AMJA-NAIF Conference on Interfaith
Sacramento, CA May 3rd-7th

I. Understanding what it is Interfaith, history of interfaith work and milestones in its development. (Understanding the Marketplace)
II. Field experience and lessons learned for Dawah, sharing studies from the field. (Navigating the Marketplace)
III. Best responses to repeated assertions against Islam around the topic of revivalist/reform movements and the political situation in Muslim countries. (Winning the Marketplace)

Resources:

Some Quotes to keep in mind:
- "Make your friends before you need them!"
- "Work smarter not harder!" (America was built on specialization, so quality over quantity)
- "Connect the dots!" (Be a hub and not a spoke)

Important Definitions:
- Interfaith Relations: method of promoting dialogue so that different segments of the faith-based community may "get to know one another". Once familiarity is established groupings of similar minded folks do whatever activity to express their mutual beliefs they come up with. Promotes increasing tolerance in society as more people engage it.
- Evangelism: bearing "witness to Christ". Similar to the Islamic concept of Dawah. Soft evangelism might include "walking with Christ" by expressing ones faith through social works, while hard core evangelism would include direct lobbying someone to convert and accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior (i.e. being "born again" if the individual was Christian but of a different denomination).
- Ecumenicalism: big tent concept in Christianity to bring different denominations together, similar to "intra-faith relations".
- Liberalism: social ideology developed post-Enlightment that placed the individual's rights to choose above all else. Initially began with a free-market oriented economic style but through the influence of socialism in the 20th Century, Liberalism has come to include large government influence in the free-market and social programs. Critics point to its degraded social mores and welfare state enterprises.
- Conservatism: social ideology developed post-Enlightment by Edmond Burke in England as a counter to the excesses of the French Revolution. Generally associated with traditional social values and a free-market economic system. Was traditionally the

1

promoter of individual liberty and small government, but critics today point to its emphasis of military might and xenophobia.

- Dhimmitude: As understood by the average American it is a form of second-class tolerated existence before that minority is exterminated.
- Islamists: "Islamiyoon" or Islamicly oriented Muslim Activists working to expand Islam's influence into every facet of life using the political governance systems if allowed.
- Jihadists: Terrorists or groups like Al-Qaeda, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Takferi groups.

Mega-Trends defining societies (Center for the 21st Century):

1. Globalization – borders mean nothing, ghettoization is ineffective and counter-productive. How comfortable are you with dealing with the "other"?
2. Informationization – in the 21st Century humans will create as much information as in the previous 20,000 years. Are you an efficient analyst or just drowning slowly?
3. Democratization – the individual becomes his own decision maker. Are your people trained and properly equipped to make the right decisions?
4. Marketization – how clear and freely available is your message? "The early bird gets the worm!"
5. Restructurization – how fast is your system adapting to change? Does it recharge you and enhance your effectiveness or further wear you down?

Major Denominations of Christians:

Mainline Protestants (Reform Jews are philosophically-theologically here)	(Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc.)	Easy to navigate, very ecumenical, left of center, women clergy, gays mostly accepted, pluralistic, set-up in Judicatory like regional bodies, motivated by Mica Bible passages to welcome the stranger and help the needy, largest group are Methodists, used to be 2/3rd of American Protestants while Evangelicals were 1/3rd in '60s but have since swapped, largely see the Bible as allegorical.
Catholics (Conservative & Orthodox Jews)	Largest denomination but not of Anglos, Patty (Irish) are mostly Protestant now, Hispanics largest growing segment but huge differences exist between Italian, Polish, Irish and Hispanic Catholics. Anglos have "minority complex" due to the no-nothing movements of the 19th Century. Naturally indifferent to Muslims unless Pope's insulted and half are now voting with Evangelicals where some have axes to grind. Cannon law is set by the Vatican, not a democratic structure.	
Mainstream Evangelicals	Dominated by Baptists and Southern Baptists at that. Dozens of conventions (umbrella groups), only protestant denomination still divided racially from days of slavery, largely tolerant because they're not literalists, women allowed more responsibilities but they're still	

	many decades behind Mainline Protestants, vanguard protectors of religious liberty in America, libertarian (not centralized) in their structures, at war with Fundamentalist Evangelicals, 2nd half of 'center' in "center-right coalition", closest to observant traditional Muslims.
Fundamentalist Evangelicals	Perhaps up to 40% of Evangelicals due to last 3 decades of grassroots activism, literal believers in Bible as God's word, always challenging and looking for ways to weaken the 1st Amendment, largely Fundamentalist Southern Baptist, Born Again types and Pentecostals, minority group of perhaps only 3 million are Christian Zionists (CZ), significant group are "Dispensationalists" or believers in we're now in the "End of Days" with the "Rapture coming soon. Have largely failed to grow past the 50-60 Million range and keep masses as dogmatic as leadership while the South is changing demographically. Most hostile group to Islam due to Muslim behavior oversees in treatment of Christian minorities and apostates. CZs can't be assuaged of their hostility, dispensationalists love to debate naive Muslims (whether immigrant or liberal) and their questions are really about Political Islam/Islamism using Liberalism as the litmus test of modernity (sameness=equality, so why does Islam do "X"), concerned with competition.

