

Remarks at *Confronting Extremism: Faith-Based Community Initiatives towards Positive Diversity, Protecting Minorities and Enhancing Accountability and Good Governance.*

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Sheik father, Excellencies, distinguished guests,

It is my honour to participate on this panel with the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Iraq and the Ambassador of the OIC to the UN. I would like to thank the Al Khoei foundation for organizing this critical event.

Today, I would like to discuss how democratic, inclusive governance and can provide a framework for social cohesion. Inclusive governance promotes accountable decision making, empowering any country to address serious security challenges while providing resilience to external shocks. Further, religion can help to promote this cohesion and does not need to be a hindrance to governance. In Iraq, commonalities of faith can be a bridge for governance, an ethic for political reconciliation and a foundation for resilient communities.

Democratic governance, which is inclusive, participatory, and accountable, forms an essential framework for achieving resilient communities. Resilient communities require that the people, societies, and systems have the capability to: mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces vulnerabilities. Resilience places an emphasis on inclusive processes led by stakeholders – it must be nationally driven. It requires participatory assessments, planning and accountability to improve service delivery, to reduce social exclusion, and to enhance relations among parties. It emphasizes the use of a wide range of actors to identify the root causes of insecurities and to develop coordinated community responses.

A society that is transparent and accountable may well be best suited for discerning potential causes for conflict. The need to support effective, capable and representative institutions; and, to create a robust civil society ensuring participation of women and traditionally marginalized groups is fundamental for establishing the foundation of a stable society.

In contrast to Liberation struggles, or violent extremism, which are about attaining power a constitutional democracy is about limiting power.

Basic principles embedded in the Constitution include a government created by and for the people, a government guided not by a person or group of people, but by laws, and through separation of powers and a system. The basic idea behind Rule of Law is that when individuals and the government both adhere to a set of rules rather than to a group of people, authoritarian rule is less likely.

Democratic Governance and Inclusive society can exist and recognize faith as a means for ensuring social cohesion.

For example in the United States, theological underpinnings are found in the US constitution, the bill of rights and the Declaration of Independence. The Bible and biblical principles were important in the framing of the Constitution. In particular, the framers started with a biblical view of human nature.

James Madison argued in *Federalist* #51 that government must be based upon a realistic view of human nature.

"But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.

Framing a republic requires a balance of power that liberates human dignity and rationality and controls human sin and depravity.

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form."

Whether democracy and Islam can coexist is a topic of heated debate. Some argue democracy is a purely Western concept imposed on Muslim countries. Others feel Islam necessitates a democratic system and that democracy has a basis in the Quran since "mutual consultation" among the people is commended (42:38 Quran). Rather than rejecting democracy, Sharia can exist within a democratic and inclusive framework."

Incorporating the theology of its people is not contradictory to Constitutionalism or rule of law. The rule of law means that the power of leaders and the government bodies has known and predictable limits. Further, these limits can be enforced through established procedures. As a body of political or legal doctrine, it refers to a government that is, in the first instance, devoted both to the good of the entire community and to the preservation of the rights of individual persons.

Promoting social cohesion is about creating change structures and processes for engagement in the society and for tolerance for opposing ideals and policies.

Although capacity gaps exist in almost every institution of governance, the Iraqi people seem by and large, committed to ensuring that change comes about through democratic means – especially as it becomes more predictable, accountable and inclusive.

Iraq is in a critical time for institution-building, reconciliation and development. Religion in IRAQ does not have to be a barrier for governance. Faith based values can help to redress the wounds caused by war, genocide, and dictatorship. Both justice and the effective restoration of political order call for a more holistic, restorative approach. These traditions offer the fullest expressions of the core concepts of justice, mercy, and peace.

The Preamble connects Iraq with its historical past with: "... Mesopotamia, land of the prophets and resting place of the holy imam," it recalls the various groups' respective traumas, "the pains of the band despotism, sectarian oppression," and makes the remembrance applicable to all Iraqis: "Sunni, Shiite, Arab, Kurd and Turkomen and the remaining brethren in all communities". In Chapter one, article one, the constitution describes the state's system as "a democratic, federal, representative, republic" and it goes on to state that "Islam is the national religion and a basic foundation for the country's laws." Although this declaration embraces the Iraqi population, it also integrates the principles of faith in the life and in the community.

In view of the necessity for the new government in Iraq to be inclusive, decisive and perceived as legitimate, it can rely on unifying principles of the Koran. These principles, along with the historical memory of inclusiveness in Iraq, can provide support dealing with the daunting human security challenges.

By any purely institutional account, Iraq may not now be a model democracy. But very few countries have fought for democracy harder, or endured more for its sake or understand more deeply why it matters, than Iraq.