

Put both sides' moderates together

America and Muslims

By **Prince El Hassan bin Talal and John Marks**

International Herald Tribune. Thursday, August 29, 2002

Amman. One of us is a Jordanian Prince; the other is an American who heads an international conflict resolution organization. We have joined forces. What brings us together is a shared desire to do something about the widening gap between Muslim countries and the United States. We are committed to reducing polarization and strengthening moderates on both sides.

As much as we would like to see an Israeli-Palestinian settlement or a satisfactory outcome in Iraq, we are not prepared to wait for these problems to be resolved. We see an urgent need now for our two cultures to come together around shared humanity.

We believe that the world cries out for a new kind of leadership that emphasizes building bridges and meeting basic human needs. Police and military force, while necessary, are clearly not sufficient to create real security.

In 1969, the late Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson, a visionary leader, launched an initiative called *Partners in Development*. He maintained that rich and poor countries must work in partnership in order to achieve successful economic development. We see a similar need for partnerships between Muslim countries and the United States.

So, we are launching a new organization, in the Pearson spirit. We will be called *Partners in Humanity*, and we will be a network of NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations – catalysts and facilitators of Islamic-Western dialogue. Our partners will need only to be willing to engage and cooperate across the cultural divide. We will dedicate ourselves to preventing – and to transcending – the *clash of civilizations* that some see as inevitable.

Like Pearson, we believe that when people focus on shared human qualities, they can usually overcome differences. Our emphasis will be on education, media, and popular culture. People from both cultures need to find better

ways to communicate, whether through satellite television channels, Websites, or schoolbooks.

Such communication must be two-way. It is not good enough only to bring Western ideas and constructs to the Muslim world.

Specifically, we will carry out activities along the following lines:

We will bring together organizations dedicated to Islamic-Western dialogue with US humanitarian groups and government agencies. Such organizations already exist in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, and they are engaged in a kind of dialogue that we would like to see exponentially expanded. Connecting these centers will not only increase their impact but will also provide an opportunity for them to work in a highly leveraged way.

We will strengthen mutual education programs, including student exchanges, American and Islamic studies programs, curriculum development and training. The idea is to encourage learning in both directions.

We will organize a *Film and TV Summit* that brings together Islamic and Western filmmakers and concentrates on reducing stereotypes.

We will promote production of videos, television talk shows, and other educational material that advances dialogue and provides a forum to moderate thinkers and activists.

Activities such as these will help strengthen the forces of dynamic moderation. In the end, we moderates need to be as energetic in our commitment as extremists are in theirs.

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