



PERSONS OF THE YEAR



The Muslim 500

THE WORLD'S 500 MOST INFLUENTIAL MUSLIMS

2026





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# *The Muslim 500*

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INFLUENTIAL MUSLIMS

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2026

The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims, 2026

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وَاصْبِرْ لَنَا  
فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُدُّنَا  
إِلَيْكَ قَالَ عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ  
وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَسَأَكْتُبُهَا  
لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالَّذِينَ  
هُم بِآيَاتِنَا يُؤْمِنُونَ



Al-A'raf 7, 156

And prescribe for us in this world good and in the Hereafter. We have turned to You'. He says: 'My chastisement - I smite with it whom I will, and My mercy embraces all things, and so I shall prescribe it for those who are God-fearing and pay the alms, and those who believe in Our signs;

# INTRODUCTION

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا

لَسُبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا

فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

Ghafir 40, 7

Those who bear the Throne and those around it glorify with praise of their Lord, and they believe in Him, and they ask forgiveness for those who believe: 'Our Lord, You embrace all things in [Your] mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and shield them from the chastisement of Hell-fire.

Welcome to the seventeenth annual issue of *The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims*. We are very pleased that we have made it this far and that the book has evolved as it has. We thank you for all your support and suggestions and look forward to continually receiving them.

There are approximately 2.1 billion Muslims in the world today, making up over a quarter of the world's population. As well as being citizens of their respective countries, they also have a sense of belonging to the 'ummah', the worldwide Muslim community.

This publication sets out to ascertain the influence some Muslims have on this community, or on behalf of the community. Influence is: any person who has the power (be it cultural, ideological, financial, political or otherwise) to make a change that will have a significant impact on the Muslim world or Muslims. Note that the impact can be either positive or negative, depending on one's point of view of course. The selection of people for this publication in no way means that we endorse their views; rather we are simply trying to measure their influence. The influence can be of a religious scholar directly addressing Muslims and influencing their beliefs, ideas and behaviour, or it can be of a ruler shaping the socio-economic factors within which people live their lives, or of artists shaping popular culture. The first two examples also point to the fact that the lists, and especially the Top 50, are dominated by religious scholars and heads of state. Their dominant and lasting influence cannot be denied, especially the rulers, who in many cases also appoint religious scholars to their respective positions.

This doesn't discount the significant amount of influence from other sectors of society. How to measure this influence is of course the most challenging aspect of the publication, and the one where opinions diverge the most. Influence can sometimes be gauged on a quantitative basis, the number of followers, the number of books written, the amount of sales etc., but more often it is not something measurable in quantitative terms and is more related to the qualitative and lasting effect of that influence. A combination of social metrics, public opinion (we have a month-long open call for nominations every year, and all suggestions are considered) and expert opinion are the basis of this attempt to measure influence. The achievements of a lifetime are given more weight than achievements within the current year. People who are trailblazers, or the lone voice in a remote area are also taken into account as we give weight

to people breaking barriers and to local influence as well as global influence. This means that our list of names will change gradually, rather than dramatically, year-on-year.

The Top 50 individuals are ranked and listed first. The remaining 450 names are then listed (not ranked) in categories of influence, with a small number also chosen to be in our Honourable Mentions section to value the notable contributions made in their fields.

Our 13 categories are:

- Scholarly
- Political
- Administration of Religious Affairs
- Preachers and Spiritual Guides
- Philanthropy/Charity and Development
- Social Issues
- Business
- Science and Technology
- Arts and Culture
- Qur'an Reciters
- Media
- Influencers and Sports Stars
- Extremists

The individuals are ordered in each category according to geographical region (Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, North America, South America), then in alphabetical order by country and finally by surname.

This publication combines aspects of a review of the past year, including a timeline and statistics, but it also hopes to serve as a prospective guide to the new year, much like a *Who's Who*.

## WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE?

We start this issue with our Persons of the Year, who this year are the collective men and women of Gaza. They are surviving one of the most horrific assaults on humanity that has been witnessed.

We then have a Selected Survey of the Muslim World covering the major events which have affected Muslims over the past twelve months.

Our Special Feature looks at the pogroms that are taking place in the West Bank, as the Israeli occupation steps up its ethnic cleansing across Palestine.

Then we have our regular House of Islam essay which gives an overview of Islam and its branches. An updated Top 50 and 450 lists (including Honourable Mentions) then follows.

The final part of our lists is the Obituaries section which lists the people from last year's book who have since passed away. A special mention must be made of the Chief Editor of *The Muslim 500*, Professor Abdallah Schleifer, who passed away (see Obituaries section on page 227) after a brief illness at the age of 90 in his beloved Egypt. The team learned so much from him, and were often regaled with one of his splendid stories. May he rest in the Highest Paradise.

Our Guest Contributions section has exclusive articles covering a wide range of issues. These are sure to stimulate thought and discussion around current pressing issues.

The Book Corner covers some books that have been published recently and others which may be of interest.

The 'Major Events' section provides a timeline of the major events that have taken place over the past year.

Appendices I and II provide us with lots of statis-

tics. Appendix I shows total population and Muslim population by country, for all the countries in the world. Appendix II compiles a list of the most popular Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, X and YouTube Muslim users, as well as worldwide.

To give a richer visual experience we have also included several calligraphy pieces throughout the book, which we hope will serve as a beautiful reminder to pause and reflect as you go through the book. We have also added write-ups within the main body of the text about major initiatives (see the Amman Message on p. 138, A Common Word on p. 221, the Marrakesh Declaration on p.152, The Muslim Council of Elders on p. 150, Free Islamic Calligraphy on p. 210, UN World Interfaith Harmony Week on p. 180, AlTafsir.com on p.188 and Eco Legal Persona on p. 221)

Our website [[www.TheMuslim500.com](http://www.TheMuslim500.com)] is a popular destination. We welcome your feedback and will take nominations for the 2027 edition through it.



Al-'A` raf7, 156

My mercy embraces all things

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## The Men and Women of Gaza

### THE CONTINUING ABOMINATION – THE GAZA GENOCIDE

This year, *The Muslim 500's* Man and Woman of the Year are the collective men and women of Gaza who have endured unimaginable horrors, yet continue to live with humanity. They pray over and bury their loved ones with dignity, share their meagre resources, risk their lives to treat the wounded, and document the truth for which they are targeted and killed. Their stories are a testament to the strength of the human spirit and its natural and unyielding desire for justice and its legitimate resistance to oppression.

Between 2023 and 2025, the people of Gaza have endured one of the gravest humanitarian catastrophes of recent times. The Israeli occupying power, in violation of international humanitarian law, has devastated every aspect of civilian life in this besieged enclave.

Over 100,000 tonnes of explosives—the equivalent of nearly seven Hiroshima bombs—have been dropped on Gaza thus far, an area of just 365-square kilometres. Civilian infrastructure has been systematically targeted: homes, schools, hospitals, mosques, water facilities, and much more have been reduced to rubble. Food aid distribution points have become scenes of massacre, where civilians are killed while seeking the most basic means of survival.

Israel is intent on rendering Gaza uninhabitable, forcing the displacement of its 2.3 million residents. Israel has deliberately produced famine, outbreaks of disease, and the collapse of all essential services.

The death toll of 60,000 – 200,000 residents is expected to be multiplied several times once the bodies under the rubble have been counted. The number of murdered children, over 20,000, is sickening enough without contemplating the countless others injured, orphaned, or having limbs amputated, often without anaesthesia. Today, Gaza is home to the largest cohort of child amputees in the world.

#### Global Organisations Label it Genocide:

The following organisations and entities have termed Israel's actions in Gaza a genocide, citing intent to destroy Palestinians through killing, starvation, and displacement:

- UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli

Practices (November 2024): Cited mass killings and starvation as genocidal acts.

- Amnesty International (August 2025): Described deliberate starvation and destruction as genocide.
- Médecins Sans Frontières (2025): Labelled attacks on civilians and healthcare as genocidal.
- B'Tselem (2024): Called the campaign genocide due to infrastructure destruction and displacement.
- Physicians for Human Rights–Israel (2024): Identified genocidal acts in healthcare targeting.
- International Federation for Human Rights (2024): Accused Israel of genocide via mass killings and blockades.
- Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor (November 2023): Noted bombing intensity and intent as genocidal.
- South African Government (December 2023): Filed an ICJ case, with a January 2024 ruling finding it a plausible genocide.
- Lemkin Institute (2024): Highlighted sexual violence and other genocidal acts.
- Scholars in Genocide Studies (December 2023): Over 55 scholars, including Uğur Ümit Üngör and Norman Finkelstein, labelled it genocide, citing leaders' statements and actions.
- A 2024 Brookings survey found 34% of 758 Middle East scholars called it genocide, with an additional 41% calling it “major war crimes akin to genocide”.



### Live-Streamed Genocide

The Gaza genocide is the first instance of genocide being broadcast in real time, with Gazans and even Israeli soldiers posting raw footage of destruction and slaughter. From Hind Rajab's final pleas to images of emaciated children, these visuals have exposed Israeli brutality—hospitals flattened, entire families wiped off the civil register, and aid seekers shot. Gazan journalists, risking death, ensure the world sees this, posting, "We are still here, still fighting to live on our land."

### Global Protests: A World United

Millions worldwide have protested Gaza's genocide, echoing Gazans' resilience. From London to Jakarta, protests have condemned the live-streamed atrocities, with social media amplifying images of starving children and bombed homes, galvanising global solidarity with Gazans' fight to stay on their land.

### Voices of Heroism

The Gazans' resilience and steadfast commitment to their ancestral land and dignity has been a humbling experience for those who have helplessly watched it unfold in real-time on their screens. The unfathomable suffering of the men, women, and children has moved the hearts and minds of millions across the globe and has triggered world-wide outrage in the form of activism, protests, marches, encampments, freedom flotillas and even films and songs.

Gazans have refused to abandon their homeland. Families like that of Jamil Mughari in Maghazi, who lost 30 kg scavenging for food to keep his children alive, remain in their shelled neighborhoods, declaring, "This is our land; we will die here before leaving." In Deir al-Balah, Abu al-Abed, a father of five, described his family's hunger and fatigue but vowed to stay, saying, "Our roots go deeper than their bombs." Even as 90% of Gazans—1.9 million people—were displaced, often multiple times, they clung to Gaza's

shrinking "safe zones", refusing permanent exile. In July 2025, when Israel issued mass evacuation orders in Khan Younis, thousands returned to rebuild tents amid rubble, defying orders to flee south. This steadfastness is not mere survival but an act of resistance against ethnic cleansing, as Gazans assert their right to exist in their homeland. Communal efforts underscore this resilience.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), with 1,600 staff and volunteers, distributed 1.6 million relief items and provided medical care to over 100,000 people by August 2025, despite losing workers to Israeli strikes. In Gaza City, a new clinic opened in August 2025, staffed by malnourished doctors who refused to abandon their patients.

Grassroots initiatives, like soup kitchens run by local women in Rafah, feed hundreds daily, with organisers like Umm Mohammed stating, "We feed our people to keep them strong, to keep them here." Gazan journalists and social media activists, risking death, have live-streamed their struggle, ensuring the world sees their refusal to be erased. A young Gazan, posting on X in July 2025, wrote, "They bomb our homes, starve our children, but we will rebuild. Gaza is ours."

Gaza's men and women have endured a darkness few could imagine, yet from that darkness they have been a profound light to the world. Their voices, carried through shattered streets and over broken airwaves, have affirmed life against death and dignity against humiliation. In the end, they stand not only as victims of one of the most devastating atrocities in the last two centuries, but as symbols of unyielding courage, dignity, and grace under fire. Their steadfastness in the face of annihilation has illuminated the conscience of humanity, reminding the world that justice cannot be silenced, nor a people erased. By honouring them as *The Muslim 500's* Man and Woman of the Year, we affirm that their struggle is not theirs alone, but belongs to all who believe in human dignity, freedom, and the right to live on one's land. Their resistance—rooted in faith and love for family, community, and homeland—will remain an enduring testament to the resilience of the human spirit and a rallying call for generations to come.



# A SELECTED SURVEY OF THE MUSLIM WORLD 2025

**By Professor Mustafa Abu Sway**

This selected survey highlights key issues that have affected the Muslim world over the past year. We will examine developments in various countries, regions and by theme. The dramatic events in the Middle East take up much of the coverage, and so it is there that we start.

## THE AL-AQSA MOSQUE AND AL-HARAM AL-SHARIF – THE FIRST QIBLA, THE FIRST CONCERN: A TARGET OF ESCALATING VIOLATIONS

For many years, the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, officially part of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs, and Holy Sites, has published regular reports documenting Israeli violations and the growing threats facing the Blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. These reports highlight a pattern of systematic provocations by extremist Jewish settlers, which have intensified particularly in the eastern part of the holy site—an area increasingly feared to be at risk of conversion into a Jewish synagogue.

Such provocations occur regularly, from Sunday to Thursday, and have escalated both in frequency and in severity. During these incursions, the Israeli police and security forces prohibit the presence of Muslim worshippers in the eastern section of Al-Aq-

sa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel's Minister of National Security and leader of the extremist Otzma Yehudit party, continues to make repeated visits to the compound, actions widely viewed as deliberate provocations aimed at inflaming tensions and bolstering his political standing among far-right supporters. In his official capacity—overseeing the Israeli police stationed at the gates of Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and at a police post north of the Dome of the Rock—Ben-Gvir has significantly altered the historical status quo. Under his authority, Jewish extremists have been permitted to pray, sing, dance, blow the *shofar* (ram's horn), raise the Israeli flag, and conduct organized tours inside the compound under heavy protection from Israeli police and special forces.

During these incursions, Muslims face severe restrictions on entry, and those already within the compound are often forced to clear the paths for settler groups. Over the past few years, additional punitive measures have targeted Muslim visitors from abroad—particularly from South Africa, who have been denied access to the *fajr* (dawn) prayer at Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. These restrictions are widely perceived as retaliation against the South African government's decision to pursue legal action against Israel at the International Criminal Court (ICC) over the genocide in Gaza.



Despite the ongoing and blatant violations within the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound, the Israeli Prime Minister continues to pay lip service to the so-called preservation of the status quo. In practice, it is well known that all key decisions regarding the compound emanate directly from the Prime Minister's Office.

For over 1,400 years, Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif—an integral part of the Islamic faith and one of Islam's three holiest sites—has remained an exclusively Muslim place of worship, safeguarded under the Hashemite Custodianship. Since 1924, the Hashemite Royal Family has assumed responsibility for the care and protection of both Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein currently serves as the Custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, continuing this historic and religious duty.

The Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has repeatedly lodged formal protests with Israel, condemning these violations and demanding an immediate end to all attempts to alter the established framework governing the site. Independent organizations, including Ir Amim, an Israeli NGO specializing in Jerusalem affairs, have published detailed reports documenting the ongoing erosion of the status quo and warning of the grave consequences such actions pose to regional stability and interfaith coexistence.

Jordan has also maintained success in leading resolutions at UNESCO aimed at protecting Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif and preserving its historical identity. Furthermore, diplomatic efforts during meetings between Arab and Muslim leaders and President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, in which His Majesty King Abdullah II played a key role, resulted in commitments to support an end to the war in Gaza and to reaffirm the importance of maintaining the status quo at Al-Aqsa Mosque.

His Majesty King Abdullah II has drawn clear red lines regarding the future of Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif: “no division and no sharing” of the site under any circumstances.

On 30 March 2013, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas signed an agreement formally recognizing His Majesty King Abdullah II as the Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem—a custodianship that is widely recognized internationally. This role builds upon the historic *bay'ah* (oath of allegiance) pledged in 1924 by Palestinian leaders to Sharif Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, affirming his religious and political responsibility to protect

Jerusalem's holy sites—a duty faithfully upheld by his Hashemite descendants, the Kings of Jordan.

The international community and the Muslim world must act urgently and collectively to safeguard the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. This sacred site is not solely a Palestinian or Jordanian concern, but a matter of profound importance to the entire Muslim Ummah.

## GAZA AND PRESIDENT TRUMP'S 20-POINT PLAN

The abominable human killing and suffering that Israel has carried out in Gaza over the last two years is well-documented. Millions of images of utter destruction, of dead children, of famine stricken tiny bodies, and of children waiting to fill their empty pots at makeshift soup kitchens in the open, are all a testimony to the failure of the international community to stop the genocide.

Hundreds of prominent international organizations and NGOs have called out Israel on its genocide of Gazans. On August 1, 2025, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'Tselem), the most important Israeli human rights watch group published a statement on its website. The following is a quote from the statement:

*“Genocide always occurs within a context: there are conditions that enable it, triggering events, and a guiding ideology. The current onslaught on the Palestinian people, including in the Gaza Strip, must be understood in the context of more than seventy years in which Israel has imposed a violent and discriminatory regime on the Palestinians, taking its most extreme form against those living in the Gaza Strip. Since the State of Israel was established, the apartheid and occupation regime has institutionalized and systematically employed mechanisms of violent control, demographic engineering, discrimination, and fragmentation of the Palestinian collective. These foundations laid by the re-*



*gime are what made it possible to launch a genocidal attack on the Palestinians immediately after the Hamas-led attack on 7 October 2023.”*

The countries that have recognized the State of Palestine stand on the right side of history. It is time for the United States to do the same and help usher in a new era of stability and justice in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. A Reuters/Ipsos poll shows that 58% of Americans believe nations should recognize a Palestinian state. This recognition should not be left to endless negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians—it will not happen. The Likud Party, in an internal vote, unanimously rejected the establishment of a Palestinian state.

President Trump’s initiative, which led to a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, allowed the people of Gaza a brief moment to breathe. Regardless of its shortcomings, the effort demonstrated the seriousness of the U.S. administration in seeking to maintain the ceasefire.

Trump’s 20-point Gaza Peace Plan, however, contains several vague and troubling provisions. Article 7, which conditions the restoration of aid on Hamas’s agreement, is unacceptable. Humanitarian aid—food, water, and medicine—must never be withheld under any circumstance.

Article 19 should have been the plan’s first priority:

*“While Gaza redevelopment advances and when the PA reform program is faithfully carried out, the conditions may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood, which we recognize as the aspiration of the Palestinian people.”*

Article 18 addresses interfaith dialogue:

*“An interfaith dialogue process will be established based on the values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence to change mindsets and narratives of Palestinians and Israelis by emphasizing the benefits that can be derived from peace.”*

Interfaith dialogue, however, should not be secondary or subservient to politics. Its participants must highlight truth and justice as prerequisites for genuine peace and confront the ideological and theological justifications for violence, including the misuse of biblical narratives such as the stories of Amalek and Jericho.

Those engaged in interfaith work are not economic advisors to promote the “benefits of peace.” They should instead emphasize respect for human life and dignity, the Golden Rule, and the belief that God does not sanction supremacy or genocide. The United States knows well how Senator George Mitchell labored for 700 days to secure the Good Friday

Agreement in Northern Ireland. It is time to revisit that model—its patience, persistence, and the Mitchell Principles that made lasting peace possible.

