

CORDOBA WORKSHOPS REPORTS

Promoting Constructive Political Participation of New Faith-Based Political Actors in the Arab Region

Promoting Constructive Political Participation beyond
Party Politics and furthering Peaceful Coexistence

Istanbul, October 2014

Alistair Davison

**Polarisation and the Role of Coalition Building in the
Success of Political Transition**

Istanbul, March 2013

Lakhdar Ghettas

**Challenges of Political Participation and the Transition
from Preaching to Politics for Salafis in North Africa**

Tunis, September 2012

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Workshops:

- Promoting Constructive Political Participation beyond Party Politics and furthering Peaceful Coexistence (*Istanbul, October 2014*)
- Polarisation and the Role of Coalition Building in the Success of Political Transition (*Istanbul, March 2013*)
- Challenges of Political Participation and Passage from Preaching to Politics of Salafis in North Africa (*Tunis, September 2012*)

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Promoting Constructive Political Participation beyond Party Politics and furthering Peaceful Coexistence

Autor: Alistair Davison

Istanbul, October 2014



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the immediate repercussions of the 2011 uprisings was the entry of new religiously inspired actors into politics, especially actors coming from Salafi-based movements who had previously refused political participation or been excluded by authoritarian regimes, or had been very cautious about entering the political sphere. It was against this backdrop that two previous workshops (held in September 2012 in Tunis and in March 2013 in Istanbul) brought together Salafi parties and movements from six different countries, covering the region from Rabat to Sana'a.

The Tunis and first Istanbul sessions had shown a growing openness within the Salafi current in the Arab world, and not only the "Arab Spring" countries, towards political participation. The Salafi groups who participated in these sessions identified a number of issues to be addressed, partly of a practical nature and reflecting political realities, to further develop their political participation. They also agreed that in order to ensure successful participation there was a need for all parties to respect the rules of the political game. Furthermore, they expressed their belief that their cross-regional affiliations could be put at the service of peace promotion, both through their connections and through the development of theoretical academic work to counter the interpretations of religious texts used by violent groups to justify their actions¹.

These meetings reflected a range of diversity within the Salafi current, which cannot be seen as a single doctrine but rather as a spectrum of thought with various sub-schools, including at the extreme edges violent groups and those who quit the political sphere. The workshop participants shared a common view that the violent groups pose a danger to political transition in the Arab region, since violent acts provide ammunition and justification for violent repression, or even a return to dictatorship. Promoting political participation of Salafi groups willing to enter politics is therefore crucial for the success of the democratic transition in the region. Moreover, as indicated above, the Salafi groups participating in these meetings are willing and ready to play a desirable role in peace promotion.

This meeting convened 12 parties from 7 different countries across the MENA region, together with a representative from an evangelical Christian group from the US, further developed the themes discussed at the previous workshops, and was conducted under the Chatham House Rule. It took place against a background which has deteriorated in many countries of the region, especially since the military intervention in Egypt of July 2013. The return across the region of elements associated with the former regimes has caused significant disillusion, particularly among the youth. In the absence of opportunities for meaningful political participation, a significant number have opted to join violent extremist groups, notably ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and the contagion of violence risks spreading further. The workshop was built around the following themes: recent developments in the region; non-party based political participation; the current

¹ See executive summaries and links to reports here <http://cordoue.ch/nawat/constructive-political-participation>

challenge presented by the emergence of ISIS; and a focus on the participation of Salafi youth. The workshop comprised plenary sessions and small workshops based around specific themes.

The participants at the meeting made a number of observations and concrete proposals that, if acted upon, could go some way towards re-establishing trust and engagement among youth and other sectors of society. Proposals were also made for specific projects to ensure greater dialogue among Salafis and Islamic parties, and between these parties and other members of society, including at the international level. Themes and proposals which emerged included the following:

- Disillusion among the youth with the progress of political change is a serious and growing issue for the entire region.
- The education and training of youth for future leadership roles in the political process is important.
- There is distrust of authoritarian regimes and the “deep state”, compounded by distrust of the international community, which is seen to be acting with double-standards.
- There is a need for Salafi groups to strengthen juridical and religious guidance on political participation.
- Respected Salafi scholars who are not linked to authoritarian regimes can play an important role in discouraging youth from participation in extremist violent groups.
- A strategy needs to be developed for the reintegration of members of society who return from violent extremist groups, and lessons can be drawn from previous successful efforts in the region.
- Attention must be given to the improving media sources and messages that encourage peaceful political participation.
- The participants at the meeting showed a clear commitment to the inclusion of all trends and the representation of all views in the political process in order to build a healthy participative political system.
- With regard to the Shia-Sunni line of tension, a project will be undertaken between two research organizations and the CFG, to explore potential entry points.
- In view of the deterioration of the situation in Yemen, representatives of different religious and sectarian groups will be brought to explore common themes and concerns (this meeting has now taken place).
- To address the gap in the humanitarian field between Islamic organizations and Western NGOs, a project will be initiated to explore lines of tension and potential entry points.

The participants agreed that the current general situation is extremely serious, and that this meeting was very useful in highlighting and proposing some avenues that might be explored to address certain cross-regional issues. Among other needs, a plan of action must be formulated to promote dialogue, cooperation and tolerance, to promote initiatives for conflict transformation and the engagement of youth in peaceful political participation, and to address the grave issue of violence propounded by extremist groups.

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I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This meeting, held in Istanbul on October 8-10, 2014, was the third in a series of workshops held since the 2011 uprisings across the Arab world, to promote the constructive political participation of new faith-based parties in this region. Previous meetings held in September 2012 in Tunis, and in March 2013 in Istanbul identified a number of themes and recommendations for addressing such participation in a changing regional political context. These workshops have been organized within the scope of the NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program², jointly implemented by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva (CFG) and the Religion Politics Conflict desk of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The political upheaval that swept the MENA region in 2011 shook the political, social, and economic state of affairs in the Arab region. This political watershed has had far-reaching geopolitical consequences in redrawing the demarcation lines of political participation in the public sphere and in the realm of ideas. One of the immediate repercussions of the 2011 uprisings has been the entry of new religiously-inspired actors into politics. This significant development marked a monumental highlight of the recent history of the Salafi School, with some Salafi-based

² NAWAT focuses on reinforcing the capacity and mechanisms for transforming violent, or potentially violent, political conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East and/or involving Muslims in the West. Its objectives are to develop a collectively shared understanding of what is at stake, who are relevant actors and how to address identified problems, to contribute to enhancing the capacity of relevant conflict transformation actors, to coordinate a network acting as a "mediation space" and to contribute to conflict transformation initiatives that address specific conflicts and enhance citizenship.

movements deciding to set up political parties and officially enter politics.³ This shift in the Salafi movements' appreciation of political participation was not limited to movements that were until then focused on preaching and charity work (Scientific / literalist Salafism - e.g. Nour Party and Al-Watan Party in Egypt), but also extended to formerly violent (Jihadi) groups who decided to embrace party politics.⁴ Examples of this process include the Egyptian Jamma Islamiya (Islamic Group) that set up the Al Binaa wa Tanmiya (Construction and Development) Party, and the Jihad Organisation, which set up the As-Silm wal-Binaa (Peace and Construction) Party. In Libya, the Libyan Fighting Group (LFG) created the Al-Oumma Al-Wasat (Median Nation) Party, while a splinter group from this group formed the Al-Watan (Homeland) Party. As Arab countries affected by the 2011 uprising embarked on a strenuous uphill path of political transition, the new faith-based political actors faced the challenges of passage from preaching to politics.⁵

³ Al-Fadhila Party was the first Salafi political party to be set up in Egypt on 24 March 2011, after the 25 January uprising. This move paved the way for other Salafi actors to set up political groups such as the Al Asalah Party, Al Nour Party, and Al Islah Party. In Tunisia, Al Islah Front whose origins go back to the Tunisian Islamic Front in 1980s, before it was banned, re-emerged from underground activity. In Libya, Al Ouma Al Wasat and Al Risala Party were set up. In Yemen, Al Ihssan Association decided to form a political party under the name of Al Rashad Party.

⁴ In May 2012 a large conference convened renowned Salafi scholars and figures in order to ponder the theme of political participation. Sheikh Ihssan Al-Utaybi presented a paper titled "The Legitimacy of Forming Political Parties".

⁵ Interest by academia and policy centers to explore and understand Salafism has been growing since 2011. The latest conferences on Salafism include a 2013 event by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung on Salafi Transformations: Significance,

Against this background, two workshops (in Tunis and Istanbul), organized within the scope of the NAWAT program, brought together Salafi parties and movements from six different countries, covering the region from Mauritania and Rabat to Sana'a.⁶ They also included independent experts and academics from the Arab region as well as Evangelical and Protestant participants from Costa Rica, the US and UK. The theory of change supporting the workshops is that if formerly excluded political groups such as Salafi actors (and in particular "participative" ones) are successfully integrated into the political sphere (democratic dialogue and commitment to the principles and values of inclusiveness, political participation and pluralism), then this will result in an appeased political climate and contribute to smooth political transition and co-existence in the region. The integration of these actors will mitigate the negative aspects and risks of political exclusion (including alienation, extremism & non-adherence to the above-mentioned values and principles, which represent important conflict transformation mechanisms).⁷

Implications and Prospects", [http:// library.fes.de / pdf-files / bueros / amman / 10294.pdf](http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/10294.pdf); and a 2014 Aljazeera Studies Centre conference on Salafism in the Arab World: Perceptions, Trends and Groups", [http:// studies.aljazeera.net / en / events / 2014 / 01 / 201412194433987696.htm](http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/events/2014/01/201412194433987696.htm)

⁶ The two workshops were implemented within the scope of the NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program of the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, in partnership with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

⁷ Executives summaries of the Tunis and Istanbul workshops are available here:

(Tunis 2012)
<http://cordoue.ch/publications/papers-a-reports/item/305-workshop-report-tunis-september-2012>;

(Istanbul 2013)
<http://cordoue.ch/publications/papers-a-reports/item/306-workshop-report-istanbul-march-2013>.

The efforts undertaken during the Tunis and first Istanbul workshops had largely yielded tangible outputs and positive outcomes. These included, for instance, the decision by a Moroccan religiously-inspired movement to merge with an existing small conservative political party and form the Ennahdha wa Al-Fadhila (Renaissance and Virtue) Party. The leader of the Salafi movement has become secretary general of the Al-Fadhila Party. In Yemen, the Al Silm wa Al-Binaa (Peace and Construction) Party was created by the Al-Ihassan Charity Association in early 2014. In Mauritania, participants who attended the Istanbul workshop representing preaching and charitable work decided to undertake steps towards forming a political party, tentatively named Al-Asala wa Mou'asara (Authenticity and Modernity) Party. These three cases reflected the exchanges during the workshops regarding entry into political life and its challenges, peace promotion, as well as issues of polarization and coalition building.

The 2013 political crisis in Egypt and the ousting by force of President Mohamed Morsi in early July 2013, however, introduced a significant challenge to the process of democratization in the MENA region and political participation by new faith-based actors. The military intervention in Egypt came at a critical time in the fragile process of political transition in the region. On the one hand, the question pertaining to the entry of Salafi actors into politics was not yet settled among the religious Salafi authorities and references. An intellectual justification for the setting up of political parties (traditionally considered by most literalist Salafis to be factors of schism and division of the *umma*) is yet to be produced. On the other hand, the

[reports/item/306-workshop-report-istanbul-march-2013](http://cordoue.ch/publications/papers-a-reports/item/306-workshop-report-istanbul-march-2013).

military intervention consolidated the position of some Salafi movements and scholars who, while they are not against political participation, nonetheless do not encourage it. They rather prefer to remain apolitical and focus on preaching and charitable work. The aftermath of the military intervention in Egypt, the threats to transition in Tunisia and the tumultuous events in Libya stand, in their opinion, as further reasons for caution. This position is reflected in the wait-and-see posture of some Salafi movements that had set up political party structures but stopped short of officially announcing the creation of a political party: the Al-Asala wa Mou'asara (Authenticity and Modernity) Party in Mauritania is a perfect example of this attitude. By contrast, the Al Silm Wa Al-Binaa Party in Yemen was set up six months after the July military intervention.

In the light of this context, as well as the civil war in Syria and its spillover effect into Iraq (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant /Sham: ISIL/ISIS), new religiously-inspired political actors face testing times. There is persistent debate as to whether to stay the course of political participation or default back to their previous role of preaching and charitable work. The choice is not a straightforward one, given the fact that with the return to authoritarianism in Egypt and the discourse of the war on terror in Tunisia even the limited margin of non-political participation in the public space has been drastically restricted. Hundreds of mosques, the traditional theatres for the preaching and charitable work of Islamic groups, have been either closed or placed under government control in Tunisia and Egypt. The return to authoritarianism in the latter is so forceful that it has not spared even those who supported the July military intervention, as was the case with the Salafi Movement in Alexandria, the cradle of the Al Nour Party.

The Egyptian regime's decision to declare the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) a terrorist organization introduced more challenges to peace in the MENA and Gulf region given the transnational organizational structure of the Brotherhood movement.

The British government's political review of the Muslim Brotherhood's activities in the UK and the aggressive anti-Brotherhood movement campaign led by the UAE and Saudi Arabia all present challenges to political participation by peaceful religiously-oriented actors. Such negative behavior against peaceful religious actors is fueling exclusion and providing a "justification" for violence that could not only threaten peace in the Arab world but also complicate relations of the region with the West. A return to the pre-2011 state of affairs of political exclusion and radicalization, which contributed to the 2011 uprisings, is taking place in some countries.

II. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The workshop was the first occasion for representatives and leaders of a number of Salafi Parties and groups in the region to meet following the previous Istanbul workshop. It was also the first to take place following the July 2013 military intervention in Egypt, and the recent rapid advance of ISIS/ISIL in areas of Syria and Iraq. This third workshop therefore started with a review of recent developments in each country represented, in order for the participants to exchange first-hand experiences and share lessons learned with regard to each group's position and behavior vis-à-vis developments in the region.

In view of their importance, the reviews for the two newly participating countries as well as for Tunisia and Mauritania, and especially

with regard to the situation of the youth in these countries, are presented hereunder:

SUDAN

A participant from Sudan explained that his group's emphasis continued to be on charitable work, and that his organization has not yet engaged in recognized political institutions. An overview was provided of both the general situation in Sudan at this time, and of the work being carried out.

Sudan has been ruled for more than 25 years by the same regime, and to this day there exists no constitution recognized by all parties. The regime refers to Islam and uses Islamic slogans for legitimacy, but meanwhile violates many Islamic norms. The regime recently launched a national dialogue initiative, but this has not been accepted by many potential parties to the process, and is seen as simply a way of gaining time before the next elections, when the ruling regime hopes to re-legitimize its power. Meanwhile, the country faces huge social, healthcare, educational and security problems, together with a lack of freedom of information, since there is a crackdown on all forms of criticism of the ruling elite. Sudan also suffers from a high level of insecurity, with armed groups present in all parts of the country, including remnants of the popular movements which were instrumental in the division of South Sudan from Sudan, and still control many border areas between the two countries. The existence of these groups is a factor of instability, and presents a risk of further divisions in the country. Corruption is rampant in all sectors and at all levels, and its impact is particularly prominent at the highest levels of the State. The political opposition is made up of traditional secular parties, whose leaders do not allow succession to the position of party president, and thus prevent the emergence of a younger

cadre of leaders. There are also a number of sectarian-based parties whose ideology is based on a variety of different beliefs. These factors lead to severe polarization within the country. In terms of its external relations, the close alliance of the regime with Iran has led to the opening of a number of Shiite centers (*Hussainia*) in this historically entirely Sunni country, and there have been a number of conversions to Shiism. The government has recently recognized that this alliance with Iran was leading to a loss of political support, and has taken measures to close some of these centers and reduce ties with Iran, but there is also opposition to these moves from within the regime.

With regard to Islamic parties in Sudan, these parties are relatively weak from the point of view of both their membership and growth, and their financial resources. This has allowed the regime to divide certain groups and make alliances with others. Up to now, these parties have focused on charitable and educational work, and on providing a variety of services through their various institutions. However, the "Arab Spring" created more openness towards and possibilities for political participation, and these parties are now making preparations for a more concerted involvement in the political sphere. Political participation will require more means and new competences, as well as leaders suited to this work. They are now present in the universities and working with youth, and are developing access to media institutions. They have started to initiate economic projects, and to create centers for the reinforcing of skills and to develop a culture of political participation among young people. It was noted that, among Salafi groups, the question of political participation requires the development of a new culture and approach to their work.

KUWAIT

A brief overview was provided of the current situation in Kuwait. It was noted that Kuwait is different from many Arab countries, in that national wealth is shared to an extent among the people. However, wealth is unevenly distributed, and power is concentrated in the hands of the Emir, even if this is legitimized through a constitution. In the context of the “Arab Spring” there were some protests among the youth, seeking a change of prime-minister (who is chosen by the Emir). The parliament was then abrogated through a court verdict, and this led to further street protests. The subsequent election was largely boycotted, with a turnout of only 39%, and this was followed by more coercive measures from the government, which stirred protests further. This movement is now starting to fade, and this may be linked to new government measures to withdraw the nationality of protesters, following initial more brutal methods. The problems remain, and can be traced back to political events in 2006, when there was a move to change political constituencies, and the Emir was obliged to dissolve parliament in response to pressure from the youth.

In this context, Islamic movements are not very active in Kuwaiti politics. The prevailing view among Islamic parties is that it is forbidden (*haram*) to oppose the ruler. It was noted that the opposition had earlier this year launched the new Hashd reformist movement. This movement does not want to upset the Islamists, but was formed in protest to the 2013 constitutional changes. In conclusion, it was noted that there are no violent armed activities, but that there is general conflict between all parties on the political level.

TUNISIA

The participation of the youth in the first months following the Tunisian revolution was compared to the current situation. Immediately after the revolution, many young people were motivated by what they saw as a movement of change towards a more just society. However, following the important constituent assembly election of 23 October 2011, and the inability of the winner to realize the promises made during electoral campaigning, increasing disillusion developed among young people towards the electoral and broader democratic process. While some have become apathetic, with the return of the “deep state” others have been attracted towards violent change, saying that “bullets are the only solution”, and responding to the call of violent groups, ISIS in particular. Meanwhile, the assumption of power through military intervention in Egypt is seen as a disaster for hopes of peaceful change in the region, since this intervention has effectively brought Egypt back to its pre-revolutionary state, and potentially undermines other progressive movements in the Arab world. There is also a perception that the international military coalition against ISIS effectively gives support to the oppressive regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, while ignoring the crimes committed by this regime against its own people. These are important factors in understanding the current attitude of Tunisian young people, who were previously motivated towards justice and human rights, but who now see only the hypocrisy of the ruling elites and sense increased humiliation. One speaker believed that Tunisian youth would not participate in large numbers in the forthcoming election, due to their disillusionment, and this was likely to favor representatives of the “ancien regime”.

