

**STATEMENT ON RULES FOR A GLOBAL NEIGHBOURHOOD IN A  
MULTICULTURAL WORLD  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have inhabited this planet for a million years. There are six billion of us now. We live in a multicultural neighbourhood. Yet there is very little neighbourliness in our relations. Once in a while we do reach out to one another, for example when some natural calamity strikes. But most of the time we do not really care for one another. Indeed, in many parts of this global neighbourhood, death and destruction abound.

2. The human race is deeply divided. In a global order that favours the strong, the weak are vulnerable. Injustices and inequities abound. Huge disparities of wealth and power separate us. Negative feelings overwhelm positive sentiments. Distrust and suspicion prevail as hatred and prejudice grow. Both the rich and the poor live in fear and insecurity. Both the strong and the weak have resorted to violence and terror to find solutions to problems.

3. International law does exist to provide the rules for maintaining peace. But some states and groups of people violate the law. They do not respect the legitimate rights of others. They are guilty of aggression, invasion or occupation. They are not averse to using force. Innocent civilians get killed or maimed.

4. The weak can be disciplined through sanctions and other means. But when the powerful commit the same crimes, there is little that can be done. Some even behave as if they are above the law.

5. This distressing situation is most evident today in the relations between Israel and its supporters in the West on the one hand, and a lot of Muslims on the other. The roots of this conflict do not lie in culture or religion. They lie in politics and the projection of power.

6. Muslims are acutely sensitive to the fact that millions of their brethren have been dispossessed; their lands occupied; their resources usurped; and their dignity trampled. If we measure the amount of violence and count the number of lives lost in the centers of conflict, we will begin to understand why Muslim anger and anguish are now at their zenith. The application, by the powerful, of double standards have made things worse.

7. These statements I have just made are by no means the prejudiced view of a partisan Muslim. These views have been affirmed - in the United Nations Report of the High Level Group on the Alliance of Civilizations - as the root cause of the present polarization between the West and the Muslim world. The Report was recently released in November 2006.

8. It is unfortunate that an extremist fringe among the Muslims has chosen to respond to the injustices and humiliation by resorting to mindless acts of terror. These actions must be condemned. Indeed, they violate the fundamental principles of Islam.

9. But terrorism cannot be eliminated through military action alone. The conditions that have given rise to terrorism needs to be addressed. Specifically, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be resolved. This conflict is the single most important factor fuelling Muslim anger towards Israel and the West.

10. Israel must abide by United Nations resolutions and withdraw to its pre-1967 borders. A Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, can then be established. Five million Palestinian refugees are waiting for a solution to their "right of return".

11. We are often told that the Arab conflict with Israel and its supporters is a complex problem, and one that is difficult to resolve. I believe otherwise. The conflict remains unresolved because the powerful are not prepared to do the necessary to enforce, and apply equally on all sides, the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

12. Iraq is another place and issue which epitomizes the polarization between the West in general and the Muslim world. There can be no solution unless there is an end to the foreign military occupation. There must also be an end, no doubt, to the armed resistance and the sectarian violence ignited by the occupation. All these cannot be achieved without the cooperation of Iraq's Muslim neighbours. The Organization of Islamic Conference can also play a part.

13. The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the crisis in Iraq will do much to heal the rift between the West and the Muslim world. Scrupulous observance of international law will help stabilize the area, and indeed other parts of the global neighbourhood as well.

14. However, even a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a return to normalcy in Iraq will not guarantee global peace and justice. Certain other fundamental disparities must also be removed. The international community needs to do more, much more, to reduce the huge disparities in wealth, power and knowledge among the peoples of the world. Money spent on arms for instance should be channeled into activities that benefit that half of humanity which lives on less than two U.S dollars a day.

15. Of course, we must also not forget Afghanistan and Lebanon. There will be no real peace in the Islamic world unless they include enduring solutions for the situations in Afghanistan and in Lebanon.

16. Above all, we need to focus upon developing understanding and empathy within our multicultural neighborhood. All our religions and cultures enjoin us to reach out to "the other", to share their joy as well as their pain. Our philosophical traditions are profoundly aware of our common humanity. It is this dimension of religion that we should emphasize in our increasingly globalised neighbourhood.

17. For Muslims, "to know the other" is almost a religious injunction. The Noble Qur'an proclaims, and I quote from Surah Al-Hujurat (Chapter 49, verse 13), which translates as follows:

“O MANKIND! WE CREATED YOU FROM A SINGLE (PAIR) OF A MALE AND A FEMALE, AND MADE YOU INTO NATIONS AND TRIBES, THAT YE MAY KNOW EACH OTHER (NOT THAT YE MAY DESPISE EACH OTHER). VERILY THE MOST HONOURED OF YOU IN THE SIGHT OF GOD IS (HE WHO IS) THE MOST RIGHTEOUS OF YOU. AND GOD HAS FULL KNOWLEDGE AND IS WELL ACQUAINTED (WITH ALL THINGS)”. END OF QUOTE.

18. My own country, one of the most multi-religious and multi-cultural societies in the world, appreciates the significance of these universal principles for harmonious living. They blend with Islam Hadhari, or civilizational Islam, which I have introduced to my fellow citizens as an approach for a proper appreciation of the Islamic religion as a way of life in these modern times. Islam Hadhari is an undertaking to put into practice, among others, justice and good governance; freedom and independence; the well-being of the people; protection of the minorities; balanced development; love of knowledge; and moral integrity.

19. Islam Hadhari is also for believers everywhere. It will enable Muslims to be innovative, creative and relevant in this age of modern science and technology, and allow non Muslims to better appreciate the true nature of Islam.

20. The spirit of Islam Hadhari also burns in every other great religion, culture and philosophy. It is a spirit that promotes tolerance and understanding; moderation and peace; as well as freedom and justice for all. It is a spirit that abhors inequities, oppression, extremism and violence.

21. What better spirit to inspire the rules for a global neighbourhood in a multicultural world? What better spirit to celebrate our unity in diversity as members of the human family in a universe of such diverse beauty?

I thank you for your attention.