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**New Political Parties and Movements with a Religious Reference:**
**Promoting Constructive Political Participation beyond Party Politics and furthering Peaceful Coexistence**

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New Political Parties and Movements with a Religious Reference:
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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 actions[1].

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

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[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 if 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) program[2], 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

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]

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[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] 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 Ihassan 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]

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

Implications and Prospects", http:// library.fes.de / pdf-files / bueros / amman / 10294.pdf; and a 2014 Aljazeera Studies Centre conference on Salafism in the Arab Word: Perceptions, Trends and Groups", 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.

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 intrumentalized 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 2005[8], others have been in parliament since 1981, and are seen to be highly penetrated by the government. Even those within parliament

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[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.

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[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

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[10] A 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]

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[11] This 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.