Meanwhile, the leader of a Tunisian Salafi party said they had put particular efforts into the representation of youth and women, who made up 60% and 20% respectively of its Shura council. For the parliamentary elections to be held on 26 October 2014, and in the context of its political alliance with a recently formed leftist party, it would present a list of candidates covering 19 constituencies. More than 70% of the candidates are from among the youth, including 4 women candidates who wear the *niqab*. The party, which has Salafi Islamic references, aims to stand up to against the exclusion of Islamic parties, and to change the incorrect perception of Salafism as equivalent to terrorism and intolerance. It is trying to engage in decision making within civil society, and to encourage its members and supporters to believe they are participating citizens. The possible return of the former regime through the electoral process is seen as an issue for this party, and for other parties, as they consider the former regime to have been dominated by secular leftists. As a result, some Salafis are struggling to participate. However, it was confirmed by the representative of the Salafi party that it is committed to participating over the long term, and is becoming established within the political arena.

MAURITANIA

Despite its geographical position in the far west of the Arab world, Mauritania has strong links with both the Arab world and with neighboring and regional countries in West Africa. Its location is also the reason for its ethnic make-up, with a majority of Arabs and diversity of African tribal groups. Almost the entire population is Muslim, following the Malikite School of jurisprudence. Mauritania is heavily influenced by external developments, particularly in other Arab

countries. The revolutions of the “Arab Spring” had strong resonance in the country, but attempts to follow the same revolutionary trend were unsuccessful, with the regime maintaining its control on the country. Meanwhile, the country faces its own unique internal challenges, including the black separatist FLAM movement (African Forces for the Liberation of Mauritania). In addition, there is the issue of the treatment of former slaves and their proper integration into society and political processes, as well as chronic issues of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. Politically, the current president enjoys a relatively strong position, having been re-elected for a second term, amid a large boycott by the key opposition groups despite general weakness among opposition ranks. The country is relatively free from a political and media standpoint, but is suffering from sharp increases in poverty and the struggle for survival among certain social classes. All these factors present challenges for a large country with long and vulnerable borders, particularly in the light of the ongoing instability in northern Mali.

With regard to Salafi political participation, the establishment of Salafi parties in other Arab countries following the “Arab Spring” was broadly welcomed by Salafi groups in Mauritania. However, the events in Egypt had a very negative impact, and have been a source of disillusion among the youth. Likewise, the French military intervention in Mali has been perceived negatively, and young people generally view international politics as hypocritical and subject to double-standards. These events, including the aftermath of the military intervention in Egypt in 2013, have unfortunately driven an increasing number of youth away from political participation, which is considered a waste of time, and towards other solutions, sometimes violent. It was noted that since the Istanbul workshop of 2013 many in the Salafi

movement have been disappointed by the relapse of the “Arab Spring”. It was pointed out that Sunnis in Iraq are now completely disillusioned by the political process and are prepared to make an “alliance with the devil” to achieve their goals of greater sharing of power and wealth. One participant stated that the international community is seen to have remained silent in situations when it could have taken measures, such as imposing Chapter VII at the United Nations on countries in violation of international norms. People in Mauritania and across the Arab world have lost hope in the effectiveness of attempts at political participation, and are looking at Egypt, Syria etc. as examples of the outcome of such attempts. A great level of cynicism has unfortunately grown since the previous workshop, and it was hoped that this meeting would provide some reasons for renewed hope. Meanwhile, it was confirmed that the Al-Asala Wa Al-Tajdid party continues to be convinced that the best chances for peaceful change lie in political participation.

GENERAL THEMES AND VIEWPOINTS:

Throughout the discussions on regional developments and the reaction of Islamic groups and Salafis in particular, a number of themes emerged, as follows:

- There is growing frustration among the youth, who have seen the disappointment of their hopes for change that were raised during the “Arab Spring”. Counter-revolutionary developments, and the return of elements linked to former regimes, are seen to be having a very negative impact on the engagement of youth and their openness to peaceful political participation.
- During the decades preceding the “Arab Spring”, two factors contributed to the attitude of disengagement of Islamic

groups towards political engagement: one was the belief that, in the face of oppressive regimes, any political participation was ineffective; the second was a belief that political participation was not sanctioned by Islam. Both these positions were challenged by the “Arab Spring”, but are now re-emerging. It should be noted that some faith-based groups were willing and sought to participate politically, but were excluded by the authoritarian regimes. This forced them to go underground or encouraged them to embrace violent means for change. This was notably the case of Jabhat Al Isla in Tunisia for the former position and the Libyan Fighting Group for the latter.

- There is a polarization between Salafis and other Islamic groups with regard to political participation. This is caused partly by an absence, in the Salafi current, of formal scientific analysis on the subject, as well as a lack of strong relationships with other parties, to develop a dialogue on political participation. It was pointed out that dialogue is a fundamental value among Islamic movements, and this needs to be reinforced.
- In addition, many Salafis and other Islamic groups lacked relevant experience because they had been denied the space for political development, and in some cases imprisoned, in the years leading up to the “Arab Spring”. There is now a need for support in order to learn how to participate positively.
- The transition among Salafi groups towards a democratic and participative approach was not an easy step to take, but they showed a willingness to make this change. Many are now severely disillusioned. There is a need to collaborate and exchange with civil

groups in Europe and the US to restore a belief in democracy.

- Having made the step towards a democratic model, Salafi groups now need to develop this further, and build a political model in which they can believe. Currently the only models offered in the Muslim-majority world are those of Iran and Turkey, but these may not be the only alternatives, and thinking needs to evolve on this subject.
- The question for many groups, including Salafis, is how to confront the return of authoritarianism and tyranny. Some groups will inevitably resort to a violent response, which is likely to lead to a deteriorating cycle of violence.
- In addition to questions over political participation, the return of elements of the former regimes has also resulted in a crack-down on the traditional activities of some Salafi groups, preaching, education and charitable works. This only adds to the risk that members of these groups may see violent action as the only possible response.
- There is significant distrust of the “international community”, in the light of apparently partisan decisions made in response to regional events. It was noted, for example, that international powers were seen to act quickly against ISIS, but not to reign in the excesses of the Asad regime in Syria, the support of Iran for Ansar Allah in Yemen and other Shia-linked groups in the region.
- It was recognized by some present that the West supports “functional states” for pragmatic reasons. There was acceptance of changes brought about by the “Arab Spring” by many in the West. However, when order was seen to be breaking down, and there seemed to be threats to regional stability (for example a fear that Egypt would renege on the Camp David

Accords and give greater support to Hamas) the West preferred the apparently greater security offered by the players behind the coup in Egypt, counter-revolutionary movements in Libya, Syria etc.

- The West’s position was encouraged by regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who feared the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic opposition groups.
- In the light of this distrust of the “international community”, building relationships is vital. One reason that authoritarian regimes are listened to by the West is that they are the only players known to Western governments. It is therefore very important for Salafis and others to build relationships with these governments, so that an alternative viewpoint is heard.
- The view that external players continue to influence politics in the region dissuades Salafi parties from political engagement. The rejection by the international community of democratic will within the Arab world (the response to the election of Hamas in the Palestinian Territories, international acceptance of recent events in Egypt etc.) are seen as moves to interfere with the development of a regional model of democracy, and the influence of these external players is seen to be too strong.
- There continues to be a need to manage the image of Salafi and Islamic parties through the media, and in the face of continued attempts by the regimes to portray these parties, and other opponents, in a negative light. Salafi groups sometimes suffer the banning of their newspapers, blocking of their websites etc.

- Despite the failures to date of political participation through the ballot box, and their negative impacts on views of democracy, many present believe that Islamic groups can continue to participate in broader ways in political development.

There was general agreement that the current situation, and the general level of frustration with developments since the “Arab Spring”, is very grave and gives cause for alarm.

III. EXPERIENCES OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITHOUT PARTY POLITICS

Salafi currents throughout history have essentially been reformist movements. Since the early days of the Islamic period, from Ibn Hanbal in the 3rd Century Hijri (9th Century CE) through to the Islamic renaissance and the confrontation with colonialist powers in the 18th Century CE, and up to the present day, Salafi movements have regularly emerged to counter and correct “*bid’a*” (innovation in religious rituals) and advocate a return to the essence of Islam. At certain stages throughout history, and across the Arab world, a minority of Salafi movements have resorted to violence through Jihad. Due to a general lack of knowledge of these movements, there is a prevailing view, at least in the West, that all Salafi currents are associated with violence, and this misinterpretation of the various currents within Salafism hinders dialogue and understanding.

Meanwhile, there are differences of opinion among different Salafi groups regarding the legitimacy of participation in national political processes, and this affected the initial reaction the “Arab Spring”, with some Salafi scholars issuing fatwas against participation in the revolutions. However, in

general terms, it is felt that the “Arab Spring” was positive for all Islamic groups, including Salafi movements, and some were encouraged to join the political process as a response to the huge societal and political changes that appeared to be taking place. This was evidenced in Egypt, for example, with the forming of the Al-Nour party in May 2011 and its subsequent participation in the political process.

However, as noted above, for many Salafis the counter-revolutionary developments since the “Arab Spring” have thrown into question the wisdom of participating in party politics and electoral processes. While the reasons for revolution continue to exist, and a certain level of fear was removed by the revolutionary movements, the return of elements of former regimes in some countries has halted the progress towards the possibility of full political participation. Nevertheless, the movement towards reform is likely to continue, and Salafi groups need to look at the part they can play in this movement. The relationship between the rulers and the ruled across the Arab world is at a delicate stage, and the position of Salafis with regard to political engagement continues to evolve.

There is a need for academic and juridical research on the right approach to political engagement, but current realities cannot be ignored, and it is no longer appropriate to refer to a model developed centuries ago. Meanwhile Egypt is no longer seen as the modern model, following the 2013 military intervention, and there is a need to consider other models developed in other regions (such as Latin America, for example). The evolution of political participation is an ongoing process, and there is no perfect model of democracy. However, the aspirations of people throughout the world are generally similar, despite religious and

cultural differences, and capacity building within a strong civil society, together with solid political development, is an important step towards meeting these aspirations.

A - EXAMPLES FROM OUTSIDE THE REGION

To foster discussion on the development of political participation without party politics, and the development of a strong civil society, examples from outside the region were presented:

From the US, the example was presented whereby a church community had carried out a project to develop housing for the homeless, and also carried out a program of visits to prisoners. From the UK, examples were given of projects carried out to promote social cohesion and the inclusion of Muslims in civil society. These have included joining an inter-religious assembly working on practical issues, such as a campaign to ensure that a group of (non-Muslim) migrants received the minimum wage. Such social actions in collaboration of people of other faiths led to exchanges on the basis of shared beliefs in social justice, and greater dialogue. They also had the direct impact of improving the status and social situation of those who benefit from these joint actions. In addition, communication was established with civic and political leaders at the local (and national) level, enhancing respect for Muslims as members of British society.

Lessons drawn from these Western examples included the following:

- Actions speak louder than words: trust will be gained through genuine attempts to address concrete issues. "People are more affected by what you do, and how you react to events, than what you say."
- It is important to listen to other communities and really understand local needs.

- Joint actions with other communities on social issues have enriched the credit of Muslims in Western countries.
- "All politics is local" – people will vote for people who care for them, even if they hold different views. However, memory is short in politics, so there need to be a constant revitalization of actions and review of needs.
- "Do not give up: politics is messy", and those involved in civil action and politics need to be ready to deal with people with very different viewpoints. It is also important to "love your enemy".
- People driven by faith in God should see their political and civic development as their "practical walk with God".
- In order to direct practical civic and political action, it is important to understand and be guided by public sentiment, and this can be achieved using social media.
- In countries where Muslims are living as minorities and there is danger of growing Islamophobia, participation and involvement in relevant local training and community action is a good response.
- Acceptance and working with those of other cultures is important, and leads to societal resilience at times of acute stress within multi-cultural communities (such as in the wake 9/11 in New York, 7/7 in London etc.).

Representatives present at the meeting agreed that there is a need among Salafi groups to learn from experiences and lessons from Europe and the US, in order to move from theory to action and bring about a real renaissance. It was noted, however, that Salafi and other Islamic groups face particular difficulties due to a lack of basic freedoms. Governments in Arab countries often prevent Islamic groups from involvement in charitable work, and there is

a need for an understanding of these restrictions and support from international partners in societies with greater freedoms. It was also suggested that there is a need for locally based organizations to work together, and to avoid being divided in their efforts through government manipulation. Fractures within society (and between different schools of Islamic thought) are exploited by those in power, and it is important for groups with similar goals to work together where possible.

One helpful concept referred to in this regard is the “alliance of good men”, a pre-Islamic concept welcomed by the Prophet Mohammed. Men and women of all faiths and none can work together for common goals, the recognition of and support for those who suffer, the development of civil society and peace initiatives. Several of those present mentioned good experiences of dialogue with people of other faiths, and the discovery that the commonalities were far greater than the differences. It was acknowledged that there had been a great deal of fruitful sharing of truths in this regard during this meeting, and that this helps to reduce tensions and suspicions. In the light of this, the proposal was made that the CFG should help to facilitate further meetings between Salafis and those of other faiths, to enhance dialogue and aim for joint actions and initiatives.

B - REGIONAL EXAMPLES

In the current context, where direct participation in party politics is difficult in many countries across the region, the promotion of political participation through other means which contribute to the building of civil society is an important theme. Different organizations from within the region therefore gave an overview of their approaches and the challenges they face.

MOROCCO: NON-PARTY POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The founders of a Moroccan organization represented at the meeting had originally planned to form a political party, but permission was refused by the Moroccan authorities. Following much internal debate the decision was made to establish an association with ultimately political goals, although it was noted that there is a shortage of *fiqh* to help provide guidance in matters of political participation. In the face of oppression, severe corruption and a system suffering from the hangovers of colonialism, the organization rejects both on the one hand violence and extremism and, on the other, direct participation in existing institutions and systems, which are considered to be corrupting and controlled by the existing powers. The organization’s stated strategy is to work within civil society, with a focus on restoring the trust of human beings in society and in Islam as a basis for political action. It bases its approach on the two pillars of education, being active particularly in universities, and dissemination of its ideas through the publication and distribution of the writings of its founder and other political works.

Recent developments have included the establishment of a Charter, which has been very helpful for the organization. The overall view is that change will take time, but needs to be based on sound principles and trust in God. While the association does not aim to copy other models, the philosophy guiding the Charter was helped by the work on the development of democratic institutions carried out by O’Donnell and Schmitter, and originally focused on countries of Latin America. One of the principles guiding the Charter is to establish shared goals within society and to have respect for the rules of political competition. There is focus on

peaceful and gradual change to achieve a smooth transition, and to avoid the two extremes of violence and compliance. There needs to be an evolution from the current constitution, whereby rights are “granted” by the ruler, to a real contract with and among the people of the country.

Attention was drawn by one of the workshop participants to a recent in-depth study carried out by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. This research underscored the significant role non-partisan organizations are able to play in the Moroccan public sphere, despite not being a political party or social movement in the classic sense.

KUWAIT: CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Salafi groups have previously been formed in Kuwait, notably with Ihya al-Turath (Revival of Legacy) established in 1981. However, this organization is quite closed to other groups, and for example does not interact with the Muslim Brotherhood and has considerable animosity towards Shiites. Following its establishment, there was much debate among Salafis in the 1980s over the legitimacy of taking part in political institutions and standing for parliament. Ihya al-Turath has been black-listed by the US government, but it was commented that this may show a lack of understanding of how supportive the organization is towards the ruling family.

One of the participating organizations at the meeting was a Kuwaiti-based charitable organization. Through focusing in particular on charitable action, it aims to be a model for interaction with other parts of society, as well as internationally, in order to create a more open civil and political system. It operates within a legal grey zone in Kuwait, where the government works under a law

dating from 1961, and the ruling family opposes the establishment of charitable organizations, due to their potential for political influence. Charitable activities are generally tolerated, but the authorities can block their accounts and effectively control the prominence of different groups at different junctures according to political expediency. Another participant was a research institute focusing on Islamic movements and following developments on the Kuwaiti and international scene.

It was reported by participants that Salafi thought on political participation in Kuwait, as in other countries, is in crisis and faces several challenges. Firstly, many Salafi sheikhs oppose participation in democracy, and although there is now growing acceptance among Kuwaiti Salafis, solid *fiqh* in this area is lacking. Secondly, there is the concern that moving away from *da'wa* and into political action would involve abandoning Salafi principles. Thirdly, obedience to the ruler is a central tenet for many Salafis, including Ihya al-Turath, even when there is an authoritarian regime, and this causes further reticence towards participation. Finally, there is a certain political naivety and lack of awareness, which allows Salafis to be instrumentalized by regional dictatorships playing on regional or doctrinal fault lines (Shia-Sunni, Salafi-Liberal etc.).

There was some discussion of the lack of consistency among the approaches and achievements of Salafi groups in Kuwait. While some have organized armed resistance to the regime, as happened in 2005⁸, others have been in parliament since 1981, and are seen to be highly penetrated by the government. Even those within parliament

⁸ The Peninsula Lions organization.

have not acted as a consistent bloc. It was noted that not many Salafi groups participated in the popular movements of 2012, and fell into mistaken competition with the Muslim Brotherhood, in a game orchestrated by the regime. It was noted that although Kuwaiti Salafis were the first to be involved in parliamentary politics, they had not developed the theoretical bases needed to take proper advantage of the “Arab Spring” movements. The mixing of political and charitable funding is also an issue, since there is an absence of law on the use of *zakat* dues for political ends. At the same time, the state controls *waqf* (endowment) institutions. Meanwhile, one participant reported that the experience of Salafi parliamentarians who have pushed for a multi-party approach has sometimes been very negative, as they have been attacked by other Salafi groups.

The question of finding suitable models for political participation was also raised, with some discussion of Asian examples, such as Malaysia. There had been some successful dialogue among youth members in this regard. One participant pointed out that some scholars (including Yusuf al-Qaradawi) had encouraged looking at modern political science for pointers in how to find and adapt the right model in the Arab-Muslim context. The model for political participation needs to reflect and respond to contemporary reality. Meanwhile, there is a need to look at examples of good governance from Islamic history, to provide appropriate and culturally-adapted models – Turkey, for example, has benefitted from its heritage in creating a modern, democratic state. It is also important to look at models in the West, which have also benefitted from Islamic civilization due constant and historical cultural exchange and cross-fertilization.

TUNISIA: RESEARCH GROUP

A Tunisian research group with its roots in the Islamic movement was represented at the meeting and presented its approach and aims. It had been established as a free space and forum to give priority to cultural matters, with a philosophy of promoting diversity of thought and openness. It is not a political party, but follows the principle that without cultural depth political action simply becomes an objective in its own right and will not transform society. The Tunisian Islamic movement was born in the early 1970s, and members of this research group were instrumental in its establishment. In its early days, the research group had links to the Al Itijah Al Islami Tunisian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), but as the latter expanded some members started to question its development and called for a time of pause and reflection, leaving the Al Itijah Al Islami movement for this purpose. Several years were spent in critical analysis of not just the MB experience, but of Islamic thought in general, and many ideas were generated. Following the coup that brought Ben Ali to power in 1987, the research group’s activities were closed down, due to its former association with the Itijah Al Islami, which became the Ennahdha Movement in the mid-1980s.

