

## **Muslims of Europe Charter**

Since early 2000, the Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe (FIOE) debated the establishment of a charter for the Muslims of Europe, setting out the general principles for better understanding of Islam, and the bases for the integration of Muslims in society, in the context of citizenship.

The FIOE formed a committee to prepare the charter, which was discussed at the organisations leadership level. The charter was then presented to many European Islamic bodies at a seminar attended by their representatives and held in Brussels in January 2002. The project was then disseminated widely, to include the greatest possible number of Muslim organisations in order to add their comments and suggestions.

After amendments were approved, and duly incorporated, the final version of the charter was ready. It was signed by Muslim organisations from 28 European states; these are listed in the accompanying document.

Thereafter, signature of the charter will remain open to all organisations that decide to adopt it.

### **Introduction to the Charter:**

Despite their diversity, Muslims of Europe share common values and principles. In order to portray this to European society they need to clearly express their religious convictions and the nature of their presence in Europe.

This charter aims to define a number of principles in accordance with the common understanding of Islam within the European context and to set thenceforth the foundations of greater positive interaction with society.

The rationale for such a charter includes:

- The contribution of Islam to modern Europe as well as the rooted Islamic presence as represented by Muslims in many of the Eastern European states. Likewise, the establishment of Muslim communities in several Western European countries has witnessed a shift from a transitory presence of foreign migrants to a more permanent presence.
- The Muslim presence in Europe requires a framework of citizenship based on justice, equality of rights, with respect for difference, and the recognition of Muslims as a European religious community.

- In line with the expansion and development of the European Union, there is a need for greater co-operation among Muslims of Europe.
- The need to enhance the values of mutual understanding, working for peace and the welfare of society, moderation and inter-cultural dialogue, removed from all inclinations of extremism and exclusion.
- The importance of Islam in the world and its spiritual, human and civilisational potential requires a rapprochement with the West, and Europe in particular, in order to ensure justice and peace in the world.

These considerations have led European Muslim organisations to formulate this charter in the hope of enhancing the role of Muslims in benefiting European society and to help it build bridges with the rest of the Muslim world.

## **Articles of the Charter**

### **Section one: on the understanding of Islam:**

1. Our understanding of Islam is based on immutable, basic principles that are derived from the authentic sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (Sunnah), within the framework of Muslim scholarly consensus and with consideration for the time factor as well as the specifics of the European reality.
2. The true spirit of Islam is based on moderation as extended from the Universal Objectives (Maqasid) of this religion. This moderation avoids both laxity and excessiveness and reconciles reason and divine guidance, taking into consideration the material and spiritual needs of man, with a balanced outlook on life which brings together the reality of the next life with constructive work in this world.
3. In its principles, rulings and values, Islam can be structured around the following three areas: the creed as expressed in the six pillars of faith - Belief in God, the Angels, the revealed books, the messengers, the Hereafter and Divine Decree; the Shari'ah as expressed in acts of Worship and human interaction; and the Ethical code which lays down the foundations for living a good life. These three interconnected areas are complementary and aim to fulfil the Interests (Maslaha) of humanity and avert harm from it.
4. The emphasis on the human dimension, legislative flexibility and respect for diversity and natural differences among human beings are general characteristics of Islam.

5. Islam honours human beings. This honour embraces all the children of Adam, both male and female, without discrimination. By virtue of this honour, human beings are to be protected from anything that is an affront to their dignity, is harmful to their mental faculties, is damaging to their health or which abuses their rights by exploiting their vulnerabilities.
6. Islam gives particular emphasis to the social dimension and calls for compassion, mutual support, co-operation and brotherhood. These values apply particularly to the rights of parents, relatives and neighbours but also to the poor, the needy, the sick, the elderly and others, regardless of their race or creed.
7. Islam calls for equality between man and woman within the framework of human dignity and mutual respect and views that a balanced life is one in which the relationship between man and woman is harmonious and complementary. It unequivocally rejects all notions or actions that undermine women or deprive them of their legitimate rights, regardless of certain customs and habits of some Muslims. Islam rather confirms women's indispensable role in society and strongly opposes the exploitation of women and their treatment as mere objects of desire.
8. Islam considers that a family based on the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman is the natural and necessary environment for the raising of future generations. The family is an indispensable condition for the happiness of the individual and stability of society. Thus, Islam emphasises the significance of taking all measures in order to reinforce the family and protect it from all things that will weaken or marginalise its role.
9. Islam respects human rights and calls for equality among all human beings; it rejects all forms of racial discrimination and calls for liberty. It condemns compulsion in religion and allows the individual freedom of conscience. However, Islam encourages that freedom should be exercised in accordance with moral values, such that it does not infringe upon the rights of others.
10. Islam calls for mutual acquaintance, dialogue and co-operation among people and nations so as to enhance stability and guarantee peace in the world. The term Jihad that occurs in Islamic texts means to exert all efforts towards good, starting from reforming oneself to spreading truth and justice between people. Jihad in its understanding as warfare is regarded as one of the means available to any sovereign state when it needs to defend itself against aggression. The teachings of Islam, in this respect, are in line with international law. Based on such an understanding of Jihad, Islam rejects violence and terrorism, supports just causes and affirms the right of all people to defend themselves by legitimate means.
11. Islam enjoins Muslims to be honest and to respect their pledges; forbidding treason and treachery. It also commands them to pursue excellence in dealings with other people, as well as with the rest of creation.

