



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **PAIN AND SUFFERING MUST STOP**

*By Prince El Hassan bin Talal*

These days it seems as though world history is being determined by exceptions rather than rules. In the wake of the horrific bombings of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 we have all had to re-examine our own values and the values of other cultures. We stand today at the crossroads of our very existence. The choice appears stark; move further away from one another, basing our sense of self and self-interests upon the idea of a threatening 'other'; or move closer together as unique individuals sharing common values that allow us to unite as one human family.

A desire for political power may lead individuals to seek that power through the manipulation of religious beliefs. No culture or religion can claim to have a monopoly on the truth. Yet, to certain people, religion is first and foremost a political means to a personal end, which brooks no diversity or adaptability to new circumstances. Only secondarily - perhaps even incidentally - have extremist beliefs anything to do with the betterment of life for individuals and communities.

World leaders and religious leaders from a number of faiths should be commended for their prompt response in affirming the rights of Sunni and Shia Muslim communities to live in peace and work with others to address the common problems facing societies worldwide. In spite of the efforts of these leaders, even some third and fourth-generation Muslim communities in the West have suffered unjust consequences in the form of a backlash against what is still thought to be a threatening 'other' or a 'fifth column' in society.

In many cases this backlash must be ascribed to ignorance of Islam, as it is expressed in the Holy Quran and in the *Hadith* (sayings) and *Sunnah* (traditions) of the Prophet Muhammad. The Quran enjoins mankind to seek knowledge and to educate children, clearly specifying both boys and girls. It outlines women's rights and minority rights in a way which was unheard of in the Arabian Peninsula (and in most other times and places) before the Prophet's divine revelation. It institutes a public welfare system and exhorts its followers to perform altruistic acts.

These are principles to which all civilized communities aspire. Islam does not lay an

exclusive claim to them. Clearly, the solution to extremist acts undertaken in the name of a great religion is not to condemn that religion wholesale. Rather it is to promote on every side its centrist and progressive aspect that will co-exist with diverse cultures and will welcome plurality, but will not tolerate acts of terror and inhumanity.

Islam does not tolerate the irresponsible destructiveness that is terrorism. Such irreligious acts run counter to Islamic practice, as this book will make clear; just as they run counter to the practice of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and indeed all other faiths of mankind. Muslims have been vociferous in their condemnation of terrorism, arguing that terrorist acts violate Islamic law. The Islamic scholar Shaykh Zaki Badawi argues that the atrocities of September 11, 2001 are a violation of Islamic law and ethics. Neither the people, who were killed or injured, nor the properties that were destroyed, qualified as legitimate targets in any system of law, especially Islamic law. Sayyed Abdel-Majid al-Khoei has described the attacks as "a criminal and barbaric act removed from every moral code and from every religious and humanitarian principle".

In his farewell sermon, the Prophet Muhammad, addressing thousands of pilgrims at the foot of the Mount of Mercy, said: "God has made inviolable for you each other's blood and each other's property until you meet your Lord." He was reminding them of the Quranic decree that to destroy the life of one individual amounts to destroying the entire human race (5:32). The Quran emphasizes that those who disturb the peace of society and spread fear and disorder deserve the severest punishment that can be imposed (5:33).

No school of Islam allows the targeting of civilians. An insurrectionist who kills non-combatants is guilty of *baghi* (armed transgression) - a capital offence in Islamic law. Those who commit such atrocities and claim to do so in the name of and using the sacred symbols of any religion are the enemies of us all - indeed, they are the enemy within. Such people do nothing for religion. On the contrary, they have taken up arms against the true people of the faith. By wrongly ascribing the name of Islam to their perpetration of such a horrendous crime, the September 11 terrorists have propagated a lie that wanton violence plays a role in Muslim belief or activity. This lie can only be swallowed by onlookers who mistake politics for faith and a narrow nihilist outlook for religious fervour.

The killing of Russian children in a school house in Beslan, North Ossetia, leaves us with unspeakable sorrow, moral outrage that calls us to resolve to help our religious communities to work together to advance peace with justice. We are deeply heartened by the knowledge that Russian religious leaders were working together in Beslan to defuse the crisis. Yet the loss of the children only makes more clear the fact that cooperation among all of our religious communities, based upon sound principles and the values that we all share, must be strengthened if we are to face squarely our common challenges for establishing peace and overcoming terrorism.

An important step toward our acceptance of one another is to act positively concerning our values - by confessing to each other what we believe to be true and good. This frank expression of belief, and willingness to reach out, is as necessary within the many schools and sects of Islam as it is between Islam and other faiths.

In this hour of great pain, three years since the tragedy of September 11, 2001, let us renew our resolve to work together as religious communities, respectful of our differences, united in our shared cares. Let us continue to work together for peace.

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