During the rule of Ben Ali, the research group managed its survival in difficult circumstances through the following strategy and tactics: 1. It did not give up its work at any point, finding ways to operate under a dictatorship. 2. It avoided collusion with the authorities, but found and gradually expanded a “safe space” in which to operate. 3. Where it was impossible to tell the whole truth, ways were found to say at least partial truths. 4. It remained open to others, while not allowing others to impose their priorities,

thus avoiding the mistake of some Islamists groups of remaining isolated. Indeed, since the 1982, the forum has been working to eliminate the division between Islamists and others in civil society. 5. It retained its belief that the power of thought can defeat authoritarianism – it is important to never underestimate the power of thought. 6. It trained young people to be the leaders of the future, and now sees these young people in leadership positions within Ennahdha and other movements.

According to a Tunisian analyst present at the meeting, since the start of the “Arab Spring” in Tunisia the country has become a political laboratory. Many people wanted to take the lead in the evolving political scene, and to “grab power” in order to bring about change. However, many of these new leaders lacked the experience or depth of thinking to achieve results, and people became rapidly disillusioned with their performance. The belief of the research group is that change must come from the bottom up. Meanwhile, religion had returned to influence the public space, which was both a positive development but also runs the risk of being used as a tool for societal control. There are currently different and contradictory currents within Islam, both supportive of and against democracy. There is a need for a movement of deep religious renewal, not just of language (discourse) and *da’wa*, though this is important, but of religious perceptions and concepts, which need to be revisited and restructured in the light of the current context and needs.

It was noted that Ennahdha came to power with 365 promises and failed to fulfil “any of them”, and there was some discussion of the reasons for these failures. They had clearly found the political realities difficult and the problems greater than they had expected, as well as a society suffering from severe social

and psychological problems. But Ennahdha also lacked a deeply rooted political culture and values, the legacy of which is available in Islamic tradition, which historically had a strong civil society component but which has not been explored sufficiently in recent years. Ennahdha also failed, according to this analyst, to engage other currents of opinion within both the secular-liberal and Islamic trends. Meanwhile, they did not know how to deal with the Salafi current, which was relatively new in Tunisia, and whose evolution had not been followed by Rached Gannouchi and other Ennahdha leaders during their years in exile, although for many people they had provided an alternative to the secular program of the Ben Ali regime. Ennahdha was unable to integrate these other Islamic currents and, with the lack of good political alternatives, the rejectionist stance of Salafi Jihadis has unfortunately led this current further into violence. Meanwhile, concern was expressed that since the “Arab Spring”, there had been strong animosity among secular liberal currents, especially intellectual circles in the West, towards anything representing an Islamic project. This had caused the growth of bitterness between the different currents, although the real disaster had been the rejection of the democratic movement within the Arab world, with the example of Egypt particularly damaging.

There were some comments that research groups such as the one represented at the meeting are mainly of interest to the elite, and questions as to the definition of the “Islamic left” and how they can reach the lower classes of society, as well as whether it would not have been better for this research group to remain with the fold of Ennahdha. However, it was acknowledged that the experiences and research of this group could prove useful to others, particularly to Islamic political movements, and it was requested

that their ideas and literature be shared to help further debate and thinking on relevant political thought. It was also suggested that the group could act as a mediator between secularists and Islamic parties. It was stated that Tunisian society appears fragmented and polarized, with a lack of broad consensus, and a model is needed for how to live as contemporary democratic Muslims.

IV. THE CHALLENGES TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION PRESENTED BY ISIS

The recent emergence and impact of ISIS in the region is seen as a direct consequence of disillusionment with political developments since the “Arab Spring”, and particularly the frustrations of the youth currently flocking to join its ranks. It is pertinent to note that ISIS is attracting youth not just from the region, but also second generation young Muslims from Europe as well as converts. Among many, the war against ISIS is seen to be a “crusader” war against Islam, and in particular against Sunni Islam. While it is viewed as a geo-political game by regional elites, young people see it as an exciting opportunity to “defend Islam”, while also responding to injustices in the region.

There was some discussion of the historical emergence of ISIS, going back to the battles between Islamists and US forces in Fallujah in 2003, and subsequent developments among Jihadi fighting groups.⁹

One view expressed was that the emergence of ISIS was simply a response to a chaotic situation, and that organizations will only last if they have a coherent long-term vision. ISIS appears to be capitalizing on the power

vacuum in parts of Syria and Iraq, and while it bases its current actions on a solid military strategy, there are questions over its long term acceptability to the people in areas under its control. Unfortunately, one current impact of its existence is that all Salafi groups are typified as related to or similar to ISIS. An understanding had started to emerge in the West between 2011 and 2013 that there were different types of Salafi groups, but the tendency is now once again to see them all in the same light.

In response to the general view that foreign powers tend to favor partners in the region who are not popular with their people, one Western representative pointed out that there was not a consistent view among politicians in the West. There had, for example, been differences over the appropriateness of intervention in Libya. Likewise, with regard to Syria, the US government had been concerned not to make matters worse, or to become involved in the growing regional conflict between Shia and Sunni, which was why it had avoided intervention. Western politicians know that they do not understand all the nuances in the region, and certainly do not want to be seen as “crusaders”. In general, US and other Western politicians are keen to offer help to the peaceful development of the region. However, it was true that the views of both people and politicians in the West had been influenced by highly publicized ISIS attacks on indigenous Christians and other minorities, as well as Western aid workers. ISIS has been skillful in exploiting stereotypes and caricatures, in order to achieve polarization between Muslims and Western governments. This only serves to emphasize the importance for opinion leaders in the Muslim-majority countries and the West to come to know each other better.

⁹ In this context, reference was made to the analyses made by the Jordanian researcher Mohammed Abu Rumman.

It was pointed out that the current ISIS movement is not a Salafi movement, but a drawing together of various fringes who all believe they are fighting injustice. It was believed that not many religiously educated Salafis have joined ISIS, since the acts carried out by this group are clearly disapproved of by Islam. However, the existence of ISIS is complicating greatly the situation for Salafi parties and movements. Many young Salafis are rejecting political participation, and may be attracted to the fighting groups. However, aerial bombardments are unlikely to eliminate the problem, since the root causes of injustice remain. Youth need to be persuaded through discussion and dialogue that this is not the correct response, and Salafi groups need to build their capacities for communication and the media in order to give this message.

One theme which is common throughout the “Muslim world” in its relations with the West is a desire for justice. Generations of Muslims have seen the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, in which the US supports the oppressor, as well as Western support for other oppressive regimes within the region. The fact that ISIS is seen to be standing up to unjust Western powers is part of its attraction for young people, and it is possible that the use of power to crush ISIS will only strengthen its appeal, or lead to the emergence of even more violent and extremist groups.

Another theme is the belief that Western governments dictate the positions and actions of most governments in the region, particularly those such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE which are closely tied militarily and economically. Therefore, the more Western governments stand up for just causes, and bring their influence to bear in support of democracy, the easier it will be dissuade young people from joining groups like ISIS.

Western hypocrisy over elections in Algeria (1992), Palestine (2005), Egypt (2013) etc. have all added to a sense of double-standards in their dealings with Arab countries.

In the light of the emergence of ISIS, its strong conflict with Western powers, and the casting of all Salafi groups in the same light, it was proposed that communication needs to be established between Salafi groups and Western powers, as well as potentially representatives of the regional regimes. Salafis currently feel excluded from the political process for various historical and ideological reasons. It was suggested therefore that the possibility might be explored of meetings between leading Salafis and US or other Western politicians, for an exchange of views on areas for potential cooperation. There is clearly a link between the ISIS phenomenon and the (lack of) promotion of political participation, and this needs to be addressed.

V. SALAFI YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The topic was introduced with a presentation on the experience of youth in Tunisia both before and after the “Arab Spring”. In the early 2000s, university students and other youth were notably disinterested in politics, but this gradually started to change as the decade progressed, with the chanting of football slogans changing to more political themes. This was accompanied by increased exchange on social media, and the groundswell of youth movements taking an enthusiastic interest in political change and ready to take advantage of the events leading up to the revolution of 2010/11. However, since the “Arab Spring”, the counter-revolutionary events in Egypt, Libya etc. have caused severe disillusion among the youth. A Tunisian Salafi party is putting all its efforts

into the encouragement of youth participation, and has formed the “Ash-Sha’b Yurid” alliance, in the belief that youth continue to have enormous power, and that this needs to be channeled.

A participant from Tunisia explained that, unfortunately, many young Tunisian people are going to join fighting groups in Iraq and Syria, and they are counted among the largest groups of foreign fighters in these countries, as well as the most extreme. There is severe disillusionment among the youth with the previous support of world super-powers for the Ben Ali regime, and now the counter-revolutionary movements throughout the Arab world. This is coupled with frustration at the long-standing injustices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and the refusal of the US to consider as criminal acts any of the excesses carried out by Israel. These factors have a big impact on the re-awakened Tunisian youth. There is a need for real dialogue with all parties, and the youth need to be involved. The participant emphasized that there is much admiration among the youth for aspects of western society and achievement, but this is accompanied by a perception of the West’s hypocrisy and double-standards, and these are strong recruiting sergeants for groups fighting against the US and other international powers.

This overview of the situation in Tunisia was followed by group sessions addressing the following two questions: 1. What are the obstacles in the various countries preventing the political participation of the youth? 2. What practical recommendations can be made to overcome these obstacles? Most of the comments focused on the lack of education, either political-civic or religious, political issues, be it local, national or

regional, and the role of the media, particularly the use of new media channels.¹⁰

VI. JOINT WORKING GROUPS – KEY THEMES

Small working group discussions were held, each grouping together the representatives from three or four of the different countries represented, to discuss further the key themes emerging from the meeting and to make concrete proposals for next steps and initiatives. Outcomes from these country-based meetings touched on themes which are similar throughout the whole region. They included the following comments and recommendations:

1. For the promotion of peace, one of the most important elements is dialogue rather than a security-based approach, which tends to lead to counter-reaction. Therefore a strong focus is needed on educational and cultural dialogues to engage and educate young people. Many young people are drawn into violence out of good intentions, but with serious misunderstandings of religious texts, and influenced by violent groups disseminating erroneous media and literature. Dialogue and education are needed on the *fiqh* of jihad, which does not sanction random and unjustified violence.
2. Guidance on political participation from a religious standpoint is given by sharia, but there is lack of understanding of the texts, so education is important also in this area.
3. Islam has clear teaching on interaction and exchange with people holding

¹⁰A detailed summary of all the points that were raised by the participants is available in Appendix 1.

- different views, and this is supported by the behavior and ethics of early Muslims. There is a need to learn from Islamic tradition and teachings in this matter.
4. “*Najdi*” Salafi religious texts need to be reviewed and their interpretation corrected and “purified” where they have been used to support unjustified violence. There is in effect a need to return to Salafi orthodoxy in these matters.
 5. The best method for changing society is through incremental change using consultation, dialogue and seminars. This approach should be promoted by respected religious scholars who are neither extremist nor working closely with governments and regimes (these latter scholars are particularly distrusted among young people). There is a need to strengthen religious references who are moderate, and enable them to speak to the public. Some sheikhs and other references within this trend have a very important role, due to their lack of affiliation with governments and their known opposition to corruption and authoritarian regimes. In addition, a number of Salafi religious scholars have been addressing the issue of violence for some time on the scientific and intellectual level, for example issuing *fatwas* calling for dialogue in the wake of the “Arab Spring”. Their non-violent message has frequently been distorted or drowned out by regime propaganda. Questions were raised over how realistic and practical it will be to overcome this regime propaganda against *ulema* promoting an alternative discourse. However, appropriate country-specific plans must be developed for delivering their message of non-violence, particularly to young people, through different media channels (video, radio, social media etc.).
 6. Religious educational institutions with sound religious teachings and knowledge of Islam need to be established or strengthened. These institutions should not be dominated by the authorities or infiltrated by the regimes, so that they are not influenced by political pressures. The current curriculum in existing state institutions also needs to be reviewed, in the interest of reducing secular extremism that can lead to religious extremism as a reaction.
 7. On a separate track, communication and dialogue with political authorities also needs to be established, to discuss and address approaches to issues of common concern. It is particularly important to find ways to engage with the authorities and convince them of the benefits of allowing independent respected scholars to make their message heard.
 8. Young people should be encouraged to become involved in charitable projects, to encourage local participation in community and civic action.
 9. With regard to the Shia-Sunni tensions, there was some discussion of historical aspects, current facts and events and external infiltration from other countries. It was generally agreed that the dichotomy has been exacerbated in recent decades, increasing its prominence and destabilizing a previous situation of generally peaceful coexistence in Arab countries such as Yemen and Kuwait. The current confrontation appears to have its origins in the Iranian revolution and establishment of the *Velayat-e Faqih*, which has had a generally expansionist discourse. The interference of world and regional powers has also made the situation worse in recent years. It is therefore important, in the context of political participation, to reframe the dichotomy in the context of citizenship,

and counter the sectarian vision of society.

A proposal was made for a project between two research bodies present at the meeting and the CFG to hold a joint workshop or project, and to carry out joint research on this subject as a starting point for potential interventions, looking at local lines of tension and the question of citizenship in one of the countries represented at the meeting.

It was reiterated that the current general situation is extremely serious, and that a plan of action needs to be formulated for promoting dialogue, cooperation and tolerance to promote an Islamic message of conflict transformation, engage youth in political participation and address the grave issue of violence propounded by jihadi groups.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSED ACTION POINTS

The workshop reached the following conclusions and recommendations with regard to Salafi political participation and other related initiatives:

1. Disillusion among the youth with the progress of political change is a serious and growing issue for the entire region, leading to apathy among some while a significant number join violent extremist groups, with ISIS exerting a particular appeal. In this context, it is proposed to establish an observatory focused on youth, to identify danger signs (“early warning rapid response”) and to encourage alternatives to violent extremism (including reintegration of former “fighters” in society – see below).
2. The return of the “deep state” and elements of pre-“Arab Spring” regimes in a number of countries in the region is a disturbing development which is unlikely to lead to greater or more open political participation, and likely to further alienate younger members of society.
3. Distrust of the ruling (or returning) oppressive regimes is compounded by distrust of the international community, which is seen to be supportive of these regimes and acting with double-standards in its relations with the region.
4. Salafi groups lack clear juridical and religious guidance on political participation, and work needs to be done in this area to provide a solid basis to justify and encourage political participation, as well as to deepen thinking on potential models for democratic participation. The establishment and strengthening of institutions with expertise in this matter will also contribute to this effort.
5. Respected Salafi scholars who are not linked to the regimes have an important role to play in developing a strong religious-based argument discouraging youth from participation in extremist violent groups.
6. New media channels, including social media, should be used to convey messages which promote a non-violent and participatory response to issues in the region. The production and dissemination of these messages needs to be of a high standard.
7. Salafis and other Islamic parties tend to have a poor or distorted image in the media, both regionally and internationally. It is therefore important to improve communication and dialogue with other parties (including where possible with elements of regional regimes and the international community) in order to build better relationships and understanding. In particular, there will be further exploration of a proposal for leading Salafi scholars to meet with members of the US Congress for an exchange of views and to build mutual understanding.

8. The workshop showed a clear commitment to the inclusion of all trends within society, and a representation of all views, in the political process in order to build a healthy participative political system.
9. The proposal was made that the CFG should help to facilitate further meetings between Salafis and those of other faiths, to enhance dialogue and aim for joint actions and initiatives.
10. Charitable and other community work carried out in collaboration with other members of civil society are good ways to build bridges across society, in order to construct a common project towards comprehensive political participation, as well as to build “societal resilience” in times of crisis. This is true in both Muslim-minority counties (e.g. the US and Europe) and in the region.
11. Work on the education and training of youth for future leadership roles is important, and needs to embrace “cultural” development, in order to broaden their world-view and to provide greater capacities for addressing future political challenges.
12. A strategy needs to be developed for the reintegration of members of society who return from activities with violent extremist groups, to ensure their peaceful return to civil society. The lessons learned from previous experiences in the region (e.g. Mauritania) will be helpful in this matter.
13. Proposals were made, as the result of a side meeting, for a project to address the gap between Islamic organizations and Western NGOs in the humanitarian field, where there is inadequate cooperation and lines of tension exist. The objective would be partly to ensure that these organizations develop their role as peace actors. A partnership was proposed for this project between a Kuwaiti charitable organization and the CFG.¹¹

¹¹This was explored further in the Peace Promotion Workshop held in Nouakchott in December 2014.

The obstacles to youth participation identified by the different groups included the following:

- Lack of awareness of the importance of political work, due partly to its former criminalization by authoritarian regimes.
- The belief among some Salafi currents that political participation is illicit.
- The negative popular image of Islamic political participation, due to the failures and failed experiences of some Islamic parties (e.g. in Egypt), which has led to a loss of confidence in Islamic parties.
- The collusion of the *ulema* of some Islamic parties with the regimes, which has undermined their credibility among the youth.
- Lack of attractiveness of some *ulema* in the eyes of youth who have known them since infancy and are not inspired by their messages, which have become tired and are seen to be ineffective.
- A media discourse that is strongly unfavorable towards Islamic parties and their political engagement. Secular groups have significant media resources, and this was particularly evident in Egypt, with the strong media criticism of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.
- Absence of a proper differentiation of the various parties, to identify their position with regard to political participation. This leads to confusion of the different Islamic currents (Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis, Jihadis etc.), and Salafis tend to be treated as all having the same approach.
- Political parties are often not attractive to youth, lacking regular activities that would engage and enthuse them to participate.
- Lack of relevant expertise and experience among the youth to enable them to engage in the political process. This is exacerbated by the previous non-participation of Islamic currents.
- Lack of acceptance of “the other” and their points of view.
- Lack of financial means among Islamic groups, compared to authoritarian regimes which have access to greater resources and financial institutions.
- An unstable security situation, which discourages youth from participating in politics and also exposes them to weapons. The perceived partisan approach of international powers supporting liberal and authoritarian regimes also drives young people towards Jihadi movements.
- One group made a distinction between youth who reject political participation, due to a perceived lack of support from recognized religious references, as well as a lack of trust in official ones, and those who suffer from temporary apathy, often due to social and economic problems combined with attacks on the parties to which they would have an affiliation.
- Tribalism and geographical affiliations are obstacles to building partisan political participation culture (e.g. in Libya).
- The absence of a collective youth project to attract young people.

Proposals for practical steps to overcome the obstacles included the following:

- A collective (religious-based) project to give all ideological currents the chance to meet and exchange, under the umbrella of shared citizenship.

- Deepening awareness of religious and political bases and references among the youth, including within parties or groups which are relatively closed at present.
- Efforts among religious scholars to clarify and communicate properly the distinction between legitimate fighting (for example in self-defence) and terrorism.
- Enhancing the engagement of the *ulema* with the people, in order to restore credibility, especially for those who are perceived to be in collusion with authoritarian regimes.
- Developing training and qualifications for the youth, and also enhancing the capacity of youth political cadres to deal with different issues.
- The development of a new Salafi youth leadership, with greater attractiveness and more relevant messages for the younger generations, and who are more likely to inspire hope.
- Improved and extended use of new media channels, such as YouTube and social media, so that communications supporting peaceful political participation are as effective as those broadcast by fighting groups such as ISIS.
- Reflection on new social channels through which to engage with society.
- Encouraging parties to broaden their constituencies, for example by naming themselves in a less narrow way (party identity).
- Encouraging associations to work with women's and children's groups, to broaden their outreach and lead to more contact with the youth.
- Developing a code of ethics for the media, so that there is less insult and provocation of Islamic parties and others, less incitement to attack them, and a more inclusive media culture.
- Greater communication with human rights groups and parliamentarians in the West. As has been noted, the authoritarian regimes have good connections in the West, while Islamic parties have few links, and are thus poorly understood.
- Developing early warning mechanisms to identify youth likely to move towards violent groups and enable establishment of a dialogue with them.
- The pardoning and reintegration of previously violent people who are genuinely willing to live by the rules of society and give up violence, following models already used in some Arab countries.
- Engagement of youth to focus on addressing local issues and injustices, to balance the current excessive focus on international conflicts.

