Call for Papers

**Background**

Religious freedom is the civic right of persons and religious communities to practice, express, change, renounce and spread their religion. Free expression of religion allows pluralistic religious organizations to exist within modern nation states. They provide volatile societies with models of peaceful coexistence. To ensure religious freedom, most governments provide constitutional safeguards and institutions.

Islam recognizes religious freedom on the basis of Quranic evidence such as “There shall be no compulsion in religion” (2:256). Religious freedom was later affirmed and demonstrated through the ‘Charter of Medina’, signed by the Prophet Muhammad and the citizens of Medina guaranteeing religious liberty for all communities.

Religious freedom within the nation-state has been a matter of great importance to many people for centuries, especially when the debate on how human rights can be enforced. As a general rule, the government should protect the rights of religious people and institutions to practice their faiths as they may wish; openly, freely and without governmental or in some cases, interference from other religious groups, unless the religious practice harms others. The government should not compel the practice of, or adherence to, any faith. This requirement extends to freedom of interpretation of religion, as the authority to interpret religion is often used by the authorities and dominant groups to curtail intellectual freedom.
Religious Freedom in Muslim majority countries

Most Muslim majority countries provide the necessary safeguards for religious freedom in their constitutions. Despite that, the status of religious freedom, as with political and economic freedom, remains poor. The entire blame cannot be placed on the state authorities because general attitudes, including the attitudes of those who are otherwise highly educated, remain hostile to the notion of religious freedom.

The modern European notion of religious freedom is rooted in the idea of secularism, which has wide interpretations. One common understanding of secularism is separation of public policy from religion. However, to the Muslim mind, secularism is mainly understood as “…disenchantment of nature, desacralization of politics and the deconsecration of values” (Syed Naquib al-Attas, 1993). This interpretation of secularism creates serious doubts about religious freedom itself, though both secularism and religious freedom should be understood separately.

By and large, many Muslims do not accept the possibility that a secular framework may guarantee religious freedom for all; for them, a secular framework means the expulsion and rejection of religion. Secularism itself is somewhat vague and also not clearly understood. Can one find a place for secularism within Islam, given the fact that Islam, Islamic law and shariah are not only meant to address the religious but also the secular affairs of people! Secularism is also a broad concept and a question may also arise whether all aspects of secularism are unacceptable to Islam?

Therefore, there is a dire need to construct and expand an Islamic case for religious freedom.

Rationale

The Islam & Liberty Network will be organizing its 7th International Conference titled “The Islamic case for religious freedom.” This Conference is needed especially now, due to the growth of illiberalism at both political, economic and social levels, and not just within Muslim majority countries. As national security becomes a predominant concern, it is often used as an excuse for curbing civil freedoms, including religious freedom.

We believe that this conference will help in the promotion of equality and human rights and their enforcement in Muslim majority countries. Our concern is that the vast majority of the populations of many of these countries do not enjoy religious freedom due to social pressures, legal discrimination, and poor rule of law despite the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom by the state. It is also observed in some countries such as Malaysia and Iran that the government has set up religious departments and religious police which directly affect and interfere with freedom of religion.

By presenting the importance of constitutional safeguards on religious freedom in Muslim majority countries, the conference will be a step in encouraging better pluralistic coexistence, the establishing of free societies and the holding of governments and public bodies to account for their implementation of equalities and human rights commitments.
Themes of the Conference

The call is now open for submission of abstracts. The preferred themes and indicative questions for conference abstracts/papers are:

1. Should we have “human rights in Islam” or a “universal concept of human rights in an Islamic culture?”
2. Islam and peace: Is peace the normative framework of relations between Muslim and non-Muslim states?
3. Do we have a basis for equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in shariah and fiqh?
4. Who are the leading scholars seeking to apply Islam’s timeless principles to contemporary circumstances, and what are their contributions in the field of religious freedom?
5. The Marrakech Declaration: what was its genesis and what are its implications for religious freedom for non-Muslim minorities?
6. Are there any differences between those Muslim countries with an “Islamic” constitution and those with a “secular” constitution with respect to religious freedom?
7. Religious freedom and democracy: What has been the experience of democratic Muslim majority countries versus non-democratic Muslim majority countries?
8. Freedom of religion and apostasy in Islam: has the debate evolved?
9. Blasphemy laws and freedom of expression in Islam: can we draw boundaries?
10. Facing religious persecution: how should Muslims respond?

The papers are expected to be well-grounded in their theoretical analysis but, where needed, should be well-informed by empirical data based on a specific country or countries. It is assumed that the geographical and social background for the research is largely Muslim-majority countries.

Conference Book

The conference papers will be later published as a book, under an arrangement with a leading mainstream Malaysian publishing house.

Dates and Venue

The 7th International Islam & Liberty Conference will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia on 11th-12th November 2019. Abstracts are due by 30th June 2019.
Instructions

- The abstracts and papers should follow APA referencing style and British English.
- Abstracts should be around 250-300 words. The Abstract should clearly establish a relationship between the planned paper and one or more themes as announced.
- The accepted papers should be of 4,000-6,000 words and should not have been published or presented elsewhere. They should clearly establish the author’s opinion regarding the identified themes and should follow normal academic standards.
- Referenced/cited text should not exceed 15% of the paper.
- Joint submissions are acceptable.
- Travel grants and local hospitality will be provided to selected authors.
- Interested authors are requested to send their bio-note (maximum of 50 words) and abstract to support@islamandlibertynetwork.org by 30th June 2019.

Sponsor and Partners

The main sponsor and organiser of the 7th International Conference is the Islam and Liberty Network (I) Foundation, which is legally organised as a non-profit Labuan foundation registered in Malaysia and is governed by an international board of directors, all of whom except for the part-time CEO give their time freely. Founded in 2011, it is a platform for researchers, academics and public intellectuals to explore and promote a Muslim case for religious, economic and political freedom by disseminating knowledge and developing human resources. We are funded by like-minded foundations and individuals.

Main partners for our 7th International Conference include: the world’s largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (Indonesia); the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS), Malaysia; and the Religious Freedom Institute, based in Washington DC.