I.   *Understanding Interfaith Relations:*

Beginning-

Since time immemorial there have been debates on how to deal with the "other", whether they are defined by religion, ethnicity, culture, nationality or whatever. The paradigm was generally one of a zero-sum game where a benefit to one group was seen as a loss to another. Islam's revelation 14 centuries ago began a process of adjustment to this domination paradigm by putting a minimum code of relations into practice, but most Westerns view the European Enlightment as the true corner where progress was made.

Milestones:

The post Protestant Reformation 30 year war period provided for an intellectual (philosophical) renaissance (Ijtihad) public space to develop what became known as the European Enlightment. Prior to this period "Faith and Reason" were often disengaged by dogma enforced by an order marrying Church and State. As faith and reason as well as no faith and reason were allowed to flourish in Western European societies and their colonies, new socio-economic trends were empowered leading to the elevation of the individual's rights vis-à-vis the state.

Some societies such as Protestant Holland were ahead of the curve more than other more traditional Catholic societies. Those Protestant lands with a larger engagement of Enlightment

principles such as Pluralism had interfaith community relations develop into a civic compact of sorts and minorities such as Jews flourished there more (see history of Jewish immigration to Holland post Andalusia). Coupled with the mindset of national pride as a higher comparative metric than theological literalness, the dye was cast for an expansive social emancipation with economic prosperity.

One of the reasons for a stronger "freedom (liberty) index" in Protestant societies vis-à-vis Catholic ones was due to the central, autocratic and sometimes corrupt influence of the Papal structure as opposed to the more democratically egalitarian nature of the former. The national pride social order expanded the public space for secularism at the expense of more traditional and stabilizing doctrines such as Religion so much so that unspeakable human tragedies occurred in World War II. Post WWII the Catholic Church launched the 2nd Vatican Council in 1965 to do among other things:

1. Change the official language of liturgy in the MASS prayer.
2. Outline the framework for recognizing that man can achieve salvation (rahma in heaven) through Judaism, Protestantism and Islam though salvation was best guaranteed through "The Church" because the Abrahamic Covenant was passed to it.
3. Removed the Excommunication of the Orthodox Church and launching a process of reconciliation that has been held up over the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.

Post Vatican II all across America and the Christian world new "ecumenical" bodies were formed that expanded from just Mainline Protestants to include Catholics and later Jews but a group descended from the Anabaptist Protestants largely remained outside through personal choice. This expansion of "ecumenicalism" was built on the moral relativism foundation and therefore empowered Liberalism and multi-culture(ism) in Western societies. As with all trends a counter-trend emerged to empower Fundamentalist Evangelical Protestants (largely Baptist) empowering Conservatism and self-identity built on an "Originalist" interpretation of history. The extreme end of the free-market moral relativism included a Universalist sense to liberalism or secular humanism that traditional cultural conservatives globally rail against. While the extreme end of the self-identity moral absoluteness crowed produced caste racism and xenophobia.

A small far-right extreme choose to further secede (baraa) from global liberalism by adopting a "Dispensationalist" perspective to the world reflecting their low confidence level in other social order ideologies to explain the "Post-Modern" world they live in. Post-Modern Anglo-American Politicians like Reagan and Thatcher have been able to marshal these disenfranchised folks for electoral benefit by speaking of things such as America being that "shining city on a hill".

<u>Muslims in Interfaith Relationship Building Post WW II:</u>

Though historical exchanges can be found between European and Islamic Scholars over the proceeding centuries, interfaith relations was not of any significant scale. Post WWII due to the yearning desire of grassroots Europeans searching for a peaceful tract in dealing with a resurgent "Southern Hemisphere" and exhausted by near annihilation warfare interfaith relations became a growing market globally. This desire to engage Muslims in Western societies was done through "ecumenically" focused institutions desiring to "integrate" Muslim immigrants into their tolerance oriented pluralistic societies for economic purposes. "Originalist" focused institutions were largely dead in Europe and in America engaged Muslims largely in the 80s and 90s through Seminary outreach efforts targeting conversion and the Ahmed Deedat movement largely bludgeoned that effort. Since the Muslim masses in Western societies were granted a seat at the interfaith table, economically empowered and had their culture celebrated; Muslims in the West thought glowingly of their success in Liberal Metropolitan Western societies. Pan-National Muslim institutions also found a conducive "ecumenical" environment for them to build interfaith relationships through dialogue with Western Christian institutions such as the Vatican on issues of common purpose (ex. Pro-Life/Family Values at the UN).