Further comments from the discussions on the issue of violence prevention among youth and proposed additional recommendations included the following:

- With regard to returning Jihadis, it was noted that the authorities are not thinking of how to reintegrate them positively. Islamic actors need to carry out serious reflection on the issue and how to channel the energies of these returnees. One suggestion was to encourage them towards human rights activism in a civil society context.
- With regard to use of the media, quality is important – both the regimes and groups such as ISIS have access to high-quality media tools and channels, and participative political parties need to counter with equally high-quality communication.

- While there may be apathy among youth towards political participation, a bigger problem in countries such as Morocco and Tunisia is youth engagement in extremist groups, and reinforcement and strengthening of this extremism when they are imprisoned. Ideas are needed for how to counter this trend.
- There is a need for the reform of the whole of society through the education of young people. This involves encouraging openness to other members of society with different opinions and points of view, and using culture (art, film, music etc.) to stimulate creativity, discussion and exchange among young people, and to develop their independence and personalities, so that they are stronger to resist the pressures of the media or extremist groups.
- Awareness needs to be promoted that citizenship is for everyone, and all parties need to agree on a common project. Likewise, the quality and practice of self-criticism needs to be developed, so that young cadres have better self-awareness.
- There was also a suggestion that charity work and political work should be kept separate, in order to avoid tarnishing the former with political concerns and actions.
- Attention was also brought to increasing tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims across the Arab and Muslim world. There is a very confused picture of different alliances and power plays continuing to emerge across the region, influenced directly and indirectly by the actions of rebel groups or governments. This has the dangerous effect of polarizing young people so that they see the Muslim *umma* in terms of friends and enemies. In a very complex political and religious scene, this is an issue which needs to be addressed.
- Finally, strong concern was expressed that the violence across the region is destroying the Arab and Islamic persona, spreading a culture of violence, and ignoring the injunctions of Islam against violence and in favor of mercy and peace.

Polarisation and the Role of Coalition Building in the Success of Political Transition

Autor: Lakhdar Ghetta

Istanbul, March 2013



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on the findings and recommendations of the Tunis session¹ on promoting constructive political participation of faith-based political parties and movements in the Arab region, a second session was held in Istanbul on 11-14 March 2013 within the NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program². The Istanbul workshop was implemented by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva.

The Tunis session demonstrated that there is a growing tendency within the Salafi groups in the Arab world, and not only in the “Arab Spring” countries, towards political participation. However, the Salafi groups who participated in the session acknowledged that they lack the necessary political experience and organizational skills that would be useful to meet the challenges of political life and support their transition from predication to politics. They also acknowledged the diversity within the Salafi movement, which cannot be seen as a single doctrine but rather as a spectrum of thoughts with various sub-schools, including notably the radical violent groups. Participants agreed on the issue that those groups constitute a danger for the political transition in the Arab region. Indeed, radicals’ acts might provide ammunition and justification for calls of securitization of public affairs, or even push towards a return to dictatorship. Therefore promoting political participation of Salafi groups who are willing to get into politics is crucial for the success of the democratic transition in the region, knowing that the Salafi groups are keen to play an active role in peace promotion.

It was against this backdrop that the Istanbul workshop was expanded to 12 parties and movements from six different countries, covering the region from Rabat (Morocco) to Sana’ (Yemen). It also included independent experts and academics from the Arab region as well as Evangelic and Protestant politicians from the U.S and U.K. Conducted under the Chatham House rules, the workshop aimed at deepening the process of inter-Salafi exchange of experiences³. Given the severe polarization between political parties with a religious reference and seculars that resulted from the elections and constitution drafting processes in the Arab region, the workshop aimed at addressing the coalition building’s principle as a mechanism to defuse, or at least lessen polarization. This required raising the Salafi groups’ awareness towards the challenges of political

¹ See executive summary here <http://cordoue.ch/nawat/constructive-political-participation/item/236-september-2012-meeting>

² NAWAT focuses on reinforcing the capacity and mechanisms for transforming violent, or potentially violent, political conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East and/or involving Muslims in the West. Its objectives are to develop a collectively shared understanding of what is at stake, who are relevant actors and how to address identified problems, to contribute to enhancing the capacity of relevant conflict transformation actors, to coordinate a network acting as a “mediation space” and to contribute to conflict transformation initiatives that address specific conflicts and enhance citizenship.

³ This objective became even more relevant after the Tunis workshop given the political context, which saw more and more Salafi parties participate in the elections.

life, as far as political party identity construction, party structures organization, and dealing with the “more distant other”⁴.

Discussions at the workshop were thematically structured around six axes: Organizational skills, Salafi coalition building experiences, challenges of political arena and how to address them, and polarization and coalition building. Discussions were enriched by an open dialogue with the non-Salafi participants who shared analyses and ideas, notably on how non-Salafi groups in the region see Salafi political participation. Western participants also shared lessons learned from their parties’ political participation and experience of transition, from predication to politics. Following the discussions between Salafi and external participants, small groups country-based brainstorming activities in which participants were asked to ponder the issue of coalition building to defuse polarization were conducted. A similar activity was conducted on the issue of possible peace promotion initiatives in the region.



⁴ The “More distant Other” designates in this report three main categories of political actors and stakeholders which do not belong to the Salafi ideology camp. These are the non-Salafi segments of the population whose votes Salafi political parties seek to capture. Second, non-Salafi political parties (such as the seculars, socialists, liberals and even Islamists i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood), which are political competitors to Salafi groups. Third, the violent groups with Salafi reference that reject political participation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Following the success of the first session of the Tunis meeting held on 10-13 September 2012, which brought along 19 Salafi participants representing nine North African (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Libya) “participative”⁵ parties and movements, a second expanded session was implemented in Istanbul on 11-14 March, 2013.

Both workshops were implemented within the scope of NAWAT (North Africa and West Asia in Transformation) program of the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva, in partnership with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The program focuses on reinforcing the capacity and mechanisms for transforming violent, or potentially violent, political conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East and/or involving Muslims in the West. Its objectives are to develop a collectively shared understanding of what is at stake, who are the relevant actors and how to address identified problems, to contribute to enhancing the capacity of relevant conflict transformation actors, to coordinate a network acting as a “mediation space” and to contribute to conflict transformation initiatives that address specific conflicts and enhance citizenship.

While the Tunis session focused on the fundamental issues of evolving from predication to politics, and the challenges

⁵ “Participative” is used in this report to describe Salafi groups and movements that were until the Arab uprisings involved in predication and charity work but unlike the Muslim Brotherhood School, they boycotted political participation on different religious and practical grounds. The “participative” groups reject violence and believe in political participation.

faced during such processes⁶, the Istanbul session aimed at promoting constructive political participation of political parties with a religious dimension, expanding the project geographically to encompass Mauritania and Yemen. Building on, and consolidating the outcomes of the first session in Tunis, the Istanbul session focused on three main questions. First, the challenges faced by the Salafi parties when entering the political arena. Second, how to develop political strategies and build coalitions, in order to mitigate polarization? Finally, the workshop addressed the Salafi parties’ potential role to become actors in peace promotion. The whole process’s approach aimed at successfully including “participative” Salafi formations into the political game: by becoming an integral part of the democratic process, political transition in the region will be strengthened while extremist actors will be delegitimized.

The six months following the Tunis meeting were characterized by extreme polarization in the Arab Spring countries, as noticed during the confrontations in November 2012 in Egypt or the assassination of the Tunisian leftist leader Choukri Belaid, in January 2013. Besides, the French-led military intervention in Mali has raised another source of tension in the region. According to the political and social context, the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva considered it relevant and timely to associate accompany the constructive integration of Salafi actors into the new political spheres, and to support their transformation from predication to governance.

This report aims to reflect the exchange of experiences and lessons learned among the

⁶ As for example «dealing with the other is considered”.

new Salafi political parties and movements in the Arab region. It is structured around three main sections. The first section focuses on the intra-Salafi exchange, reviewing the recent developments since the Tunis session, in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Morocco, and Mauritania. It also discusses Salafi coalition building experiences and the challenges faced when dealing with “the close other”, or the “more distant other”⁷. The second one examines the perception of Salafi groups’ political participation by non-Salafi actors in the region, and the Western perception of such political participation. Finally, the last one presents the results of small group brainstorming activities on the issues of polarization & coalition building, and potential collaborative peace promotion initiatives.

2. OVERVIEW OF SALAFI POLITICAL PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS EXPERIENCES

The workshop was the first opportunity for leadership of Salafi Parties and groups (representing several parties across the region from Morocco to Yemen), to meet after the Tunis session. It also took place in a context of extreme polarization, notably in Tunisia and Egypt (see below). The Istanbul workshop started with a review of the developments in each country represented at the meeting, in order for the participants to hear firsthand from one another, exchange experiences and share lessons learned as far as each groups’ position and behavior vis-à-vis the developments in the region. A summary of these discussions is presented below:

⁷ See footnote 4 above.

TUNISIA

A Tunisian participant reported on the extreme polarization between Islamists and Seculars that dominates Tunisian politics. This situation has been exacerbated following the assassination of the leftist political leader Choukri Belaid, in February 2013, and the arrest of Salafi activists and youth following the American Embassy incidents. As the Tunisian government did not charge or sue those Salafi detainees, some of the Salafi detainees declared hunger strike. As a result, two detainees died driving thereby a wedge within the Islamist camp itself. While some Salafi participants see the West’s meddling hand in the Tunisian political scene, others believe that there has been a systematic provocation of the Salafi current by the seculars, as it has been perceived as well during the case of the paintings exhibition, in late 2012. Other forms of perceived provocation such as barring travel to Tunisia Salafi sheikhs invited to participate in cultural activities organized by Salafi groups. This led to the widespread conclusion within the Salafi camp that “the Ennahda-led government is trying to reach consensus with the Seculars by making Salafis its enemy”. Unlike Egypt, polarization within the Islamist parties’ camp is “a difficult situation” noticed a Tunisian participant. Despite calls from Salafi sheikhs on their followers to observe self-restraint and not responding to provocation, some overzealous Salafi youth could not be controlled.

EGYPT

The last months in Egypt have been characterized by “a state of perplexity of the political leadership”, highlighted an Egyptian participant. In the absence of game rules between the government and the opposition

the situation became a state of “political stubbornness”. This political behavior exacerbated the economic difficulties of the country, while the government could not provide any solutions “outside the box”. Besides, the opposition does not have any other alternative unless being against Islamists or President Morsi. In such context, one of the established Salafi parties believes they have to play a “strategic and influential role”, rather than being only a complementary element within the Islamist camp. According to them, it explains why they intervened, offering a crisis exit strategy when the standoff between the government and the opposition reached a head. This mediation initiative was, however, criticized by some of the parties under the Islamist umbrella, the participant concluded. “We are very comfortable with the fact that our political proposals could attract us criticism”.

Another Salafi group believes that the political leadership in Egypt faces two challenges: in addition to the economic challenge, it faces the challenges of entering into politics after decades of prediction and charity work. They either have to bring up new innovative ideas or follow the Muslim Brotherhood model. The key lesson learnt from political experience indicates the importance of consensus in periods of political transition regardless of electoral majority in the context of the Egyptian bureaucracy, and the role of the Deep State⁸.

⁸ Contrary to the wide assumption in the Arab world, the term Deep State was coined by the Turkish political elite and is not a product of the Egyptian affairs in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Deep State designates a loose network of a diverse group of influential military and intelligence officers, bureaucratic officials, intellectuals, and businessmen who transcend governments and presidential terms; and who act in concert to preserve what they believe the state’s national interest principles. The concept dates back to the 1970s but the latest

“The Brotherhood government seems to have forgotten that the British colonizer had to leave Egypt after a strike by the bureaucracy”, stressed one Egyptian participant⁹.

This group discussion identified two risks that could result from Islamist’s integration into the political arena: first, the call on the army to intervene and second, the potential loss of popular base and reservoir for the Islamists that may follow their rapid and massive withdrawal from predication, charitable fieldwork and militancy in universities.

A third group discussion stressed the role of the Deep State in fueling unrest and the absence of a “clear vision” by the government as what they perceived being the main reasons of the stalled political transition process in Egypt. Nevertheless, they identified Egypt’s problem as “a security one rather than an economic one”. Within the leadership of this group, the decision was taken to “support the presidency in order to ensure the continuity of legitimacy”, while leaving the door open to dialogue with the opposition.

Respecting the people’s will and popular legitimacy was reiterated by a fourth Salafi group who also underscored democratic values and freedom. This group identified the

manifestation of the term in Turkish affairs is the Ergenekon Case, Serdar Kaya, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Turkish “Deep State”: The Ergenekon Case’, *Insight Turkey*, Vo. 11 7No.4/2009, pp.99-113. In the Arab region, after the 2011 uprisings it came represent influential remnants of the old regimes that lost power and privileges and are accused of creating troubles and hurdles for the transition process.

⁹ As emphasized by a participant, “Egypt is founded on the bureaucratic and civil servants apparatus: It is neither sectarian nor tribal”

major risk as the one of returning to dictatorship - should all actors and stakeholders not appreciate lessons of the past. It was therefore stressed that Salafi parties should reach out and listen to other political actors. These principles have guided this Salafi party's political behavior in playing a "balanced" role; putting national interest and public good before partisan gain in order to build trust, explained one Egyptian participant from the group: "Salafi and Islamist parties should work in concert in order to offer a "common vision". Finally, the group warned of the "myth of consensus" and emphasized the necessity to direct efforts towards "co-existence".

YEMEN

All Yemeni participants stressed that the revolution that ousted Ali Abdallah Salah was "incomplete". According to them, the Gulf Initiative has basically driven Yemen "under international tutelage" and the National Dialogue faces internal and external challenges¹⁰. At the internal level, the non-participation of the southern actor, the symbolic participation of the old regime and of the Howthi group are all factors that undermine the Dialogue, particularly for those actors who work against it on the ground. At the external level, foreign intervention in the name of the "war on terror" and Iran's smuggling of arms inside Yemen jeopardize the success of the National Dialogue's efforts. As a response to such challenge, one participant explained that they support the Dialogue and have taken the initiative to set up mediation committees among all Yemeni Salafi movements, in order to unite them.

¹⁰ Link to the official website of the National Dialogue Conference: <http://www.ndc.ye>

LIBYA

The three main challenges faced by the transition in Libya were identified as follows: security, lack of trust between the government and the armed groups / revolutionaries, and the implementation of the political isolation law intended to ban all senior civilian and military cadre of the old regime from political participation in the next ten years. While security has in part to do with the wide-spread and uncontrolled circulation of weapons, mistrust between the armed groups and the government is causing further difficulties in building the state's institutions, especially a national army. Although there is general consensus on political vetting and barring the old regime's cadres from serving in the new state's institutions, there is a profound disagreement regarding the implementation's technicalities of the law's stipulations. The Libyan situation presents a two-fold dilemma for its leadership and opposition: Political isolation is necessary but it may lead to barring three quarters of Libyans from public life, and results in the loss of experienced civil servants and cadres. As a consequence, it might lead to further polarization and unrest. Simultaneously, the persistent existence of armed groups outside the control of the state is a grave impediment to the state sovereignty while dismantling them on the other hand may create a dangerous security issue as there is no national army capable of protecting the country.

MOROCCO

A Moroccan scholar stressed the "acceptable" performance of the Development and Justice Party, pointing out some "gains" such as freedom and reforms that have recently been achieved. Nevertheless, he emphasized existing "discriminatory practices" against

Salafis, which can go as far as their “exclusion”. One example of such practices is the authorities’ decision to ban a public seminar on the history of Salafism in Morocco. Morocco is witnessing “precarious political stability”, and scenarios for the post-PJD government’s fall are already underway, said another participant. The Palace and Deep State’s propping up of old established political parties which have lost popular support and the delay of local elections are manifestations of such efforts. On the other hand, the Salafi support the PJD government, which is in turn helping the Salafi movement to break free from the pressure exerted on it. There is a current attempt by a Salafi group to set up a political party while opening public debate on the issue of the Salafi detainees, and promoting moderate Salafi thoughts among Salafi youth.

MAURITANIA

Mauritanian politics is plagued by the syndrome of successive coups since its independence in 1960. With the advent of the “Arab Spring” uprisings, the opposition tried to put its weight behind the Brotherhood Tawasul Party in an attempt to trigger a Mauritanian “Arab Spring”. This was manifest when one of the biggest businessmen joined the opposition. The war in Mali has now shifted focus and presents a major challenge to both, the state and the Salafi movement, in the sense that the war might attract Salafi youth to violence. Around seven years ago, when the regime faced a similar situation on its border with Algeria, it tried to mitigate the situation by freeing some of the leaders of the Salafi movement while encouraging them to set up a political party. Within the context of the intervention in Mali, the same practice was underway. However, the regime’s offer was rejected because of the Salafi movement’s non-readiness, among other

reasons. Currently, there is an important debate within the Salafi movement in Mauritania on the desirability of following the Al Nour Party’s experience in setting up a political party. In a near future, it is expected that a Salafi party will be founded in Mauritania by those who are convinced of the necessity of political participation.

3. CHALLENGES FACED WHEN ENTERING POLITICAL LIFE

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

While the above section reflects on the developments across the region and on the Salafi groups’ difficulties to keep up with the speed and the scale of challenges faced when entering politics for the first time, the following section describes new challenges. In addition to the difficulties for each party to devise and portray a specific political identity, the section will examine the challenge of acquiring organizational skills and implementing them within the party structures.

As an introduction, it is important to underline the diversity within the Salafi movement itself, as reflected by the exchange among participants. While there is a wide consensus on the absence of clear determination in regard to political Islamic thought and jurisprudence from the Salafi political parties, which emerged after the Arab Spring, some groups insisted on their long time existence in politics¹¹. One Moroccan participant argued that even Omar Abd Errahman and Osama Bin Laden believed in political participation but abandoned the idea and embraced Jihadism

¹¹ Mostly underground because of the old regimes’ policy towards these movements.

because they soon concluded that political action was not worthwhile. However, there is one question on which all participants agreed: Salafi groups need urgent and comprehensive research on establishing the theoretical and conceptual Islamic foundation of their political participation. Participants argued that such evolution would become the cornerstone in their relation with other Salafi groups which reject political participation on the basis of their religious scholars' interpretation of certain Quranic verses.

