



## Religious Pluralism in the Palestinian Territories

### Introduction

There are more than one and a half billion Muslims practicing Islam worldwide, eighteen percent of which are Arabs. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, with the number of Arab and non-Arab practitioners expected to rise. Throughout the centuries, depending on the political and religious tenor of the times, the different shades of Islam have developed their own respective teachings which cover the spectrum from radical to moderate and from liberal to ultra conservative fundamentalist Islam. In light of the current geo-political situation, the global focus has been on Muslims who practice an extreme, fundamentalist brand of Islam, and who inflict acts of terrorism on society.

In an effort to counteract this violent trend, WASATIA, or the middle way movement, was established in January, 2007 to promote moderate culture within the Palestinian society. It operates in Palestine to build bridges between Muslims, Jews, and Christians as a way to mitigate the growing chasm between religious groups, and to separate perception from reality of what is Islam. WASATIA, or the middle ground, is the true practice of Islam as prescribed in the Quran, and teaching WASATIA to Palestinians is a way to promote understanding and tolerance of the "other," to mitigate hostilities between religious groups and communities, and to reduce the number of extremists who practice of Islam.

### Goal of WASATIA

The goal of teaching WASATIA is to educate as many practitioners and non-practitioners as is possible in Palestine to the true teachings of Islam as part of a group of Abrahamic religions

which includes Judaism and Christianity. Understanding the true tenets of the faith will have the effect of reducing the level of violence and abuse within the Muslim family unit, will generate less animosity and outward aggression against the "other," resulting in increased religious tolerance, and will narrow the chasm of the religious divide. As the "other" will not be feared, or viewed as the enemy, the stereotype of "all Palestinians are terrorists" will disappear.

As WASATIA takes hold, the effects should be visible especially at the community level with more tolerance and less extremism and tension and more interaction and cooperation within the Islamic community and between the various religious groups. There will be more cooperation on social and economic activities that benefit the entire community, as opposed to small groups acting in their own self-interest to the detriment of the collective good and strength of the community.

### **Mini-Grant Project Activities**

WASATIA designed three workshop programs. The facilitators were young specialists in the field. The training program was launched in Ramallah and Abu Dis.

There were two workshops for men on Religious Pluralism in Palestine. This program, offered to outstanding young leaders from Palestinian universities and NGOs, explored religious tolerance, moderation, voluntarism, leadership, communications, and gender equality with a special focus on religious pluralism and interfaith moderation through dialogue.

A similar workshop for marginalized Muslim young women was conducted in Ramallah on Wednesday, October 19, 2011.

#### **Selection of participants:**

The participants were selected by WASATIA from different Palestinian universities and NGOs.

#### **Objectives:**

- To advance comprehension of justice, balance, voluntarism, and religious moderation as core values in the Palestinian society;
- To deepen knowledge of the key factors and principles in Palestinian society that have created the context for religious pluralism;

- To expand understanding of different religious traditions in Palestine,
- To foster appreciation for the strengths and complexities of a religiously pluralist society;
- To identify and guide learning of the principles, values, and practices of interfaith dialogue;
- To develop participants' capacity for leadership in their society.

**Impact:**

WASATIA managed to achieve the following goals by grass roots "bottoms-up" quality of life enhancement:

- Add to knowledge and understanding of Islam and Judaism with a focus on the concept of moderation in both faiths
- Correct erroneous / misinterpretations of both Islam and Judaism
- Reduce level of religious conflict among adolescent target groups
- Improve inter-community relations
- Correct the misconception that Muslims must clash with Jews and Christians as part of an Islamic calling.

**The Project Director: Mohammed Dajani Daoudi**



Professor Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi  
WASATIA Founding Director  
Jerusalem

[Read an interview](#) with Mohammed by Zeina Mounir Barakat where he talks about what the Holocaust means to him as a Palestinian.

To learn more about Mohammed go to [www.bigdreamsmallhope.com](http://www.bigdreamsmallhope.com) or email: [mohddajani@gmail.com](mailto:mohddajani@gmail.com)

## WORKSHOPS

**Workshop Topic: WASATIA, Moderation, and Religious Tolerance**

**Workshop Facilitator: Zeina Mounir Barakat**

**Place: Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Al-Bireh, Palestine Date: Friday, September 23, 2011 from 9:00 am - 4:00pm**

**Topic: "Interfaith Dialogue and Moderation."**

**Participants: 15 participants**



**Facilitator: Zeina Barakat**



**Coordinator: Shada**



**Workshop Topic: WASATIA, Moderation, and Religious Tolerance**

**Workshop Facilitator: Zeina Mounir Barakat**

**Workshop Coordinator: Ahmed Nazzal**

**Place: Abu Dis, Al-Quds University, Palestine**

**Date: Sunday September 25, 2011.**

**Participants: 25 Palestinian participants (Muslims and Christians) and 30 American Students (Jews and Christians)**

Both groups were asked to introduce themselves and then exchange questions and answers about the faith of each other with a facilitator conducting the event. At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to evaluate the event and to state what they learnt and how the activity enlightened them about the faith of the other.



**Coordinator: Ahmed Nazzal**