As the future has unfolded we have seen a proliferation of interfaith groups started by Muslims and since Christian customers are currently dominated by the Protestant concept of the "priesthood of the masses" then engagement with the "Islamic" institutions is becoming of a limited value as time progresses and civic networks allowing the free-flow of information to mold perception are built. All in all Muslims are largely engaging in interfaith dialogues without much strategic guidance in the West and across the Muslim world, though some do hold a cautious "cultural" mindset not transferable to future generations. Similar struggles are found amongst the Fundamentalist Evangelical Protestants and one can see their fragmentation post 9/11 with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) issuing more workable guidelines then their counter-parts at the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Some Muslim governments such as the Royal Family of Jordan have also established interfaith institutions in their home countries to aide Christian minorities.

<u>Some challenges ahead for interfaith relations development in the 21st Century:</u>

Some challenges ahead for interfaith relations development in the 21st Century:

<u>Muslim Side-</u>
- Muslims are affected more by then they are affecting the developing trends. All the five mega-trends reforming society (Center for the 21st Century) empower the liberal and feminine at the expense of the traditional order, while at the same time magnifying the violent extremism's affect to further weaken the conservative traditional.
- Muslims receive almost 0% education on the sociological trends framing society and therefore local community development is largely preservationist and rarely strategic.
- Muslims receive almost 0% education on the evolution of Christianity outside the Islamic theological and historical perspective.
- Muslims are highly affected by the political context of various radicalized socio-political revivalist movements and due to the flatness of leadership skill sets are often self-ghettoizing their 'orbits of influence' in reactionary and self-southing methods.

Psychologically suffering from "cognitive dissonance" does not aide in the development of visionary proactive moral leadership.

Christian and Jewish Sides-

- Hopelessly fragmented with further degradation and don't know how to transform their post-modern "traditional values" sahwa (awakening) into a coordinated way of engaging Muslims globally. Ironically some are studying Muslims for lessons learned efforts.
- Attempts to transcend internal frustrations by using the well known psychology concept of "deflection" to a foreign enemy but that is losing its effectiveness due to the fragmentation of media and information distribution. A recent post 9/11 example would be how Conservatives attack Islam for its "ill-liberalism" to win over social progressives, while Liberals (ex. Neo-Cons) attack Islam as an expansionist totalitarian empire building movement in order to unite traditional conservatives who would be against global government (Anti-Christ), anything totalitarian and have been programmed for decades in the 20th Century on how to fight expansionist empires. Opposing one trying to impose "dhimmitude" through "Shariah law" is an easy sell as simply Round III and Rocky can win that. For a sample analysis of this, visit http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=NzY3NjU1ZGNkNWQzNzE5NzlhODMyZGUxNDUyMGY1ZGI=
- The secular and civic democratic societies built on the Protestant concept of the Priesthood of the masses frustrates their desire to have an honest discussion with Muslims whether at the Papal level on how the violent extremist of today is un-Godly or at the grassroots conservative evangelical level concerning the issues of apostasy and the religious liberties of minorities in majority Muslim societies. Some politically oriented Muslims understand what the market is asking for but are calculating that they don't have to engage until they exact their desired political price. This might be the only choice in their current weakened state but it still comes off as morally relative (repugnant), disingenuous and untrustworthy in today's interdependent world where collective welfare is seen as the guarantor of individual welfare.
- Views of Muslims:
    1. Mainline Protestant have a very favorable impression of Muslims and that will continue so long as Muslims don't create proof for the argument that Muslims would like to "dhimmitude" them as a sub-class when politically capable to.
    2. Catholics are Muslims long-term global strategic challenge but they are currently experiencing paralysis in a hopeless civil war between one half being conditioned through the "culture of life" movement and the other half through the "social justice" movement.
    3. Evangelicals currently treat Muslims at arms length (baraa) but in many parts of the American South Muslims would be unwise to ignore them. They have a high unfavorable rating of Islam and Muslims and affect bad public opinion on Islam to a similar proportion as "Islamists" in Muslim majority countries affect the perception of the US or the West. Muslims need to understand the fault lines

between "Mainstream Evangelicals" and "Fundamentalist Evangelicals" and reach out aggressively to the former while remaining approachable by the latter.

