

Chairmen's Introduction. – Please read out

A healthy and varied civil society is considered essential to successful modern representative government. The components of civil society include religious organisations, free mass media, political parties, local elected leaders and representatives, academic centres with lives of their own, independent institutions supported by private citizens concerned with various causes, non-governmental organisations, and professional associations and trade unions. If they are to be effective these bodies need to be entitled to be independent from the government (and possibly from well-wishing influences from outside the country) and they need to be democratically, transparently and incorruptibly run, and open to influence by all those in the country who have concerns about their area of activity. There also need sufficient funding of a kind which does not prejudice their independence. Civil society leads to pluralism i.e. scope for different views and interests to flourish together.

Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

1. List the institutions of civil society which are most important, and the most important conditions under which they should operate.
2. If there are any differences of view please set these out.
3. What are the conditions necessary for a flourishing civil society?

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

List and description of individual civil society activities:

- Religious organisations
- Free mass media
- Political parties
- Local elected leaders and representatives
- Academic centres
- Causes of importance to various citizens
- Professional associations
- Trade Unions
- Description of how NGOs should be funded and their independence protected

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Chairmen's Introduction. – Please read out

There are now many human rights under various International Conventions which are recognised to varying degrees, some being basic and some being very detailed and specific. It is impossible to consider them all. Some of the basic ones (found in the Convention on Fundamental Human Rights) for our purposes are:

- Equal treatment for all persons in a country
- Innocence until one is proved guilty, trial in a fair public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal (this need not be considered here as it is covered by V. 'Respect for the Rule of Law').
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to manifest, teach, practice and observe
- Freedom of opinion and expression
- Freedom of assembly and association
- All persons to take part in government directly or through freely chosen representatives (this and the next point need not be considered here as they are taken under II. Democracy).
- The will of the people is the basis of the authority of the government, and is expressed in periodic and genuine elections by universal and equal suffrage held by secret ballot
- Access to public service for all (i.e. to work as a civil servant)

These provisions were agreed in 1948 in the U.N. and, although they embrace justice and equality in social and gender issues generally, they are not specific in relation to those issues. It will therefore be necessary for us to consider social and gender issues specifically under this heading. In addition there are other human rights which need fuller consideration than in the 1948 list above. In practice in the USA and Britain there are now specific laws against discrimination on the ground of sex, race, religion, colour and age. These need to be considered equally. Other more recent rights include rights of children and the right to work and various social security rights. These should also be considered here.

All these rights should all be discussed and defined if possible in language equally acceptable to Muslims and Episcopalians and Anglicans (E/A).

It should be noted that some human rights conventions and national laws state a right and then add 'in accordance with the law'. This normally restricts the right in important respects depending on the terms of the relevant law. The proviso 'in accordance with the law' should not therefore be used in your answers unless you set out the effect of the law in question.

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Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

1. What human rights are agreed to be important? Please define the agreed scope for each and give them an agreed order of importance, or state differences of view.
2. Are there any problems over agreement as to what is a human right and what is a right to cultural specificity?

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

1. Specific comments should be made on the following human rights listed above:
 - Equal treatment
 - Freedom of thought, conscience and religion including the right to manifest, practice and teach
 - Freedom of opinion and expression which includes the question of censorship
 - Non discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race, colour or age
 - Rights for children
 - Right to social security
 - Right to work

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

Chairmen's Introduction. – Please read out

Cultural matters are naturally specific to particular groups, and no one wants to have global uniformity for the whole human race. Some matters of cultural specificity are considered by those who have them as wholly or generally good for their own society, but are considered by outsiders to be bad for other societies. Examples of these might be the value many Americans give to vibrant, rough-and-ready competitiveness in advertising, and manner of interrelating, particularly in business. Some Europeans will no doubt deplore this (though others would not) and most Muslims would probably disapprove.

On the other hand, some Muslims hold firm views on the way women should deport themselves outside the home (or whether they should leave the home). Many other cultures do not agree with these views, indeed often disapprove of them.

So long as cultural specificities do not infringe on agreed human rights, democratic rights or justice and equity, they should be accepted by all as being appropriate in the cultures where they exist, on the ground that we do not want global uniformity for its own sake.