## IRAN

Throughout 2024, Israel intensified military operations aimed at striking Iranian assets and their regional allies. Israeli airstrikes repeatedly hit Iranian-backed militias in Syria, seeking to erode Tehran’s military presence in a country whose position had been critically undermined after the collapse of President Assad’s regime. What started as a campaign to assassinate Iranian commanders and sabotage Iran’s nuclear infrastructure through cyberattacks ultimately escalated into direct Israeli airstrikes on Iranian territory on 13 June 2025. For 12 consecutive days, Israel systematically attacked Iranian military assets across the country, including nuclear-related facilities. During this period, Iran responded by launching missiles and drones at Israeli targets.

On 22 June, the United States joined the offensive, striking the Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan nuclear sites using B2 bombers. In retaliation, Iran launched missiles the same day in a calculated strike on the Al-Udeid American airbase in Qatar, after informing both Qatar and the United States in advance. No casualties were reported. The scale of Israeli and American airpower, along with the volume of munitions deployed, likely devastated numerous Iranian targets. Israeli media reported that more than 200 fighter jets dropped over 330 munitions on approximately 100 targets on 13 June alone.

Following the end of this wave of attacks on Iran, it became clear that the Fordow nuclear facility had not been destroyed, and enriched uranium had been relocated elsewhere. According to the IAEA, no new radiation leaks have been detected from Iran’s nuclear sites since the U.S. strikes. On 28 September 2025, the UN Security Council reimposed all nuclear-re-



lated sanctions and restrictions on Iran that had previously been lifted under Resolution 2231, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This decision followed the invocation of the snapback mechanism by France, Germany, and the UK, citing Iran's "significant non-compliance" with its obligations under the agreement. On 20 October 2025, *The National* reported that Iran annulled the agreement reached with the IAEA in Cairo the previous month, as the agency sought access to investigate potential nuclear weapons development.

Iran has deepened its strategic partnerships with China and Russia. Nevertheless, it is expected that Iran will continue facing sanctions and, likely, renewed conflict in the near future.

## LEBANON

One of the greatest challenges facing Lebanon today is the foreign pressure to dismantle Hezbollah's military wing and integrate it into the Lebanese Army. Hezbollah (Hizballah) operates both as a paramilitary organization and a political party holding 12 parliamentary seats. Along with its allies, it secured 62 seats in the 2022 elections—short of the majority it enjoyed in 2018. Hezbollah is a Twelver Shi'ite Islamist movement with deep ties to Iran. It was established in 1982, following Israel's invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon, which forced the Palestine Liberation Organization to relocate to Tunisia. Israel ultimately withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, yet intermittent hostilities persisted, with the Lebanese Army largely remaining on the sidelines.

Hezbollah's military capabilities expanded into what many describe as a "state within a state," creating a complex relationship that remains difficult to dismantle.

Three major developments contributed to Hezbollah's weakening in 2025: the fall of Bashar al-Assad's predominantly Alawite regime in Syria, Israeli and American strikes against Iran, and Israeli operations



targeting Hezbollah, including the assassination of its Secretary-General, Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah, on 27 September 2024.

President General Joseph Aoun urged Hezbollah to disarm, emphasizing that this process must occur through dialogue, even as he assured the United States of his commitment to achieving disarmament. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawwaf Salam echoed President Aoun's stance, reiterating that weapons must remain solely under state authority.

Since 2006, the United States has invested more than \$3 billion in the Lebanese Armed Forces. In early October 2025, Washington pledged an additional \$230 million in military aid to the Lebanese army and intelligence agencies to assist in Hezbollah's disarmament. Private American military consultants—funded by the U.S. Department of Defense—along with British and Canadian advisers, were dispatched to Lebanon as part of a broader security support effort.

Easier said than done. Hezbollah's new leader, Sheikh Qassem Naim, defiantly declared that "the Resistance will never surrender its weapons while [Israeli] aggression continues; we will fight a Karbala battle if necessary." In Shi'ite tradition, Karbala symbolizes ultimate sacrifice, recalling the martyrdom of Husain ibn Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, on 10 October 680 CE (10 Muharram 61 AH).

Israel continues to occupy five positions in southern Lebanon.

## LIBYA

The political impasse in Libya continues between the UN-recognised Government of National Unity, based in Tripoli in the west, led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, with advisory support from the High State Council, and the eastern-based Government of National Stability, led by Prime Minister Osama Hamad and backed by the House of Representatives and the self-styled Libyan National Army under the command of General Khalifa Haftar. No general elections are forthcoming as the deadlock between the rival governments has persisted since the indefinite postponement of the 2021 elections. Municipal elections took place in 36 municipalities in the west, with high turnout and some municipalities facing security challenges. No municipality elections in the east and the south took place.

To solidify the family's control over eastern Libya, Khalifa Haftar, who is 79 years old, appointed his

son, Saddam Haftar, as Deputy Commander of the General Command. In addition, his brother Khaled was promoted to Chief of Staff. These actions, by creating a strong family structure within the Libyan National Army in the east, could be interpreted as rejecting international attempts to restart the political process to unify Libya.

## QATAR

When it comes to protracted conflicts involving state and non-state actors, Qatar has become a household name in conflict resolution, and Doha is now regarded as the capital of mediation. Its reputation as a neutral and trustworthy mediator is unique and rooted in its constitution. Article 7 explicitly makes mediation a key pillar of foreign policy, stating it is “based on the principle of encouraging peaceful resolution of international disputes.”

Over the years, Qatari diplomacy has played a pivotal third-party role in mediating between numerous parties including: the United States and the Taliban to negotiate the US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan; intra-Lebanese factions; intra-Palestinian factions; Sudan and Chad; Yemen’s government and the Houthis; Djibouti and Eritrea; Kenya and Somalia; the United States and Iran; Hamas and Israel; and facilitating a peace agreement between DR Congo and Rwanda with U.S. and African Union support. On 17 July 2025, Qatar announced the reunification of Russian and Ukrainian children separated by the war. Even the October 2025 border confrontation between Afghanistan and Pakistan resulted in both countries sending their defence and intelligence chiefs to Doha for mediation.

Therefore, beyond being a violation of international law, it was shocking when Israel attacked Doha on 9 September 2025. The airstrikes targeted Palestinian negotiators and Hamas leaders while they were discussing President Trump’s Gaza proposal. There were casualties, but the assassination attempt failed and became a watershed moment. Is dependence on the United States for security still sustainable in the long term?

The U.S. operates Al-Udeid, the largest military airbase in the Middle East, hosting CENTCOM’s forward headquarters. Qatar supports NATO and cooperates with the U.S. on Gulf security. Hosting Hamas leaders in Doha had international approval. Arab League and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation leaders met in Doha on 15 September in solidarity, but their statement lacked concrete action and



the GCC’s activation of its defence pact was largely symbolic. Countries who are part of the Abraham Accords did not recall ambassadors or downgrade ties with Israel.

On 29 September, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu apologized to the Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani for the attack during a call from the White House with President Trump. This helped Qatar resume its mediation efforts, eventually contributing to a ceasefire in Gaza.

## SAUDI ARABIA

On September 17, 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a strategic mutual defence pact. It took place one week after Israel attacked Qatar. Though security cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is not new, there are close to 2,000 Pakistani officers and soldiers in Saudi Arabia, the pact reflects the Gulf countries’ dissatisfaction with the US position for not preventing the attack on Doha.

Saudi Arabia co-hosted with France the United Nations summit on the question of the State of Palestine and implementing the two-state solution, during the UN General Assembly 80th session, which began on September 23, 2025. Many key western countries recognized the State of Palestine. Four of the permanent members of the UN Security Council recognize Palestine. Only the USA does not! The recognition of the State of Palestine as unfolded lately is a game changer. It carries a great symbolic meaning, political weight, and juridical implications. It represents a failure of Israel’s diplomacy and a shift in world opinion. More than three quarters of the UN member states recognize the State of Palestine. As HM King Abdullah II said during his speech at the UNGA, it is “an indisputable right, not a reward”.

Politically, Saudi Arabia was perceived to be on the cusp of formalizing diplomatic relations with Israel, a monumental shift in regional dynamics. However,

the ongoing war on Gaza has stalled the normalization process. Saudi Arabia has instead positioned itself as a key player in demanding an immediate ceasefire and the establishment of a Palestinian state. During the 2024 United Nations General Assembly, Saudi Arabia, alongside other Arab nations, led a coalition advocating for Palestinian sovereignty, underscoring its stance on the issue.

Economically, Vision 2030 remains central to Saudi Arabia's future ambitions. The plan seeks to diversify the kingdom's economy away from its dependence on oil. At its core is Neom, a futuristic city designed as a 170-kilometre linear structure, set to rise 500 meters above the ground, with zero carbon emissions. Despite being hailed as a revolutionary urban design, practical challenges have led to the initial phase being scaled down to a more manageable 2.5 kilometers by 2030. Foreign investment remains crucial for the realization of such ambitious projects, with Saudi Arabia actively seeking global partnerships.

Saudi Arabia is constructing the world's largest green hydrogen plant, the NEOM Green Hydrogen Project, in Oxagon, within the NEOM development in north-western Saudi Arabia. It is 80% complete and is set to be operational in 2026. It is totally powered by solar and wind energy and will produce 600 tones of green hydrogen per day, making Saudi Arabia a leading country in renewable energy, though hydrogen is still not competitive compared to fossil fuel.

On the domestic front, unemployment among Saudi nationals was 7.6% in Q1 2024, reduced to 6.8% in Q2 2025. Saudi policies aim at replacing foreign workers with Saudi citizens in various sectors.

## SUDAN

The civil war in Sudan entered its 3rd year in April 2005. What began as a serious attempt by the par-



amilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to rule over all Sudan by fighting the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), seems to have shifted recently into a more modest goal of de facto establishing governmental institutions in the areas under the control of the RSF, preparing the scene for splitting the country.

On 30 August 2025, Mohamad Hamdan Dagalo, the leader of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), was sworn in as head of a parallel Sudanese government. This move could lead to a situation like Libya, further complicating the conflict with the Sudanese Army and threatening to divided Sudan once more in its contemporary history, which previously saw the secession and independence of South Sudan in 2011.

This parallel government includes coalition partners, including the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-north (SPLM-N), the largest non-state armed group in Sudan. Its leader, Abdelaziz al-Hilu, was appointed as vice-president. The African Union and the Arab League condemned this initiative. Still, the Arab countries are not united in their practical approach and appear divided in what side they support, including providing military assistance to the warring parties.

The RSF traces its origins to the Janjaweed militia, employed by the Omar al-Bashir regime during the Darfur conflict. The Janjaweed were accused of genocide and ethnic cleansing, displacing millions of non-Arab Sudanese. The RSF has reportedly recruited fighters from ethnically affiliated tribes across borders, as well as foreign mercenaries, including some allegedly from Colombia.

Arms continue to flow to the RSF. According to Reuters, the group has deployed at least ten drones in Nyala, its de facto capital. On 19 September 2025, a drone strike during dawn prayers at Al-Safiya Mosque in El-Fasher killed more than 70 worshippers, including children. Although the RSF was blamed, it denied responsibility. Just days later, on 24 September, another drone attack on an El-Fasher market killed 27 civilians. The RSF has besieged El-Fasher for over a year, frequently attacking nearby refugee camps. UNICEF estimates that by late August, 600,000 people had been displaced from the city. On 11 October, at least 57 people—including 22 women and 17 children—were killed when RSF forces attacked the Dar Al-Arqam displacement centre in El-Fasher, according to Sudanese medical groups.

Following several military defeats, the RSF has reportedly withdrawn from northern and eastern Sudan, including Khartoum, maintaining its strongest

presence in Kordofan and Darfur.

In July 2025, the International Criminal Court (ICC) briefed the UN Security Council, stating that war crimes and crimes against humanity were ongoing in Darfur. Attacks on civilians and widespread sexual violence persist across Sudan, particularly in Darfur. Simultaneously, outbreaks of cholera, dengue fever, malaria, measles, polio, and rubella have surged due to the collapse of the healthcare system.

On 6 October 2025, the ICC convicted Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman (Ali Kushayb)—a Janjaweed commander whose forces evolved into the RSF—of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, torture, and forced displacement for his role in Darfur two decades ago. The RSF, critics note, continues to employ many of the same brutal tactics today.

## SYRIA

The Assad regime collapsed on 8 December 2024 following a major offensive by opposition forces led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and supported by the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA). The campaign marked a turning point in the Syrian civil war, which began during the Arab Spring pro-democracy uprisings.

Before the offensive, Syria was split among the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the northeast, the SNA in the north, HTS in the northwest, and the Assad government in central and southern areas. HTS advanced rapidly with minimal resistance.

On 10 March 2025, interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa signed a U.S.-brokered agreement with Mazloum Abdi of the SDF to integrate Kurdish forces into state institutions. The YPG sought special military units, but this was rejected. Sporadic clashes fol-

lowed in Aleppo's Sheikh Maqsood and Ashrafiyyeh districts until a ceasefire was reached on 7 October, after talks with U.S. officials and CENTCOM.

Calls for federalization persist, but Türkiye opposes any autonomous Kurdish region along its border and resumed airstrikes in September. There are four major Kurdish regions—in Türkiye, Syria, Iraq, and Iran—with past attempts at autonomy, such as the Soviet-era “Red Kurdistan,” forcibly ended. On 29 March 2025, Ahmad Al-Sharaa formed a transitional government under a five-year constitutional framework, replacing the caretaker cabinet of Mohammad al-Bashir.

Following Assad's fall, Israel intensified airstrikes on Syrian military sites. The new government avoided retaliation, signaling it “does not seek confrontation.” Israel occupied additional territory near the Golan Heights and supported Druze leader Al-Hajiri in creating a semi-autonomous entity in Sweida, where Israeli flags were raised. Reuters reported Israeli financial and military aid to Druze separatists. The UN documented grave abuses against Druze civilians since July 2025, including killings, abductions, and sexual violence. A U.S.-Jordanian mediation produced an accord affirming Syria's territorial integrity and promising protection for Druze communities.

Israel-Syria negotiations are underway: Damascus demands a return to the 1974 armistice lines, while Israel seeks a buffer zone near the Golan. The Heights, occupied since 1967 and annexed in 1981, remain Syrian under international law, despite U.S. recognition in 2019. Refugees from Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan have begun returning. On 5 October 2025, parliamentary elections were held for 121 of 210 seats; most winners were Sunni Muslims. Voting was postponed in Kurdish and Druze areas, leaving 21 seats vacant.





Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE pledged over \$10 billion for reconstruction, also settling Syria's World Bank arrears and funding public-sector salaries through the UNDP, with U.S. approval.

## YEMEN

The civil war in Yemen has entered its tenth year, creating one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with millions facing famine, displacement, and disease. Since 2014, Yemen has been torn between the internationally recognized government and Houthi militants (formally the *Ansar Allah* movement). A fragile truce brokered in 2022 reduced large-scale hostilities but has failed to end the conflict, with violations continuing by both sides. At the 80th UN General Assembly, Dr. Rashad Al-Alimi, Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), voiced frustration with the stalemate, stating:

"After repeated failures of peace initiatives, it has become imperative to move collectively and decisively toward imposing peace. Therefore, I call today for the establishment of an effective international coalition to restore Yemen's security and stability—a coalition that rebuilds state institutions and liberates our country from the grip of militias and terrorist organizations of every kind."

Meanwhile, Aidarous Al-Zubaidi, Deputy Chairman of the PLC and President of the Southern Transitional Council (STC)—which holds three seats in the Council—told *The National* (24 Sept. 2025) that declaring an independent southern Yemeni state would pave the way for joining the Abraham Accords, allowing the south to "make its own foreign policy decisions." He asserted that all conditions for statehood were now in place. The peace process remains stalled, as neither side appears willing to compromise. Regional powers continue to use Yemen as a proxy battleground for their competing geopolitical agendas. Ordinary Yemenis remain the chief victims—caught between airstrikes, famine, and the

collapse of essential services.

Yemen's vocal support for Gaza has made it a target of U.S., U.K., and Israeli airstrikes. Repeated attacks have struck Sanaa International Airport, Hudaydah port, power plants, and other vital infrastructure. On 28 August 2025, the Israeli Air Force bombed a gathering of senior Houthi officials in Sanaa during a televised speech by Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, killing Houthi Prime Minister Ahmad al-Rahawi and several ministers.

On 6 May 2025, Oman announced it had mediated a ceasefire between the United States and the Houthis, under which both parties agreed to halt attacks on one another, ensuring freedom of navigation for U.S. vessels. The Houthis, however, explicitly excluded Israel from the deal, vowing to continue targeting Israeli interests as long as the war in Gaza persisted.

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Africa is the richest continent in the world. Africa is the poorest continent. Both statements are true. Africa is not the primary benefactor from its gold, oil, uranium, and diamonds resulting in twenty-two of the twenty-eight poorest countries in the world being in Africa. Colonial legacy, weak governments, fragile state institutions, coup d'états, rigging elections, violating constitutions and democratic norms, coupled with struggling economies, are fertile grounds for breeding violent non-state actors, including Islamist movements. Africa has 50 active armed conflicts, amounting to 40% of all armed conflicts in the world, resulting in 35 million refugees in Africa. The International Red Cross does not have enough resources to aid all refugees, especially that the USA dismantled the USAID agency in 2025, cutting thousands of projects around the world, putting millions of vulnerable people at risk. Africa was hit hard.

France withdrew from the Sahel region, and so did the Americans, exposing the countries to the spread



of Jihadist movements. The Russians filled the vacuum with bilateral agreements with its Africa Corps, a group that is the successor to the notorious Wagner Group and reportedly directed by the Russian Ministry of Defence. China and Türkiye are also vying to expand their footprint in the region.

The armed conflict in the Central Sahel, driven by jihadist groups, has spread across borders, displacing over 200,000 people from Mali to neighboring countries. In July 2025, a major armed group expanded its attacks into western Mali, reaching border towns near Senegal and Mauritania.

The threat is spilling over into coastal countries like Benin and Togo, with significant increases in violent extremist events near their borders. In Central Africa, groups like the Islamic State Central African Province (ISCAP) have a presence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) among many insurgent groups, some with Rwanda's support. Al-Shabab continues to be the dominant Islamist group in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, with known attacks across the border into Ethiopia and Kenya.

Not all insurgencies are rooted in Islamic jihadist ideology. Historically, the primary conflict in Mali originated in the Tuareg's quest for self-determination by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, which claims to represent other ethnic minorities. It is only in 2012 that Islamist forces emerged among the Tuareg. After a period of alliance between the secular and Islamist Tuaregs, they fought among each other, with the secularists losing the war.

Despite having the Alliance for the Sahel States, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger suffered from increased attacks in 2025 on military bases and civilian centers. Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), an Al-Qaida affiliate, carried out a series of large-scale and coordinated attacks across Burkina Faso and Mali. On 11 May, militants overran a military base in Djibo town, in Burkina Faso, killing up to 200 soldiers, and in a town west of Djibo they reportedly killed 60 soldiers.

In the first half of 2025, the militants, who now use drones, killed 1,680 people in Burkina Faso, 1,102 in Niger, and 645 in Mali. The deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso's contradicts the strong revolutionary image of its charismatic leader Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who is much loved at home and abroad. He is an anti-western, pan-African leader, a social media savvy who shows up in military fatigue in meetings with African leaders, and abroad. He pursues leftist economic plans, nationalizing gold



mines, and slightly improving the economy, spending more on public health and education.

