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Towards ICCS 2022

Coexisting with Diversity and Differences

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SYNOPSIS

Throughout history, humanity has been punctuated by conflicts based on race, religion and faith, the cause of countless wars between and within nations. It is important to understand the value of social cohesion and to cultivate it through a culture of peaceful coexistence, to avoid confrontations and maintain international peace and security.

COMMENTARY

SINCE HUMANS are naturally drawn to those with whom they feel most similar, there tends to be a fear of those most different, such difference wrongly associated with a potential threat or danger. In the face of this old and complicated social phenomenon, modern nations and communities have strived to promote cultures of coexistence, tolerance, and diversity, and exerted tremendous efforts on the intellectual, theoretical, and cultural levels.

However, changing thought, culture, values, and traditions in practice has been very limited and still did not reach the expectations many of us would have hoped for by the 21st century. Perhaps this is a result of the fact that changing the cultures which underpin communities is a very complicated and delicate process; one which cannot be achieved by preaching or promoting it or through simply speaking about it in the public domain.

Tolerance and Coexistence

The value of tolerance is often confused with the concept of coexistence. It is true that they both share many aspects in common, but there are differences which, though nuanced, are vital to understand.

Tolerance is an ethical value that governs the relations between humans. It stems from diverse cultural systems that include religious, political, social, cultural, and educational aspects which share a common objective: accepting other humans regardless of how different they are while sticking with one's own values, ethics, and faith.

Tolerance and coexistence both have a noble goal: they both constitute the pillars of peaceful coexistence among humans while preserving diversity. Coexistence on the other hand is a much more comprehensive term and one which truly embraces each and every human regardless of colour or creed. Rather than merely 'tolerating' those who are different, coexistence is the very real means of living side by side in peace and harmony, where differences are celebrated rather than punished or merely accepted.

Lessons from History

There are countless instances in history where differences sparked bitter conflicts and wars. For example, after three centuries of renaissance, enlightenment, and modernity, Europe woke up to a fanatic and racist ideology that had led to, amongst other conflicts, World War II (WWII).

This had resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent victims persecuted for being of a different race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Many wars were driven by a racist and supremacist ideology that denied the concept of coexistence, instead seeking its destruction.

Since WWII, humanity has been concerned with promoting the cultures of tolerance and coexistence to establish peace in communities and prevent the eruption of racist tendencies and religious fanaticism as these jeopardise the peace and security of society and ultimately lead to instability.

This instability in turn hinders economic development and the welfare of society. Nevertheless, racism and hate crimes are still prevailing in our world, and their impact has in recent years become more intense on a societal and state level. In the meantime, we must not lose hope and remain firm with the many people who dream of a fair, diverse world that embraces all of humanity in a system of peaceful coexistence.

Legal Rights: The UAE example

There are several examples which confirm the idea that economic development and social welfare are the fruit of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a small Gulf nation – young in history yet deeply rooted in human traditions and culture – stands as a living example of active and sustainable coexistence between over 200 nationalities.

This country has become a symbol for coexistence among the people and nations of the world, one of the world's most diverse landscapes of peoples living and working

together side by side. The UAE made this possible, instilling a culture of tolerance within the community, and part of the public order now enshrined into law.

The UAE's legal system upholds that all humans be treated equally regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity, the notions of coexistence and tolerance transformed from social and cultural values into a stratified system of rights which is protected by [law](#).

Protecting the rights of coexistence is a fundamental tenet of the UAE legal system and is executed in a way to protect the rights of coexistence to all people, preserve the particularities of each one of them, and guarantee diversity and difference as human features.

The UAE also established many organisations, bodies, and institutions such as the Ministry of Tolerance and Peaceful Coexistence. The Ministry promotes and instills the culture of tolerance in the minds of younger generations as a tradition of their ancestors.

Post-Tolerance Mindset: Cohesion and Peaceful Coexistence

The UAE has gone beyond the notion of tolerance to the post-tolerance mindset. It introduced the example of active and sustainable coexistence which guarantees the existence and continuity of pluralism and diversity for all. It also considers the diverse population a source of cultural richness for both the community and the country.

For the UAE, diversity and pluralism are the winning combination that achieves the interests of the community and protects the future of its children. It is the roadmap for building a bright future where all people lead a happy and secure life without exception.

The essence of human existence is to live together and coexist in peace and harmony. Social cohesion through peaceful coexistence paves the way for intellectual, cultural, and economic growth and prosperity which all people and nations aspire to have.

Without it, the world will be the ground of conflicts, hatred, and wars. We must learn from history if we are to secure a peaceful future for the next generation and the generations to come.

Dr. Ali Nuaimi is the first Chairman of the International Steering Board of Hedayah, The International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism based in Abu Dhabi. He also founded and currently chairs the World Council of Muslim Communities and was the first Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Elders. Dr. Ali Al Nuaimi is a leading international expert on Extremism and Education, and a prominent advocate of Global Peace, Tolerance, and Coexistence. This is part of a series leading up to the International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) 2022.
