

**Presentation on
Building a Common Life
With Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers¹**

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In this paper, we may focus on ten points:

First: The phenomena of migration and asylum are recurrent in human history, and they occur for various political, economic, social and security reasons. In today's world, the scale of the asylum phenomenon has been on the increase, as a result of revolutions, wars and internal conflicts, as well as poverty, unemployment and drought. In addition, the huge disparity in income rates between countries, may lead many to migrate in search of better life opportunities.

Second: Most beliefs and ideologies agree upon a set of values and human standards such as justice, equality, compassion and cultural co-existence, which form the basis for mutual work between different countries and nations to uphold these values and interact according to them.

Third: The teachings of the Islamic religion largely focus on human values and are not related to one's sex, colour, nationality, sect, place or time. Allah Almighty sent his messenger Muhammad—peace be upon him—“*And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds*”³; all people deserve justice whatever the difference with them; “*and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just.*”⁴ People are as equal as the teeth of a comb; difference in beliefs, races, colours and nationalities should be a means of association, integration and cooperation, “*and made you peoples and tribes that*

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³ *Surat al-Anbiya* (The Prophets): 107, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=21&verse=107>

⁴ *Surat al-Mai'dah* (The Table spread with Food): 8, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=5&verse=8>

*you may know one another*⁵; No one should be coerced into a different religion or idea “*There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion.*”⁶ People as humans have a great value in the Islamic understanding; even taking care of animals and preserving their lives have their place and appreciation. In the Hadith Sahih (authentic narration by Prophet Muhammad) “A prostitute saw a dog moving around a well on a hot day and hanging out its tongue because of thirst. She drew water for it in her shoe and she was pardoned (for this act of hers),”⁷ while “A woman got into Hell-Fire because of a cat whom she had tied, and thus it could not eat, and she did not let it free so that it could devour the insects of the earth, until it died.”⁸

Fourth: Islam offers an advanced human rights system in comparison to contemporary international law, as it necessitates the provision of protection and care to those who need them. This includes immigrants and refugees, even if they adopt a different religion; “*And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection.*”⁹ Refugee rights include appreciation, provision of needs, family reunion, preservation of property and money, non-discrimination, non-repatriation against their wish or in case of danger, and inclusion of all nationalities, races and religions. Even the option of Muslim individuals giving shelter/refuge should be allowed, with the Muslim state’s commitment to respect their decision. The ethics of Islam encourages the provision of assistance to travellers and giving aid to those in need, as well as philanthropy, generosity and good neighbourliness.¹⁰

Fifth: In practice, the Islamic civilization has succeeded to a great extent in the application of human values and humanitarian standards, accommodating different nationalities under one umbrella, such as Arabs, Persians, Turks,

⁵ *Surat al-Hujurat* (The Dwellings): 13, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=49&verse=13>

⁶ *Surat al-Baqarah* (The Cow): 256, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=2&verse=256>

⁷ Sahih Muslim Book 026, Hadith Number 5578, <http://bit.ly/2hYMagn>

⁸ Sahih Muslim Book 032, Hadith Number 6348, <http://bit.ly/2gxTxLf>

⁹ *Surat Tawbah* (Repentance): 6, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=9&verse=6>

¹⁰ Mohammad al-Murqi, “Rules of Refuge in Islamic Jurisprudence and International Law,” Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1998.

See also ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Sa‘udi, “The Rights of Refugees Between Shariah and the Law: Comparative Analytical Study,” Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, Riyadh, 2007, <http://elibrary.medi.u.edu.my/books/MAL05164.pdf>

Kurds, Amazighen, Blacks and Indians...; with different religions coexisting under its roof such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism... with their respective adherents being active members in society and contributors to the construction of this civilization. Leadership was in the hands of men and ruling families of different race.... In fact, a whole country had a central role in Islamic history, with its rulers being the Mamluks (who were originally slaves of Caucasian and Central Asian origins) in Egypt, Bilad al-Sham and the Hijaz. The Islamic civilization formed a system of protection providing a safe haven to displaced people fleeing from different oppressive environments, as was the case when the Ottoman state, for example, gave refuge to the Jews fleeing persecution in Andalusia (Spain and Portugal).