The Al-Shabaab militants in Somalia have adopted new tactics, infiltrating a military base in February 2025 in Mogadishu. The new tactics are a response to the counter-insurgency efforts by the state, which has overstretched its resources. There are reports that al-Shabaab infiltrated the government security forces, gathering intelligence, undermining the government plans. On 18 March, there was a failed attempt to assassinate President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud using a roadside bomb. President Mohamud said in an interview with BBC that there have been five attempts on his life within the last two years, highlighting the deteriorating security situation. On 18 May, a suicide bomber targeted a queue of young recruits registering at the Damanyo military base in the Somali capital Mogadishu, killing more than 10 people.

In Nigeria, two major militant groups, Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) and Boko Haram, including its rebranded splinter group, the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP) pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Boko Haram is mostly active in Nigeria but also carries out attacks in neighboring countries around the Lake Chad Basin, specifically Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

On 6 September 2025, fighters believed to be from Boko Haram slaughtered at least 55 people including six soldiers in an attack on Darul Jama, a Muslim village in northeastern Nigeria's Borno State where people had recently returned after years of displacement. The Nigerian government established the Agro Rangers, along with a trench surrounding the farmland, to protect farmers against the onslaught of Boko Haram. Other soldiers fled the village. The fighters arrived on motorbikes, shooting indiscriminately, and setting homes ablaze, killing men and leaving women behind.

According to a tally by Good Governance Africa, a nonprofit, the first six months of 2025 saw a resurgence in activity from armed groups. It charted about

300 attacks – mainly from ISWAP – that killed about 500 civilians. Security, especially in the predominantly Muslim north of Nigeria, has been deteriorating for years. Some 10,000 people have been killed and hundreds abducted since Bola Tinubu became Nigeria's president in mid-2023. The violence has pushed as many as 3 million people out of their homes. In the Middle Belt region many lives were lost. In July, attackers stormed the farming village of Yelwata in Benue, killing at least 160 people. The fertile region sits at the fault line of Nigeria's deepening farmer vs. herder crisis where mostly Christian farmers and mostly Muslim Fulani herders have a long history of tension and clashes. Attacks and reprisals on both sides go back decades and have grown deadly. Christian farming communities bear the brunt of the violence and accuse the government of failing to acknowledge the scale, including the ethnic and territorial undertones of the crisis.

US Senator Ted Cruz accused Nigeria of facilitating mass murder of Christians, and he is rallying Evangelical Christians to demand that the Congress designates Nigeria as a violator of religious freedom. On 17 October 2025, The Washington Post refuted his claim as “unfounded” and that the “data disagrees”.

There is a security crisis from Senegal in West Africa all the way to Somalia in the Horn of Africa, and beyond. There are many studies, meetings, and declarations, yet not enough resources are dedicated to developing these countries, to improve services, to implement democratic norms, to get rid of corruption, and address the mistrust between governments and peoples.

## ASIA

### BANGLADESH

Since gaining independence, Bangladesh, a country highly vulnerable to natural disasters and historically impoverished, has been classified as one of the world's Least Developed Countries (LDCs) under UN criteria. It is set to graduate from this status in November 2026, marking a significant milestone following the end of Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian regime in August 2024. While this graduation reflects Bangladesh's economic progress, it also presents new challenges, as the country will lose LDC-specific trade privileges, potentially impacting exports, and development funding.



The country is currently facing an ongoing flood crisis, which began in mid-May 2025, driven by heavy monsoon rains and upstream water flows from India. On 14 May 2025, the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved \$270 million in financing to support flood recovery and enhance resilience against future disasters. This assistance will fund the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure, strengthening of agricultural systems, and livelihood support for communities devastated by the August 2024 floods.

Politically, the interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, banned the Awami League under the Anti-Terrorism Act on 10 May 2025. Later, in October 2025, the party's student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League, was also designated a “terrorist organization” for its role in violent attacks on protesters during the uprising that led to the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who subsequently fled to India.

The plight of Rohingya refugees remains critical. Nearly one million Rohingyas reside in the Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, facing severe shortages of clean water, sanitation, and healthcare due to the scale and speed of their arrivals from Myanmar. As Bangladesh's 2026 elections approach, some politicians have pledged to repatriate Rohingya refugees, even as new waves continue to flee Myanmar, where border towns are increasingly being burned.

### PAKISTAN

On 22 April 2025, a deadly militant attack in Indian-administered Kashmir killed 26 tourists. India blamed Pakistan, which denied responsibility. On 7 May, India launched missile strikes on nine sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir, triggering four days of intense fighting that ended with a ceasefire on 10 May. In July, Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed



Forces, admitted that Indian jetfighters, including advanced French Rafales, were downed by the Pakistani Air Force, reportedly using Chinese fighter jets—an outcome that likely contributed to the swift halt of hostilities.

On 23 April 2025, India unilaterally suspended the Indus Water Treaty, a landmark 1960 agreement governing the sharing of Indus basin waters. Though India currently lacks the infrastructure to cut off water supplies, any future disruption could trigger a full-scale war. De-escalation requires addressing the core issue of Kashmir's status.

Pakistan faces multiple internal challenges: poverty, economic mismanagement, soaring inflation, high foreign debt, dysfunctional institutions, a biased judiciary, pervasive corruption, military interference in politics, and militant activity. Militant groups, particularly Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), operate near the Afghan border and in Balochistan, attacking military convoys, looting weapons, and kidnapping security personnel. On 13 September 2025, a TTP attack killed 12 soldiers and seized arms; on average, the group carries out more than one attack per day.

On 9 October 2025, two large explosions struck Kabul, Afghanistan, followed by a third in Paktika province near the Pakistani border. Violence escalated along the Durand Line, marking the worst clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan since the Taliban's takeover in 2021. A ceasefire was agreed on 19 October in Doha, with a follow-up meeting scheduled for 25 October in Istanbul to negotiate a detailed agreement. Simultaneously, India announced plans to reopen its embassy in Kabul, suspended since 2021, signalling a renewed diplomatic engagement. Afghan officials visited New Delhi, while Pakistan and India may be extending their historical rivalry into Afghanistan, compounded by the TTP

threat to Islamabad.

On 17 September 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a strategic mutual defence pact, building on decades of military cooperation. Though nuclear capabilities were not explicitly mentioned, the agreement covers all defence contingencies.

In October 2025, Pakistan invited the U.S. to invest in the \$1.2 billion Pasni Port project on the Arabian Sea. The initiative focuses on financial and logistical cooperation, without provisions for U.S. military bases. Critics argue that Pakistan's reliance on foreign assistance reflects domestic structural deficiencies. The Pasni Port is strategically near Gwadar Port, operated by China Overseas Port Holding as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Following the ouster of former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2024, Pakistan engaged with Bangladesh, signalling a potential new trilateral alignment between Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China, which could further isolate India in South Asia.

## ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS

In 1750, Jan Jacque Rousseau, in a prize-winning essay "A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences" he wrote to the academy of Dijon, said:

*"Europe had relapsed into the barbarism of the earliest ages; the inhabitants of this part of the world, which is at present so highly enlightened, were plunged, some centuries ago, in a state still worse than ignorance. A scientific jargon, more despicable than mere ignorance, had usurped the name of knowledge, and opposed an almost invincible obstacle to its restoration. Things had come to such a pass, that it required a complete revolution to bring men back to common sense. This came at*



*last from the quarter from which it was least to be expected. It was the stupid Mussulman (i.e., Muslim), the eternal scourge of letters, who was the immediate cause of their revival among us."*

Of course, for the Islamic civilization to save Europe from the Dark Ages, and to prompt European renaissance, is anything but stupid. Rousseau's image of the other, the Muslim, belongs to general bias. An early, but not rare, moment of Islamophobia, which has echoed over the centuries by many prominent Europeans. Europe came to be as such in its encounter with Muslims.

Erasing the Islamic civilization when using the "Judeo-Christian civilization" political construct is Islamophobic. Civilizations are cumulative, and one builds on another. Convivencia is an inclusive civilizational paradigm. It was born in Andalusia and Baghdad, where otherness was softened, especially vis-à-vis the People of the Book. Equal opportunity in scientific and academic fields, in trade and medicine, assuming public offices, as well as having familial and social relations along are integral to the Islamic worldview.

The Holy Qur'an goes beyond tolerance when dealing with ethnicities. Human physical appearance referred to as color, along with languages, are divine signs to be celebrated:

*"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge".* Surah Ar-Rum (30:22)

European geography became a Eurocentric identity, based on "whiteness". During the colonial period, Europe went out and colonized the world. When things changed for the better and the world got rid of European colonialism, Europe adopted a reclusive stance, closing its doors, or wanted to close them, in the face of the other. But the other, the immigrant, kept coming, by land, sea, and air, sometimes invited,

and they stayed. Can the other become European? This is not about citizenship but the majority of Muslims in Europe have. This is about acceptance without erasure, without discrimination, without having to give up part of Muslim identity or religion.

Aristotle Kallis of the UK's Keele University, who specializes in far-right ideologies and political discourse, stresses that the current surge in anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe is not merely reactive but rather an acceleration of long-existing trends.

*"It has remained at very, very high levels ever since,"* he explains, referring to anti-Muslim hatred. *"It was not a spike, so it didn't go up and then come down."*

According to Kallis, social media has become a primary battleground, emboldening far-right actors.

*"They're now using far more sophisticated techniques in social media to stir up hatred within the communities ... There's no major political party of the far right, but you have all these grassroots organizations with links to social media that are stirring up hatred,"*

He cites the outbreaks of violence and unrest in British cities such as Leicester in 2022 and Southport a year later as clear examples of an increasingly fractured society.

Islamophobia is on the rise in the EU where 26 million Muslims live. According to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey, one-third of Muslim citizens have difficulty finding jobs and housing. One in two Muslims is a victim of discrimination in daily life.

The FRA report reveals significant differences in the 13 member states surveyed: Austria is the most Islamophobic, with 71 percent of Muslims targeted, followed by Germany and Finland. The rate of racial discrimination drops steeply in Spain and Italy, the countries with the lowest levels. In general, the most affected are young Muslims and women who wear religious clothing. Intertwined in the Islamophobic behavior of EU citizens are not only religious ele-

ments but also the skin color and ethnic or immigrant background of the European Muslim population. “*A phenomenon fueled by the conflicts in the Middle East and made worse by the dehumanizing anti-Muslim rhetoric we see across the continent,*” said the director of the EU Agency, Sirpa Rautio.

Some media outlets play a negative role by spreading Islamophobic narratives, including attempts to silence the use of “Islamophobia” itself. On 20 October 2025, Paul Goodman published an op-ed titled “*Islam has been a problem in Britain for a long time. It’s time to face up to that*” in *The Telegraph*. It has the following statement:

“And while a determined response to anti-Muslim prejudice and violence is required, the very concept of Islamophobia, which threatens free expression, must be resisted.” The title, using “Islam” is a typical case where religion is blamed for the action of individuals. Had he said “Muslims”, it would be a fallacy of overgeneralization. It will also be problematic because the religion of non-Muslims who commit objectionable acts are rarely mentioned. And the claim that the use of “Islamophobia” threatens free speech, is itself a threat to free speech.

Other fair articles could be used as a counter argument. On 25 July 2025, Zoe Williams, a columnist for the Guardian wrote an article “*Islamophobia isn’t just socially acceptable in the UK now-it is flourishing. How did this happen?*” She reflected on a recent poll that found 41% of the British public believe that Muslim immigrants have had a negative impact on the UK. Nearly half (49%) think that Muslim women are pressured to wearing the hijab. And almost a third (31%) think that Islam promotes violence. She reveals that there is a slide in British society from “*Muslim extremists have views incompatible with British life*” to “*all Muslims*”.

This Islamophobic change did not happen on its own. It was deliberately manufactured in the United States and then spread to the UK, she said: “*The US lab created this virus, and we caught it*”.



It was manufactured. She referenced a 2015 US thinktank Center for American Progress publication Fear, Inc 2.0: The Islamophobia Network’s Efforts to Manufacture Hate in America.

Islamophobia results in demonization of Muslims in the UK public service broadcasting, where “*Muslims lives are considered less valuable than non-Muslim ones, and their loss less tragic.*” In subtler ways, she concludes, this casual demonisation puffs up a notion of “British values” that are nowhere in evidence, nowhere defended, except in the supposed dichotomy with a Muslim worldview.

Islamophobia in the US is also on the rise, with new trends. On 11 March 2025, CAIR, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, published its “2025 Civil Rights Report: Unconstitutional Crackdown.”

On the positive side, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 9-0 in favor of CAIR’s arguments against the federal No Fly List. Attorneys representing individuals impacted by President Trump’s 2017 Muslim Ban reached a major agreement for nearly 25,000 affected individuals. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) acted to prohibit the sale of sensitive location data from Muslim app users, protecting their privacy and preventing its misuse for surveillance.

Muslims constitute 0.1% of South America, compared to 1.1% in the USA. Islamophobia in South America is less prevalent than in North America or Europe. Anti-Muslim sentiment in the region has historical roots dating back to the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions and has been more recently amplified by geopolitical events and local political rhetoric.

Brazil, like numerous other nations, grapples with mounting Islamophobia, according to a recent survey by the Anthropology Group on Islamic and Arab Contexts, an organisation affiliated with the University of São Paulo, incidents of harassment among Muslim Brazilians have surged since October 7th. This mirrors the same trend in Europe and the USA.

Muslim communities in the Triple Frontier (Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay) suffered from the American “War on Terror” rhetoric which influenced policies in SA and led to surveillance. Political rhetoric can also fuel these prejudices, such as when former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro promoted anti-Muslim narratives.

On the other hand, they successfully mobilized with support from local civil society to counter stereotyped images associating them with terrorism. Some governments are beginning to act. In Brazil, for example, a study on Islamophobia was presented to



the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship to inform government policy. Argentina has also seen government institutions partner with anti-Islamophobia activists.

In 201, Argentina passed a law protecting women's right to wear the hijab in public, following advocacy efforts. This could be compared to France's ban on hijab in public institutions, or the anti-Shari`ah laws that some states in the USA have passed for political reasons and as part of political campaigns. Muslims never attempted to impose Shari`ah laws in the USA. On the other hand, how could close to 1% of the population do that.

## CONCLUSION

A multilateral summit of the leaders of the United States and eight Arab States and State members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was convened at United Nations Headquarters on the margins of the High-Level Week of the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Arab and Muslim leaders emphasized the need to end the war in Gaza, rejecting forced displacement, and stressed President Trump's leadership to achieve a just and lasting peace.

These leaders, including HM King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein of Jordan, and Custodian of the Muslim and Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem, emphasized the need to work out details of a plan for stabilization, while ensuring stability in the West Bank and Jerusalem's Holy Sites.

Leaders of the member states of the OIC can make a difference in the protection of Jerusalem Holy Sites, by rallying behind Jordan, in its effort to protect and serve these Holy Sites, including Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, which is under imminent threat.

The Arab and Muslim leaders are very able to address the pressing issues facing the Muslim Ummah

through the Organization of Islamic Conference, and other forums. Among these are the many armed conflicts in the Arab and Muslim world, between neighboring countries, internal civil wars, and the ongoing onslaught of Israel on Arab countries, to which Qatar was added this year.

There is a need to revive, expand, and improve the defense agreements, within a paradigm of unity, to provide deterrence. This is a pressing issue, as the world, represented by the UNSCs could not end the Russia-Ukrainian conflict, which could still deteriorate, posing a higher risk. The UN and the international community are not dependable. They could not stop the genocide in Gaza as it unfolded live on TV. These are other than the states that were involved directly and knowingly in sustaining it. The latter should pay reparations according to their share in supporting the genocide.

The security of the Arab and Muslim world, as one eco-system, cannot be achieved through bilateral agreements, or by shifting alliances in an emerging multipolar world order, if at all.



Professor Abu Sway frequently lectures globally as well as in the heart of Jerusalem, Palestine, at Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa. He is a member of Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, and the Islamic Waqf Council in Jerusalem. He is author of three books on Imam Al-Ghazali: *Islamic Epistemology: The Case of Al-Ghazali*, *Fatawa Al-Ghazali (Arabic)* and *A Treasury of Al-Ghazali*.



# WEST BANK POGROMS

**MUSLIM 500** SPECIAL FEATURE



Palestinian boys face unidentified Jewish settlers who've taken Palestinian houses in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem

# 1. Prologue: A Village in Ashes

On a moonless night in April 2024, the West Bank village of Al-Mughayyir was thrust into flames. A convoy of masked Israeli settlers, armed with automatic rifles, descended from nearby hilltop outposts. They torched homes, overturned olive carts, and opened fire on residents attempting to flee. More than 50 structures were razed, dozens wounded, and three Palestinian men killed. The assault lasted five hours—uninterrupted. Israeli soldiers stood by or, according to residents, even fired at those defending their homes.

This was not an isolated event. Nor was it spontaneous. It was part of an escalating, systematic campaign of intimidation and displacement: a wave of



settler violence sweeping the West Bank in what many now call a coordinated series of pogroms.



Sheep pass cars torched by Israeli settlers at the Palestinian village of al-Mughayyir in the West Bank. (Quique Kierszenbaum/*The Observer*)



*Top:* Palestinians survey the devastation after settlers and soldiers uprooted thousands of olive trees in Al-Mughayyir, occupied West Bank. (Oren Ziv)

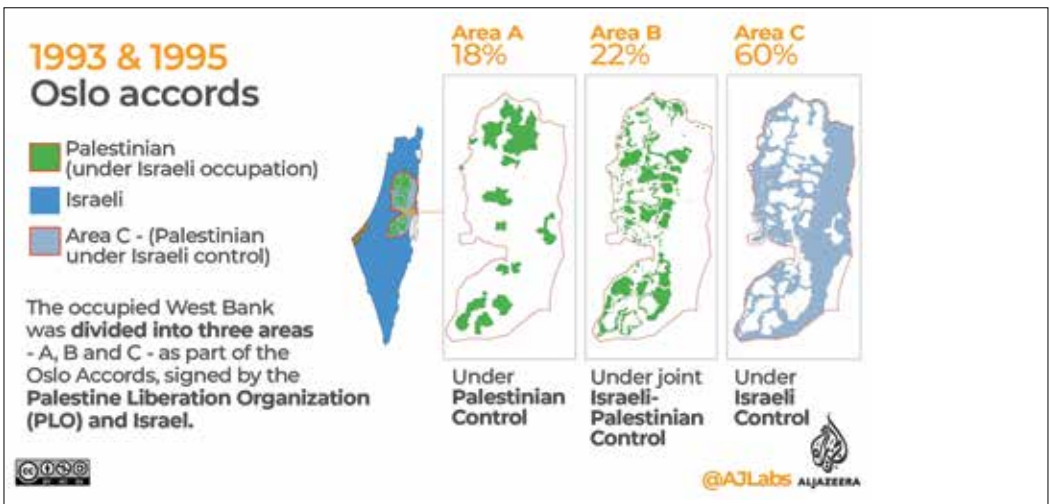
*Above:* Palestinian residents of al-Mughayyir inspect damage caused by the three-day Israeli siege on the village, August 25, 2025. (Anne Paq/Activestills)

*Left:* Israeli settlers wearing headscarves near billowing smoke after a raid in the village of al-Mughayyir (Reuters)

## 2. The History Beneath the Hills

Since Israel captured the West Bank in 1967, it has maintained military control over its Palestinian population while simultaneously advancing a civilian settler population into the territory. The Oslo Accords of the 1990s divided the region into Areas A, B, and C—a patchwork meant to pave the way to peace. Yet today, Area C, where Israel retains full military and civil control, comprises more than 60% of the territory and houses nearly all Israeli settlements.