The lack of a specific political identity or the lack of ability to project one publicly is often the charges or challenges faced by the Salafi groups when entering politics. "How to make one's political identity clear? and how to articulate the party's political identity, while maintaining ties with other movements with whom the party disagrees?" were two questions at the centre of the discussions during the workshop. Participants' inputs reflected their various political experiences in the dynamics of the post-uprising in the different countries, but the common underlying question of the discussions was "where to draw the line between Islam as a religion and politics as a set of shared and agreed rules to achieve a political goal?. There was a consensus among participants on the confusion of roles between the one of a preacher and the one of a politician. According to participants, such confusion affects the party's behavior at both, the internal and external levels. Internally it leads to a confusion of roles or even to a lack of organizational structure within the party, as far as decision making is concerned and its impact on the internal democratic management of the party affairs. Externally, it blurs the party's political identity and its relationship to other movements, because the party's message tends not to be the outcome of a concerted political debate within the

party's structure, but rather of the group's top leadership which often mixes religious preaching with political communication.

Participants also examined the process of articulating a political identity while keeping a relationship with other movements with whom the party disagrees. According to an Egyptian participant the following elements are required: 1- commitment to accept the rules of the political game, even those not in line with the party's convictions, 2- rejection of violence when dealing with the other, 3- respect of elections results, 4- rejection of the monopoly of power, and finally 5- clarification of position towards the others. For one participant, "political acts send a stronger message than words". Therefore, their party decided to offer its two seats in the constitution constituency committee to non-Islamist civil groups; they did so in order to promote youth participation and build trust. The same Egyptian party has taken the initiative to mediate between political parties and the presidency as well as to work on promoting citizenship by mediating between Muslims and Copts. Two Libyan participating groups explained that they established inter-party liaison committees in order to reach consensus on key transitional issues.

Participants have identified another risk: "falling into the trap of an automatic ideological solidarity with political groups from the same ideological camp". The polarization in Egypt over the seculars call for ultra-constitution articles that led all Islamist parties to side with the Muslim Brotherhood government is an example of such automatic ideological solidarity. Peer solidarity might lead to sending the wrong message in the sense that coalitions based only on ideological / religious solidarity might blur the party's specific political identity. "The challenge is therefore to strike

a balance between principles and pragmatism", added a participant.

While internally, Salafi parties should abandon the logic of peer group / sect and embrace that of the nation-state and institutions, they still have to answer to some challenges posed by their entry in politics. Other participants' identified additional challenges at a more fundamental level: deficiency on thought on different foundational issues. For example, Salafi groups' relation to democracy should be examined further. Can they accept the democratic process and its tools while rejecting its fundamental rules? What is the definition of state for Salafis: accepting the society's diversity or imposing their model? How can Islamists develop an economic model based on values but independent from globalization? One participant concluded by saying that there is a huge deficiency as far as Islamic thought on political participation is concerned.

At the structural level, participating Salafi parties presented various guidelines and criteria implemented internally. The Egyptian contribution was the most specific. It comprised the following elements: adoption of the principle of Shura in decision-making, justice within the party, adoption of competence as the criterion for internal party elections or for general elections, and accountability. Promotion of youth to leadership positions within the party while not relying extensively on religious preachers and sheikhs; as candidates for elections were two other measures mentioned by a participant. The necessity to implement the rule of law after decades of absence of institutions was stressed by a Libyan participant who insisted on establishing institutional traditions within the party as their top priority.

4. SALAFI COALITION BUILDING EXPERIENCES

Due to the variety of degrees in political participation among Salafi political parties, coalition building dynamics are diverse in the region. While some parties were elected to parliaments and hold now large chunks of seats, other parties are part of the minority group or have joined coalitions with other non-Salafi faith-based political parties¹². However, in general, even Salafi movements which are present on the ground but which do not have yet set up political parties, interact with the coalition building process by lending their support to existing Salafi parties or non-Salafi Islamist parties.

During the workshop, the cross-regional exchange of experiences and the country-level review of inter-party coalition projects and lessons learnt enriched the discussions about coalition building processes. On a general basis, discussions on this topic reflected a two-way process: movements which are not organized in political parties offered their constructive insider criticism while observing the practical challenges of coalition building in the light of the experiences of the Salafi political parties represented. Some examples of coalition building processes were also mentioned.

A Tunisian participant discussed two coalition experiences. The first one, included four other parties and did not succeed; and the second one, included three other parties and did not last very long. An invitation to join a third coalition comprised of Islamist parties was rejected, due to a Shia party involvement. In Libya, one party established

¹² Al Oumma Alwasat Party and Al Rissala Party in Libya, for example, have joined the Loyalty to Martyrs coalition inside the General National Congress.

a coordination committee in order to liaise between political parties that are ideologically close. The aim is to create a counter-balancing force within the next parliament with parties that are relatively farther once the coordination committee members have joined forces and set up a common ground. A Libyan participant explained that his party has formed a voting bloc within the National General Congress. Two participants from different countries related experiences of other Islamist groups, which were involved in coalition projects with leftist or liberal parties, but failed¹³. In Yemen, a representative of a participating party explained that they worked with all Salafi and non-Salafi actors, in order to present the group's "neutral" vision for dialogue that is "neither on the side of the government, nor on the one of the opposition, but on the people's side". He stressed that such group's coalition-building strategy is not ideological and can be made with parties of different political coloration, depending on the national interest.

Reflecting on the lessons learnt from past coalition experiences, participants agreed that for a successful coalition it should be clear from the outset whether it is a partial / tactical one or a strategic venture. The coalition should be structured around a clear identity (name, leader, manifesto), and a parliamentary bloc with a single spokesperson while pushing a unified legislation / voting agenda to ensure the coalition institutionalization and sustainability rather than personalization of it. However, some participants were a bit

¹³ This example led one Egyptian participant to raise the issue of whether holding a coalition with non-Islamist parties is unacceptable in Islam. One participant reacted by stressing the weakness of Political Islam thought on these questions and its negative impact on coalition building processes.

more pessimistic about coalition building processes. "The weak cannot make a coalition" said one of them, while another argued that the new political process that is still at its early stage and the extreme polarization between Islamist and liberals, constitute impediments for the creation of coalitions.

5. HOW TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL LIFE

DEALING WITH THE "CLOSE OTHER"

Salafi groups face manifold challenges when entering political life. Depending on the country, these challenges can range from restrictions when forming political parties to deal with the "close other". The latter could be 1) other Salafi groups which participate politically, 2) Salafis who do not directly participate in the political game, but who constitute an electoral "reservoir", or 3) Salafis who reject political participation.

Following the "Arab Spring", formation of political parties with a Salafi reference has become easier in Libya and Egypt (ten Salafi parties) but it remains not allowed in Morocco. In Mauritania, the situation is not clear. While the Mauritanian government has not yet officially objected to the creation of a Salafi party as it is the case in Morocco, the matter is not as easy as it is in Yemen which saw the creation of its first Salafi party last year, in 2012. In Tunisia, where Islamist parties were banned under Ben Ali's regime, restrictions to form parties were loosened under the Baji Kaid Esebssi's government except for Salafi parties. It was not until the fall of Esebssi's government that Salafi parties were legally registered.

More specifically, participants to the workshop shared a common analysis when

dealing with the “close other”. Apart from the legal aspect, political participation has been subject to intense debate within the Salafi school of thought, especially since Abd El Khaleq pioneered the creation of the first Salafi party in Kuwait. This analysis takes place at both levels, internal and external ones. At the internal level, Salafi who are willing to participate in the political game have to deal with opposing opinions within their framework, as many scholars and religious referees / authority scholars question the Islamic soundness of entering politics while satisfying their popular base. At the external level, the division between the Salafi groups who accept political participation and those who reject it, poses an issue to Salafi parties to mobilize not only within their own base, but also within the rest of the population. Indeed, the rejection of political participation by some Salafi groups tends to reflect negatively on all Salafi groups making it difficult for them to expand their electoral bases. In such situation, dialogue with the authority religious scholars who oppose political participation should be undertaken through diverse means¹⁴.

According to a Moroccan scholar, disagreement among Salafis is usual and efforts should therefore focus on drafting a common charter stating a minimal agreement. Two groups presented their work to promote local religious references and their works among Salafis who until the recent political change in the region had access only to religious scholars from far away Arab countries.

¹⁴ For example, public debates, seminars as well as wide publication and distribution of reference works by established scholars who advocate for political participation are all tools which should be used.

DEALING WITH THE “MORE DISTANT OTHER”

One of the main criticisms made by political analysts and seculars towards Islamists consists in accusing the Islamist parties in general and the Salafi groups in particular of failing in addressing their political discourse to a large audience. Moreover, such criticism also points out the robust confrontational and polarizing aspect of the Salafi discourse when interacting with the “more distant other”. Such polarization is not only limited to discourse but also to current’s political initiatives or even work of good, which should normally aim at including the population at large and beyond the stronghold constituency. During the workshop, pondering the issue of dealing with the “more distant other” aimed to build bridges with the latter in order to defuse political polarization through cooperation, dialogue, and compromise for the common good.

Three categories can be identified as particularly challenging for the Salafis to reach out: 1) the Non-Salafi population on which the Salafi political parties want to capitalize 2) other political parties—especially the political competitors: such as seculars, liberals, socialists, and even Brotherhood Islamists, and 3) violent groups with Salafi reference.

During the workshop, it was clear that most participants were aware of the main criticism addressed to Political Islam i.e. vague and general discourse, absence of a clear socio-economic program, and a sect-mindset in dealing with people at large rather than adopting the democratic concept of citizenship. Indeed, the identification of solutions such as focusing on a discourse of services and social programs rather than on predication and the need to remain involved

in non-political action through charity actions reflected such awareness¹⁵.

Participants also agreed on the importance of the citizenship's concepts (to varying degrees) and political strategy. One Moroccan participant advised Salafi groups to start first with local and regional assemblies, while another Mauritanian participant stressed that public discourse should focus on the Oumma (nation), including Copts, seculars, etc., and should not be limited to Salafis only. This last point was emphasized by a participant from Yemen who concluded: "this is why our party is called national and not Salafi."

With regard to dealing with other political parties, participants agreed that respecting the rules of the democratic game, and establishing redlines are key conditions for political stability. Dialogue and pragmatism can help build bridges among all political actors. One participant reflected on its party's initiative to work with a secular party in parliament. Another Tunisian party reported that it reached out to retired figures of the old regime, in order to convince them to return to politics and play a role in the transition.

All participants agreed that rejection of political participation by some Salafis is a source of serious concern for Salafi political parties. According to them, the Deep State's and the West's (France in Tunisia and USA in Egypt) bet on exhausting the Islamist governments, would in turn lead to the failure of Islamist political participation and offer the Jihadists an unexpected opportunity. Some of the participants shared their experience (in addition to research,

¹⁵ It was stressed that service to people as a religious virtue and obligation is also an argument for dealing with the more distant political party.

revisions, and public debates) in dealing with violent groups with a Salafi reference. A Tunisian participant specifically discussed how they approached the referent sheikh of a violent group in order to convince the group to enter politics. Such approach remained unsuccessful and the party then turned to Salafi youth with success. An Egyptian group reported on its mediation attempt in Libya.

In regard to dealing with Jihadists, "there is a strand of Jihadists which is closely observing what Salafi political participation would yield" said one participant. "Accomplishing goals with moral commitment would push the Jihadist current to enter politics", added another participant. One concrete consequence of such approach was the change of position of Salafi detainees following the PJD's efforts in defending the rights of Salafi detainees after the 2003 Marrakech attack and the change of positions by detainees in regard to political participation. «Democracy and power alternation are the hope of the region" for progress, concluded an Egyptian participant.

6. HOW DO NON-SALAFI GROUPS IN THE REGION VIEW SALAFI POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

One of the main objectives of the workshop was to share perceptions and exchange best practices in terms of political participation. Independent political experts and academics from the region and Salafi groups aimed at engaging a debate on 1) the challenges of Salafi participation from the point of view of other parties and trends, 2) the main issues Salafi parties should be aware of 3) building the Salafi awareness on such issues, 4) and finally identify ways of dealing with diverse and complex societal issues.

1) Three external participants from Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco summed the challenges

of the Salafis' persisting confusion of religion and politics in their discourse and political behaviour. According to them, Salafi parties have not yet settled the issue of the nation / nation-state dichotomy in their ideological founding documents and the issue of party identity on a conceptual level. Organisationally, Salafi parties have not, in the majority, institutionalized the relationship between the party's base and its leadership neither the decision-making mechanisms within the party. Furthermore, despite the large popular base of some Salafi parties, especially in Egypt, it is not yet proved that the party followers are convinced by the party's ideological ideals and concepts. This last point was echoed in part, by a participant who stated that the expectations of the Salafi current's base in his country are beyond the party's organizational means. Finally, it was said that dealing with international political powers is one additional challenge faced by Salafis in today's multi-polar world.

2) An external expert from Egypt advised Salafis to focus on large issues rather than on secondary-matters during times of democratic transition, following a bottom-up political upheaval or revolutionary change. He argued that political confrontation on issues such as identity leads to deepening the societal rift, which could ultimately threaten social cohesion and peace. He also added that it could even become detrimental not only to political Islam but also to the Islamic faith itself. "Identity cannot be built by laws and decrees, otherwise it becomes artificial", said the expert.

While the identity issue triggered a heated debate among participants, one Libyan participant responded: "Identity is not built by laws but is safeguarded by constitutional laws and decrees". Another Tunisian participant claimed that "identity is at risk".

"Should we leave it to seculars to define societal identity?", he added.

A Tunisian external expert warned the Salafi participants about the next phase's political battles, which he identified as: first, social justice that is more than food provision and basic living means; and second, security that entails the danger of potential return to a police state. «The Deep State is afoot and democratic transition is a narrow path», he said. Failing to navigate it safely would lead to either the return of dictatorship or descent into civil war. This advice was strongly and consistently echoed by an Egyptian participant who argued that "safeguarding freedoms should be the priority of the transition phase and beyond, in order to bar the road to a return to dictatorship." A Libyan participant echoed the warning by reminding all participants not to forget that the popular uprisings were not carried out by Islamists alone, but by all segments of society. Salafi groups should thus, focus on state-building and not partisan competition during this delicate phase. They should focus on devising mechanisms that ensure freedom for all. Building coalitions for common work with all political actors should be a strategic decision and not a mere democratic act of pragmatism to show tolerance to "the more distant other". An external Moroccan expert offered four avenues to be explored: first, agreement on the fact that the civic state does not negate Islam. Second, elections should guarantee power rotation. Third, recognizing citizenship for women within the cultural framework of Islam, while moving gradually to full citizenship. And finally, building strategic coalitions with the "more distant other".

Finally, the questions of identity, freedom, the status of women and the status of minorities triggered varying positions by Salafi participants. As for example, a Tunisian

participant asked the following question: “should we accept blasphemy of sacred entities in the name of freedom? Instead of imposing pre-conditions on Salafi political participation on issues related to the shape of the state, women, and freedoms, etc, a minimum agreement on redlines should be sought: the refusal of violence”, concluded a Moroccan participant.

7. WESTERN PARTICIPANTS VIEW OF SALAFI POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The second round of debate between Salafi groups and external participants took place on the backdrop of presentations by three Western participants from the United States and Northern Ireland. All three participants reflected on their personal as well as political groups’ experiences from waging religious discourse to engaging in politics. The presentations focused on the challenges faced personally, or by their parties in participating in politics while trying to retain the identity as Christian-based political parties. The presenters reported practical experiences in pushing legislation in Congress / Parliament, or in building coalitions with rival parties.

Reflecting on how he was elected, a former congressman explained that he adapted his religious discourse and addressed the people’s needs, meeting with all groups “even those who rejected religious politicians”. Once elected, he found crucial to understand why those who usually reject religious-based party voted for him. He insisted on the importance of permanent contact with the constituency though for example town-hall meetings, telephone calls, and written replies to keep in touch and show willingness to listen.

As it was said earlier for the Salafis, pushing through legislation in Congress is equally

demanding and challenging because it involves working on two fronts at the same time: within the Congressman’s own party, where there is need to “reason with extremists of his own party”, and at the external level, reaching out to the opposite party, with which cooperation is a key for passing almost any piece of legislation. In practice, it involves “switching discourse within the party from ideology to process”. Once that is achieved, efforts should be directed to reaching out to the leader of the opposite party in order to “find a middle ground.” If it failed, the former Congressman recommended, working with other congressmen “to push forth agenda by means of personal relationships”.

One of the pitfalls of religious politics is to allow “politics to stand in the way of policy”, or “to make perfect policy the enemy of good policy” explained the US Congressman. He advised building relationships with the media to counter propaganda and to preserve consistency and commitment to ethics vis-à-vis the people of one’s constituency. He concluded by stating that slowly but gradually conservative charity groups started to engage in his constituency “because of the presence of a religious congressman”.

A Member of Parliament (MP) from Northern Ireland said that his group’s entry into politics was not underpinned by “a religious motivation but because they wanted to contribute to the construction of society by core values”. The same issues, which dominate the political and societal debate in the Arab region nowadays, used to dominate current affairs in the West years ago. Some human rights issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage still divide Western societies today, stressed the MP. The challenge is to strike a balance between core values and politics. According to him, coalition building through pragmatism is the

answer. Religious groups which care about the importance of core values and about preserving morality in society should understand that “if they are not in government they cannot preserve core values nor influence policy”, added the MP. The MP insisted on that faith parties have to determine the main core values they want to preserve in laws and policy. It is about striking a balance between core values and “allowing a choice for the people.” He finally concluded by asking: “what will be your legacy: dogma / faith or social programs and construction of society?” Reflecting on his own political experience, he advised participants to work with local structures on the ground, long-term projects and to build from ground up, addressing party organization, and constructing a party message and discourse that are clear and media articulate and proficient.

8. SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

POLARIZATION AND COALITION BUILDING

Polarization between Islamists and Seculars has been the common feature of the political transition in the Arab region. This topic has been consistently raised by different parties and movements throughout the workshop. There was a strong consensus on the idea that severe polarization might lead to political and social chaos that in turn could lead to a return to dictatorship as said before. Participants conducted brainstorming activities in country-based small groups in order to ponder over coalition building initiatives and extending trust building bridges with secular political parties and movements.

The brainstorming activities reflected on the varying degrees of polarization in the

different countries while identifying the political weight of each Salafi group. As an example, the Al Nour Party’s mediation initiative between the National Salvation Front and the government was discussed. Participants differed on Al Nour’s initiative. While some understood the initiative, others showed more skepticism on the timing. In Egypt, where polarization was identified as the highest in the region, participants reported on a number of ongoing coalition initiatives with secular or non-Islamist partners. One party reported on its initiative to sit down with security officers and experts in order to coordinate efforts to reduce insecurity and violence. Another Egyptian party presented its experience in a 16-member coalition which includes liberal parties and the Muslim Brotherhood. The same party launched the “Egyptian Dream Initiative”, which aimed at joint work on economic issues, such as the energy project, with partners from different ideological backgrounds. A third party reported that it was in the process of launching a call for a one year political truce¹⁶.

In Mauritania, where polarization is by far lower than in Egypt, the focus had been on building trust. This effort was conducted through active participation of a Salafi charity in the civil society activities. It included cooperation with town-halls and hospitals in coordinating the distribution of humanitarian aid and the organization of a training workshop for journalists, in collaboration between a Salafi association and the journalists’ guild.

¹⁶ It was interesting to learn that for the Egyptian participants the brainstorming exercise was the first time ever the Salafi parties sat down as a group and brainstormed opportunities of coalition building with secular groups.