4. Jews are trailers in all the trends identified above and are led by Evangelicals not the other way around due to their fears over Israel's future. Jews provide a good alley to Muslims in America and Muslims should build deeper relationships with them, but Muslim must recognize that they must build their own relationships with Christians and not seem as a sub-group led by the Jewish community.

II. Field experience and lessons learned for Dawah, sharing studies from the Field

Note: Retail interfaith work is defined as one-on-one and is generally done at a local level. This section will focus on wholesale interfaith work, defined as "interfaith community-to-community relations". In simple IT language this is about building the hub that will connect to other hubs managing human traffic on the social network we call society.

Challenges to effective Dawah:
- $50 Million PR Plan for CAIR said to:
  1. Create the official information you want disseminated.
  2. Distribute the information through as many distribution channels as possible.
  3. Strategically advertise your information to targeted market segments.

*** "Anything less would be uncivilized", or at least leaving it up to each local to create his own sales pitch and market it to his best ability with no standardized product in the market then society can not be held accountable for not knowing how a McDonald's French Fry is supposed to taste like (thank you Mr. Croc).

Three (3) Step process for gaining access to social network hubs after identifying them:
  1. Create a similar structural body to the network hub you wish to tap (parallel infrastructure) to offer up the agreed upon Muslim middle ground.
  2. Create interdependencies through joint projects or jointly lobbying on various public policy issues. (Create a history of coalition work)
  3. Leverage relationships for "outside validators" (others who'd stand up for you when attacked and affirm (validate) that you're the mainstream party in the conflict, ex. Texas Senate Prayer controversy in April '07)

Texas Islamic Council (T.I.C.) Approach in Texas:
- Libertarian Association of Masajid, a Chamber of Commerce of sorts so as to speak for member congregations so a collective "Islamic" voice can be provided on Social Public Policy issues.
- Strong central hub of qualified "net workers" (F&J) to connect and impact routing policy in other hubs.

- Purpose is to open doors and impact policies not speak on behalf of member congregations.
- After establishing credibility launched the 1st T.I.C. project in '06 to reclaim control over "Islamic" language as part of a grand bargain of reciprocation with other hubs for each faith-based community to define itself through its own language.
- Leveraged relationships with landmark speeches and partnerships with Mainstream Evangelical, Catholic, Mainline Protestant and Jewish bodies outlining the acceptable protocols for interfaith community relations.
    i. <u>National Vision:</u> To see 49 other similar state-level interfaith community relations bodies working with the T.I.C. to connect into a National Islamic Council (perhaps ISNA) to create the American Muslim version of the McDonalds French Fry and close the door on disinformation campaigns whether by the media or by civic activism groups like the recently launched 50,000 anti-Islam books mailed to 50,000 Pastors nationwide.

Triumph Over Terror (TOT) Project

The Texas Islamic Council (TIC), an independent statewide coalition of Islamic Centers (Mosques) across the Lone Star State coordinated by the Freedom and Justice Foundation (F&J), voted in June 2006 to build expansive interfaith partnerships that include all of civic and political society in order to clarify the language used in the Global War On Terror (GWOT) in order to accurately define our enemy. To learn more, read the background information below.

<u>Background:</u>
The demonization of Islam by its editorialized association with Terrorism in the mainstream media started taking off approximately 10 years ago and hasn't stopped since. Today it has reached such a fevered pitch that it makes our job of defeating terrorism stemming from the Muslim world a much more difficult task.

Though this TOT Project was initiated by American Muslims to highlight a drowned out perspective as to why this Global War on Terror's enemy is misidentified; it has now grown to include Americans in all walks of life. This misidentification with Islam has allowed hate/pressure groups to perpetuate a vitriolic assault on the Religion of Peace, Islam, and its founder, Prophet Muhammad. Misidentification with Islam, a global religion with over a billion adherents, has also left many Americans fearful and willing to curtail the precious civil liberties of their fellow American Muslim Citizens. This sense of fear has left Muslims in a very vulnerable position to overzealous and selective prosecutions coupled with an under siege feeling brought upon by misguided law enforcement tactics.

We fully recognize the threat posed by al-Qaeda's global militant anarchist movement to our American way of life. Though America might have awoken to al-Qaeda's threat on 9/11, many were combating their propaganda many years earlier. Many people involved in this project are

8

coordinators of federal law enforcement homeland security community relations efforts, have served our nation with honor in the US Armed Forces or have voluntarily aided our nation's Public Diplomacy efforts oversees post 9/11.