Over 670,000 Israeli settlers now reside in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, living in some 250 settlements and outposts—many illegal under international law. Settlements fragment the land, dissecting Palestinian cities, enclosing villages, and severing movement with bypass roads and military checkpoints. Palestinians, around 2.8 million in the West Bank, are effectively hemmed in.



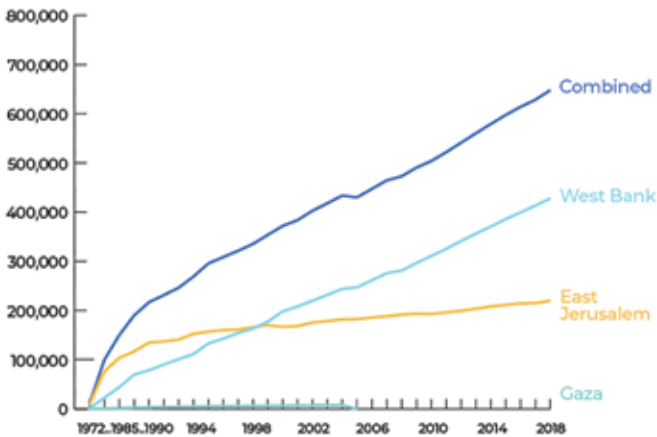
Left: An Israeli settler holds a flag with slogans at the Amona outpost, northeast of Ramallah (Getty Images)

## ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

# Israeli settlements continue to grow

Settlements are Jewish-only communities built on Palestinian land. There are between 600,000 - 750,000 Israeli settlers living in at least 250 settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israeli settlements are illegal under international law.

**Combined:** 683,553  
**West Bank:** 463,353  
**East Jerusalem:** 220,200



A picture taken from the El corridor area of the occupied West Bank shows the illegal Israeli settlement of Maale Adumim, on June 16, 2020 [Ahmad Charabi/AFP]



- Palestinian (Under Israeli occupation)
- Area C - (Palestinian under Israeli control)
- Illegal Israeli settlements and outposts



Source: Foundation for Middle East Peace (1972 - 1999), PeaceNow (2000 - 2018). Israel Ministry of Interior (2020), Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research (2020).

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### 3. After October 7: A Turning Point

The Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent Israeli military campaign in Gaza, had immediate repercussions in the West Bank. But while media attention focused on Gaza’s devastation, violence in the West Bank surged in parallel.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 1,100 settler attacks were recorded between October 7, 2023, and August 2024. By mid-2025, attacks had exceeded 1,400, with over 757 since

the start of that year alone. These included shootings, beatings, arson, and destruction of agricultural land. On average, there are now 6 to 7 settler attacks per day—double the rate before the Gaza war.

The term “pogrom,” used by Israeli and international human rights groups alike, reflects the organized, militarized nature of these assaults: villagers encircled, homes burned, elders beaten, children shot at, all with the apparent complicity of the Israeli state.



Armed Jewish settlers under the protection of Israeli soldiers raid the Old City area of Hebron, West Bank.





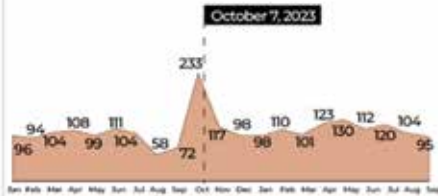
Palestinian villages in the West Bank are seeing an increase in illegal settler attacks since October 7, 2023.

OCCUPIED WEST BANK

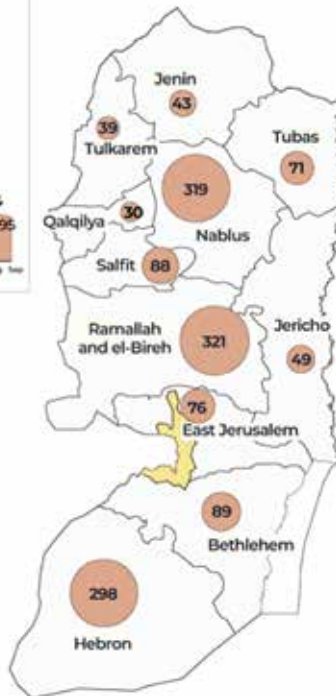
## Israeli settler violence in the West Bank

At least 1,423 incidents of settler violence were recorded across the occupied West Bank over the past year - an average of four settler attacks per day.

Incidents initiated by settlers that resulted in deaths and/or property damage



A group of Jewish settlers under the protection of Israeli soldiers raids the Old City area of Hebron, West Bank on September 14, 2024 [Mamoun Wazwaz]



Source: OCHA | October 7, 2024



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## 4. Death, Displacement, and Ruin

Since October 2023, over 960 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces or settlers. Another 53 Israelis have been killed in Palestinian-perpetrated attacks. The disparity in casualties reflects a broader trend of asymmetrical force.

OCHA reports that over 2,300 Palestinians have been forcibly displaced from rural communities due to settler violence, home demolitions, and movement restrictions. Some estimates place

the figure closer to 30,000 when indirect displacement is factored in.

Among the most tragic episodes was the killing of Awdah Hathaleen in July 2025—a respected Palestinian filmmaker and activist from Umm al-Khair. Shot dead by a settler during a land dispute, his body was withheld by Israeli authorities for over a week. His funeral was restricted; mourners were arrested. The message was chilling: even the dead are not free.

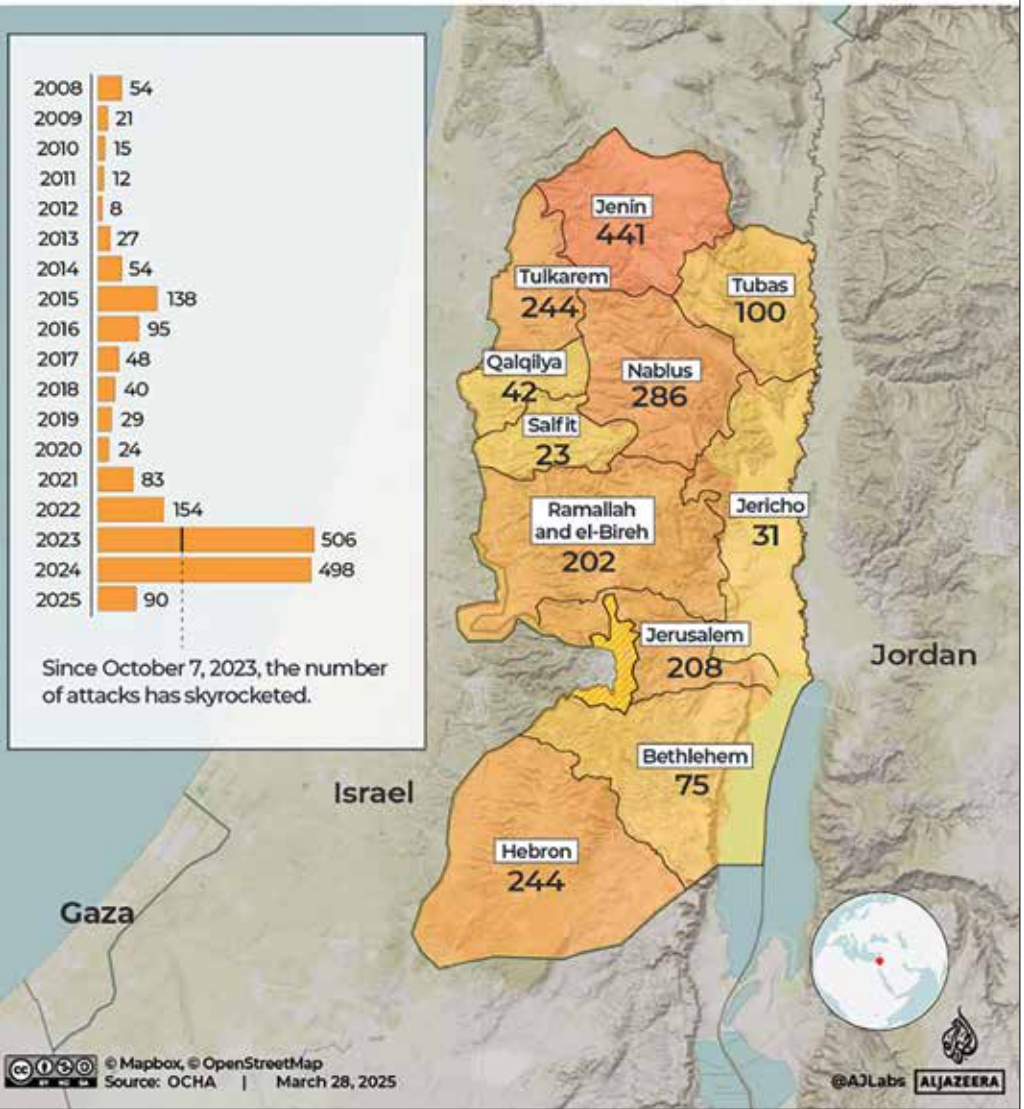
Photo of Awdah Hathaleen



OCCUPIED WEST BANK

# Palestinians killed across the West Bank

Since systematic documentation began in 2008, UN data shows that at least 1,896 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces and settlers.



## [Case Study] The Death of Christianity in the Holy Land: Settlers Attack Taybeh



The land behind the ancient, 1500-year-old Al-Khader Church in Taybeh was set on fire by Israeli settlers.

In July, 2025, Zionist settlers set fire twice to land belonging to local residents and also behind the historic Al-Khader church in Taybeh. They also set fire to the adjacent cemetery while seizing olive groves for livestock grazing. Taybeh is the oldest, and now the only, Christian village in the West Bank.

The *Washington Post* said that this attack was the latest in a series of “violent raids against Palestinian villages in the West Bank, often with impunity in the presence of Israeli soldiers or directly with their help.”

The Christian community in Taybeh faces systematic targeting, with its 50,000-strong minority doubly vulnerable as both Palestinians and Christians. Church officials highlighted how settlers, emboldened by Israeli state impunity, are aggressively expropriating Palestinian lands and homes, undermining decades of efforts to sustain Christian communities. Taybeh’s plight symbolises the collision of religious heritage, territorial conquest and fading international protections in the Occupied territories.



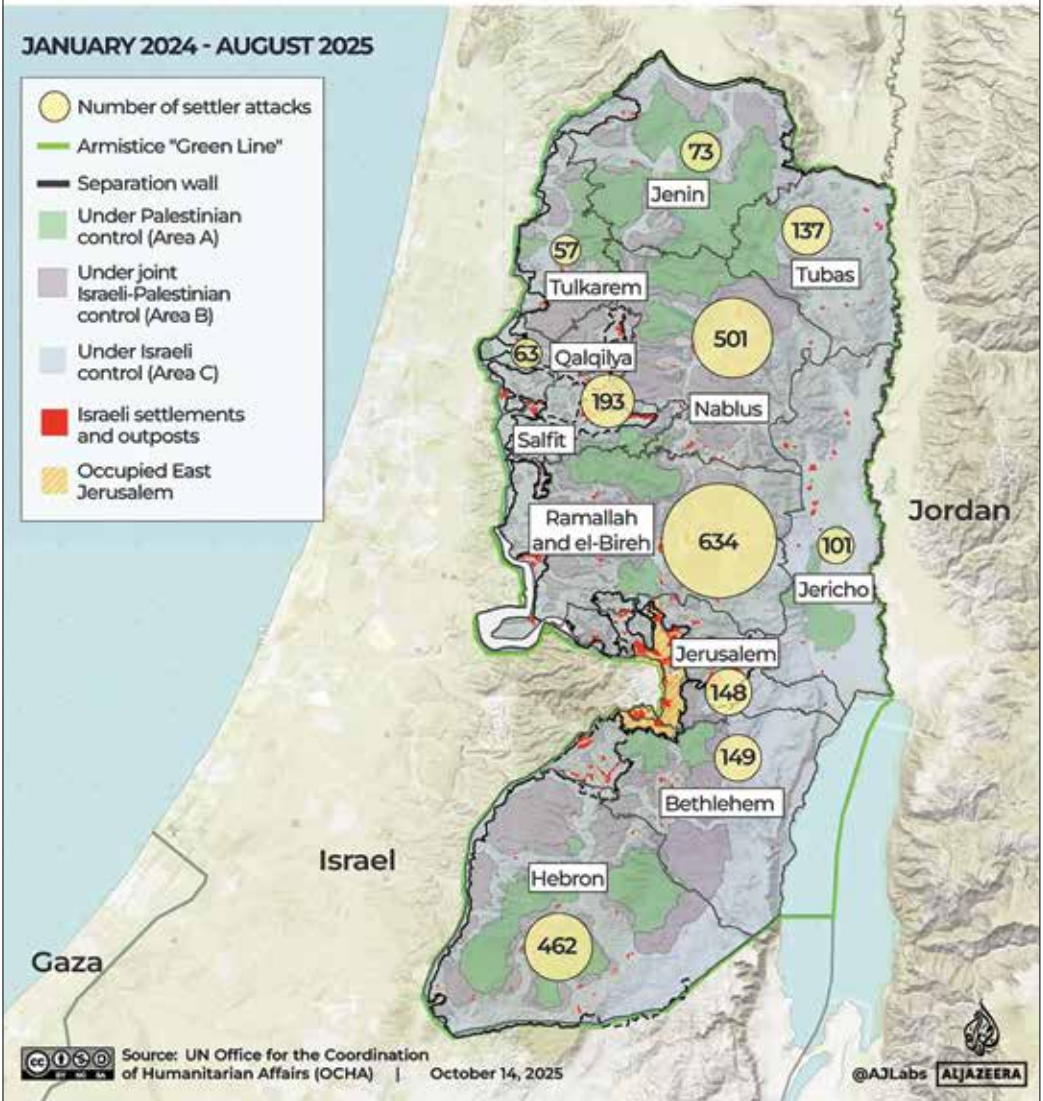
Jerusalem church leaders visit Taybeh following arson attacks by settlers.

## OCCUPIED WEST BANK

# Settler attacks (2024-2025)

Every West Bank governorate has faced settler attacks, especially in Area C, which makes up more than 60 percent of the territory and is under full Israeli control.

JANUARY 2024 - AUGUST 2025



Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) | October 14, 2025

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# 5. Anatomy of a Pogrom: How Violence Unfolds

1

## THE PATTERN

It often begins with a WhatsApp message or a Facebook post in far-right settler groups. There is a call to action following an alleged Palestinian attack or land dispute. Within hours, convoys of settlers descend, usually at night, often accompanied by soldiers.



2

## THE ACTORS

These are not mere civilians. Many belong to extremist networks such as the Hilltop Youth or Lehava. Settlers carry M16 rifles, wear military-style gear, and coordinate in ranks. Since October 2023, the Israeli government has issued thousands of firearms to settlement militias under the pretense of “self-defense.”



# 3

## THE STRATEGY

Targeting is strategic: villages near outposts; shepherding communities in valleys; isolated homes without cameras. Attacks aim to drive residents away permanently—freeing up land for settlement expansion.



# 4

## THE RESPONSE

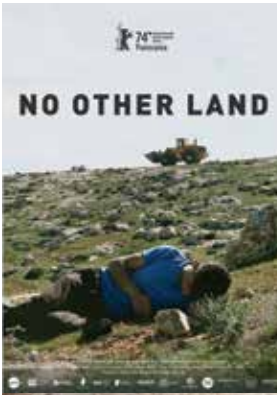
Israeli authorities rarely intervene. According to Yesh Din, only 6.6% of settler violence cases lead to indictment; conviction rates are under 3%. In more than half of all recorded attacks, Israeli forces were present and did nothing. In some cases, they directly participated.



# 6. Profiles in Resistance and Grief

## AWDAH HATHALEEN

At 34, Hathaleen had already won international recognition for his documentary “No Other Land,” which chronicled life under occupation. He was unarmed when shot. Witnesses say the settler fired point-blank. Israeli police declined to prosecute, citing “insufficient evidence.”



Awdah Hathaleen, shot and killed on July 28, 2025.



Family and friends of Awdah Hathaleen cover his grave in dirt during his funeral, in Umm al-Kheir, West Bank



## **SUMOUD NAWAJAA**

A young woman from Masafer Yatta, Nawajaa led a network of shepherds evicted from their ancestral land. Her community faced constant threats. Their livestock were poisoned, tents burned, children detained. “They want us to disappear,” she told a visiting UN delegation in May 2025.



Israeli forces carrying out a demolition in Masafer Yatta. (Anadolu)

## **RABBI ARIK ASCHERMAN**

A long-time Israeli human rights defender, Rabbi Ascherman has faced repeated attacks for accompanying Palestinians during harvest season. In October 2024, he was beaten unconscious by settlers while protecting a Palestinian family in the South Hebron Hills.



Rabbi Arik Ascherman, who had been helping Palestinian farmers defend their land.

# 7. State Support, Not Just Indifference

Israeli far-right ministers such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich have encouraged hardline settler behavior. Ben-Gvir, as National Security Minister, personally oversaw expanded gun licensing for settlers and appointed loyalists to key police posts.

In May 2025, the government approved 22 new settlements—the largest such expansion since the 1990s. This came amid international calls for

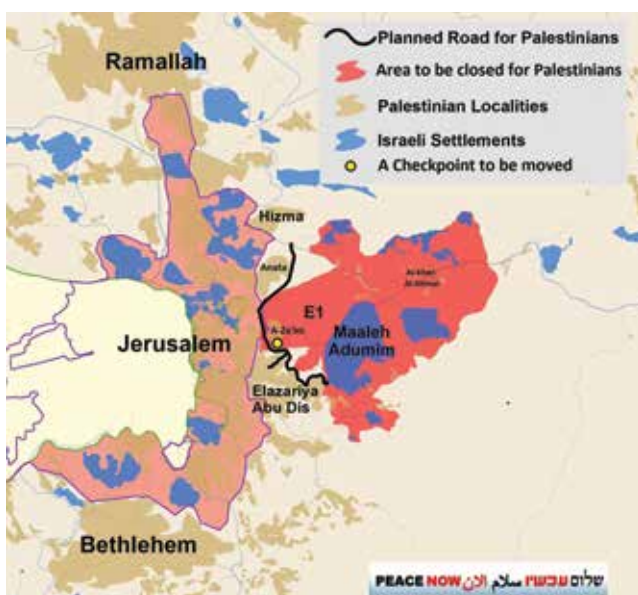
de-escalation. These new settlements formalized many outposts built on private Palestinian land, signaling official endorsement of prior land grabs.

A leaked cabinet memo in March 2025 revealed a government directive to “restore deterrence in Area C” by “pre-emptively neutralizing hostile village clusters.” In effect, it gave military commanders carte blanche to raze entire communities on the flimsiest pretexts.



*Above Left:* Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich next to a map detailing the E1 settlement project.

*Above Right:* Israeli far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich.



*Left Map:* In August 2025, Israel approved at record speed the construction of thousands of new settlement units in the illegal E1 settlement project. The plan also includes a “tunnel road” for Palestinians to drive between the north and south West Bank which will be separated by the construction. The E1 settlement project bisects the West Bank, and effectively kills the two-state solution. Cartographer Khalil Toufakji said: “If Israel builds it, it means that there is no Palestinian state with Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.”