12. Given the virtues of consultation (Shura) and with consideration to human experience in the political, legislative and constitutional realms, Islam affirms the principles of democracy based on pluralism, freedom to choose one's political institutions and peaceful alternation of power.
13. Islam urges human beings to use nature in a responsible manner. This requires the preservation of the environment and its protection from all causes of pollution and harm as well as from anything that may destroy the delicate balance of nature. Likewise, it requires the protection of natural resources and forbids cruelty to animals, over consumption and wastage of wealth.

## **Section two: the Muslim Presence in Society:**

### **The principles of interaction among Muslims:**

14. Despite their ethnic and cultural diversity and their affiliations to various schools of Islamic law and thought, Muslims of Europe constitute one religious entity within the framework of Islamic principles, united by fraternity. They are also tied with each other, in each European country, by their belonging to the same national entity. Any discrimination arising between them based on ethnic origin is against the value of Islam which emphasises unity.
15. Considering the basic principles of their religion and their common interests, Muslims of Europe are urged to come together, co-operate and co-ordinate the efforts of their different institutions and organisations. This should not fail to recognise the natural diversity that exists among them, within the framework of Islam as generally agreed by scholarly consensus.
16. In addition to their belonging to the country in which they reside and their commitment to the demands of citizenship, Muslims of Europe retain their links with fellow Muslims by virtue of the normal relationship which exists between members of the same community.

### **On Citizenship:**

17. Muslims of Europe respect the laws of the land and the authorities that uphold them. This should not prevent them from individually or collectively defending their rights and expressing their opinions based on their specific concerns as a religious community or on any general matter that concerns them as citizens. Whenever there is a conflict with regard to certain laws and matters that are specific to religion, the relevant authorities should be approached in order to arrive at suitable and viable solutions.

18. Muslims of Europe adhere to the principle of neutrality of the state regarding religious affairs. This means dealing fairly with all religions and allows those who hold religious values to express their beliefs and practise the rites of their religion either as individuals or groups, in conformity with European and international human rights charters and treaties. Muslims have, therefore, the right, as religious communities, to establish mosques, religious, educational and welfare institutions, to practise their religion in day-to-day affairs such as diet, clothing and other needs.
19. As European citizens, Muslims of Europe consider it their duty to work for the common good of society. Their endeavour for the common good is as important as defending their rights. Finally, an authentic understanding of Islam requires of Muslims to be active and productive citizens who are useful to society.
20. Muslims of Europe are urged to integrate positively in their respective societies, on the basis of a harmonious balance between preservation of Muslim identity and the duties of citizenship. Any form of integration that fails to recognise the right of Muslims to preserve their Islamic personality and the right to perform their religious obligations does not serve the interests of Muslims nor the European societies to which they belong.
21. Muslims of Europe are encouraged to participate in the political process as active citizens. Real citizenship includes political engagement, from casting one's vote to taking part in political institutions. This will be facilitated if these institutions open up to all members and sections of society, an opening up which takes into account competence and ideas.
22. Muslims of Europe emphasise their respect for pluralism and the religious and philosophical diversity of the multicultural societies they live in. They believe that Islam affirms the diversity and differences that exists between people and is not discomforted by this multicultural reality. Rather, Islam calls for members of society to appreciate and enrich one another through their differences.

### **Islam's Contribution to Europe:**

23. Through its universal and humane principles, Islam adheres to the rapprochement of all people who respect the rights of others and their particularities, who abide by the rules of fairness among people in matters of dealings and co-operation. Starting from these principles, Muslims of Europe consider it their duty to participate in strengthening relations between Europe and the Muslim World. This requires the removal of all the prejudices and negative images which stand between Islam and the West in order to build bonds of rapprochement between people and to establish bridges of fruitful exchanges among different civilizations.

24. Given its culturally rich heritage and emphasis on humanity, Islam, through its presence in Europe, can participate in enhancing important values in contemporary society such as justice, freedom, fraternity, equality and solidarity. Islam gives primacy to moral considerations as well as to scientific, technical and economic progress. This participation can be beneficial and enriching for the whole of society.
25. The Muslim presence in Europe represents a key element in establishing better communication and co-existence between the different religions and beliefs by encouraging discussion between different faiths and ideologies. This will no doubt bolster the path towards global peace.
26. Through their religious and cultural legacy as well as their presence in many European states, Muslims of Europe represent an enhancing element to the efforts of strengthening the European Union. With its diverse religious and cultural make up, Europe can act as an important civilisational signpost with a key role in maintaining international stability between influential world powers.

**“O Mankind, indeed we created you from a male and female and have made you different nations and tribes so that you may get to know one another.” [Qur’an; Chapter 49: Verse 13]**