What we are united in calling for is that all Americans wishing to aid our global struggle against politically motivated violence targeting civilians by groups like al-Qaeda or individuals espousing its ideology should terminate the usage of the word "Islam" as the root of terms describing the terrorism our nation confronts today.

We encourage our fellow Americans to read the Triumph Over Terror interfaith statement, share it with family and friends and join its growing signatories list. Our nation is fighting a determined enemy with strategies that repulse the average human being and therefore could never win through the ballot box. Alienating large populations with inaccurate terminology, whose broad brush tarnishes millions, makes the terrorist recruitment efforts to "defend the faith" easier not harder. That, after all, harms our national interest and endangers American lives. We know that some will view this as a trivial cosmetic change, but to those we would answer that whether it was the Congressionally mandated 9/11 Commission or the White House Administration of George W. Bush the message that this war will be won or lost amongst Muslims has been clearly articulated. This is a struggle for hearts and minds; speaking what we mean will help tremendously at home and abroad.

Why was this project necessary?
Many attempts have been made at the difficult task of describing our enemy in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The 9/11 Commission defined our enemy in the GWOT as "Islamist Terrorists." Our President has also used variations of the term "Islamist" and "Islamic," when referring to this same enemy. These and similar efforts, while well meaning, to define the enemy as a sub-set of the practitioners of the Islamic faith, have been unsuccessful. These associations of terms utilize a broad brush that translates to "all the practitioners of the faith." This fact has aided the propaganda of al-Qaeda and other groups in successfully characterizing the GWOT as a "War on Islam."

By simply adding an "*ist*" which the American Heritage Dictionary defines as "an adherent or advocate of a specific doctrine, theory, or school of thought" at the end of the term "Islam," means we have marginalized and alienated much needed allies among Muslim populations. In this case the doctrine, theory or school of thought is the religion of "Islam," and therefore is the equivalent of the term "Muslim." Unfortunately this term is used without any distinction amongst the faith's spectrum of adherents. Words have meanings and when operating on a global level as we are today, we need to amend this terminology and others with similar construction in order to define our American struggle as one purely against the perpetrators of terrorism and not against a particular religion (Islam).

Read the Op-Ed that kicked off the Triumph Over Terror (TOT) Project:

9

Note: This Op-Ed has run on numerous news websites including the Democratic Party of Texas and leading Journalism Schools like Columbia

Mohamed Elibiary: Making terrorists seem like religious spokesmen is wrong
Monday July 18, 2005 Dallas Morning News

President Bush has defined our course as a "global war on terror," and the 9-11 Commission defined our enemy as "Islamist terrorists." It's worth noting how these public relations missteps are strengthening the efforts of our enemies daily in this battle for hearts and minds.

The terminology defining our enemy as "Islamic" or "Islamist" is a PR disaster for the West. Simply explained, defining Islam in terms not native to it is not effectively accurate – and is sometimes offensive – to a Muslim ear.

Also, when translating either of these terms from English to Arabic or any other derivative of the Arabic language, it translates as "pertaining to or supporter of Islam." Defining the civilized world's enemy as "jihadists," "madrasas" (a generic word meaning school) or by any other Islamic term not pertaining to terrorism is also inaccurate.

At a recent meeting with the Texas Conference of Churches director in Austin, we discussed the concept of "jihad" in Islam and "mission" in Christianity. Jihad, a concept of active struggle, can't be removed from Islam, just as mission can't be removed from Christianity. The fact is that one-fifth of the world struggles (jihad) to spiritually submit five times a day when it prays before its lord. Putting faith into action is a struggle (jihad) whether working on social justice, the environment or defending one's homeland.

Now, is Osama binLaden calling for a "militant 'defensive' jihad" against the West every time I see him on Al-Jazeera or the Internet?

Of course he is, but all major Islamic clerics and organizations have rebuffed and condemned the nonsense that he's preaching in his attempt to legitimize civilian casualties because of a perceived Western onslaught on the Muslim world. Bin Laden's global militant anarchist movement is a fringe element driven by a psychological state that appeals to the disenfranchised within a society, to overturn its social order. Sound familiar?

According to Pew research polls, the number of Americans who believe that Islam is more likely to encourage violence has doubled since 9-11 to 46 percent. Demonizing Islam, the Prophet Muhammad or the Quran – or saying Islam is the cause of the violence we suffer from today – is counterproductive to our efforts to win hearts overseas, lessen the potential for a hate-crime backlash and, most important, not marginalize our own Western Muslim youth.

Muslims don't want special treatment, but if you can't substitute Jew or Christian for Muslim and get away with it socially, then it shouldn't be said. The same goes for Islam being substituted by

Christianity or Judaism. Islam is a noun referring to a religion equal to Christianity and Judaism. Muslim is a noun referring to an individual who practices Islam and is equal to a Christian or Jew. Identifying a terrorist by religion seems logical when appropriate. For example, a terrorist can be Muslim, Christian or Jewish.