# 8. Case Studies in Terror

## **Kafr Malik (June 2025)**

A settler mob attacked the village after a nearby outpost reported missing sheep. They killed three, torched cars, and burned wheat silos. Israeli soldiers on site made no arrests. CCTV footage showed settlers using military-issued equipment.



*Above:* Murshed Hamayel, 35 years old, Mohamad Al-Naji, 21 years old, and Lotfi Baerat, 18 years old, were killed in the attack.



### **Ein Samiya (December 2024)**

Known for its Roman-era spring, Ein Samiya had survived waves of demolitions. In December, settlers from an illegal outpost emptied the water source with a diesel pump, poisoned nearby wells, and beat a shepherd to death. Within days, the remaining residents fled.



A Palestinian man inspects his tent burned by Jewish extremists in the area of Ein Samiya in August, 2015. Attacks and intimidation by Israeli settlers and military forces on Ein Samiya have been taking place for years. (APA Images)

### **Huwara Redux (April 2024)**

Echoing the February 2023 rampage, settlers blocked roads, threw Molotov cocktails, and set 12 homes on fire in retaliation for a shooting that left one Israeli wounded. The IDF declared Huwara a “closed military zone”—but only after the damage was done.



# 9. International Reaction: Words Without Teeth

The United Nations, EU, and numerous rights groups have condemned settler violence as violations of international law. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned in July 2025 that Israel's actions may amount to crimes against humanity. The U.S. has sanctioned a small handful of settlers.

Yet such rebukes remain toothless. The Israeli government routinely dis-

misses international scrutiny as biased. Meanwhile, Palestinians living under siege watch their homes vanish with no redress.

In January 2025, the International Criminal Court opened a new file on West Bank displacement. However, Israel does not recognize ICC jurisdiction, and most Western powers have been reluctant to support prosecutions.



# 10. Language Matters: Why “Pogrom” Is Accurate

The word “pogrom” originated in Tsarist Russia to describe state-condoned mob violence against Jews. Its use is controversial, but increasingly appropriate. Pogroms are not defined by body counts but by intent: targeted violence against a minority with the tacit or active support of the state.

What we witness in the West Bank mirrors this: targeted communities, premeditated attacks, destruction of life and property, and a state unwilling to protect victims.

When Israeli journalists, rabbis, and former generals call these attacks pogroms, they signal that a moral red line has been crossed. The goal is not merely punishment or retaliation—it is erasure.



*Above:* A depiction of the 19th-century pogroms against Jews in Kyiv by the Tsarist authorities.

*Below:* A field burns amid a series of Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank, near the village of Qusra, June 22, 2023.



# 11. The End Game: A West Bank Without Palestinians



The cumulative effect of settler violence, home demolitions, land confiscations, and movement restrictions is to make Palestinian life in rural West Bank untenable. This is not accidental.

By pushing Palestinians out of strategic corridors, settlers create facts on the ground: disconnected enclaves that can never cohere into a viable state. The vision is clear—a de facto annexation of

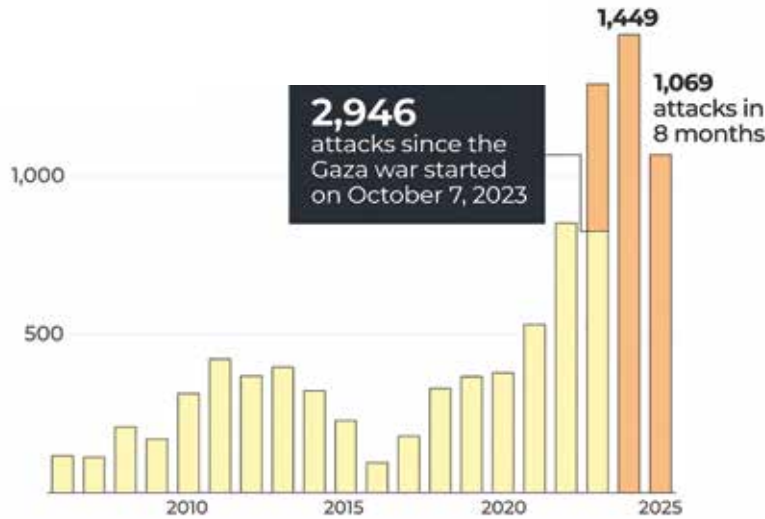
Area C under Jewish control, with Palestinians confined to fragmented bantustans.

Already, over 100 Palestinian villages face total depopulation. Humanitarian agencies report malnutrition, mental health crises, and school closures. The machinery of dispossession grinds on, village by village.

# 12. Conclusion: Bearing Witness, Demanding Justice

The West Bank today is a territory under siege—not from an external enemy, but from an ideology of settler supremacy backed by the state. The language of occupation no longer suffices. This is displacement. This is apartheid. This is pogrom.

Indicator	Estimated Figures (Oct7, 2023–Aug2025)
Settler attacks recorded	~1,100+ (to Aug 2024) increasing to ~1,400+ by mid 2025
Palestinian fatalities	≥ 964 by mid 2025
Israelis killed in Palestinian related violence	53
Palestinians displaced	2,300–30,000+ depending on metrics
Conviction rate for settler violence cases	~3%
New settlement approvals (since 2024)	22 new settlements approved in May2025



Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) | October 14, 2025





In June 2024, illegal Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian villages and properties in several areas of the occupied West Bank that were marking the second day of the Muslim Eid al-Adha holiday.



Mohammed Arrah: a Bedouin displaced along with his family by settler violence in Wadi al-Seqq. Palestinians in the West Bank continue to live in fear in their own land.





The separation wall next to the Arab neighborhood of Al-Eizariya, near where the Israeli government says housing units will be built as part of the E1 settlement development project (AP Photo)

“If the E1 plan proceeds, it will sever the West Bank into north and south, eliminate Palestinian territorial continuity around Jerusalem, and destroy the Bedouin presence in the Eastern Corridor—one of the last active Palestinian footholds in the area.”

—*Al-Baidar Organization for the Defense of Bedouin Rights and Targeted Villages*



THE HOUSE  
OF ISLAM

# I. THE HOUSE OF ISLAM

This section reprinted by permission of Vincenzo Oliveti © 2001

(with the exception of President Obama's speech)

**T**he religion of Islam is based on belief in the One God (who in Arabic is called Allah). It was founded by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (570-632 CE) in the ancient cities of Makkah and Madinah, in the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula (known as the Hijaz). God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ the Holy Qur'an, the Sacred Book of Islam. The religion thus created, however, was not a new message but simply a final restatement of God's messages to the Hebrew Prophets and to Jesus.

The Holy Qur'an says:

*Say ye: we believe in God and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the Prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have submitted. (2:136)*

Moreover, the Holy Qur'an did not exclude the possibility of revelations other than those that were given to the Prophets mentioned in the Bible (and thus did not exclude the possibility of other genuine ancient religions other than Judaism, Christianity and Islam). God says, in the Holy Qur'an:

*Verily we have sent Messengers before thee [O Muhammad]. About some of them have we told thee, and about some have we not told thee... (40:78).*

*And verily we have raised in every nation a Messenger [proclaiming]: serve God and shun false gods... (16:36).*

## THE ESSENCE OF ISLAM

The essence and substance of Islam can be easily summed up by three major principles (which are also successive stages in the spiritual life): Islam (meaning 'submission to God's will'); Iman (meaning 'faith in God'), and Ihsan (meaning 'virtue through constant regard to, and awareness of, God'). The second Caliph, the great 'Umar ibn al Khattab, related that:

*One day when we were sitting [in Madinah] with the Messenger of God [the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ] there came unto us a man whose clothes were of exceeding whiteness and whose hair was of exceeding blackness, nor were there any signs of travel upon him, although none of us knew him. He sat down knee upon knee opposite the Prophet, upon whose thighs he placed the palms of his hands, saying: 'O Muhammad; tell me what is the surrender (Islam)'. The Messenger of God answered him saying: 'The surrender is to testify that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger, to perform the prayer, bestow the alms, fast Ramadan and make if thou canst, the pilgrimage to the Holy House.' He said, 'Thou hast spoken truly,' and we were amazed that having questioned him he should corroborate him. Then he said: 'Tell me what is faith (Iman)'. He answered: 'To believe in God and His Angels and his Books and His Messengers and the Last Day [the Day of Judgement], and to believe that no good or evil cometh but by His Providence.' 'Thou hast spoken truly,' he said, and then: 'Tell me what is excellence (Ihsan)'. He answered: 'To worship God as if thou sawest Him, for if Thou seest Him not, yet seest He thee.' 'Thou hast spoken truly,' he said... Then the stranger went away, and I stayed a while after he had gone; and the Prophet said to me: 'O 'Umar, knowest thou the questioner, who he was?' I said, 'God and His Messenger know best.' He said, 'It was Gabriel [the Archangel]. He came unto you to teach you your religion.'<sup>1</sup>*

Thus Islam as such consists of 'five pillars': (1) the Shahadatayn or the 'two testimonies of faith' (whose inward meaning is the acknowledgement of God).

(2) The five daily prayers (whose inward meaning is the attachment to God). (3) Giving alms or Zakat—one-fortieth of one's income and savings annually to the poor and destitute (whose inward meaning is the detachment from the world). (4) Fasting the Holy month of Ramadan annually (whose inward meaning is detachment from the body and from the ego).

1 Sahih Muslim, Kitab al Iman', 1, N. I. (The Hadiths of the Prophet ﷺ, like all sacred texts, are written above in italics).

(5) Making the Hajj (whose inner meaning is to return to one's true inner heart, the mysterious square, black-shrouded Ka'ba in Makkah being the outward symbol of this heart). Thus also Iman as such consists of belief in all the essential doctrines of religion (and the inner meaning of this is that one should not go through the motions of religion and of the five pillars of Islam blindly or robotically, but rather have real faith and certainty in one's heart). Thus, finally, *Ihsan* as such consists in believing that God always sees us, and therefore that one must be virtuous and sincere in all one's actions. In this connection the Prophet ﷺ said: *'By Him in whose Hand is my Life, none of you believes till he loves for his neighbour what he loves for himself'*.<sup>2</sup> In summary, we could say that the essence of Islam is exactly the Two Commandments upon which Jesus said hangs all the Law and the Prophets:

And Jesus answered him, The first of all commandments is...the Lord our God is one Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second commandment is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.<sup>3</sup>

### THE CANON OF ISLAM

Islam does not, like Christianity, have a clergy. There is no temporal or even spiritual institute that holds it together or unifies it. So how has it held together—and indeed, flourished—for the last fourteen centuries approximately, when its scholars and temporal policymakers keep changing and dying out over time? How has it remained so homogeneous that the Islam of 1900 CE was doctrinally exactly the same as the Islam of 700 CE? Where have its internal checks and balances come from?

The answer is that Islam has a traditional canon:<sup>4</sup> a collection of sacred texts which everyone has agreed are authoritative and definitive, and which 'fix' the principles of belief, practice, law, theology and doctrine throughout the ages. All that Muslim scholars (called *ulema* and muftis or sheikhs and imams) have left to do is to interpret these texts and work out

their practical applications and details (and the principles of interpretation and elaboration are themselves 'fixed' by these texts), so that in Islam a person is only considered learned to the extent that he can demonstrate his knowledge of these texts. This does not mean that Islam is a religion of limitations for these texts are a vast ocean and their principles can be inwardly worked out almost infinitely in practice. It does mean, however, that Islam is 'fixed' and has certain limits beyond which it will not go. This is an extremely important concept to understand, because misunderstanding it, and setting aside the traditional canon of Islam, leads to people killing and assassinating others in the name of religion. The traditional canon of Islam is what protects not just the religion of Islam itself, but the world (including Muslims themselves) from terrorism, murder and oppression in the name of Islam. The canon is Islam's internal check and balance system; it is what safeguards its moderation; it is 'self-censorship' and its ultimate safety feature.

To be more specific, the traditional Sunni Islamic Canon starts with the Qur'an itself; then the great traditional Commentaries upon it (e. g. Tabari;



2 Sahih Muslim, 'Kitab al Iman', 18, n. 72.

3 The Gospel according to Mark 12:29–31. (See also Deuteronomy 6:5; and Matthew 22:37–40).

4 Even the English word 'canon' comes from the Arabic word *kanun* meaning 'law' or 'principle'.



and finally—albeit only extrinsically—Jahiliyya poetry (as a background reference for the semantic connotations of words in the Arabic language). We give a specific (but not exhaustive) list here in order to minimise the possibility of misunderstanding.

## ISLAM IN HISTORY

It is evidently not possible to do justice to the role of Islam in world history, thought and civilisation in a few words, but the following paragraph by Britain's Prince Charles attempts it:

'The medieval Islamic world, from Central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic, was a world

where scholars and men of learning flourished. But because we have tended to see Islam as the enemy, as an alien culture, society, and system of belief, we have tended to ignore or erase its great relevance to our own history. For example, we have underestimated the importance of eight hundred years of Islamic society and culture in Spain between the 8th and 15th centuries. The contribution of Muslim Spain to the preservation of classical learning during the Dark Ages, and to the first flowerings of the Renaissance, has long been recognised. But Islamic Spain was much more than a mere larder where Hellenistic knowledge was kept for later consumption by

Razi; Zamakhshari/Baydawi; Qurtubi; Jalalayn; Ibn Kathir; Nasafi; and al Wahidi's *Asbab al Nuzul*); then the eight traditional collections of Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ, (e. g. Muslim; Bukhari; Tirmidhi; Ibn Hanbal, al Nasa'i; Al-Sijistani; Al-Darimi and Ibn Maja); the later Muhaddithin, or Traditionists (e. g. Bayhaqi; Baghawi; Nawawi and 'Asqalani); then the traditional biographical and historical works of Sira (Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Sa'd, Waqidi; Azraqi; Tabari; and Suhayli); the *Risala* of Al-Shafi'i; the *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik; the *Ihya' 'Ulum al Din* of Ghazali; Ash'arite and Maturidian theology; the (original) 'Aqida of Tahawi; Imam Jazuli's *Dala'il al-Khayrat*,

TOP LEFT: Manuscript pages of *A Sketch of the Islamic Law* by Ma Boliang (1640–1711 CE), an influential Islamic scholar from Jining, China. Islamic scholars who authenticated the work include Li Yongshou, Wen Yingshi, Yang Jiu'en, Ma Minggao, and Ma Zhilin.

TOP RIGHT: A manuscript page from *Sahih al-Bukhari* from the National Library of Bulgaria dated 407 AH (1017 CE).

BELOW: Alhambra Palace in Spain



the emerging modern Western world. Not only did Muslim Spain gather and preserve the intellectual content of ancient Greek and Roman civilisation, it also interpreted and expanded upon that civilisation, and made a vital contribution of its own in so many fields of human endeavour—in science, astronomy, mathematics, algebra (it self an Arabic word), law, history, medicine, pharmacology, optics, agriculture, architecture, theology, music. Averroes [Ibn Rushd] and Avenzoar [Ibn Zuhr], like their counterparts Avicenna [Ibn Sina] and Rhazes [Abu Bakr al Razi] in the East, contributed to the study and practice of medicine in ways from which Europe benefited for centuries afterwards.<sup>25</sup>

On 4 June, 2009, US President Barack Obama said the following at Cairo University:

‘As a student of history, I also know civilisation’s debt to Islam. It was Islam—at places like Al-Azhar—that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe’s Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was innovation in Muslim communities that developed the order of algebra; our magnetic compass and tools of navigation; our mastery of pens and printing; our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds



my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President, John Adams, wrote, ‘The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims.’ And since our founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States. They have fought in our wars, they have served in our government, they have stood for civil rights, they have started businesses, they have taught at our universities, they’ve excelled in our sports arenas, they’ve won Nobel Prizes, built our tallest building, and lit the Olympic Torch. And when the first Muslim



## II. MAJOR DOCTRINAL DIVISIONS WITHIN ISLAM

### Sunni Theology

#### 1) ASH'ARI AND MATURIDI SCHOOLS: SUNNI ORTHODOXY<sup>1</sup>

These two schools of doctrine are followed by the bulk of Sunni Muslims and differ only in minor details.

**Ash'ari School:** This school is named after the followers of the 9th century scholar **Abu al Hasan al Ash'ari** (874–936 CE) and is widely accepted throughout the Sunni Muslim world. They believe that the characteristics of God are ultimately beyond human comprehension, and trust in the Revelation is essential, although the use of rationality is important.

**Maturidi School:** This school is named after the followers of the 9th century scholar **Muhammad Abu Mansur al Maturidi** (853–944 CE) and has a wide following in regions where Hanafi law is practiced. They have a slightly more pronounced reliance on human reason.

#### 2) SALAFI SCHOOL

This school was developed around the doctrines of 18th century scholar **Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab** (1703–1792 CE). Salafis have specific doctrinal beliefs, owing to their particular interpretation of Islam, that differentiate them from the majority of Sunnis, such as a literal anthropomorphic interpretation of God. Salafis place a great emphasis on literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *Hadith*, with skepticism towards the role of human reason in theology.

#### 3) MU'TAZILI SCHOOL

This school was developed between the 8th and 10th centuries. Although it is traced back to **Wasil ibn Ata** (d. 748 CE) in Basra, theologians **Abu al Hudhayl Al-'Allaf** (d. 849 CE) and **Bishr ibn al Mu'tamir** (d. 825 CE) are credited with formalizing its theological stance. Mu'tazili thought relies heavily on logic, including Greek philosophy. Although it no longer has a significant following, a small minority of contemporary intellectuals have sought to revive it. Mutazilites believe that the Qur'an was created as opposed to the Orthodox Sunni view that it is eternal and uncreated. Moreover they advocate using rationalism to understand allegorical readings of the Qur'an.

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<sup>1</sup> Orthodoxy in Islam is based on verse 2:285 of the Holy Qur'an, and has been best defined by the historical 2005 international Islamic consensus on the 'three points' of the Amman Message (see: the Amman Message at the end of this section)

# Shia Theology

## 1) THE TWELVER SCHOOL

The infallibility (*'Ismah*) of the Twelve Imams descended from the family of the Prophet (*Abi al-Bayt*) who are believed to be the spiritual and rightful political authorities of the Muslim community (*Umma*). The twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, is believed to be in occultation to return in the future.

## 2) ISMA'ILI SCHOOL

The Qur'an and *Hadith* are said to have truths lying with a single living Imam, descended directly from the Prophet. Also known as 'seveners' for their belief that Isma'il ibn Ja'far was the seventh leading-Imam of the Muslim community.

## 3) ZAIDI SCHOOL

The infallibility of the Twelve Imams and the notion of occultation are rejected in favour of accepting the leadership of a living Imam. The Imamate can be held by any descendant of the Prophet (*Sayyid*). Also known as 'fivers' by other Muslims for their belief that Zayd ibn Ali was the fifth leading-Imam of the Muslim community.

# Ibadi Theology

## IBADI SCHOOL

Ibadis believe that God created the Qur'an at a certain point in time, and that God will not be seen on the Day of Judgment. They also believe in the eternal nature of hell for all those who enter it.

# III. IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS

## TRADITIONAL ISLAM

(90% of the world's Muslims)

Also known as Orthodox Islam, this ideology is not politicized and largely based on consensus of correct opinion—thus including the Sunni, Shia, and Ibadi branches of practice (and their subgroups) within the fold of Islam, but not groups such as the Druze or the Ahmadiyya, among others.

## ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

(9% of the world's Muslims)  
(8% Salafi; 1% Ikhwan)

This is a highly politicized religious ideology popularised in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through movements within both the Shia and Sunni branches of Islam—characterised by aggressiveness and a reformist attitude toward traditional Islam.

## ISLAMIC MODERNISM

(1% of the world's Muslims)

Emerging from 19th century Ottoman Turkey and Egypt, this subdivision contextualized Islamic ideology for the times—emphasizing the need for religion to evolve with Western advances.

# IIIA. TRADITIONAL ISLAM

## SUNNI

(90% of the world's traditional muslims)

The largest denomination of Muslims referred to as *Ahl as Sunnah wa'l Jama'h* or 'people of the prophetic tradition and community'—with emphasis on emulating the life of the last Prophet, Muhammad ﷺ.

## SCHOOLS OF SUNNI ISLAMIC LAW

### Hanafi

(45%)

Named after the followers of Imam Abu Hanifa (699–767 CE/ 89–157 AH) in Iraq.

### Shafi'i

(28%)

Named after the followers of Imam al Shafi'i (767–820 CE/ 150–204 AH) in Madinah.

### Maliki

(15%)

Named after the followers of Imam Malik (711–795 CE/ 93–179 AH) in Madinah.

### Hanbali

(2%)

Named after the followers of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (780–855 CE/ 164–241 AH) in Iraq.

## SHIA

(9.5% of the world's traditional Muslims)

The second-largest denomination of Muslims referred to as *Shiatu 'Ali* or 'the party of Ali,' the fourth caliph of Islam and first Imam in Shi'ism.

## BRANCHES OF SHIA ISLAM

### Zaidis (Fivers)

(Less than 1%)

Named after the followers of Imam Zaid ibn 'Ali (695–740 CE) in Madinah.

### Twelvers

(8%)

Named after the followers of Imam Ja'far al Sadiq (702–765 CE/ 83–148 AH) in Madinah.

### Isma'ilis (Seveners)

(Less than 0.5%)

Named after the followers of Muhammad ibn Ismail (746–809 CE/128–193 AH) in Madinah.

## SCHOOLS OF ISLAMIC LAW FOR TWELVER SHIA

### Usuli

99% of Twelvers. This dominant school favors the use of *ijtihad*, independent legal reasoning, with an emphasis on four accepted collections of *Hadith*. Derive legal opinions from living *ayatollahs*, or *mujtahids*, whose rulings become obligatory. *Taqlid*, the practice of following rulings without questioning the religious authority, is a core tenet of this school. The name Usuli is derived from the Arabic term *usul* meaning 'principle'.

### Akhbari

Akhbaris reject the use of *ijtihad* or reasoning, and do not follow marjas who practice *ijtihad*. They also prohibit exegesis of the Qur'an. Derive legal rulings from the Qur'an, Hadith, and consensus. The name Akhbari is derived from the Arabic term *akhbar* meaning 'traditions'. They can trace their roots to the followers of Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1627 CE). Akhbaris continue to exist to this day, although in small, concentrated pockets, particularly around Basra, Iraq.

### Ibadi

(0.5% of the world's traditional Muslims)

The Ibadi school has origins in and is linked to the Kharijites, but the modern day community is distinct from the 7th century Islamic sect. It was founded after the death of Prophet Muhammad and is currently practiced by a majority of Oman's Muslim population. Also found across parts of Africa.

## MYSTIC BROTHERHOODS

Although reliable statistics are not available for the millions of Muslims who practice Islamic mysticism, it has been estimated that 25% of adult Sunni Muslims in 1900 CE participated in these brotherhoods as either *murids* (followers of the Sufi guide of a particular order) or *mutabarrikîn* (supporters or affiliates of a particular Sufi order).

### SUNNI ORDERS

#### **Naqshbandiyya**

Founded by Baha al Din Naqshband (d. 1389 CE) in Bukhara, modern day Uzbekistan. Influence: popular from China to North Africa, Europe and America.

#### **Qadiriyya**

Founded by scholar and saint 'Abd al Qadir al Jilani (1077–1166 CE) in Baghdad, Iraq. Influence: stretches from Morocco to Malaysia, from Central Asia to South Africa.

#### **Tijaniyya**

Ahmad al Tijani (d. 1815 CE) who settled and taught in Fez, Morocco. Influence: major spiritual and religious role in Senegal, Nigeria, Mauritania and much of Sub-Saharan Africa.

#### **Shadhiliyyah**

Founded by the Moroccan saint Abu'l-Hassan al Shadili (d. 1258 CE). Influence: most influential in North Africa and Egypt.

#### **Kubrawiyya**

(d. 1221 CE) from Khawarzm, modern day Uzbekistan. Influence: mostly present across Central Asia.

#### **Suhrawardiyya**

Founded by Persian scholar Abu Najib Suhrawardi (d. 1168 CE) in Iraq. Influence: a strong presence in India.

#### **Chishtiyya**

Founded by the Persian saint Mu'in al Din Chishti (d. 1236 CE) Khurasan. Influence: highly influential in India.

#### **Mawlawiyya**

A Turkish order founded by the Persian saint and poet Jalal al Din Rumi (d. 1273 CE). Influence: mainly in Türkiye.

#### **Rifa'iyya**

Founded by Ahmad ibn 'Ali al Rifa'i (d. 1182 CE) in southern Iraq. Influence: widely practiced across the Muslim world with a strong presence in Egypt.

#### **Yashrutiyya**

Founded by 'Ali Nur al Din al Yashruti (d. 1892 CE) in Palestine. Influence: strong presence in Syria and Lebanon.

#### **Badawiyya**

An Egyptian order founded by the Moroccan saint Ahmad al Badawi (d. 1276 CE), considered by many as the patron saint of Egypt. Influence: active role in Egypt and the Sudan.

#### **Khalwatiyya**

A Turkish order founded by the Persian saint 'Umar al Khalwati (d. 1397 CE). Influence: wide presence in the Balkans, Syria, Lebanon and North Africa.

### SHIA ORDERS

#### **Irfan**

*Irfan*, which means 'knowing' in Arabic and 'most beautiful and knowledgeable person' in Pashto, is Shia mysticism. **Mulla Sadr al Din Muhammad Shirazi** (1571–1636 CE) from Iran is considered a leading Shia theorist of *Irfan*.

## IIIB. ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

### SUNNI

#### **Muslim Brotherhood**

The Muslim Brotherhood, or Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen is a transnational Sunni movement, with no particular ideological adherence. It is the largest political opposition organisation in many Arab states, particularly in Egypt where it was founded in opposition to colonial rule by Hassan al Banna in 1928. Al Banna originally sought to revive Muslim culture from its position of exploitation under colonial rule, through charitable and educational work, to bring Islam into a central role in people's life. Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966 CE) was also a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 50s and 60s.

#### **Wahhabism/Salafism**

Wahhabism/Salafism are terms used interchangeably to refer to a particular brand of Islam. Salaf, meaning predecessors, refers to the very early practice of Islam by Muhammad and his immediate successors. Salafism seeks to revive the practice of Islam as it was at the time of Muhammad and can be critical of too much emphasis being placed on thinkers from after this period. Muhammad ibn 'Abd al Wahhab (1703–1792 CE) was an important figure in the resurrection of this ideology therefore Salafism is often simply known as Wahhabism.

### SHIA

#### **Revolutionary Shi'ism**

Revolutionary Shi'ism is an ideology, based on the teachings of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989 CE), which shares many similarities with Marxist revolutionary thought. Khomeini believed that the only way to secure independence from colonial or imperial forces was through the creation of a Shia state, under the idea of Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist). This means that all politics is subject to the opinion of the Supreme Leader who is responsible for the continued success of the revolution. It is only practiced in Iran.

## IIIC. ISLAMIC MODERNISM

Islamic modernism is a reform movement started by politically-minded urbanites with scant knowledge of traditional Islam. These people had witnessed and studied Western technology and socio-political ideas, and realized that the Islamic world was being left behind technologically by the West and had become too weak to stand up to it. They blamed this weakness on what they saw as 'traditional Islam,' which they thought held them back and was not 'progressive' enough. They thus called for a complete overhaul of Islam, including—or rather in particular—Islamic law (*sharia*) and doctrine (*aqida*). Islamic modernism remains popularly an object of derision and ridicule, and is scorned by traditional Muslims and fundamentalists alike.



# THE TOP 50

# The Top 50

1. HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani  
Emir of Qatar (3)
2. HE Justice Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Usmani,  
Mufti and Leading Scholar, Pakistan (6)
3. HE Sheikh Al-Habib Umar bin Hafiz  
Scholar and Founder of Dar Al-Mustafa, Ta-  
rim, Yemen (2)
4. HE Grand Ayatollah Hajj Sayyid Ali  
Khamenei  
Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
(4)
5. HM Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein  
King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,  
Custodian of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem (1)
6. HE Sheikh Dr Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyeb  
Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University, Grand  
Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, Egypt (13)
7. HE Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
President of Türkiye (8)
8. HM Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud  
King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the  
Two Holy Mosques (5)
9. HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan  
President of the UAE (7)
10. HE Anwar Ibrahim  
Prime Minister of Malaysia (15)
11. HE Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hussein  
Al-Sistani  
Marja of the Hawza, Najaf, Iraq (9)
12. HM Mohammed VI  
King of Morocco (10)
13. Sheikh Salman Al-Ouda  
Scholar and Educator, Saudi Arabia (11)
14. HRH Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdul-  
Aziz Al-Saud  
Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia (12)
15. HE Lt Gen Prabowo Subianto  
President of Indonesia (18)
16. Maulana Mahmood Madani  
Leader and President of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind,  
India (14)
17. HRE Sheikh As-Sultan Muhammadu Sa'adu  
Abubakar III  
Sultan of Sokoto, Nigeria (16)
18. HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah  
President of the Forum for Promoting Peace in  
Muslim Societies, Mauritania (17)
19. HE Yahya Cholil Staquf  
Chairman of Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia (19)
20. Professor Ibrahim Kalin  
Director of the National Intelligence Organiza-  
tion, Türkiye (23)
21. Sheikh Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi  
Leader of the Houthi, Yemen (27)
22. HE Abdel Fattah Saeed El-Sisi  
President of Egypt (20)
23. HE Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa  
Former Grand Mufti, Egypt (21)
24. Sheikh Habib 'Ali Zain Al Abideen Al-Jifri  
Director General of Tabah Foundation, Yemen  
(22)
25. Sheikh Hamza Yusuf Hanson  
Teacher and Co-Founder of Zaytuna College,  
USA (24)

26. Sheikh Ahmad Tijani bin Ali Cisse  
Leader of the Tijaniyya Sufi Order, Senegal (25)
27. Sheikh Usama Al-Sayyid Al-Azhari  
Minister of *Awqaf* (Religious Endowments), Egypt (26)
28. Sheikh Mustafa Hosny  
Preacher, Egypt (28)
29. Captain Ibrahim Traoré  
Interim President of Burkina Faso (new)
30. HE Ilham Aliyev  
President of Azerbaijan (30)
31. Al-Habib Luthfi bin Yahya  
Preacher, Indonesia (31)
32. Maulana Tariq Jameel  
Scholar and Preacher, Pakistan (32)
33. Sheikh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi  
Scholar, Syria (33)
34. Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr  
Philosopher and University Professor, USA (34)
35. Dr Timothy Winter (Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad)  
Scholar, UK (42)
36. HE Samia Suluhu Hassan  
President of Tanzania (35)
37. HE Sheikh Uthman Taha  
Calligrapher, Syria (37)
38. HE Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi  
Politician, Tunisia (38)
39. Mohammed Salah  
Footballer, Egypt (39)
40. Sheikh Muqtada Sadr  
Scholar and Politician, Iraq (40)
41. Maulana Nazar-ur-Rehman  
Amir of Tablighi Jamaat, Pakistan (41)
42. HE Sheikh Ibrahim Saleh Al-Hussaini  
Scholar, Nigeria (43)
43. HE Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada  
Leader of the Taliban, Afghanistan (44)
44. Sheikh Muhammad Ilyas Attar Qadiri,  
Founder of Dawat-e-Islami Movement, Preacher, Pakistan (45)
45. HE Mahmoud Abbas  
President of Palestine (HMs)
46. HE Khaled Mashal  
Politician, Palestine (450 lists)
47. HE Ahmed Al-Sharaa  
President of Syria (450 lists)
48. Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas  
Malaysia (46)
49. Professor Mustafa Abu Sway  
Scholar, Palestine (48)
50. HE Muhammad Yunus  
Interim Prime Minister of Bangladesh (50)

# THE TOP 50 AND HONOURABLE MENTIONS LISTED BY CATEGORY

Although the influence of the Top 50 straddles many categories and cannot be limited to just one or another category, it can be insightful to place them into more general categories. To the Top 50 we have added the Honourable Mentions and have chosen three general categories into which to place them: 1. Rulers and Politicians, 2. Scholars, Admin of Religious Affairs and Preachers and 3. Social Issues, Science, Arts & Culture, Media and Sports.

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## *Rulers and Politicians*

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1. HH Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Qatar
2. HE Grand Ayatollah Hajj Sayyid Ali Khamenei, Iran
3. HM King Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein, Jordan
4. HE President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye
5. HM King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, Saudi Arabia
6. HH President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, UAE
7. HE Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister, Malaysia
8. HM King Mohammed VI, Morocco
9. HRH Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, Saudi Arabia
10. HE President Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia
11. Professor Ibrahim Kalin, Director of the National Intelligence Organization, Türkiye
12. Sheikh Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi, Yemen
13. HE President Abdel Fattah Saeed Al-Sisi, Egypt
14. HE Captain Ibrahim Traoré, Interim President of Burkina Faso (new)
15. HE President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan
16. HE President Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania
17. HE Rached Ghannouchi, Tunisia
18. HE Sheikh Muqtada Sadr, Iraq
19. HE Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, Afghanistan
20. HE President Mahmoud Abbas, Palestine (HMs)
21. HE Khaled Mashal, Politician, Palestine (450 lists)
22. HE President Ahmed Al-Sharaa, Syria (450 lists)
23. HE Interim Prime Minister Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh
24. HE Former Prime Minister Imran Khan, Pakistan
25. HE Sir Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, UK

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## *Scholars, Admin of Religious Affairs and Preachers*

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1. HE Justice Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Usmani, Pakistan
2. HE Sheikh Al-Habib Umar bin Hafiz, Yemen
3. HE Professor Dr Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyeb, Egypt
4. HE Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hussein Al-Sistani, Iraq
5. Sheikh Salman Al-Ouda, Saudi Arabia
6. Maulana Mahmood Madani, India
7. HRE Amirul Mu'minin Sheikh As-Sultan Muhammadu Sa'adu Abubakar III, Nigeria
8. HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah, Mauritania
9. Dr Yahya Cholil Staquf, Indonesia
10. HE Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa, Egypt
11. Sheikh Habib 'Ali Zain Al Abideen Al-Jifri, Yemen
12. Sheikh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, USA
13. Sheikh Ahmad Tijani bin Ali Cisse, Senegal
14. HE Sheikh Usama Al-Sayyid Al-Azhari, Egypt
15. Sheikh Mustafa Hosny, Egypt
16. Habib Luthfi bin Yahya, Indonesia
17. Maulana Tariq Jameel, Pakistan
18. Sheikh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi, Syria
19. Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, USA

20. Professor Timothy Winter (Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad), UK
21. Maulana Nazur Rahman, Pakistan
22. HE Sheikh Ibrahim Salih, Nigeria
23. Sheikh Muhammad Ilyas Attar Qadiri, Pakistan
24. Dr Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, Malaysia
25. Professor Mustafa Abu Sway, Palestine
26. HE Grand Ayatollah Abdullah Jawadi Amoli, Iran
27. HE Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Ishaq Fayadh, Iran
28. HE Dr Aref Ali Nayed, Libya
29. Professor Akbar Ahmed, Pakistan
30. Dr Ingrid Mattson, Canada
31. Dr Aisha Bewley, USA
32. HE Alhaji Dr Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, Nigeria
33. Mufti Abul Qasim Nomani, India
34. Mohamed Bechari, France
35. HH Prince Rahuim Aga Khan V, UK
36. Dr Amr Khaled, Egypt
37. Sheikh Nuh Keller, Jordan
38. Dr Muhammad Al-Arif, Saudi Arabia
39. Dr Zakir Abdul Karim Naik, India
40. Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al-Sudais, Saudi Arabia

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*Social Issues, Science, Arts & Culture, Media and Sports*

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1. HE Sheikh Uthman Taha, Syria
2. Mohammed Salah, Egypt
3. HM Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, Jordan
4. Ahd Tamimi, Palestine
5. Sami Yusuf, UK
6. Bisan Owda, Palestine
7. Mehdi Hassan, UK
8. Bassem Yousef, USA
9. Sadio Mane, Senegal
10. Khabib Nurmagomedov, Russia

**Country:** Qatar

**Born:** 3 June 1980 (age 45)

**Source of Influence:** Political

**Influence:** Ruler of richest country per capita in the world

**School of Thought:** Sunni

2025 (3)

2024 (4)

2023 (3)



President Trump with the Press on Air Force One, Oct. 12, 2025:

*“They {Qatar} really helped us with this deal. And the Emir is an amazing man who really helped us. Qatar was a tremendous help to getting this done. I hope people can realize that it’s very, it was very tough and very dangerous for Qatar. They were very brave, and their leader, the Emir, was very, brave, and Qatar should start getting some credit.”*

Over:

**5** million visitors in 2024

Over:

**500** billion sovereign wealth fund



*His Highness*

**Emir Sheik Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani**

# HH Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani

## Emir of Qatar

HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani ascended as Emir of Qatar at the age of 33 after his father, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, abdicated in June 2013. Qatar is the richest country in the world with a GDP per capita of \$77k. It has under 400,000 citizens whilst the rest of its population of 3 million are expatriate workers. It is the top exporter of liquefied natural gas and the site of the third largest natural gas reserves in the world.

**Family and Education:** Sheikh Tamim is Sheikh Hamad's fourth son and was chosen as Crown Prince in August 2003. His mother is the powerful Sheikha Moza, who still plays a prominent public role as an advocate for social and educational causes. Sheikh Tamim completed his studies at a private school in the UK before going on to graduate at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst (in 1998). During his time as Crown Prince (2003-13), Sheikh Tamim had exposure to a wide range of posts including security (he was deputy commander of the armed forces), economics (chairman of the Qatar Investment Authority) and sports. He supervised Qatar's successful bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

**Blockade:** In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, with the backing of the Trump administration, cut all relations with Qatar and imposed trade and travel bans. This drastic action resulted from various claims that Qatar was supporting terrorism and had violated a 2014 agreement with GCC countries. Its good relations with Iran and its hosting Al Jazeera TV network were also factors in this tense situation which saw foodstuff imported from Iran and Turkish soldiers called in to help safeguard Qatar assets. A further complicating factor in this feud was that Qatar hosts the largest American base in the Middle East and all the blockade partners are close allies of the US. The 43-month blockade was finally lifted in January 2021, having made little impact.

**Major Assets:** Qatar continues to increase its influence through major investments globally. The Qatar Investment Authority has over \$557bn in assets ensuring it is a major player in global finance. In addition, Qatar runs the Al Jazeera media network, which was virtually the only global media organisation reporting credibly on the Gaza genocide.