In Morocco, a participating scholar reported that he called for a dialogue initiative with seculars but he received very little support. Another participant reported on an ongoing cross-party and cross-ideology coalition building initiative addressing the arbitral detention of Salafi in Morocco.

In Libya, participants stated that polarization was less along ideological lines, but rather on a political basis, as the coalition between Islamist parties and secular party demonstrates on the issue of political vetting. On the contrary, in Tunisia, polarization is very acute and the most publicized form of contact between Islamist and seculars materialize itself in televised debates between representatives of the two camps. An Egyptian participant, however, advised against televised debates, which fuel polarization and division, and recommend adopting dialogue mechanisms, which build trust instead.

9. PEACE PROMOTION

The workshop concluded by conducting small group activities with the aim of brainstorming peace promotion initiatives in the Arab region and the sub-Saharan Sahel. The different Salafi parties and movements demonstrated how cross-region connections could be put at the service of peace promotion. According to participants, peace promotion is deeply embedded in the Salafi doctrine due to their charitable activities or predication efforts.

In regard to the Maghreb region, participants proposed dispatching mediation teams in northern Mali and in various towns on the Tunisian-Algerian and Tunisian-Libyan

borders to talk to violent groups. In Egypt where inter-sectarian clashes have become recurrent, it was suggested dispatching mediators from both Al Azhar and the church in order to diffuse tensions. In Yemen, participants argued that one of the factors fueling extremism is the detention of approximately 5,000 prisoners detained without trial for the past five years. Speeding up the trial process in order to charge and sentence the prisoners if found guilty; or release them if innocent, would contribute to peace in Yemen. It was also said that American drone strikes in the south fuel frustration and offer Al Qaeda a fertile terrain for recruitment, as it is the case in the Abyan province.

Overall, participants highlighted the paramount importance of theological academic work in order to debunk the flawed religious concepts used by violent groups to justify armed action and violence. A Libyan participant presented its party's contribution to this academic effort following the attacks on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, and called for the need to find an institution which promotes moderate Islamic thought. A Moroccan scholar presented his efforts while giving a brief presentation of his book on the prohibition of armed attacks and the use of explosives against civilians.

The American participants suggested that despite ideological differences between the Muslim world and the West, there is a common wish for peace promotion in the Arab and Muslim region. Therefore, American-Salafi groups meetings could be held in an Arab country and at a later stage in Washington D.C. (with non-elected figures and in a later stage with elected politicians); in order to ponder over peace promotion.

10. CONCLUSION

The workshop reached the following conclusions and recommendations in regard to Salafi political participation.

1. The confusion of roles between that of a preacher and that of a politician affects the party's behavior and political identity at the internal level and the external level. Internally, it leads to a confusion of roles or even to a lack of organizational structure within the party. Externally, it blurs the party's political identity and its relationship to other movements.
2. Articulating a specific political identity requires, among other requirements, commitment to accept the rules of the political game; rejection of violence when dealing with the "other"; respect of election results; rejection of the monopoly of power; and finally clarification of party's position towards the other.
3. One of the organizational challenges that Salafi political parties face is that, in the majority, they have not yet institutionalized the relationship between the party's base and its leadership neither the decision-making mechanisms within the party.
4. Participants agreed that in dealing with other political parties, respecting the rules of the political game and establishing redlines are key conditions for political stability.
5. Rejection of political participation by some Salafis is a source of grave concern for Salafi political parties.
6. In order to avoid extreme polarization which could lead to chaos or a return to dictatorship political actors and stakeholders should focus on major issues rather than on secondary matters during times of democratic transition, following a bottom-up political upheaval or revolutionary change.
7. Participants agreed that the Deep State¹⁷ is afoot and democratic transition is a narrow path. Failing to navigate it safely would lead to either a return of dictatorship or descent into civil war.
8. It is important to focus on state-building and not on partisan competition during delicate transition.
9. Building coalitions for common work with all political actors should be a strategic decision and not a mere democratic act of pragmatism to show tolerance to the "more distant other".
10. Pushing through legislation in parliaments or constituent assemblies is equally demanding and challenging. Faith-based parties face the challenge of switching discourse within the party from ideology and general theoretical concepts into practical policy and legislation process. The challenge is to strike balance between core values and politics. Religious groups which care about core values and about preserving morality in society should understand that if they are not in government they cannot preserve core values nor influence policy.
11. New Salafi-political parties should gain political experience by working with local structures on the ground, long-term projects and building from ground up, addressing party organization, and constructing a party message and discourse that are clear, media-articulate and proficient.
12. Salafi parties and movements explained how their and others' cross-region connections could be put at the service of peace promotion. They also highlighted the paramount importance of theological academic work in order to debunk the flawed religious concepts used by violent groups to justify armed action and violence.

¹⁷ See footnote 8 above.

Challenges of Political Participation and the Transition from Preaching to Politics for Salafis in North Africa

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ORTHODOX BELIEVER

Conforming to the established, accepted or traditional doctrines of a given ideology, faith or religion, often also implies adhesion to traditional, conservative views.

SALAFI

Salafism can be defined as a diverse school of Sunni Islam, which take as models and source of inspiration the Prophet, his companions and early followers (“salaf as-salih”). Salafis are inspired by a shared normative religious discourse and behavior. Various Salafi schools and currents differ among other things in how they view the relation between the governor and the governed as well as political participation. In the past decades, this diversity has increased and a Salafi current is emerging between the poles of political abstentionism and violent opposition. This third trend believes that corrupt dictatorship must be challenged by political means and non-violent resistance. New political parties and movements linked to this Salafi current have been founded recently and are engaging in political change through political participation, particularly in the electoral processes and public institutions.

EVANGELICAL

Given the complex history of the foundation of Protestantism, and along the Lutheran slogan “every man is his own priest”, there is no single definition of evangelicalism. Most evangelicals would prefer to define themselves by their core convictions: God, the Scripture, following the teachings of Jesus Christ, the salvation brought by faith, and the love for God and for the neighbour lived as daily action. Evangelicals are present in many churches and denominations, with a shared focus on the sovereignty, mystery, and majesty of God; acknowledging differences without engaging needlessly in theological and/or political debates. During the workshop, a distinction has been made between capital ‘E’ evangelicals – political, strident, and unforgiving – and lower case ‘e’ evangelicals – winsome, irenic, and forgiving. The latter can be seen as a silent majority despite the fact that most media attention is given to the ‘E’.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A workshop was held in Tunis on 10-13 September 2012, convening faith-based political groups and parties from North Africa and the Americas. It was facilitated by the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva within the framework of its conflict transformation programme *North Africa and West Asia in Transformation (NAWAT)*. The event aimed at accompanying the integration of new political actors into the new political sphere, by facilitating exchange of experiences between them as well as identifying the challenges they face and the ways to deal with them. The discussions were organised around the following leading questions: Why to engage as orthodox believers in politics? How to engage in politics? What are the challenges to political participation by orthodox believers and how to address them? What are the responsibilities of the orthodox believers in terms of peace promotion?

WHY TO ENGAGE AS ORTHODOX BELIEVERS IN POLITICS

Participants agree that political action certainly represents one type of work of goodness when it is rooted in values and considered as an act of serving the creatures of God that brings closer to Him. Faith can go along with politics, and believers can embrace the choice to participate in a political system that may disappoint with the aim to lift it to another standard.

Political parties are but one of many ways to influence the political sphere, and different contexts call for various forms of political participation. The main purpose of entering politics is not necessarily to make the State religious, but to create a space for believers to participate in mainstream politics without compromise, and to make sure that their values are enshrined in the government's principles.

HOW TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS: EXPERIENCES SO FAR

After the revolution, Egyptian Salafis embraced the opportunity to participate to the Nation's development, with the objective of establishing a State of Law. The trust and confidence from the street allowed them to fare well in the elections. In Libya, Salafis pursued the role gained during the revolution by engaging to develop the country and to reform society. They first integrated politics as individuals before thinking of setting up political parties. The 'Arab Spring' in Tunisia saw thousands of freed political prisoners and exiled returning to public life. The consequence of this long isolation is a slow progress in integrating politics. In Morocco, freedoms have improved but the system changed little, and even government faith-based actors face blockages. As time may not be ripe to formally engage in politics, the current focus in Morocco remains on human rights, education and predication. When they entered politics, Evangelicals overcame their lack of experience by learning how to deal with the political system: expressing things in a way that could be understood by all and forming coalitions with like-minded people.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

Participants discussed how faith-based groups can practice politics without losing their identity and compromising their values. Finding ways to be better understood and to articulate the inclusive values of the recent political changes with their political programs requires not only values but also a good knowledge of the appropriate ways and means, the required rules and the adapted language.

When political decisions contradict religious values, participants recommend pursuing the efforts to advance values and serve the community, avoiding anger in their dialogues and respecting the other even in disagreement. Influence can also be advanced with various means such as education, awareness raising, legal and political battles, and preventive work.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

Islamic parties need to invest today for building institutions and leadership to go from discourse to real development. This includes training human resources in political, social, economic and administrative skills. It also calls for making good use of existing resources, be it scholars in Islamic science for the appropriation of modern governance according to religious principles (including citizenship, democracy or individual freedoms), or other experts to establish programmes and policies.

Among the political priorities figure the stability and security file, the fight against corruption and building social consensus. To advance economic growth and social development, strong policies must ensure welfare and invest in social, education and health projects, that all require proximity and social work.

DEALING WITH THE "CLOSE OTHER"

Alliances and coalitions were highlighted by the Salafi participants as a condition to influence the political process. This means joining efforts with other faith-based political parties, but also striving to convince other Salafi groups to support the political process. Agreement can often be based on shared concerns such as freedom, citizenship, democracy and economic growth.

One of the consequences of integrating the political sphere is the move from opposition to responsibility, which requires realistic solutions and difficult decisions. One of these is the responsibility to engage with the more extreme that call to violence in the name of religion, with the aim to bring them closer to a central posture. Another one is the responsibility to find the proper language and arguments to face internal accusations of compromising that may arise from the party's constituency and religious authorities.

Various examples were discussed, such as efforts in Egypt to defuse the risks of violent groups and preserve national security, dialog and awareness raising in Libya on Islamic principles in cases of conflict and war, engaging with isolated extremist youth groups in Tunisia, engaging in dialog with prisoners in Morocco to re-interpret religious concepts and condemn violence. As the wrongdoings of such extreme groups impact on all society and particularly on Salafis, responsibility must be taken to mobilize constructive dialog and help correct misinterpretations.

DEALING WITH THE "MORE DISTANT OTHER"

Entering the democratic process implies dealing with others who have different world views. When radical secular groups defame Islamists and attempt to isolate Islam from politics, the best reaction, according to the participants, is to avoid the confrontation and establish venues for exchange and trust building. The key to managing disagreements and disputes is the greater common good: not ignoring difference, but placing it on the right scale of priority. For instance, when the agreement on fundamental freedoms breaks around the limits of these freedoms, considering the higher interest as a priority helps to find solutions without making unacceptable compromises.

Discussing the place of minorities and of women in society, all Salafi participants insisted on the fact that the Islamic tradition guarantees rights for religious minorities and defends women's education and role in society. It was noted that wrong perceptions about how Salafis deal with women and with Christians create fear and lead to media-exacerbated tensions, despite good coexistence on the ground. Very often, face-to face discussions and clarifications defuse the conflict. Citizenship is a concept that is valued by Islamic groups and that has been explored since the political integration.

Participants regretted some Western attitudes vis-à-vis Salafis and Muslims in general such as Western double standards, the non differentiation of Salafi groups, misperceptions on the women's rights and systematic unfair accusations of terrorism. They expressed feelings of resentment related to what they see as recurrent aggressions against the Muslim community, notably the wound of the war on Iraq. It was agreed that the relationship with the West must be addressed constructively, by establishing direct channels of communication. Building trust by being frank and truthful and dealing in equal footing are conditions to achieve mutual understanding.

All participants condemned the attacks that led to the death of US diplomatic staff in Libya and called for ways to prevent such violent clashes, while regretting the insulting defamation of Islam and harmful provocations that build up popular anger. Islamic resources instruct the believer to never start with evil, and call for non-violence even in dealing with those who show disrespect. Faith-based parties must engage with their communities to raise this awareness.

The profound state of mutual stereotypes was regretted by all participants, who agreed that such venues for conversations were necessary, to have honest discussions, name differences, and find a common ground for the common good.

CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL LIFE AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

Salafis groups are confronted to the challenge of stereotypical perceptions, stigmatization and calumny. This includes portraying them as extremists or terrorists, presenting them as being against freedom.

Salafi parties believe that they can address this challenge by improving communication skills, media competency and by adjusting the terminology to promote positive values rather than defensive criticism. They should also implement a systematic and concerted position in order to distance the parties clearly from wrong deeds and violent attacks, including publicly expressing solidarity with threatened groups. Moreover, strong field presence and social legitimacy must be mobilized to engage in actions that prove the parties' commitment to their declared positions, providing practical examples of efforts against violence and showing visible results. These measures of self-reliance will convince more than words and open up channels with media and other stakeholders.

RESPONSIBILITIES IN TERMS OF PEACE PROMOTION

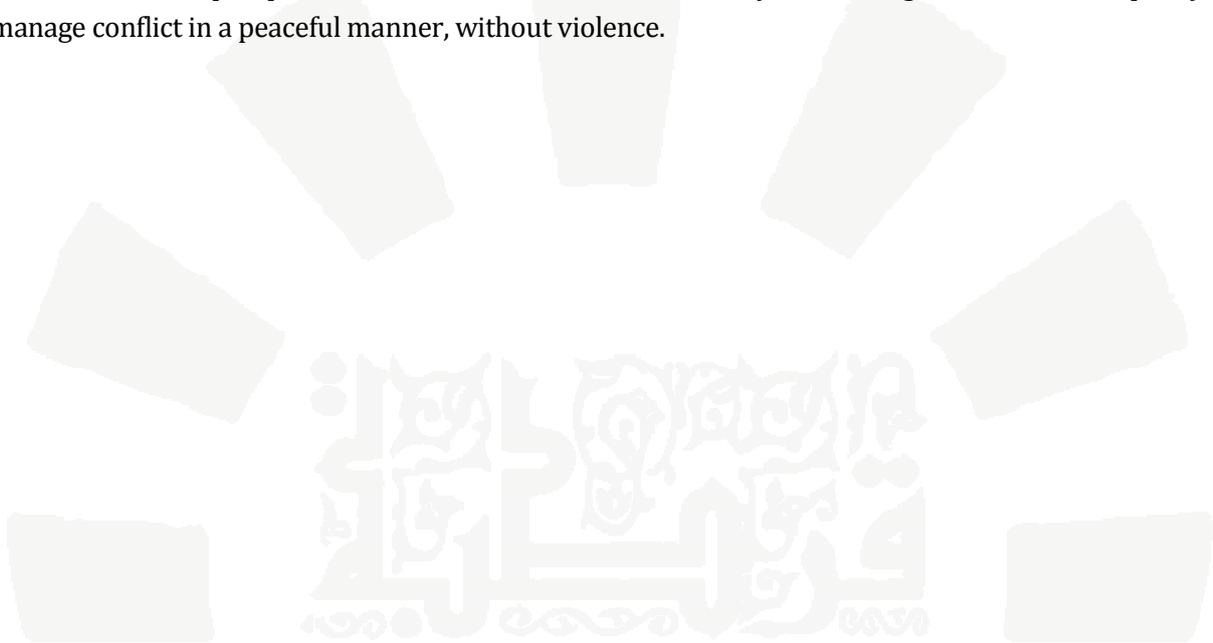
Despite the recent opportunities in the region, challenges in promoting peace remain, calling for conflict prevention and de-escalation of tensions within and among countries. For instance, internal disagreements and conflicts can be very intense between secular and Islamic views. The struggle is ongoing to keep the relationship constructive, and to maintain dignity for all. The security and stability situation is also an issue, along with the persistence of injustice and

oppression in various countries. These examples illustrate the regional dimension and cross-border responsibilities in promoting peace and security.

EVALUATION AND PRACTICAL CONTINUATION

All participants expressed appreciation of the workshop, a unique first occasion for Salafi parties' representatives from the region to meet, along with Swiss facilitators and participants from the Americas. This meeting had a symbolic weight and allowed to establish the necessary context of trust that allows engaging without compromise. Participants expressed their wish to continue both the intra-Salafi discussions and the exchange with the Evangelicals and to deepen it further, emphasizing the need for cooperation on practical projects.

Sheikh Rashid Ghannoushi, president of the Nahdha party, who met with the participants to the workshop, during a special event, advised the audience to keep in mind the terrible experience of despotism and not fear freedom. He noted that freedom is not the enemy of Islam, and history has proven that Islam prospers with freedom. He added that the key to handling freedom is the capacity to manage conflict in a peaceful manner, without violence.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The substantial changes that have occurred since January 2011 in North Africa and the Middle East led to a wide opening of the political field and new political parties and movements, among which new actors – faith-based political parties and movements, including Salafis. While the political integration of the latter actors raises several specific questions and reveals various challenges – due to their religious reference –, this integration, if successful, can contribute to smooth and peaceful transition and an appeased political climate in the region.

In the framework of the action/research programme “North Africa and West Asia in Transformation” (NAWAT), which aims at reinforcing mechanisms for transforming violent or potentially violent political conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East, the Cordoba Foundation of Geneva organized a workshop in Tunis on 10-13 September 2012 on the theme of ‘Promoting constructive political participation of and with Salafi actors in North Africa’.

The workshop followed a meeting held in Tunis in June 2012, at the margin of the Nyon Process session, which had gathered the leaders of Egyptian and Tunisian Salafi parties. During the June meeting different issues came out of the exchange, notably the need to accompany the political integration of Salafi parties and to establish a transversal exchange between them, extended to other countries of the region, as well as the importance of differentiating between Salafis since they are not a one unified school of thought but rather a large spectrum with a diversity in terms of attitudes and behaviours.

The workshop convened Salafi political parties and leaders from four countries of the region: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco. It aimed at accompanying the integration of Salafi actors into the new political sphere, by facilitating exchange of experiences as well as identifying the challenges that are crucial for successful integration and seeking the appropriate measures to deal with them. The second part of the meeting was dedicated to an exchange with Evangelical representatives from the Americas who have gone through similar challenges upon entering politics.

This report presents an analytical summary of the discussions that were held under Chatham House Rule, so presentations and points are not attributed to individual speakers but summarized to give an overall sense of the discussions and debates. The report is structured around the following leading questions:

- Why to engage as orthodox¹ believers in politics?
- How to engage in politics?
- What are the challenges to political participation by orthodox believers and how to address them?
- What are the responsibilities of the orthodox believers in terms of peace promotion?

2. WHY TO ENGAGE AS ORTHODOX BELIEVERS IN POLITICS?

The motivation of the political action was discussed thoroughly in an attempt to determine if the political engagement of Salafis and Evangelicals is religiously

¹ The word “orthodox” is used in this context since it is suitable to both Salafis and Evangelicals.

motivated or stimulated by pragmatic considerations.

Muslim participants agreed that even though politics can be a 'muddy field' if deprived from values and assimilated to protecting privileges and making concessions, it certainly represents one type of work of goodness that brings closer to God when it is rooted in values. In fact politics is about serving the creatures of God; in that sense, it is an act of obedience to God when the intention is good.