However, slapping the term Islamic on a terrorist if he claims to be fighting under the banner of Islam means you have empowered the terrorist to the level of spokesman for the religion of Islam and attributed his actions to the religion of Islam.

And after we raise a Muslim terrorist to the level of spokesman for Islam by publicizing his work as "Islamic or Islamist terrorism," coming back to blame the 2 percent of Americans who practice the Muslim faith for not speaking louder than the media megaphone and platform given to the terrorist is an unfair and absurd proposition.

Though only 30 years old now, I don't foresee the day in my lifetime when "moderate/mainstream" Muslims will have a media platform that's higher than the American media combined (newspaper, TV, Internet and radio).

If we just report accurately and stop empowering the terrorist and presenting him as a spokesman for a religion, more people would hear the moderate and mainstream Muslim voice.

He's a terrorist! He's usually a male. He has a cultural, ethnic and national identity; he doesn't need another promotion to "Spokesman for a Faith." We're only legitimizing our enemy, insulting the faith's practitioners and disenfranchising our own Western Muslim youth; so how is that productive to our aims?

Mohamed Elibiary is president and CEO of the Plano-based Freedom and Justice Foundation. His e-mail address is me@freeandjust.org.

Triumph Over Terror (TOT) Interfaith Statement:

Since September 11th 2001 and before, our nation has been under attack by a global network of terrorists who murdered thousands of our fellow American citizens in New York, Washington DC, Pennsylvania and elsewhere. This terrorist network attempts to legitimize its murderous behavior by claiming to be performing it under the auspices and authority of Islam, the religion for 1/5th of humanity as well as millions of our fellow American citizens. These perpetrators have misrepresented their claimed faith by asserting that their actions honor God and have falsely maintained that the Quran justifies these killings as acts of pure devotion. These distortions and fabrications have been correctly labeled as the "hijacking" of a faith by a misguided few.

Two questions are essential to our national understanding and national interests: 1. How do we correctly communicate about the issue of terrorists claiming religious authority without implying that all followers of Islam share this flawed interpretation? 2. How do we communicate accurate

11

information about religious belief and not unintentionally give the terrorists the very religious authority they claim?

1. How do we communicate correctly about the issue of terrorists claiming religious authority without implying that all followers of Islam share this flawed interpretation? First it is useful to understand the differences between the terms "***Islam***" and "***Muslim.***" "Islam" is a noun referring to a complete faith tradition similar to the terms "Christianity" and "Judaism." "Muslim" is a noun referring to an individual who practices Islam, and in common use, is similar to the terms "Christian" and "Jew." For example, a terrorist can be Muslim, Christian, Jewish or a practitioner of any or no faith. The root for the word Christian or Jew is derived from the religion that they practice, Christianity or Judaism respectively. However, for Muslims, practicing the religion of Islam, there is a difference in terminology – "mu" refers to the practitioner + "Islam" = "Muslim." In this way "Islamic" and "Muslim" are not equivalent terms and therefore cannot be used interchangeably. "Islamic" refers to the very nature of the religion and carries the connotation of a mandated observance for all who practice Islam irrespective and independent of their degree of success in doing so. "Muslim" when used as a modifier (adjective, not a noun), like "Christian" and "Jewish," implies the actions are the result of the understanding and interpretation of the practitioner. The use of the term "Islam" then implies that the religion of Islam is responsible for the terrorism; "Muslim" clearly indicates the claimed faith of the perpetrator, but does not necessarily imply the agreement or support of all the faithful.

Many times in our public discourse the term used to describe a fanatical religious terrorist is "Islamist." In current usage, this term is intended to narrow the category to mean "a subset of those who practice the faith of Islam." Unfortunately, the use of "Islamist" (because it uses the root word ***Islam*** and not ***Muslim***) refers to all the faith's practitioners instead of a subcategory thereof.

2. How do we communicate accurate information about religious belief and not unintentionally give the terrorists the very religious authority they claim?
Slapping the term "Islamic" or "Islamist" on a terrorist if he claims to be fighting under the banner of Islam legitimizes his actions as derived from the religion of Islam, its theology in other words. This tactical misstep elevates the terrorist to the level of "a spokesman" within the religious spectrum of Islam, conferring upon him an undeserved religious authority. This is counter-productive to America's National Security interest by creating a much broader and more unified front of opposition against us in the Muslim World than necessary. This alienation of Muslims from our mutual struggle against violent extremism thrusts the terrorist into the role of the "faith's defender" against the perceived "War on Islam."