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‘Materialism’, which is a pervasive cultural matter which all people fall victim to in various degrees and has almost ceased to be specific to a particular culture, is dealt as a separate subject.

Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

1. List major culturally-specific aspects of traditional Muslim society. Which of these do Muslims feel should fall into the class of acceptable cultural specificity? Which, if any, should be modified?
2. List major culturally-specific aspects of Western society which can be accepted and what should be modified.
3. Is there general agreement on questions 1 and 2? If not, please set out the differences of view or emphasis.

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

The answers should provide a complete list of cultural specificities which should form exceptions to universal human rights, noting where, if any, differences of view or emphasis exist.

RESPECT FOR LAW AND THE RULE OF LAW.

Chairmen’s Introduction. – Please read out

As to national laws, there will be general agreement that respect for the law and effective attainment of the rule of law are vital in each country. In addition, in each country, the principle of equal justice under non-discriminatory laws for all persons irrespective of nationality, religion or gender is presumably accepted. But there may be concerns over aspects of them and also over equality of the scope of sanctity of the person, or rights to property. Other features to consider are innocence until proved guilty, representation in court, and independent judiciary, open judgment with reasons given, rights of appeal, and whether the poor and the weak truly have equal access to justice and over rules for evidence based on gender and the nature of punishment for crime. Finally, a flaw in many western countries is the delay of the law due to sheer burden on the courts and also due to delaying tactics open to wealthy litigants.

As to national laws, there have been expressed fears, possibly unfounded, that some aspects of traditional Muslim law and legal procedures would be unacceptable for many other countries. These fears need to be set out, commented on and put into true perspective.

As to international law, a key issue is whether and to what extent international rule of law is acceptable within individual states.

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The broadly accepted basis for international laws is acceptance of UN resolutions and complying with them, recognising the sovereignty of other nations and respecting the rights of their citizens.

Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

As to national laws:

1. What are the weaknesses in western, national judicial proceedings and what weaknesses in Muslim national systems. Please list these in order of importance and setting out any differences of views or emphasis.
2. What improvement should be aimed at within the U.S. and British legal systems and what improvement should be aimed at in Muslims legal system. Set out any differences of view or emphasis.

As to international law:

3. Set out the most important provision which should be supported, identifying existing failings. Are there differences of views on these.

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

As to national laws, the following should be discussed in the answers:

- Innocence until proved guilty
- Representation in court
- Independent judiciary
- Open judgment with reasons given
- Rights of appeal
- Position of the poor and weak in court
- Problems of delay in obtaining redress

As to international laws:

- Recognition and compliance with U.N. resolutions
- Recognition of sovereignty of other nations
- Respect for the rights of other nations' citizens

MATERIALISM

Chairmen's Introduction. – Please read out

The existence of cultural specificities has been dealt with as a separate subject, but one cultural matter is so pervasive, and is not confined to one cultural group, that it needs separate attention. Undoubtedly there is a big difference of attitude towards explicit advertising and materialistic consumerism, and these matters give rise to considerable concern across many cultures.

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The issues with which we are concerned here are not whether such attitudes are undesirable in the countries in which they originated, but the effect of them globally, the effect of such outside influences on countries that have different attitudes. The effect is of course magnified by globalisation.

There may be a difference of attitude as to the degree to which undesirable tendencies may have to be accepted in the interest of obtaining the overall benefits of free market economies.

A sub-issue is advertising; different styles can be regarded as cultural specificities, but the global nature of some advertising may be regarded as extending beyond specific cultures.

Care for the environmental heritage should also be considered here.

Questions to be Discussed Which Need Answers.

1. What aspects of Western behaviour and attitude offend Muslims in their own countries and what can be done to alleviate the problems created by globalisation.
2. What do E/A feel on the different aspects of this issue?

Double-Check that the Following Cardinal Points Have Been Dealt With Specifically in Your Answers.

The answers should list the aspects of materialism that give most concern and what should be done to alleviate the problems.

Differences of opinions and emphasis should be identified.

THE END