


And there's **TurboTax FREE**

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

 PRINT THIS

 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Qatar: Future Muslim leaders seek fresh path

'No better time' for change, say activists at this past weekend's youth conference in Doha, Qatar.

By Caryle Murphy | Correspondent of *The Christian Science Monitor* from the January 20, 2009 edition

DOHA, Qatar - The question put to the young Muslims gathered here from around the world went to the heart of today's perceived clash between Islam and the West: "Do Muslims and non-Muslims share equal responsibility in taking steps to reduce Muslim extremism?"

The answer, delivered instantly through wireless voting pads, was crystal clear: Seventy-five percent replied "Yes."

The verdict is worth heeding because of where it happened: At a conference of 300 progressive Muslim activists from 75 countries.

The "Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow Conference," was meant to be a catalyst for social change in the Islamic world by inspiring the activists and giving them opportunities to network.

"We're living in challenging times, and the plot for Muslims has been written by others," said Daisy Khan, of the New York-based American Society for Muslim Advancement, which worked with the Cordoba Initiative and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to organize the event. "The time has come for Muslims to write their own plot, and to define themselves around the core values they believe in: pluralism, freedom, justice, creativity, and intellectual development."

Participants included a Saudi businesswoman, a New York filmmaker, an Indian teacher, an Italian imam, a Dutch lawyer, an Egyptian writer, and Osama Saeed Butta, who informed his peers in a fine Scottish brogue that he will be running for a seat in Britain's Parliament come the next election.

While some activists hold more conservative views than others, all are committed to pluralism as an Islamic value, Ms. Khan said.

Some were in a hurry to exert their influence. "I came because I wanted to know why it's 'Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow' and not 'Today,'" said Maha al-Khalifa, a student from Qatar.

The discussion sessions, which included the instant polling, tackled some of the thorniest questions facing Muslim intellectuals today, including: "Is there a crisis of religious authority in Islam?" Eighty-six percent said "Yes." And "are there Islamic values that are in conflict with Western values?" Sixty-one percent said "Yes."

Panelist Madiha Younas, of Pakistan's International Islamic University, said she often encounters

Award winning journalism on the topics you care about



Subscribe now and get 32 issues Free!

[Click here](#) to subscribe

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

anxiety over clashing values. "Our people are worried about what will happen if our youth will start to live like the West."

She added, to general approval from the floor, that "it's not an Islamic value to have absolute freedom. Islam puts boundaries on you."

Saudi-born attorney and Harvard University graduate Malik Dahlan led the conversation to a more theoretical level, stating: "It's freedom that is the absolute value in Islam.... It is freedom *not* to submit [to God's will] that gives value to submission itself."

In smaller discussion groups, participants covered such topics as why Europe has more Islamist radicalism than the United States, Islam's position on homosexuality, and the meaning of secularism.

When discussing who has responsibility for fighting Muslim extremism, the panelists steered clear of the polarization this subject normally provokes. Instead, they argued that both extremist interpretations of Islam and foreign policies of Western countries contribute to the radicalization of Muslim youth.

In fact, the impact of US policies in the Middle East was evident at the conference, where many participants were deeply upset, at times in tears, over the civilian death toll from Israel's three-week military siege of Gaza.

"I get a sense of helplessness with this latest crisis," said conference attendee Shaukat Warraich, director of London-based Right Start Foundation International, a community development nonprofit.

ASMA's Khan said that after 9/11, Americans wanted to know why Muslims' denunciations of the terrorist attacks were so muted. Although hundreds of Islamic religious leaders did condemn the attacks, they were not heard clearly because Islam has no central leadership, like Roman Catholicism's Vatican.

Khan, then an architectural designer, gave up her career to promote a new generation of Muslim leadership, holding the first conference in New York in 2004 with 125 participants from North America. The second conference, held in Copenhagen in 2006, included Europeans. Doha, the third one, was global.

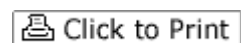
Participants had to be between 20 and 45 years old, committed to pluralism, and involved in some type of community advancement work, Khan said.

At its conclusion, the conference issued "An Open Letter to the World Leaders of Today From the Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow." Noting that "with Barack Obama as the new US president, there is no better time for ... positive change," the letter demanded that leaders start implementing policies that promote development and human rights rather than war.

For now, the Muslim leaders who will receive copies of the Open Letter do not know much about Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow (MLT), as the project is known. The conference drew little international or regional media attention. But organizers said they are committed to building a global network of progressive activists in the Muslim world, an effort they say will take time.

Find this article at:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0120/p07s01-wogn.html>



Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)