Sixth: The immigration problem has worsened in recent years. According to the UN Refugee Agency, the total number of refugees all over the world has reached 16.5 million in mid-2016.¹¹

Ian Goldin, the Director, Oxford Martin School, argued that around the world, there are an estimated 230 million migrants, making up about 3% of the global population. This share has not changed much in the past 100 years. But, as the world's population has quadrupled, so too has the number of migrants. He added that since the early 1900s, the number of countries has increased from 50 to over 200. More borders mean more migrants. Of the global annual flow of around 15 million migrants, most fit into one of four categories: economic (6 million), student (4 million), family (2 million), and refugee/asylum (3 million). There are about 20 million officially recognized refugees worldwide, with 86% of them hosted by neighboring countries, up from 70% 10 years ago.¹²

The problem of the Palestinian refugees stands out as the oldest ongoing issue in modern history (since 1948), marking the largest proportion of refugees to a particular population. Around 68% of Palestinians are refugees, while half of the Palestinian population lives outside historic Palestine, and the rest are refugees who were expelled from occupied Palestine in 1948 and forced to settle

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Mid-Year Trends 2016," 17/2/2017, [http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/58aa8f247/mid-year-trends-june-2016.html?query=mid year trend 2016](http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/58aa8f247/mid-year-trends-june-2016.html?query=mid%20year%20trend%202016)

¹² See Ian Goldin, How immigration has changed the world – for the better, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/how-immigration-has-changed-the-world-for-the-better/>

in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. More than 120 United Nations resolutions calling for Palestinians' right to return to their homes have failed to oblige "Israel" to implement those resolutions.¹³

Today, the problem of the Syrian refugees is clear, as about 12 million Syrians have been forced to leave their homes, seven million of them internally displaced and five million going abroad. There are about 2.7 million Afghan refugees living outside their country, some 1.1 million Somali refugees, and more than half a million refugees from Sudan and South Sudan. This indicates that Muslim countries are the most affected by the refugee's problem.¹⁴

Seventh: Turkey tops the refugee host countries with around 3 million refugees, followed by Pakistan with about 1.6 million, then Lebanon and Iran with around one million each. Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Uganda and Germany rank third with around 0.5–0.7 million each.¹⁵ This means that third world countries bear the brunt of hosting refugees, despite their limited resources. This is in contrast to what the Western propaganda is trying to portray, showing the waves of incoming refugees and their ensuing fears, despite the fact that these migrants do not really affect their population structure, rather, these countries benefit economically, to a large extent, from the cheap young labour provided by the refugees.

Eighth: Positive impact of immigration: Some large and developed countries rose on the shoulders of immigrants and refugees, who established and developed new communities (though on the expenses of original people) such as the United States, Canada, Australia, among others.

Nicole Kidder, in her article on positive effects of immigration, explained that "The Hamilton Project", (which is an economic research group and think tank within the Brookings Institution, launched in 2006) point to numerous benefits of immigration for both the destination country and those migrating. Positive arguments for global mobility include increased workforce productivity, a boost to economies, encouragement of innovation, promotion of tolerance and improved quality of life. It concluded that immigrants complement rather than

¹³ For more information, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2016), pp. 345–358.

¹⁴ See UNHCR, "Mid-Year Trends 2016," 17/2/2017.

¹⁵ Ibid.

compete with the native workforce to support the economy and increase productivity.¹⁶

According to the Hamilton Project, most Western countries, such as Australia and Canada, have implemented policies that heavily favor economic and education factors when approving immigrants, believing this will enhance the national economy. Well-educated immigrants who possess specialized skills increase the talent pool, infusing a fresh perspective into their industries. The Hamilton Project notes that U.S. immigrants are 30 percent more likely to start a new business and three times more likely to file patents than American-born citizens. Additionally, an analysis from the Partnership for a New American Economy found that 41 percent of the 2010 Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. were launched by immigrants or their children.¹⁷

In the United States, immigrants have been founders of companies such as Google, Intel, PayPal, eBay, and Yahoo! In fact, skilled immigrants account for over half of Silicon Valley start-ups and over half of patents, even though they make up less than 15% of the population. It is amazing that research on the net fiscal impact of immigration shows that immigrants contribute significantly more in taxes than the benefits and services they receive in return. The World Bank mentioned that increasing immigration by a margin equal to 3% of the workforce in developed countries would generate global economic gains of \$356 billion.¹⁸

Furthermore, as fertility is decreasing to below replacement levels in several western countries; experts are predicting rapidly rising dependency ratios and a decline in the workforce.¹⁹ In this case, immigrants will play a vital role in providing labour and maintaining the progress of the societies.

As a positive example of refugee's contributions to the development of Arab and Muslim countries, it is worth noting that the Palestinians, who took refuge in Lebanon after the 1948 war, carried around £150 million, which is equivalent these days to \$15 billion according to some estimates. They also contributed to the Lebanese economic growth, at a time when the Zionists took control of the

¹⁶ Nicole Kidder, "Positive Effects of Immigration,"
<http://classroom.synonym.com/positive-effects-of-immigration-12078592.html>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ian Goldin, op. cit.