**Peace Broker:** Qatar has positioned itself into the role of peace broker. It hosted the historic signing of a peace deal between the US and the Taliban in 2020 which led to the full withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. It has facilitated the return of prisoners and hostages between Russia and Ukraine. In November 2023, it brokered a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas which led to the release of about 700 Palestinian and 100 Israeli hostages. Doha has also been home to several rounds of negotiation for a ceasefire in the Gaza genocide. It has adopted a strong position of proactive engagement through dialogue with regional neighbours. Qatar has also funnelled billions in aid to Gaza, easing the humanitarian crisis. Sheikh Tamim was the first head of state to visit Damascus after the fall of the Assad regime, and Qatar was the second country (after Türkiye) to reopen an embassy there.



**Peace Talks Attacked:** On 9 September 2025, Israel carried out an airstrike on Doha targeting Hamas leaders. The strike occurred during ceasefire negotiations which Qatar had initiated and was widely condemned as a violation of sovereignty and international law. Casualties included members of Hamas and a Qatari security official. The Israeli attack risked undermining ongoing mediation efforts.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Emir Tamim has overseen significant aid deliveries to Gaza, working closely with humanitarian organisations. Qatar has also continued its diplomatic outreach to pressure aggressors and advocate for civilian protection, reflecting a proactive stance in mitigating the crisis.

**Country:** Pakistan

**Born:** 5 October 1943 (age 82)

**Source of Influence:** Scholarly, Lineage

**Influence:** Leading scholar for the Deobandis and in Islamic finance

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni (Hanafi, Deobandi)

2025 (6)

2024 (8)

2023 (6)

*“Modernity is a double-edged sword which can be used for the benefit of mankind and to cut its own throat”*

# 1866

the year Darul Uloom Deoband was established

# 143

the number of books he has authored



۞ 2 ۞

*His Eminence*

Justice Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Usmani

# HE Justice Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Usmani

## Mufti and Leading Scholar

Justice Sheikh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani is a leading scholar of Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic finance. He is considered to be the intellectual head of the Deobandi School of Islamic learning, as well as an authority outside of the Deobandi School. He served as Judge of the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan from 1982 to 2002.

**Deobandi De Facto Leader:** Usmani is very important as a figurehead in the Deobandi movement—one of the most successful of the Islamic revivalist initiatives of the past century. His views and fatwas are taken as the final word by Deobandi scholars globally, including those at the Deoband seminary in India. Usmani was born in Deoband, India, the son of Mufti Muhammad Shafi (the former Grand Mufti of Pakistan) who founded the Darul Uloom, Karachi, a leading centre of Islamic education in Pakistan. He has authority to teach hadith from Sheikh al-Hadith Mawlana Zakariya Khandelawi amongst others, and he traversed the spiritual path of *tasawwuf* under the guidance of Sheikh Dr Abdul Hayy Arifi, a student of the great revivalist scholar of India, Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanvi. His students in the thousands are spread across the globe as leaders and imams, especially in the Indian subcontinent, central Asia and many Western countries. Deobandis consider themselves orthodox Hanafi Sunnis rooted in a foundation of sufi teaching, but allowing for a broad spectrum of interpretation which accommodates politically passive members of the Taliban.

**Leading Islamic Finance Scholar:** Usmani's other influence comes from his position as a global authority on Islamic finance. He has served on the boards, and as chairman, of over a dozen Islamic banks and financial institutions, and currently leads the International Sharia Council for the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) in Bahrain. He is also a permanent member of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, one of the highest legal bodies in the Muslim world.

**Writer:** He has translated the Qur'an into both English and Urdu. He is the author of a six-volume Arabic hadith commentary on Sahih Muslim. He is the Chief Editor of both the Urdu and English monthly magazine *Albalagh*, and regularly contributes articles to leading Pakistani newspapers on a range of issues.

His legal edicts (fatwas), written over a period of 45 years, have been published in four large volumes. He has authored more than 143 books in Arabic, English, and Urdu.

**New Works:** He is directly supervising *The Hadith Encyclopaedia*, a masterful, pioneering compilation which will provide a universal number to each hadith in a manner that will make referencing any hadith as easy as it is to refer to a verse of the Qur'an. The Encyclopaedia will be over 300 volumes. A second major work recently published is entitled *The Jurisprudence (Fiqh) of Trade*. The book concludes with a proposed Code of Islamic Law of Sale of Goods and Transfer of Property, which serves as a powerful call to action for regulators and standard-setting organizations alike.

**Assassination Attempt:** On 22 March 2019, as Mufti Taqi was on his way to deliver a Friday sermon, gunmen on three motorbikes opened fire on his and an accompanying car. The Mufti, his wife and two grandchildren (a girl aged seven and boy aged five) miraculously survived the shower of bullets untouched, but two people lost their lives and a further two were severely injured. The Prime Minister of Pakistan condemned the attack as did scholars and politicians across the board. As of yet, no one has claimed responsibility for carrying out the attack. He was once again a target for assassination in 2021 and again in 2022.

**Honoured:** In 2019 Usmani was honoured with the Sitara-i Imtiaz (Star of Excellence) by the President of Pakistan. The Sitara-i Imtiaz is an honour and civilian award in the State of Pakistan, which recognizes individuals who have made an "especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of Pakistan, world peace, cultural or other significant public endeavours".

**The Gaza Genocide:** Mufti Usmani has repeatedly affirmed Hamas's right to resist the occupation and called on Muslims globally to help in any way they can, especially through boycotts and donations. He has also called on the armies of Muslim countries to stop the genocide.

**Country:** Yemen

**Born:** 27 May 1963 (age 62)

**Source of Influence:**

Scholarly, Spiritual leader and Preacher, Lineage

**Influence:** Millions of traditional Muslim followers globally

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni (Shafi'i, Ba-Alawi Sufi)

2024 (1)

2023 (11)

2022 (11)

*"Be grateful to those who point out your faults, as it aids salvation."*

15

is the age at which he started teaching and doing dawah

1993

the year Dar Al-Mustafa was founded



۞ 3 ۞

*His Eminence*

Sheikh Al-Habib Umar bin Hafiz

# HE Sheikh Al-Habib Umar bin Hafiz

## Founder and Director of Dar Al-Mustafa

HE Sheikh Al-Habib Umar bin Hafiz, a 39th-generation direct descendant of the Prophet ﷺ, stands as one of the foremost scholars, spiritual guides, and preachers within the Islamic tradition today. His prominent position in the Ba Alawi *Tariqah* further extends his influence over hundreds of millions of Muslims around the globe.

**The Aal Ba Alawi:** The Aal Ba Alawi, derived from “*Banu Alawi*” or “the clan of Alawi”, have called the Hadramaut region in Yemen their home since 4th-century *hijri* (CE 930) when a member of the Prophet’s ﷺ family emigrated there. The Ba Alawi lineage has produced exceptional scholars and devout individuals, celebrated for their efforts in propagating and revitalising Islamic teachings, anchoring their approach in Imam Al-Ghazali’s renowned work, the *Ihya’ Ulum Al-Din*. They have played a pivotal role in spreading and reviving Islam in various regions, including the Malay Archipelago (Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Brunei) through the revered Wali Sanga (the Nine Saints—eight of whom were from the Ba Alawi), in various regions of India such as Kerala and Gujarat, in East Africa in the 20th century through figures such as Habib Umar bin Sumayt and Habib Ahmad Mashhur Al-Haddad and in general with Habib Abdul Qadir Al-Saqqaf, Habib Muhammad Al-Haddar, Al-Allama Ibrahim bin Aqil and Habib Muhammad bin Hafiz. Habib Umar continues this legacy on a global scale, with tours that extend to the USA, Australia, South Africa and Europe.

**Dar Al-Mustafa:** Following the unification of Yemen, Habib Umar founded Dar Al-Mustafa in 1993. It is grounded in three fundamental principles: acquiring knowledge from qualified sources through an authentic chain of transmission; purifying the soul and refining character; and engaging in *dawah*, the call to faith. This institute started with 30 hand-picked students by Habib Umar and now thousands have graduated from it, who upon their return to their home countries, take on the role of influential educators, often by establishing their own educational institutions. In 2001, a sister institution, Dar Al-Zahra, was inaugurated, expanding religious instruction to females. Since then, additional branches have been established in Southeast Asia. Other nearby religious institutions which are closely linked to

Dar Al-Mustafa are the Rubat Tarim (est.1886) and Al-Ahgaff University (est.1995) and Al-Wasatiya University (est.2016).

**Popular Presence:** Habib Umar is extraordinarily active and frequently conducts gatherings both domestically and internationally. In 2023, a tour of Indonesia attracted over 700,000 attendees to his events. The same year, his tour of Malaysia with Sheikh Ali Gomaa, attracted over 500,000 attendees. His connection to Indonesia is strengthened through his online presence, facilitated through Muwasala. Muwasala is an organisation he established in 2007, and which has over 30,000 active members of the Indonesian Sunni scholars. His influence extends even further through the Nahdlatul Ulama, the world’s largest Islamic organisation, which boasts a staggering membership of over 90 million. Within this organisation, Habib Umar is a reference point for all matters related to religious affairs. His monthly online readings to this vast community reinforce his influence in the Islamic world. Many of Habib Umar’s students have risen to prominence as distinguished teachers in their own right and extend his influence further, such as Habib Ali Al-Jifri, Habib Kadhim Al-Saqqaf and Habib Muhammad Al-Saqqaf who established *Al-Erth Al-Nabawi* (the Prophetic Legacy) satellite channel which broadcasts Habib Umar’s daily classes as well as being a platform for an array of traditional scholars.

**Scholarship:** Habib Umar ranks among the world’s preeminent Muslim academics and scholars. His role as a signatory of “A Common Word Between Us and You” has helped to foster understanding between Muslims and Christians. He has authored a number of works that have been translated into several languages. They include: *Al-Dhakhirah Al-Musharrafah*, a compendium of essential knowledge for every Muslim, three concise hadith collections, and a summary of the third quarter of Imam Al-Ghazali’s *Ihya’ Ulum Al-Din*. Furthermore, his compositions for the *mawlid*, *Al-Diya’ Al-Lami’* and *Al-Sharab Al-Tabur*, are recited at gatherings worldwide. He is the recipient of the King Faisal International Prize for Islamic Studies (2016) and the Sheikh Zayed Award for Human Fraternity (2021), but worth far more than any award is the testimony of many that Habib Umar precisely emulates the character of the Prophet ﷺ.

**Country:** Iran

**Born:** 16 July 1939 (age 86)

**Source of Influence:** Political, Administrative

**Influence:** Supreme Leader of 92 million Iranians

**School of Thought:** Traditional Twelver Shia, Revolutionary Shi'ism

2025 (4)

2024(3)

2023 (2)

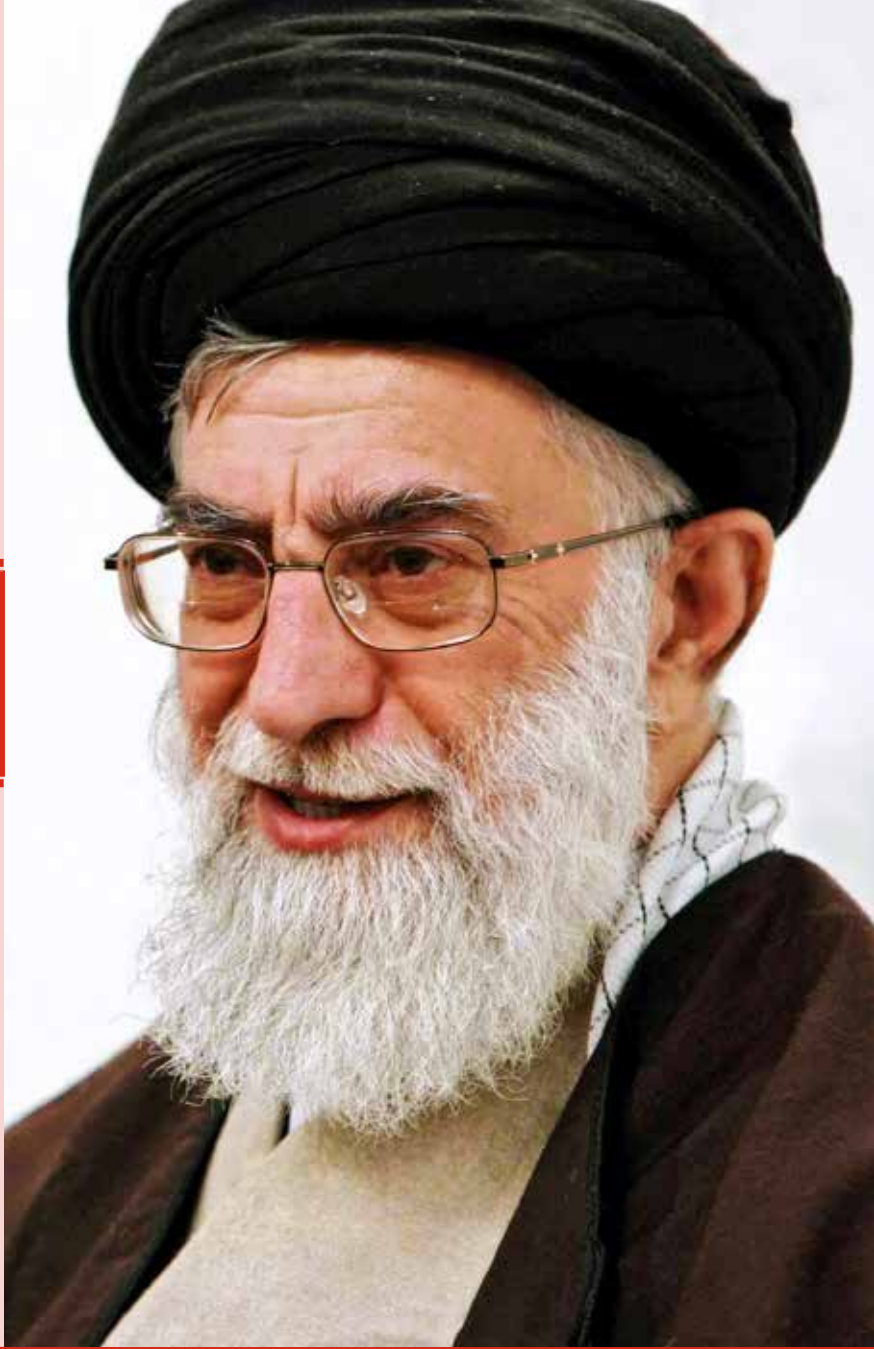
*"The purpose of Hajj is to unify the Islamic Ummah against disbelief, oppression, arrogance, and human and non-human idols."*

89%

National Literacy Rate

36

Years  
as Supreme Leader



۴

*His Eminence*

Grand Ayatollah Hajj Sayyid Ali Khamenei

# HE Grand Ayatollah Hajj Sayyid Ali Khamenei

## Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran

HE Grand Ayatollah Khamenei is the second Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He was born in Mashhad and studied in the leading Iranian religious seminary in Qom before becoming involved in the struggle with the Pahlavi Regime in the 60s and 70s. He was a key figure in the revolution in 1979 and served as President between 1981-1989 before succeeding Ayatollah Khomeini as Supreme Leader upon the latter's death in 1989.

**Supreme Leader, Velayat-e Faqih:** Khamenei's current influence stems from his powerful position as a religious leader, which gives him a unique role in political affairs. His job is to enact the *Velayat-e Faqih*—the guardianship of the jurist. In real terms this means a system where scholars of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) have a controlling say in the political affairs of the state. The rule of the jurist was a concept created by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, based on ideas that have run through Iranian political history since the time of Shah Ismail—who was the first to make Shia Islam the national religion of Iran in the early 16th century under the rule of the Safavids. It was conceived as a way of safeguarding the Iranian nation from tyranny, giving the final say in all matters to a group of religious scholars, the Council of Guardians. This Council is headed by a chief arbitrator—the Supreme Leader.

**Leader of Shia Revolution:** Khamenei draws much of his influence from his role as a leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran was forged out of the 1979 Revolution. Combating what many saw as the tyrannical rule of the Shah, Khamenei joined the Society of Combatant Clergy that staged demonstrations mobilising many of the protests leading to the Shah's overthrow. After the revolution in 1979, Khamenei became a founding member of the Islamic Republic Party, sat in the Assembly of Experts that drafted the new constitution, and was twice targeted in assassination attempts—the second leaving his right arm paralysed.

**Sunni-Shia Reconciliation:** On 2 September 2010, Khamenei issued a historic fatwa banning the insult of any symbol that Sunnis hold dear, including but not limited to the Companions and wives of the Prophet ﷺ. This fatwa was received with great appreciation by the Chancellor of Al-Azhar University, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. In August 2024, Khamenei led the funeral prayers for Ismail Haniyeh, Ha-

mas's political bureau chief, who was assassinated in Tehran in an Israeli strike.

**War:** In June 2025, escalating hostilities between Israel and Iran culminated in the United States launching airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities and military assets, marking the most direct confrontation between Tehran and Washington since the 1979 Revolution. The US intervention, undertaken in support of Israel, sought to cripple Iran's deterrent capabilities. In response, Iran responded with precision missile and drone attacks that targeted US bases and Israeli infrastructure across the Middle East. Though costly, Iran withstood the strikes with much of its military infrastructure intact and demonstrated its capacity to project power far beyond its borders. This resilience has elevated Iran's prestige across the Muslim world. For many, Khamenei's leadership during the war symbolised defiance in the face of overwhelming odds, enhancing Iran's reputation as the vanguard of resistance against occupation and imperialism.

**The Gaza Genocide:** The war on Gaza has been a defining issue for Khamenei's later leadership. He has consistently framed Israel's campaign as a genocide against the Palestinian people, denouncing Western governments, particularly the US, for complicity through political and military support. He has pledged unwavering backing for Palestinian resistance movements, calling them the "frontline of the ummah's dignity."



**Country:** Jordan

**Born:** 30 January 1962 (age 63)

**Source of Influence:** Custodian of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

**Influence:** King with authority over 12 million Jordanians; outreach to Traditional Islam

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (1)

2024 (5)

2023 (5)

On September 15th during his official visit to Singapore, HH Pope Francis said (in a historic politically and spiritually unprecedented statement from a Catholic Pope about a Muslim ruler):

*“And I want to say something, this may be a bit of me getting involved in politics: I am very, very grateful to the King of Jordan. He is a man of peace. King Abdullah is a good man.”*

Over

**3** million refugees in Jordan

**41<sup>st</sup>** generation direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ



۞ 5 ۞

*His Majesty*

**King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein**

# HM King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein

## King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Custodian of Muslim and Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem

**Gaza War:** Whilst the King has not been able to stop the war in Gaza to date, despite Jordan's relative poverty he has emerged as the most effective Arab and Islamic leader in the world for a number of critical steps he has taken to stop a larger regional war, and bring life-saving aid to the people of Gaza and the West Bank.

