

**Interfaith Dialogue and Conflict Transformation:
Towards A Paradigm of Change**
Virtual Symposium

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Keynote Speech



I would like to give my words of appreciation to the leadership and the team of Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue for making this symposium happen:

Thank you, your excellency Doctor Ibrahim Al Naimi /the Chairman of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

Thank you to the team members that we consider as our friends and colleagues in our mission of peace and conflict transformation:

Honorable Mrs Nadia Al Ashqar

And **Dr. Ahmed Abdelrahim** and all the colleagues at the Doha International Center for their leadership, dedication and hard work in making this important symposium take place.

In my name and in the name of the chairman our board Mr. Max Jonsson, and the member of the advisory board, some of whom, Dr. Bahija Jamal and Dr. Carole Faucher are participating with us today, I would like to say thank you to all **the esteemed scholars and experts** who will be presenting and discussing such a timely and important topic. Thank you for your time and generosity in sharing your knowledge and guidance.

I would also like to give my words of appreciation to our audience today for their interest in this symposium and engagements.

The Nordic Center for Conflict Transformation, was established in Stockholm, Sweden as an independent non-profit organization that works globally to contribute to normalizing a lasting positive peace.

Throughout our work, The Nordic Center brings a model of conflict transformation that focuses on everyday peacebuilding by working with individuals, groups, communities, civil society and governmental institutions, to develop a culture of peace that is embedded in justice, full respect of human rights and non-violence as the norm and a way of life. The Nordic Center offers a respected platform for information-sharing and dialogue.

This symposium today is about two interconnected fields: interfaith dialogue and conflict transformation. They are interconnected because:

1. **Interfaith dialogue, as much as it is about faith and religion, it is essentially about dialogue**, which is typically hailed as a progressive force fostering mutual understanding and embracing differences.

Dialogue sometimes works, which what we want, but sometimes it doesn't work, which we should learn from. We should accept to shift things even our convictions, and to have the sway to accept that most of the time, paradigms take far too long to shift, but it's worth the efforts and patience, much more than hitting the same wall.

- As we work in transforming confrontation to collaboration, it takes us most of the time to know how to drive in a rocky road to turn our disagreements into opportunities for sustained agreements.

2. **Interfaith dialogue is not about religion only, it's mainly about people.** Based on our work in various contexts and countries, we realized that we tend to believe that our differences in faith and religion are our most complex problems. But in fact we've learned *that civilizations, faith and religion don't clash, but people do.* People have a fascinating capacity to turn worldviews into facts, but in reality, the most impactful capacity that brings us together or breaks us apart is our emotions and grievances.

- As we work with people, sometimes the most important thing is not our voices of wisdom but, our genuine capacity to listen. That *we must learn not only from those who know how to strike deals, but mainly from those who have nothing to lose anymore* –our thoughts are with the people in Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, Iraq, in Africa and Asia...and others

3. **Interfaith dialogue, no matter what, is a unifying field.** It brings people together beyond their differences. Mr. The Chairman of the Doha international center can tell how conferences, roundtables and events on interfaith they organize in Qatar or outside, gather a large number of scholars, academics, civil society, governmental representations, youth, women from around the world. As it is the case today....

- Interfaith dialogue events constitute a platform to meet, greet and get to know one another; we may end up reaching out to each other through a phone message, or we may even engage in writing a book together to make the world a better place for all.

In a world in which the extreme is becoming more and more mainstream, a challenge is, that we observed is in one hand, interfaith dialogue initiatives are less and less institutionalized and not much in numbers. On the other hand, more and more hate groups are multiplying, especially in the US and Europe.

In the part of the world where hate groups are increasing, and as one of our advisors told me, high schools and universities in these countries have debate clubs, embedding students at a very young age within a polarizing culture of winning and losing.

- Maybe it's high time for us to transform this polarizing culture and have instead of these debate clubs, **dialogue clubs** to promote a culture of empathy, inclusion and justice, not that when a crisis emerges, but at a very early stage and on an everyday basis and at the community levels as well.

We are pleased to work with the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, which is a unique institution that is based in Qatar and works at the global level, and we are pleased to work with its leadership and team, the scholars and experts here today in advancing a culture of dialogue, sustainable peace and constructive conflict transformation.

Once again thank you. I wish you fruitful discussions.