In the Islamic tradition, the work of goodness is vast and does not cover exclusively the humanitarian action, but encompasses all aspects of life, including the protection and promotion of human dignity and human rights, conflict transformation and peace promotion; and if the politician considers him/herself a servant of the community, then he/she is performing a work of goodness.

It was stated by a Muslim participant that "politics has always been very much a part of Islam, even though we are re-discovering this fact only now that we have recovered political freedom."

The Evangelicals stated that governance and democracy are best exercised as an act of service to humankind in general and God specifically. The exercise of social, political power (government) should maintain a sense of ultimate accountability beyond its people to the sovereign God of the Universe who alone holds justice, forgiveness, order and judgment in His supreme vision. The government's role is to preserve and protect the right to practice religion and allow a public space for people of different beliefs to live as full citizens with dignity and respect. Serving in such a government may also provide a believer with a degree of practical submission to God. In that sense, one participant described his political objective

as "creating a space where Evangelicals can participate in mainstream politics without being theologically moderate and without compromise".

Faith can go along with politics, and believers "have the choice of participating in a system that disappoints in order to lift it to another standard, or to stay outside of it." As stated by one Evangelical participant, "my life must be a light, and I engage my integrity to show an example even in dark areas that I deeply disagree with".

Evangelical participants agreed that the main purpose of entering politics is not necessarily to make the State religious, but rather to make sure that Evangelical values can be enshrined in the government's principles. Aside from formal political roles, Evangelicals in the US have their own institutions, schools and lobby organizations which all contribute to influence politics in the direction of their values and faith.

3. HOW TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS? EXPERIENCES SO FAR

3.1. SALAFI EXPERIENCES WITH POLITICS

EGYPT

Prior to the revolution the Egyptian Salafis did not represent a unified force. They were mainly engaged in social and charity work. Their attitudes towards participating in the revolution were divergent, explained an Egyptian participant. After the revolution, Salafis started to think about political participation and saw that there was great opportunity to advance their mission and to establish a State of Law (*Dawlat al-Haq*) or a State governed by justice, dignity and freedom. Their objective was to participate to the Nation's development. They first

considered waiting to acquire more experience before joining the scene, but they finally decided to enter politics with what they had. They took training sessions in Egypt and abroad, benefitting from the support of volunteer university scholars. They also profited from the trust and confidence granted by the street, which was confirmed by the votes.

LIBYA

While Islamists had no role under Gaddafi, they gained an important role from the beginning of the revolution. Salafis practice politics on the basis of their religious beliefs and wish to reform society, in all transparency and honesty, a Libyan participant said. They try to develop the country at the economic, the social and the cultural levels and they do not wish to create any conflict, contrary to the attempts by some of their opponents to portray them as being “against freedom and modernity”.

Contrary to the Egyptian case, the participation of Salafis in Libya has been achieved mainly by individuals and not through Salafi political parties. Moreover, the very short period before the elections did not allow for Salafi parties to prepare conveniently, leading to their under-representation in the General National Congress. Today, many Salafi associations focus on social and health issues, with the support of influential personalities. They also follow the constitution drafting process, promoting the exclusive reference to *sharia* (Islamic law). Due to time constraints, the presentation of political activities in Libya remained general, and specific differences between Salafi parties in Ijtihad on political and intellectual views were not thoroughly discussed.

TUNISIA

The ‘Arab Spring’ brought enormous change in Tunisia, with thousands of freed political prisoners returning to public life, as highlighted by a Tunisian participant. Under Ben Ali, Islamic groups were not even allowed to participate in social work and most dissidents were isolated from society and condemned to jail or exile. Today, the progress of Salafis in integrating the political sphere is still slow. It was noted that all Islamic movements faced difficulties in the country, not only Salafis. It was stated that the clear and explicit discourse of Salafis highlights their sincerity in dealing with politics.

MOROCCO

A Moroccan participant stated that the improvement in freedoms after the ‘Arab Spring’ was not accompanied by a change in the system nor in the attitude and behaviour of those who govern, and that the context is still very difficult. Although faith-based political actors are now politically represented, even the *Parti de la Justice et du Développement* (PJD) who formed a government faces blockages from the real decision makers. Some Sheikhs were freed recently but other innocents are still imprisoned. Salafi activists, who formerly did not deal with politics and did not even vote, are currently focusing on *daâwa* (predication) and education, defending their human rights issues and improving their discourse. Some Salafis have supported and even integrated the PJD while others still reject the idea of participation.

Time is not ripe to set up a Salafi party as was done in Egypt, it was said, since the Moroccan context is so different from Egypt where the *daâwa* was very strong even under Mubarak. The move towards official political

engagement and creating a political party has not yet been made, given mainly the conditions of political freedom. The focus must be put on common values that can allow spreading peace, welfare and security, in the “hope to purify politics and clean it from personal interests and hypocrisy”.

3.2. EVANGELICAL EXPERIENCES WITH POLITICS

Initially, Evangelicals had very little experience in dealing with the political system. “So we trained people, explained an Evangelical participant, so that they could be candidates, we learned to express things in a way that could be understood. We had to work within our groups to decide a united front so that we could not be accused internally of compromising in our discourse. We worked in unified way with others groups, formed coalitions with like-minded people – including some that were Catholics – , and found that we could be allied with them on certain issues”.

Talking about the political experience and participation of Muslims in the USA, the example was given of how American Muslims have learned to participate in the political system and were accepted. Today, two of the 435 Congress members are Muslims; they were elected after 9-11 and represent districts that are predominantly non-Muslim.

4. WHAT ARE CHALLENGES TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BY ORTHODOX BELIEVERS AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM?

4.1. RELIGION AND POLITICS

The question here is how faith-based groups practice politics without losing their identity and compromising their values, in a context where there also are various actors, including

non-believers: how to be understood by these actors and the general public? What to do when some of the political decisions to be taken clash with values?

4.1.1. FROM PREDICATION TO POLITICS

One of the main challenges that Salafi parties face upon integrating the political sphere is that of establishing ways to be better understood, to articulate the inclusive values of the recent political changes with their political programs, and to put these values in practice.

The importance to translate religious values into a political language understandable by all was underlined by all participants.

It was pointed out that if the political action requires values, it also needs a good knowledge of the appropriate ways and means, the required rules and the adapted language. Otherwise the expected results will not be reached.

In the absence of a common language understood by all, the doors are wide open to misunderstanding and even conflict between partners. This requirement is known in the Islamic tradition. It is related that Imam Ali, the fourth Caliph, said: “speak to people the language they know and are used to, and leave what they do not understand.” Ibn Messaoud, a companion of the Prophet, said: “If you deliver to people a speech that is not accessible for them, it will certainly induce *fitna* (source of discord and conflict) for some of them”.

According to a Salafi participant, “if you talk in a sophisticated way, you will not be heard. You have to develop a discourse that is political in essence, and that has been previously reviewed from the point of view of its religious content.”

As described by an Evangelical participant, “Translating one’s faith perspective into political realities entails taking the best of your faith and finding the structure that is most close to upholding and defending the related principles.”

A Moroccan participant said: “Showing the pureness of Islam, we strive to give it a political dimension while insisting on being faithful to ourselves. But we also need to focus on being accepted and understood by our governments, and then the understanding of the rest of the world will follow.”

It was agreed that it is necessary to refer to a language and to institutions that are legitimate in order to minimize rejection of your discourse: this is valid for translating Islamic thought into political discourse, but also when promoting Human Rights by referring to the related rights in Islamic tradition. Since many of the values and principles of Islam are universal and valid even for non Muslims, it was said, people should articulate these values to voters rather than the doctrine in order to highlight their universality.

4.1.2. WHEN FAITH AND POLITICS CLASH

The question on contradiction between religious values and political decisions was raised. What strategies can be used in cases when political parties with religious reference cannot succeed to influence political decisions and processes?

The Muslim participants recognised that Islamic movements and politicians may encounter such a contradiction when engaging with institutions and policies that do not correspond to their values. The solutions are either to resign and give up, or

to carry on and try to serve the community under the best possible conditions.

For Evangelical participants, a priority is to educate believers to put God first and not to have anger in their dialogues, whatever the party or political opinion they choose. In a way, stated an Evangelical participant, governments are the definition of hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another. Politicians have to seek power to influence, and they will lie and cheat to do so. People of faith have to work with this state of things, “and make sure that all those who enter the political arena continue to worship the altar of God and not the altar of politics”.

Even when the positive results are not rapidly visible, work must continue in other fields also, such as education. An example of this was given by an Evangelical participant on the lessons learned in their fight against abortion, which is allowed by law: “We don’t always win, but our response is to continue to be involved”, he said. Not by radical action as some did, but with a sustained legal and political battle and increased preventive work to improve the situation of women and finding ways that allow them to keep their babies. “What happens when you lose? People react in different manners: some choose to withdraw; others go to the extremes even of killing in the name of Christianity which is a great sin against God. For us, the principle that matters most in a conflict is respecting the other in the process of the disagreement”.

4.2. ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CHALLENGES

The relatively new involvement of Salafis in politics reveals certain organizational and programmatic challenges, with specific needs in terms of training, political program drafting etc.

As stated by a Libyan participant, “Islamic parties need to invest today in fulfilling the needs for training in order to help build institutions, and to build the capacity of the leadership to go from discourse to real development in society.” The following political priorities were listed: “First, the security file; second, the fight against corruption (financial and administrative); third, a social contract by consensus between the electors and the elected.”

Until recently, the capacity of Salafi groups and parties in terms of human resources centered on people specialized in *daâwa* much more than *political and administrative staff*. This is due to the past separation between groups that work in *daâwa* and those involved in politics and education. There are therefore urgent needs for training professional human resources in political, social, economic and administrative skills, so that parties can be organized in professional teams with trusted people that are specialized in various aspects.

The Egyptian experience was important in highlighting the potential of existing resources. First, many *shari’a* scholars are very clear-sighted and can help in the appropriation of modern governance issues according to religious principles. Second, an important number of Salafis are professionals in medicine, architecture, engineering, and their expertise can and should serve to establish the programmes and policies of the parties. “Salafi parties must use the available scientific assets to provide answers to issues such as citizenship, democracy or individual freedoms, within the limits of Islamic law,” emphasised one participant. On this basis, some Egyptian Salafi parties have managed to build agreements (if not alliances) in the parliament on certain issues, which facilitates

the coordination with others who share the same Islamic values.

A Tunisian participant suggested that Egyptian Salafis could take the lead in this exchange of expertise, so that other countries could learn from their experience in popular movements and in the Shura Council.

More generally, the necessity of *advancing economic and social development*, along with stability and security, was stressed. Building a legitimate local discourse involves expanding the religious discourse to include social and political concerns, and field experience in this sense must be gained through proximity and social work.

Political programmes must involve strong policies for growth and development, ensuring welfare for the citizens and satisfactory policies on social, education or health projects in approaches that comply with Islamic principles.

An Egyptian participant believes that “to those who accuse Salafi parties of opportunistic engagement, the answer must be to stay strong on our ideals of reform, and to provide successful inputs for change in the economic field. If the Islamic movements manage to improve the countries’ conditions and address challenges of corruption, then they will have strong support.”

4.3. DEALING WITH THE “CLOSE OTHER”

4.3.1. ALLIANCES BUILT ON VALUES

The discussion turned to the challenge that the new Salafi political parties face in building alliances and coalitions and ways to coordinate their efforts at the internal and external level. This implies also for political parties to learn to manage the relationship with the religious authorities, the

constituencies, including with its extremes and the danger that can represent their uncontrolled violent reactions.

For the Egyptian participant, Salafis need to think in terms of efficient participation. Unifying all the Salafis of one country in one single party is not realistic, and some form of competition is useful. Partnership with all national political forces is important, but also the coordination between the different Islamic movements in order to have the majority in the parliament and to influence political decisions. The fact that there are different Salafi parties in Egypt is a natural development, he explained. This diversity is useful for the Egyptian people so that one idea does not dominate the political arena.

Tunisian representatives of Salafi parties are attempting to unite efforts and build a front, striving also to convince other Salafis to support the political process. This would enable them to impact the parliament and the constitutional council to include *shari'a* in the constitution, considering the first article is not sufficient. An alliance to approach with Nahdha can support efforts to build a brotherly relation with the party, based on shared references and suffering, despite some differences and a degree of coordination which is still modest.

A Libyan independent activist explained that the relationship between Islamic parties is rather good and they have managed to set up an alliance with Islamists in the General National Congress. The relationship between the secular and Islamic parties is based on agreements on a number of points, with regard to promoting freedom, citizenship, democracy and economic growth. "We want to promote the idea of citizenship that accepts change and diversity", he said.

Despite a big diversity in theological interpretation, Christian groups in Latin

America succeeded to work together on common issues. "In order to have impact in society and influence effective change in society, we need some form of unified work", explained an Evangelical representative. Costa Rica's Catholic constitution bans divorce, abortion and homosexual marriage, but debates started to call for a change which would allow abortion and homosexual marriage. Evangelicals went to the street to protest, "encountering people with very different beliefs and discovering that they shared some values". Acknowledging the need to work together in order to have any political impact, they worked together on a shared position, disseminating it to secular media and government; and lobbying parliamentarians. Protests developed, their position got to be heard by the international community, and polls showed that a majority of Costa Ricans support traditional Christian views and reject the constitutional change. This succeeded in having the law suspended and a national dialogue was launched. "We managed to express our values in a language understood by all, and this allowed all to support our cause even without joining our religion." "Today, he continued, the Church and the people of faith are more involved politically, some have formed political parties and there are two Evangelicals in the Congress."

4.3.2. DEALING WITH THE EXTREMES

One of the consequences of integrating the political sphere, as illustrated by the Egyptian case, is to move from opposition to responsibility. "It was easy for us to oppose and attack, but now we are expected to find realistic solution and take difficult decisions," explained the Egyptian participant. This entails engaging with the more extreme that are tempted to call to violence in the name of religion in order to bring them closer to

wasatiya (central posture) and make sure they do not disrupt the parties' efforts. A Libyan participant said: "We need to correct the understanding of our religion within certain groups and make it understood widely".

IN EGYPT

After the revolution, some groups started using *takfir* (excommunication) to justify the killing of individuals. These groups have been accused of being involved in attacks with gas bombs that led to the death of Egyptian soldiers – although responsibilities have not been clearly established. Al Nur and other Salafi parties reacted immediately and convened a conference to calm things down and open a venue to talk to these groups who are waging for war. The Egyptian participant explained that: "We saw it as our responsibility to defuse these risks, to engage in an effort for reconciliation and to remind to all that national security and borders should not be attacked. [...] We are engaging with them preventively to modify their wrong interpretation of this form of *takfir* as being Islamic. We also reach out to isolated extremist groups to bring them closer and engage in the same kind of dialog."

IN LIBYA

A Libyan political activist described the experience of a group of people in prison who wrote a book called 'Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad' which "addresses the mistaken understanding of those who indulge in violent reactions, due to factors such as ignorance, young age or oppression. The book refers to Islamic scientist, advising against using force to defend oneself, calling to preserve the national interest before revenge and denouncing violations such as those turned against children and youth. We

raise awareness and teach about treaties and principles of respect in Islam that must be followed even in the case of war. We have regretted accidents which unfortunately occurred after the revolution such as the attacks against ICRC representatives or kidnapping, which go against the Islamic values and the Quran which states that they are under our protection in our country until they go home." All the same, it was specified that self-defence is a legitimate principle in Islam.

IN TUNISIA

A Tunisian participant from Islah party noted that today's opposition between extreme secular and extreme religious in Tunisia is in part explained by the history of the political opposition and of the Salafi movement in the country. Initial rejection of political dictatorship without active opposition was succeeded by a phase of training of youth in leading active confrontation to the regime. After the revolution, many engaged in politics and became vocal about their ideas, convening with all other Islamic trends. Despite this, some had started to rely more on the violent action, and Islah party is now working to engage with these youth, trying to help them integrate a political action.

Another Tunisian experience consisted in working with refugees living abroad with Western education and in a secular context. These Salafis have never engaged in violent work and even tried to re-enter Tunisia but did not manage to receive passports, it was said. An Asala representative noted that they were even invited by the French government to intervene on some crisis. These Salafi returnees face a challenge now in Tunisia by some people wanting to exclude them from political process. However, they wish to improve the conditions in Tunisia and will continue to influence their constituencies.

A Moroccan activist explained how people have been imprisoned in the context of the 'Global War on Terrorism', when the government was ready to accuse innocents whose only 'fault' was to agree on certain specific claims with the presumed perpetrators. Efforts from Salafi activists to correct this misinformation and condemn the events were unfortunately either distorted or not heard.

In jail, these political prisoners engaged to get their voice heard and correct the defamation, going on hunger strike, engaging in dialog with other prisoners, revising and re-interpreting some religious concepts. "From the prison, we expressed our abhorrence of this sort of violent action, even though we were criticized from within the prison by some who accused us of compromise and of repudiating our values. These efforts to correct the stereotyped image of Salafis were pursued after the 'Arab Spring', including efforts in communication with Islamic parties. This did help to correct some distortions, including building relations of respect with the future Minister of Justice who contributed to freeing us when he was appointed."

Other Moroccan participants also insisted that Islam emphasizes the importance of security, which cannot be guaranteed without social and economic stability. "Salafis in Morocco have been very vocal on the need to protect foreigners and people from other religions, and had a big role in fighting terrorism, systematically condemning the horror of violent events, despite the fact that the media continues to distort our voices." The danger of falsely accusing Salafis and jailing innocent people can unfortunately lead some to hate society instead of

addressing extremist views with understanding and to bring them to *wasatiya*.

These efforts in dealing with the extremes require mobilizing a concerted position on certain issues, starting with the agreement to work on the principles of dialog and persuasion. "Some argue that it is not necessary to discuss with the extremes, seeing that they carry the seeds of their own destruction and can be left aside. But we wish them to come back to *wasatiya* and we insist on the need to talk with them, as our prophet recommends. Even if we do not succeed in persuading them, we have at least broken down the obstacles to dialog, and reminded them of other ways of thinking. Through constructive dialog, we help them to revise their mistaken understanding that extremism is based on Islam. In any case, their errors will impact on us and be laid on our shoulders, so we must take this responsibility."

It was reminded that dialog is currently maintained with some extremist groups that are still in prison, despite the logistical challenge of reaching them. The minister of Justice is also setting up a project to reach out to them.

4.3.3. DEALING WITH ONE'S CONSTITUENCY AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES

One of the challenges that face the Salafi leaders of political parties is to find the proper language and the convincing arguments to face internal accusations, which may arise from the party's constituency and religious authorities, of compromising with the values and deviating from the righteous path. This can be tackled by a continuous exchange with the religious authorities and a proper policy of information of the members and sympathisers of the party. Political leaders

must be proactive and avoid letting the party's constituency and religious authorities be informed about important political decisions by a third party, such as the media.

4.4. DEALING WITH THE "MORE DISTANT OTHER"

4.4.1. MANAGING DISPUTES AND DEALING WITH DISAGREEMENTS

An Evangelical participant explained that entering the democratic process implies dealing with others who do not agree with you on various issues, and learning to manage the disagreement.