¹⁹ See Ibid.

port of Haifa and Lod airport, and the focus shifted to the port of Beirut and its airport.²⁰

Many Palestinians played a major role in the prosperity of Lebanon such as Yusuf Beidas, founder of Intra Bank, Middle East Airlines and Baalbeck Studios; Hasib Sabbagh and Said Khoury, founders of Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC); Rifaat Nimer, founder of Arab Union Bank, and then Banque de Beyrouth pour le Commerce; Basim Faris and Badr Al-Fahoum, founders of Arabia Insurance Company; Zuheir Alami, founder of the company Khatib & Alami; Kamal Sha'ir, founder of Dar Al-Handasah; Raymond Audi, founder of Bank Audi; et al.²¹

The Palestinians contributed effectively to Kuwait's development and prosperity in all sectors, from government to private enterprises. Their role was not confined to marginal posts, as they were at the heart of the Kuwaiti revival. The Palestinians in Kuwait had a key role as competent and efficient cadres in government ministries and departments, and served as doctors, teachers, pharmacists, engineers, accountants, clerks, and so on. For example, 49% of teachers in public schools in 1965 were Palestinians; and even in 1975 they still represented a quarter of teachers.²² The Palestinians had a vital role in the local economy. Unlike other expatriates, most Palestinians spent their incomes in the local market and the local economy. Indeed, most of them lived with their families in Kuwait, spending most of their wages on them. Feeling they are settled in Kuwait, they linked their lives to the local economic cycle, benefiting Kuwaitis in most cases in the form of housing rents, purchases, and living expenses.²³

Ninth: Al-Zaytouna centre, as an academic research centre and a think tank, contributed several studies, strategic assessments, polls and seminars to a better understanding of refugees problems, especially Palestinians, during the period 2005–2017. One of the important examples was Polls conducted in highly

²⁰ See Saqr Abu Fakhr, Palestinian Labor Force and the Lebanese Economy: Integration and Not Competition, in *Assafir* newspaper, 20/1/2006.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² For more information about Palestinians in Kuwait and abroad, see Helena Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2003).

²³ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, "Political Analysis: Palestinians in Kuwait: A Quarter Century After the Iraqi Invasion," site of al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, Beirut, 8/9/2015, <https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2015/10/12/political-analysis-palestinians-in-kuwait-a-quarter-century-after-the-iraqi-invasion/>

academic standards in 2005 and 2006 studying the Palestinian community opinions in Lebanon. The results proved that the widely spread concerns and worries about naturalization (getting Lebanese citizenship) of Palestinians are wrong and baseless. The surveyed subjects were asked about their views on the acceptable solution for resolving the problem of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. 79.6% of the respondents accepted nothing but return to their original hometowns from which they and their families were expelled, 5.4% accepted returning to the territories occupied in 1967 (the WB and GS); while 6.3% accepted compensation and resettlement outside Palestine, but not in Lebanon, 4.9% accepted compensation and resettlement in Lebanon on condition that they enjoy all their civil rights, and 1.7% accepted compensation, resettlement in Lebanon and naturalization (getting Lebanese citizenship). Hence, only 6.6% of the surveyed Palestinians accepted resettlement in Lebanon, and 2.1% replied: "I do not know." However, returning to historical Palestine was the choice of 85% of the surveyed Palestinians. This poll obviously reveals that the insistence of the Palestinians to return to their hometowns or villages is not restricted to the Palestinian elites and activists but is rather a sweeping demand, notwithstanding the long and tremendous pressures to which the Palestinian peoples were subjected. Only a small sector has fallen into despair and frustration. Additionally, these results thoroughly indicate to the Lebanese authority that 98.3% of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon do not accept naturalization, although most of them were born in Lebanon and are not familiar with any other country.²⁴

There are legitimate concerns about large-scale migration, including the possibility of social fragmentation and sectarian conflict. However, the benefits of migration still much more than its negative aspects. Unfortunately, a number of Arab, Muslim and Western countries have strict rules with regard to receiving refugees, spreading a negative (and sometimes hostile) attitude towards refugees and portraying them as poor beggars, a burden on the community and a serious social and cultural danger..., while in fact there is a large number of refugees possessing diplomas, experience and skills, and they are capable of playing positive development roles in host countries.

²⁴ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh and Ziad al-Hasan, *The Political Views of The Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: As Reflected in May 2006* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2009).

Tenth: On the other hand, media, political and cultural tools must be used to activate the positive aspect of refugees, in terms of acquaintance and cultural coexistence, as well as participation in development and economic advancement.

It is essential that common human values regarding the treatment of refugees, taking care of them and taking positive advantage of their energy and experience be promoted, as long as they live honourably and peacefully and respect the laws of host countries.