By unintentionally granting the Muslim terrorist a religious platform that carries the weight of total religious authority (Islam), rather than the lesser authority of a single interpreter of the religion (Muslim), the religion of Islam is essentially hijacked in public discourse and taken in an undesirable direction – providing support to the terrorists claim that the US is waging a "War on Islam." The use of phrases like "Islamic terrorist" implies that the "terrorist" is a product of

12

"Islam" and creates the unintended consequence of fear in the US populace of anything associated with or connected to the term "Islam" or "Islamic." American Muslims are left to bear the brunt of the consequences for this collective fear and this small minority (2% of the US population) cannot overcome this mindset without the support of other Americans.

As our country struggles to protect itself from the violence perpetrated by Al-Qaeda's 'global militant anarchist movement,' we must remember to not give up our pluralistic American values in the process. American Muslims were also victims of 9/11. They voluntarily serve in our Armed Forces along with their fellow soldiers to protect our country from those who would do our nation harm and work diligently to help improve our national image abroad.

Muslims aren't seeking special treatment, but if one can't substitute the word "Jew" or "Christian" for "Muslim" and the result be socially acceptable discourse, then it shouldn't be tolerated for Muslims. The same applies for the word "Islam" being substituted by "Christianity" or "Judaism." In our history we have struggled to weed out bigotry whether based on race against African-Americans or religion against Jewish Americans via anti-Semitism.

We call upon our fellow Americans to help promote "Civility in our Public Discourse" by ceasing to use the term "Islamic" or "Islamist" when describing "Terrorism." The impact of this action will not only disarm the terrorists of their propaganda claming our struggle to defend America is really a "War on Islam", but it will also eradicate the use of bigoted language such as "Islamofascists" and others from our Public Discourse.

In our global struggle against this latest wave of "Violent Extremism," the terrorist should be made accountable for his own actions and not be able to cloak himself in the protection of religious authority. He's a terrorist and should be called such! He has a cultural, ethnic, national and political identity; he doesn't deserve to be elevated to the position of "Spokesman for a Faith."

Let us come together as Americans and treat one another in a more civil manner in our public discourse by renouncing the use of such counter-productive terms to our mutual national interest. As our policy makers have repeatedly told us, the Global War on Terror can be won only by winning over the hearts and minds of Muslims around the globe. The use of language that alienates those we aim to win over will only make success harder to achieve and in the end that only really helps the terrorists.

Inaugural Signatories: (Organizational affiliations are for identification purposes only.)
Rev. Dr. George Bithos – Executive Director of the Texas Conference of Churches (TCC)
Suzii Paynter – Executive Director of the BGCT's Christian Life Commission (CLC)
Mohamed Elibiary – President & CEO of the Freedom and Justice Foundation (F&J)

About the TCC: "The ***Texas Conference of Churches*** is an ecumenical community of communions: Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic, constituted February 25, 1969 in

Austin, Texas. Present membership of the TCC is comprised of 52 ecclesiastical units (judicatories) of thirteen communions. Their memberships are in excess of 9.5 million Texas Christians." For more information, visit: http://www.txconfchurches.org/

About the CLC: "Since 1950, the commission has served as the ethics and public policy arm of the *Baptist General Convention of Texas*, an organization that represents more than 5,600 congregations and 2.3 million Baptists throughout the state. The commission's goal … is to speak to — not for — Baptist churches and individuals on issues ranging from gambling and education to race relations and religious liberty." For more information, visit: http://www.bgct.org/

About the TIC: "The *Texas Islamic Council* is a congregational membership body of Islamic Centers (Mosques) in Texas coordinated by the Freedom and Justice Foundation (F&J); an independent, membership funded, educational nonprofit started in 2002 to build up a state level representative body for Texas Muslims. The current Texas Islamic Council congregational membership grants it a representative strength of more than 75,000 Texas Muslims." For more information, visit: http://www.freeandjust.org/

III.   Best responses to repeated assertions against Islam and the topic of revivalist/reform movements and the political situation in Muslim countries.

Ground Rules:
- Remember that you speak for yourself, your organization speaks of its own members and there's no such thing as an official community spokesman for all unless the media desires to manufacture one.
- Americans are a simple people but not necessarily a naive people, they can read right through untrustworthiness and BS.
- The person who speaks on these topics needs to have a strong understanding of sociology, psychology and most importantly "communications". Understand "messaging" techniques like the 27-9-3 for example.
- Understand the medium, don't give an in depth and nuanced answer when a sound bite is required.
- Americans are interested in these topics because 9/11 made it evidently clear that it has a direct security impact on their lives. Unfortunately many Muslims run away from these topics or try to pull a switch on the customer by speaking about theological Islam when the customer is specifically asking for an explanation of why the Muslim world is so socio-politically broken. Being aggressively bellicose in ones response (being on offence) is the worst thing a Muslim can do on this issue.
- Always remain calm and remember that while you feel the pressure of being inside the drama, outsiders don't necessarily see the unfolding drama.