Most of the Salafi exchange on this matter focused on the relationship with Secular groups. They regret that despite their good intentions, they have encountered so far a bitter welcome by secular forces, which have accused them of all things evil. However, they believe that the relationship with what can be considered as '*radical seculars*' should be that of avoiding confrontation and establishing venues for exchange and trust building.

It was also underlined that the principle of the greater common good must be a key in managing disagreements and disputes. Difference must not be ignored, but they must be put at the right level of priority. The principles of *sharia* protect the interests of all people, considering the higher interest to be a priority over the lower one. Hence, the proper way to deal with the 'others' is that of finding agreements based on common interests: finding solutions without making unacceptable compromises.

The Egyptian participant noted that while Salafi and secular parties can agree on certain issues such as the fundamental freedoms, they will disagree on the limits of these freedoms. In Egypt, efforts were made for the sake of the Nation's development and the

collaboration with secular parties has progressed. Engaging in continuous connection and cooperation with all parties, including seculars, has allowed overcoming some gaps in the transition period.

Several Libyan participants described their relation to secular parties as rather good, because the latter are relatively conservative and religious. To the surprise of participants of other countries, it was noted that the term 'secular' could be misleading in the Libyan context, since no party in the country would disagree with anything rooted in Islam. Another Libyan participant estimated that secular and Islamic trends agree on 90% of the issues. Despite this rather conciliatory context, the cooperation with the seculars cannot always lead to an agreement, for instance on certain points of freedom which *sharia* defines with clear limits. The experience of the first elections in Libya showed that secular parties are divided between moderates and extremists, and that some of the 'fundamentalist secular parties' aspire to isolate the Islamists from politics. In any case, direct discussions should be held without confrontation and dialog remains the best way to discuss and clarify whatever points are unclear.

"We need to learn to deal with those who have different opinions as us. Coordination, alliances or some form of integration is a condition to be able to have an impact. To make sure we do not compromise on our values, we refer to religious scientific authorities to establish appropriate Islam interpretations," he said.

Comparing to Egypt and Libya, the relationship with seculars in Morocco seems to be more difficult, and defamation against Salafis is much stronger: "We face an internal polarization, where people refuse to even hear *sharia* being mentioned, because they

have integrated the media's defamation of the concept", he said. Despite this, Salafis try to avoid confrontation and call for dialog with the seculars because "they are acting in good faith." This attitude brought positive results since Salafis and seculars participated in demonstrations together in a good spirit and some seculars even got involved in the efforts to free Salafi political prisoners.

In Tunisia also, there is a conflict between the religious project and the non religious project, explained a Tunisian participant. "Seculars in Tunisia seem to have the objective to eliminate all reference to Islam", the secular project rejecting strongly, according to this participant, anything related to Islam.

4.4.2. DIVERSITY

This part of the discussion addressed the issue of minorities (ethnic, linguistic, religious or ideological, etc.) and women in North Africa and raised the question of their place in society and the attitude and behaviour of the majority towards them. All the participants agreed on the need to respect and protect the rights of religious minorities.

The Salafi participants also agreed that Islam promotes women's contribution in building societies. Quoting a book he wrote on the role of women, a Moroccan participant explained how Islam defends women's education. They highlighted the need to challenge the wrong perceptions concerning the place of women in Muslim societies, and the importance of cooperation with the Evangelical friends that could help to find ways to make this understood abroad. Salafis and Evangelicals participants expressed shared respect vis-à-vis the role of women in the family as a mother, and the need to prevent women from being used and abused.

In Egypt, the constitution sets the main points regarding minorities such as Copts, but some priests were worried that the reference to *sharia* in Article Two meant that it could be applied to Copts. "Meetings allowed clarifying things and ensuring legal support so that even atheist and pagans could be safe. It was necessary to have face to face discussions and not to deal with such sensitive issues through the media". Egyptian Salafis have discussed about what citizenship means under an Islamic government, and have engaged to protect churches and prevent *fitna*. Despite the facts on the ground that prove good coexistence, it was deplored that the media suggested the contrary.

In Libya the 'minorities' issue is still questioned since it is associated solely to religious minorities. One Libyan participant argued that "there are no minorities: there is only one religion and everybody is a partner in the country".

A Tunisian participant concurred that protecting guaranteed rights for religious minorities is established in Islam, and that this is the case in Tunisia. But he specified that this does not apply to "wrong minorities that offend the Islamic nature of our societies such as homosexuals, prostitutes or supporters of Satan." It was noted that the situation of women in Tunisia is rather good as they occupy the majority of jobs.

As noted by a Moroccan scholar, there are good conditions and tolerance towards religious minorities in his country. "Our position is clear: in a peace situation, God does not mean for us to attack those who have not attacked us. Even in cases of war, God directs us not to be the first to attack", he added.

4.4.3. DEALING WITH THE WEST

In the exchange dedicated to Salafis-West relations, many participants regretted a number of Western attitudes and behaviours vis-à-vis the Salafi current and Muslims in general, such as the “Western double standards”, the “biased misperceptions on the women’s rights in Muslim world”, the “systematic unfair accusations of terrorism”, and “the recurrent aggressions against the *ummah* (Muslim community), notably in Iraq”. Concerning the latter issue, many of the North African participants expressed strong feelings of resentment related to the wound of the war in Iraq which is still not healed, conveying the weight of the injustice and the humiliation strongly felt by Arab countries.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXCHANGING WITH THE WEST

Most participants highlighted the fact that the relationship with the West was indeed a burning issue that required to be addressed constructively, and welcomed the contact with the Swiss facilitators as possible bridges to help overcome the vicious circle of attacks against Islam and violent reactions of anger. The profound state of mutual stereotypes was regretted by all participants, who agreed that such venues for conversations were necessary, to have honest discussions, name differences, and find a common ground for the common good.

The necessity to communicate directly with Western decision-makers and not through the media or other actors that may be tempted to distort the communication was recognised along with the need to establish direct channels of communication with all Western stakeholders, and to be present in the media on a regular basis to communicate relentlessly on burning issues.

The issue of building trust between the West and Salafis was addressed. It was noted that a reasonable level of trust can be achieved “not by being pleasant but by being frank, sincere and truthful”, by deepening the mutual understanding and welcoming each other as friends, seeing in each other a person of faith and deconstructing mutual stereotypes. Trust and confidence come through empathy, which means “understanding better the other’s identity, struggles and belief,” added a participant.

The importance of building on good experience and successes was emphasized, which includes “reviewing the Western orientalist studies and the information reports on which Western policies are based, and acting to change biased policies against Islam.” The participants noted the fact that there is a wide common ground that could be the basis for a constructive exchange. Most international conventions do not disagree with Islam, as we all believe in freedom, dignity and living in a society of welfare, reminded a Libyan participant, but such exchange requires goodwill and “good intention that is essential and can be the factor to successful understanding and respect.”

Participants insisted that it was important to establish relationships with the West based on dealing in equal footing, sovereignty and respect, and that advice was only welcome if it is rooted in faith and not motivated by any geopolitical considerations.

According to Evangelical participants, faith asks for such kind of exchanges. One of them explained how he engaged for politically and theologically irreconcilable people to talk together. Quoting differences between Muslim and Christian beliefs, he called for naming and respecting differences and commonalities in order to create trust. It was

recalled that tensions and stereotypes between the West and the Arab region are so strong that “both our people can be tempted not to understand our exchange today. Because we are trying to honour God in complicated contexts, we also need to have discussions and analyze our own roles in the context of the difficult political positions of our respective countries.”

REACTIONS TO DEFAMATION OF ISLAM

On the third day of the workshop, news came that an anti-Islamic video produced in the USA was circulating broadly on the internet, and that amid protests throughout the Arab World, an armed attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi had resulted in the death of several people including the American Ambassador.

As stated by a Tunisian participant, this kind of provocations like this video, both at the international and the internal levels “are scandalous and could risk giving way to civil wars. Such pictures, extremely harmful and insulting to Muslims, build up the anger of young people in Tunisia, to the point that we are called by Sheikhs to help calming the youth down”.

Many participants expressed their condemnation of the attacks on the US consulate, and all agreed that ways should be found together to prevent the recurring patterns of such tragic events. Indeed, it is not the first time that “authors, filmmakers, cartoonists and others make deliberate efforts to provoke and defame Islam”, and that it becomes impossible to deescalate protests that turn into violent clashes. Despicable efforts to provoke unfortunately succeed in giving rise to violent reactions, which is exactly what is expected by the provocateurs and should be avoided at all

costs, also because it reinforces stereotypes on Muslims.

The example of the Prophet was invoked to show that understanding, patience and respect was always the best response. In cases where someone appears to intend to harm Muslims, it is recommended to “never start with evil: if the insulting person indeed meant evil, he will receive the evil back against himself. If he meant well, he will receive good in return”.

All Salafi participants agreed that Islamic resources were very useful in always calling for non violence. This means that it is important to work towards one’s own community to help them resist and react in the best and most useful way, which is “answering to hateful speech by true speech on our prophet and what he means to Muslims.”

Many reiterated that public statements can be useful to clarify the positions and express the indignation, and that common declarations by various faith groups can also be a very good response, because a shared and vocal condemnation is the best way to remind people that these acts are not done in the name of our communities, or of our countries, and that we will not allow individuals that engage in despicable hate speech to cause widespread unrest.

5. WHAT ARE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL LIFE AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM?

The participants affirmed that one of the main challenges the Salafis are confronted to is the wrong stereotypical perception, stigmatization and calumny, conveyed mainly by the media, and supported by their political opponents or by regimes with the view to discredit them.

This may take the form of a distorted image of Islam and *sharia* in particular, presented as if it were limited solely to punishment aspects. It may also take the form of defamation portraying Salafists as extremists or even terrorists. Salafis are often associated with violent events without any evidence of their involvement. These events sometimes turned out to be the work of criminal groups or even intelligence services, along the same dynamics of Algeria in the 1990s.

The Salafi participants agreed that in order to face this challenge, they have to improve their communication skills, notably how to talk to the media and to reflect on the terminology they use. This requires building a crystal clear image and integrating the language of dialogue.

They also have to find an access to the media, particularly to TV channels, from which they are excluded. The experience of Salafi groups in Egypt shows that after being initially ignored, they met political successes and their results started to be visible in the field: this led to them being more and better represented in the media, and also invited to most Western embassies in Cairo. This example confirms that Salafi parties need to dare to start with some self-reliance in the first step.

A Libyan participant stressed the “need to develop the awareness of the people on the balanced position of the Salafis, to distance ourselves clearly from wrongs committed by people that we do not approve and to engage in actions that prove our commitment to our positions.” Another Libyan participant added: “We do not need to show a better image of ourselves, we simply must allow the reality to be covered.”

The Egyptian participant affirmed that “the official positions of our parties must be made very clear, in particular to correct rumours

when Salafis are wrongly accused of violent attacks. It is also important to express our solidarity publicly, as happened in Egypt when Al Nur party officials intervened officially to defend Christians. We must make sure that practical examples of our efforts against violence are covered by the media”. He added: “We need to react to all events in national and international affairs, with well-thought public reactions and comments in appropriate terms.”

The Egyptian experience showed that strong field presence and social legitimacy can decrease the impact of biased media and correct fears that assimilate Salafis with terrorists.

A Muslim American participant made the parallel with a biased US perception of Islamic culture that wrongly suspects it of not rejecting terrorism, and of not respecting rights of women and religious minorities. He stated that even if these concerns may be unfair, it is important to correct them by documented communication.

The Evangelical participants agreed that it was important to learn from past mistakes, and develop a discourse which is more based on values and less on being combative. At one point indeed, Evangelicals had become so concerned about conservative values that they were known for all that they were against, discredited as being anti-gays, anti-abortion and anti-Islam. It was then necessary to bring clarifications about the term ‘fundamental’, correcting the prejudice associated to it and relating it to values of protecting family, marriage and life.

6. WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF ORTHODOX BELIEVERS IN TERMS OF PEACE PROMOTION?

Despite the great opportunities brought by the recent political changes in the Arab region, there are still important challenges in promoting peace within and among countries. The participants gave a few examples of their engagement for preventing conflicts and de-escalating tensions.

As we have seen above, internal disagreements and conflicts can be very intense: “there is a major gap between those who have very secular views and those who promote the Muslim culture and religion. We are struggling to keep the relationship constructive and to maintain dignity and stability for the country”.

Two other interconnected issues are the security and stability situation and the persistence of injustice and oppression, for instance in Libya, where “remnants of loyalists forces are used by some tribes for the purpose of old conflicts. Salafis groups have engaged in trying to help the tribes reconciling; through accompaniment, awareness raising, conferences and booklets recalling principles of reconciliation. These efforts are important, although their success has sometimes been limited by various obstacles”. In Morocco, all political prisoners are still not freed, and while efforts of dialog with the State bring some good results, there is still “strong social unrest due to former political regime’s doing, with for instance the Casablanca explosions. Salafi groups in Morocco have issued messages to clearly denounce these events.” On the level of International affairs, the Egyptian President as well as Salafi parties have been very vocal on the situation in Syria, with “formal and informal support to the resistance, and calls

to International community to act for the end of the massacres”.

These are but a few examples that illustrate the regional dimension and cross-border responsibilities in promoting peace and security.

7. EVALUATION AND PRACTICAL CONTINUATION

For all participants, this workshop was appreciated and considered as the first instance of meeting representatives of Salafi political parties from various countries of the region, let alone a team of facilitators of the event from Switzerland, or even Evangelical representatives from the Americas, including US citizens. In this sense, the meeting had a symbolic weight and it was important for all participants to clearly state the principles of the discussion, as well as to establish without compromise the necessary context of trust that allows to actually engaging. In this sense, the workshop was extremely important as a nascent and necessary effort to connect individuals and groups that have previously held far apart. The fact that the meeting took place is in itself a great success. The participants expressed their wish to continue both the intra-Salafi and the exchange with the Evangelicals and to deepen it further. The need for cooperation on practical projects was emphasized.

INTRA-SALAFI LEVEL

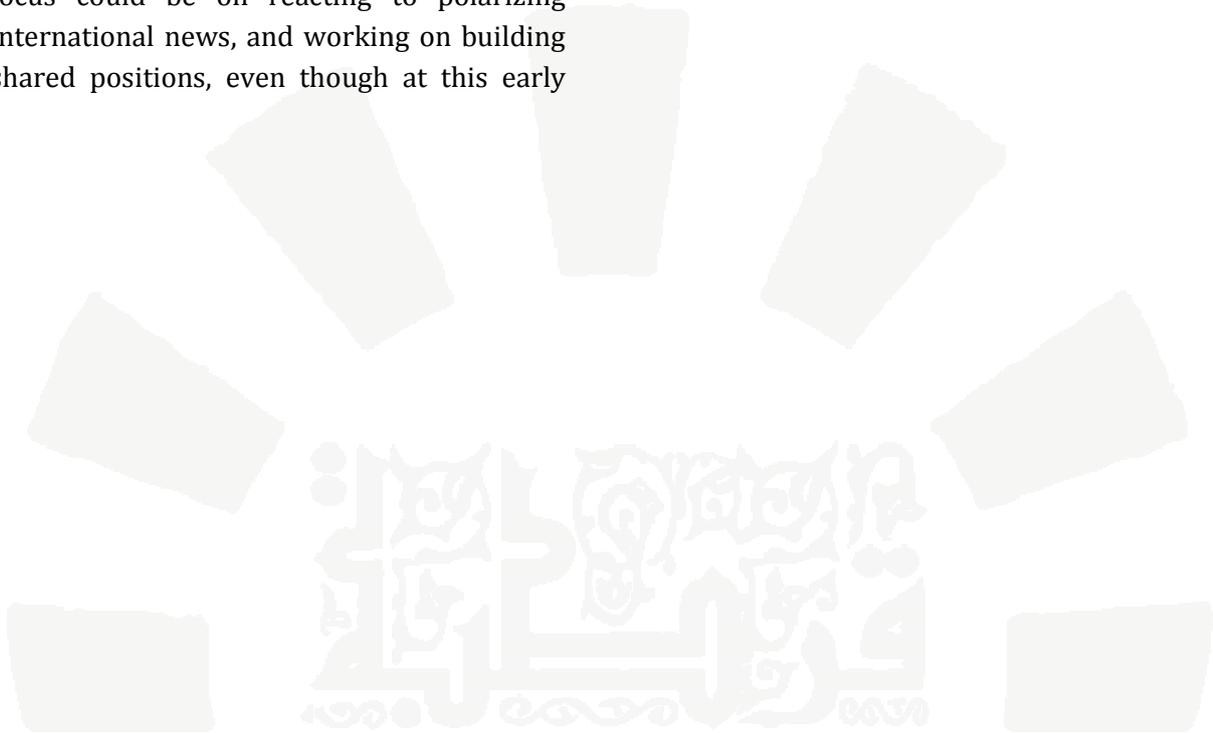
All Salafi participants agreed that communication and the exchange of experience were important priorities, and that mutual learning with other groups from the region is highly recommended. Another point of high priority that could be the subject of intra-Salafi cooperation is training. In fact, there is a need for practical training in

political life and providing awareness raising and empowerment to the constituencies.

SALAFI AND OTHER FAITH-BASED
POLITICAL ACTORS

Evangelical participants noted that the discussions would indeed deserve to be continued, maybe focusing on Egypt since there has been great progress in terms of political integration there. An Evangelical participant suggested that “one possible focus could be on reacting to polarizing international news, and working on building shared positions, even though at this early

stage this may seem ambitious. Continuing our cooperation to try and build together certain communiqués that show common values could be useful to gain support to our cooperation from our respective constituencies. Further venues for exchange could be explored, possibly in Pakistan or even a visit to the US – although this would need to be carefully prepared together to avoid counter-effects and possible negative impact on our images, since the stereotypes are so strong”.



ANNEX: SHEIKH RASHID GHANNOUSHI ADDRESSES THE WORKSHOP

Invited to the workshop dinner Sheikh Rashid Ghannoushi, president of the Nahdha party, was warmly welcomed by the organisers and representatives of all participating organisations who appreciated his presence and thanked him for spending some of his time with them. The Tunisian participants assured him that they want to be constructive partners to Nahdha, while the other participants wished him success in the mission of his party.

Sheikh Rashid addressed the participants to the workshop, welcoming them in Tunisia and expressing his joy to meet with brothers from North African countries that have gone through an emancipation process. He noticed that this meeting could not have taken place in Tunis just a couple of years ago because most of the participants would have been thrown in jail and tortured. He expressed also his happiness to meet with the Evangelicals to widen the knowledge of the world. For him, this proves that the US is not monolithic and has the same presence of good and evil as everywhere else in the world.

Sheikh Rashid insisted then on the issue of freedom. God created freedom, but evil tries to bind it. That's why the fight for freedom against despots is the fight of the prophets and the good persons, the best example being Moses fighting Pharaoh.

For Sheikh Rashid Muslim, political parties must talk about freedom as a fundamental issue. This is in compliance with his view that freedom precedes the application of Islamic law. He advised the audience to remember the awful experience of despotism, to enjoy freedom and hold onto it. "Never let despotism return, and never be tempted by it", he said. And he added: "Don't fear freedom. It is not the enemy of Islam. Islam prospers with freedom. Remember, Islam suffered the most under despotism as was the case under the Soviet Union." He then concluded that "the key to handling freedom is the capacity to manage conflict in a peaceful manner, without violence."