- For liberal audiences personalizing the response works well to gain the "sympathy vote", but for independent and conservative audiences they want to see a clear line of demarcation between the good guys and the bad guys.
- Remember to state facts that help you set-up the audiences' questions in clearly demarcated logical pathways. For example:
  - Islam and Muslims aren't synonyms. Any Muslim can have a "Muslim's opinion" but not everyone has the credentials to have an "Islamic opinion" (fatwa for example). Similar to American law, getting a degree grants one more credibility.
  - Showcase the diversity of Muslims, not of Islam, by stating that only about ¼ of Muslims globally and inside America are Arab.
  - Explain that a fundamentalist is not necessarily violent, just literalist in his interpretations. Most will check themselves for thinking that Islam was the problem automatically.
- When speaking of different groups of Muslims or various sects of Islam, use "academic" and "neutral" description terms so your credibility isn't shot down by another Muslim or an audience member seeing you as biased. For example:
  - Instead of using terms such as "radical", "extremist" or "moderate" explain various groups via where their ideology falls (ex. Salafis are origionalists because they like to return to the original texts and followers).
  - "The Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, Jordan, Tunis, etc. is a social movement for religious revival that seeks to Islamicize the society through culture changing Dawah and that includes the political system, sound familiar? Yup you're right they are the Muslim world's version of the Evangelical Christian Coalition/Moral Majority movement."
  - "We (never use you) in America largely sat out the self-determination struggles of the 19th and 20th Centuries in the developing world and therefore sometimes overlook how foreign occupations are viewed by locals. Every religion has a section on "liberation theology" that deals with how and when violence may be used to free one's land from an occupation and Islam is no different. Now have some groups taken that a bit far in their attempt to exact a heavy price on the occupier by targeting civilians, yes you bet!"
  - "We must be cognizant of the fact that each ideology whether social or religious has its own methodology on how to reform and adapt to its changing environment. We must always resist the temptation to force one group such as Islamists to reform by adopting "Liberalism" for example. That would be denying them their self-determination to structure their societies according to their public will. What we should make sure of is that public will isn't usurped, so upholding the rule of law, and that human rights are respected. We should remember that them ruling their countries with Shariah law doesn't mean them coming to our country and using our planes to destroy our buildings."
  - "It is in our national interest to democratize the Muslim world so that representative non-autocratic governments may develop leading to prosperous and freer societies. Now we have two options, we can force them to be secular and

liberal democracies like ours but then we'd be electorally disenfranchising up to 40% of their citizens who wish to see some form of an Islamic government. Or option B can be to following the Truman post WW2 option of allowing the Socialists to participate in Western European elections so long as they accepted the rule of law and democratic rules of fair play. This marginalized the Communists by themselves and as you can see from history, not one single Western European democracy went Communist during the Cold War."

- o Questions about Shariah Law should be answered with a very brief explanation that though many Muslims mistake it too, there's a difference between Shariah, Fiqh and Hudood. Explaining to them that Islam didn't invent the Westminster Parliamentarian method of creating legislation but instead used the judicial branch through the issuance of Fiqh fatwas so legislation is an ever modernizing process for the educated helps.

- Remember that you are an American Muslim and not anything else. If you have any personal allegiance to any oversees (non-American) movements then you need to disengage yourself for such a presentation and find another speaker to represent your Muslim community. Americans are looking to speak to another American not an Ikhwani from Egypt cheerleading for the Ikhwan or any other group like that, otherwise be honest and advertise whom you'd be speaking on behalf of.

- And remember that if you want to seem mainstream on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then they must see that you're trying to get the Palestinians a nation state along the '67 borders, not state outright that Israel should be cancelled as a nation state. Articulated properly the Arab League's Peace initiative is widely supported.

*** This is a 3 Part serious of presentation outlines delivered at the 4th Annual Assembly of Muslim Jurists in America (AMJA) Imam training conference held jointly with the North America Imams Federation (NAIF) in Sacramento, CA on May 5, 2007 to May 7, 2007. For more information on any of these presentations, please contact:

Mohamed Elibiary
President & CEO
The Freedom and Justice Foundation (F&J)
ME@FreeAndJust.Org
Cell: 214-403-2652