1. After the October 7th 2023 attacks on Israel, Hamas did not explain their position and their actions to the world. This left many in Israel (including in the Knesset and the government itself—as had been fully documented by South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice in Le Hague) calling for Gaza to be obliterated with nuclear weapons and for the 2.5 million residents there to be killed. Figures like US Senator Lindsey Graham publicly supported this idea even in 2024. A steady procession of western leaders made political pilgrimages to Tel Aviv, to give Israel the money, the means, the weapons and the cover to do whatever it wanted. Israel also put out a false narrative (thoroughly exposed by Jewish journalist Max Blumenthal on his YouTube Channel The Grayzone) depicting the attacks as even more horrific than they actually were, and falsely accusing Hamas of raping women, beheading babies and burning their victims (which was actually the result the Israeli army's own Hellfire missiles in 'friendly fire'). It fell on King Abdullah to change the opinion of Western decision-makers through shuttle diplomacy—which he tirelessly did thereby avoiding worse responses—just as his wife Queen Rania undertook changing western general public opinion.
2. Short of killing everyone in Gaza, Israel's 'Plan B' led many quarters in Israel to call for forcibly expelling all the remaining population of Gaza to Egypt, and then immediately the population of the West Bank to Jordan. Israeli settlers stepped up their violence and harassment in the West Bank and threatened genocide, leaving maps at night showing routes to escape to Jordan. King Abdullah along with President Sisi of Egypt made

it clear that forcible transfer was a 'red line'. Jordan's feisty foreign minister Ayman Safadi threatened several times that this would lead to war with Jordan. Despite unimaginable suffering—on June 12, 2024 the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres declared that Gaza has 'a unique level of destruction'—the Palestinian populations of the Gaza Strip and West Bank held firm, forcible transfer was avoided. But then 'Plan C' to strangle and starve Gaza was activated.

3. In response to the starvation of Gaza, the King organised an international donors conference in Amman. Whilst many international agencies mobilised aid—most by private donors—almost all of this aid lay rotting on the Egyptian border unable to enter Gaza. Even when it entered Gaza, the Israeli army checkpoints made sure most of it exited again or was dumped on the borders out of reach of Gazans. Moreover, the agencies had no mechanism for co-ordination so many of them had purchased the wrong things or the same things so that critical items like ketamine (an anaesthetic for surgical operations), insulin, baby formula, and fuel for the desalination plants were not being bought at all. The King's conference put a spotlight on this and more effective aid gradually entered Gaza. When even this aid was curtailed, the Jordanian air force started parachuting aid to Gaza on November 6th 2023, with the King himself personally on the aid planes. The Israeli air force was informed but not asked permission and begrudgingly allowed these drops, which continue until this day. Food conveyers from Jordan to the North of Gaza were also set up, and formed a critical lifeline, and indeed Jordan also provides a critical lifeline to the entire West Bank in terms of food and medicine. As of September 2025, Jordan has delivered over 119,000 tons of humanitarian aid to Gaza through a combination of air-drops, truck convoys, and partnerships. The Jordanian Armed Forces have independently trucked and airdropped over 35,000 pallets

of food, medicine, and essentials—totaling more than 22,000 metric tons—focusing on northern Gaza amid Israel’s blockade. This is the third largest military assistance operation in the world since the Berlin airlift of 1948-1949, almost all at Jordan’s expense.

4. Jordan has military hospitals in Tal al-Hawa and two in Khan Yunus in Gaza (including a women’s and maternity hospital) in addition to a mobile bespoke prosthetics 3D printer which has so far manufactured over 14,000 prosthetic limbs (as well as other military hospitals in Jenin, Ramallah and Nablus in the West Bank). Israel systematically bombed all of Gaza’s own hospitals—most infamously the Ahli hospital, killing over 500 civilians—bringing the entire medical system to its knees under the pretext that they harboured ‘terrorist tunnels’ underneath them. The only effective healthcare that now exists in Gaza are Jordan’s two military hospitals—one of which existed before the war—and which Israel harasses but does not destroy. As of September 2025, these had performed over 160,000 operations and treated over 4 million cases during the war.
5. ‘Plan D’: Israel has tried repeatedly to drag Iran and the US into a wider regional war. On April 1st they bombed the Iranian Consulate in Syria and on July 31st they assassinated Hamas’s political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. In response to the first, and in co-ordination with allies, Jordan shot down Iranian missiles headed for Israel over Jordan, and in response to the second, the King dispatched his foreign minister to the new, moderate President in Iran, Masoud Pezeshkian (see page 150) to convince him not to respond. The king was at first criticised in the Islamic world, even in Jordan, for both actions, but a wider war has so far been averted, and conflict remains at the level of controlled tit-for-tat attacks between Israel and Iran’s regional allies (Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarullah in the Yemen) to this day, proving the King right, and keeping the focus on the suffering in Palestine.

**In summary:** though the Gaza war is abominable and has so far killed over 66,000 Gazans (this is acknowledged to be a gross undercount, and includes over 28,000 women and children), 1000 Israelis and 1000 Palestinians in the West Bank, in the end Israel

is a world nuclear power and a regional superpower, and only the USA can reign it in completely. Yet Jordan’s King Abdullah has patiently and shrewdly managed to contain the Gaza war from becoming far worse and developing into a full scale regional, and possibly world, war.



**The King’s Position:** King Abdullah is not the leader of a rich or populous country, nor is he a religious scholar, but what makes his role vital is being the linchpin to the central cause of the Islamic world: the issue of Palestine and Jerusalem, and his being the Custodian of the Muslim and Christian Holy Sites there. There are over 12 million Palestinians in the world, 3 million in Jordan itself, around another 5 million in the Occupied Territories and Israel, and 2 million in Gaza. As Palestine is not recognized as a state by the entire international community, the responsibility for an equitable peace falls largely on its next-door neighbour Jordan, and on King Abdullah II in particular, especially as his family have been the hereditary Custodians of the Holy Sites from before the creation of the state of Jordan itself. Moreover, in the face of attempts to dissolve the very notion of Palestinian identity, dissolve UNRWA and illegally and unilaterally grant Jerusalem to Israel, King Abdullah has been the only influential voice actively—but responsibly—resisting this catastrophe for the Islamic world. Moreover, Jerusalem is one of Islam’s three holiest sites and is as holy to Muslims as it is to Jews and Christians, and its loss would represent a grievance based not only on justice but on faith to all the world’s 2.1 billion Muslims, a situation with explosive potential consequences, to say the least.

**The King’s Lineage:** King Abdullah II is a 41st-generation direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through the line of the Prophet’s ﷺ grandson Al-Hasan. The Hashemite Dynasty is the second-oldest ruling dynasty in the world, after that of Japan. As the current bearer of the Hashemite legacy, HM King Abdullah II has a unique prestige in the Islamic world, and is now the longest-serving Arab ruler;

having assumed the throne in 1999 and celebrated his Silver Jubilee as king in 2024. His father King Hussein himself ruled for 47 years and was the longest-serving Arab leader when he died in 1999.

**The King's Heritage:** HM King Abdullah II is the Custodian of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem, the sacred compound which contains Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. Indeed, the Hashemite Custodianship of the Muslim and Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem is essential in safeguarding the pre-1967 Status Quo at the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif. The Status Quo is a critical insurance against attempts at temporal and spatial division of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Judaizing its surroundings. His Majesty is also the custodian of Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem. He has firmly supported the upkeep and renovation of these sites. In 2016 King Abdullah issued a Royal Benefaction to provide for the restoration of Jesus' Tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, at his own personal expense. And in 2018 he helped fund the restoration of the entire Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem from his own funds.

**The King's Reforms:** In 2021, HM King Abdullah II pushed for political modernization and announced the introduction of a new committee of 92 members tasked to modernize the political system and to propose new laws for local governments. The committee proposed draft laws for political parties and elections, as well as 22 amendments to the Jordanian Constitution regarding parliamentary work and empowering women and youth. In 2024, under his guidance, parliamentary democratic elections under a party or coalition system took place for the first time.

**The King's Traditions:** 80% of Jordan's laws are based on the Ottoman *Majalla* and hence on traditional Hanafi shariah. Jordan has a Chief Mufti, official muftis in every province, army and police grand muftis and shariah courts for all personal status issues for Muslims. Yet it has Orthodox-Priest-run courts for its native Christian population in Christian personal status issues, and Jordan guarantees Christian seats in the Parliament and de facto at every level of government. It has civil law for all citizens and additional tribal laws and customs for tribesmen and tribeswomen.

**The King's Faith:** In response to growing Islamophobia in the West in the wake of 9/11 and rising sectarian strife, King Abdullah II launched the Amman Message initiative in 2004 (see "www.amman-

message.com" on page 138), which was unanimously adopted by the Islamic World's political and temporal leaderships. King Abdullah II has also initiated many projects which promote traditional Islam such as: Altafsir.com (see page 188); the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (W.I.S.E.) in Jordan (see [www.wise.edu.jo](http://www.wise.edu.jo)); Integral Professorial Chairs for the study of the work of Imam Al-Ghazali at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Imam Al-Razi at the King Hussein Mosque, Imam Al-Suyuti's Work at Al-Husseini Grand Mosque and Imam Al-Nawawi's Work at Al-Salt Grand Mosque and at (W.I.S.E.).

HM King Abdullah II is also lauded as an interfaith leader for his support of the 2007 A Common Word initiative (see page 221). He was also the initiator and driving force behind the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Resolution in 2010 (see page 180). In 2014 HM King Abdullah hosted HH Pope Francis in Jordan (having previously hosted both HH Pope Benedict XVI and HH Pope John Paul II). In 2015 the Baptism Site of Jesus Christ on Jordan's River Bank was unanimously voted a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Thus, at the same time that DA'ISH was destroying Syria and Iraq's historical and archaeological treasures, King Abdullah was preserving not just Muslim Holy Sites, but Christian Holy Sites and universal historical and religious treasures as well. In 2014 King Abdullah established a fellowship for the study of love in religion at Regent's Park College, Oxford University.



**The King's Protection:** Jordan has around 2 million registered and unregistered refugees from Syria and Iraq and other regional conflicts (such as Libya and Yemen), in addition to around 3 million refugees from the Palestine conflict. Despite its paucity of resources, Jordan has welcomed and accommodated a staggering number of refugees and is seen by many as the most stable country in a turbulent region. It has the highest percentage of refugees of any country in the world.

**Country:** Egypt

**Born:** 6 January 1946 (age 79)

**Source of Influence:** Administrative

**Influence:** Highest scholarly authority for the majority of Sunni Muslims, runs the foremost and largest Sunni Islamic university

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (13)

2024 (14)

2023 (14)

*“The tolerant teachings of Islam honoured man, preserved women’s rights, criminalized extremism and racism, and established the values of mutual respect and coexistence among all human beings”*

Over:

**2** million

Al-Azhar students in Egypt

**970**<sup>CE</sup>

the year Al-Azhar University was founded



۞ 6 ۞

*His Eminence*

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyeb

# HE Sheikh Dr Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyeb

## Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque

Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyeb was appointed Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar in March 2010 following the passing of Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi. Before that, he served as President of Al-Azhar University and earlier as Grand Mufti of Egypt. His scholarship and leadership position him as one of the foremost Sunni clerics globally.



**Leader of Al-Azhar University:** Sheikh Al-Tayyeb leads the second-oldest university in the world, where teaching has continued without interruption since 975 CE. Al-Azhar represents the centre of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence. It is a key institution that issues authoritative religious rulings and has provided extensive Islamic education to Egyptian and international students since its inception over a millennium ago. This history makes it a bastion of Sunni traditionalism. The university is considered one of the most prominent Islamic educational institutions and the foremost centre of Sunni Muslim scholarship worldwide.

**Administers Al-Azhar Education Network:** Al-Azhar is currently the largest university in the world, having risen from a group of three schools in the 1950s to its current state with 72 feeder schools, with close to 300,000 students studying there at any one time. Including schools that are part of Al-Azhar *waqf* initiatives, there are close to 2 million students. The graduates of Al-Azhar inspire great respect as religious leaders within the Muslim community, and it enjoys a powerful alumni organisation, which makes the head of Al-Azhar an extraordinarily powerful and influential person.

**Scholarly Influence:** His scholarly influence as a

leading intellectual of Sunni Islam spans the globe. He has served as the Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Aswan, and the theology faculty of the International Islamic University in Pakistan. He has also taught in universities in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. This influence is disseminated popularly through his online presence, with over 20 million followers on social media.

**Advocate of Traditional Islam:** Sheikh Al-Tayyeb has emphasised his mission to promote traditional Islam since becoming Grand Sheikh. He has stressed the importance of teaching students about Islamic heritage—considering Al-Azhar graduates as ambassadors of Islam to the world. In an age where claimants to authoritative Islam seem to be on every corner, Sheikh Al-Tayyeb has both the institute and the personal skills to authentically claim to be a representative of traditional Islam—Islam as practised by the majority of Muslims throughout the ages. Sheikh Al-Tayyeb has defined the Sunni community (*Ahl Al-Sunnah wa Al-Jam'ah*) as those who follow Imam Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'ari and Imam Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi and the scholars of Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi'i jurisprudence, as well as the moderate scholars of the Hanbali school. He also included the Sufis following the way of Imam Al-Junayd.

**Initiatives:** His tenure has been marked by interfaith initiatives. In 2020 he co-established the International Day of Human Fraternity with Pope Francis. He visited the Vatican in 2022, fostering Christian-Muslim dialogue. He also encourages media coverage of injustice, education grants for African students, and supporting Al-Azhar's branches abroad.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb has been a vocal critic of the genocidal Israeli war on Gaza. In July 2025, Al-Azhar under his leadership issued a fierce condemnation of Israel's genocide and starvation policy in Gaza. Al-Tayyeb has actively advocated for humanitarian relief, pressing Arab and Muslim leaders to ensure aid delivery and end the bloodshed. He has rejected displacement schemes outright and, in 2025, called for unified Arab stances against forced expulsions.

**Country:** Türkiye

**Born:** 26 Feb 1954 (age 71)

**Source of Influence:** Political

**Influence:** President of 87 million Turkish citizens

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (8)

2024 (7)

2023 (4)

*“If we look at history, we will see that regimes which persecute [their people] do not remain standing”*

Over

**60** million tourists in 2023

**\$30** billion incentive programme for high-tech and green investments



7

*His Excellency*

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

# HE President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

## President of the Republic of Türkiye

His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has dominated Turkish politics for over two decades, progressing from mayor of Istanbul (1994–1998) to Prime Minister (2003–2014) and President since August 2014.

**Elections:** Leading the Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2001, Erdoğan secured three consecutive prime ministerial victories with majorities in 2002, 2007, and 2011, ushering in unprecedented economic growth, infrastructure booms, and constitutional reforms. As Türkiye's first popularly elected president, he won in 2014 (52%), 2018 (52.6%), and a 2023 runoff. His unyielding advocacy for Muslim causes—from Uyghurs to Rohingya—has cemented global admiration among Muslims, positioning Türkiye as a powerhouse bridging East and West.

**Challenges:** The March 2024 local elections delivered a stinging rebuke: the opposition CHP captured 37.8% nationally, seizing Istanbul (Ekrem İmamoğlu, 51%) and Ankara (Mansur Yavaş), relegating AKP to second place at 35.5%—its worst since 2001—amid voter fury over inflation and authoritarianism. “Erdomonics”—Erdoğan's low-interest-rate dogma—depreciated the lira over 400% against the USD since 2008, fuelling 2022's 85% inflation peak. The adoption of Mehmet Şimşek's orthodox policies since 2023 have attracted \$15 billion in foreign investment.

**Failed Coup Ramifications:** The ramifications of the failed coup of 15 July 2016, which led to about 200 deaths, still continue. Erdoğan squarely laid the blame of orchestrating the coup on the late Fethullah Gülen, and has led an all-out attack on Gülen's organisations and supporters. There has been a major crackdown on many sectors with about 300,000 civil servants being dismissed in various state institutions, with over half from the education sector. Also, 50,000 people remain in detention with this number continually rising as authorities press ahead with regular raids.

**Between the US and Russia:** Relations between Türkiye and the United States remain tense following Ankara's 2019 acquisition of Russia's S-400 air defense system. This decision led to Türkiye's suspension from the F-35 fighter jet program and sanctions targeting its defence industry. Türkiye has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but avoided sweeping sanctions on Moscow. At the same time, it hosted key Russia-Ukraine peace talks in

Istanbul in May 2025 and brokered several prisoner exchanges, strengthening its diplomatic role.

**Role in Syria:** Erdoğan has been a central player in the Syrian conflict since 2011, initially backing opposition forces against Bashar al-Assad. Turkish forces now maintain control over parts of northern Syria to counter both ISIS remnants and Kurdish militias linked to the PKK. Erdoğan has also facilitated millions of Syrian refugees inside Türkiye, though domestic debate over their future is intensifying.



**Cultural Power:** In July 2020, Erdoğan restored Hagia Sophia as a mosque—reversing Atatürk's 1934 secular designation—an act widely celebrated in the Muslim world. In 2022, the United Nations formally recognised Türkiye's preferred name (pronounced tur-key-YAY), aligning international usage with its official identity since independence in 1923. Türkiye's global influence has also been amplified by its television and film industry. In 2024 the Turkish TV-series sector exported over 300 productions to nearly 200 countries, reaching close to one billion unique viewers annually. *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century), and *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* are among the historical dramas especially popular, with *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* boasting over 3 billion views globally.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Erdoğan has likened Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to Hitler and framed Türkiye as a defender of Palestinian rights, halting \$7 billion in annual trade with Israel in May 2024, closing airspace to Israeli flights in August 2025, and banning Israeli vessels from Turkish ports. However, there is criticism of loopholes through Greece and Azerbaijan allowing trade with Israel, and the role of NATO radar base at Kürecik.

**Country:** Saudi Arabia

**Born:** 31 December 1935  
(age 90)

**Source of Influence:** Political

**Influence:** King with authority over 35 million residents of Saudi Arabia and approximately 14 million pilgrims annually

**School of Thought:** Moderate Salafi

2025 (5)

2024 (2)

2023 (1)

*“My primary goal is to be an exemplary and leading nation in all aspects, and I will work with you in achieving this endeavour”*

**56%** of GDP

is non-oil activities in 2025

**8** UNESCO World  
Heritages sites



ﷻ 8 ﷻ

*His Majesty*

**King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud**

# HM King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud

## King of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques

HM King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud was proclaimed the seventh King of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in January 2015, following the death of his half-brother, King Abdullah. Prior to this, he served as Crown Prince from June 2012 and held numerous senior roles, including Governor of Riyadh Province for nearly five decades. King Salman's authority derives from his position as absolute monarch of the Arab world's most influential state, the custodian of Islam's two holiest cities, and ruler of one of the world's largest oil-producing nations.

**Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques:** As Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman oversees Makkah and Madinah, visited annually by millions of pilgrims. Each year, between two and three million Muslims perform Hajj, while millions more undertake Umrah throughout the year. Major multibillion-dollar expansion projects are underway in both the Masjid al-Haram in Makkah and the Prophet's ﷺ Mosque in Madinah, improving capacity, transportation, and facilities for pilgrims. His custodianship gives him unparalleled influence over the global Muslim community.

**Head of the World's Largest Dawah Network:** King Salman is also head of the most extensive *dawah* network of missionary Muslims in the world, promoting the Salafi brand of Islam. Salafism is historically rooted in Saudi Arabia and owes its global spread to the financial backing of Saudi Arabia.

**Oil Reserves:** Saudi Arabia possesses around 17% of the world's proven oil reserves, and petroleum continues to account for a majority of state revenues. However, King Salman has overseen a major strategic shift through Vision 2030, launched in 2016 under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's leadership, aiming to diversify the economy, reduce dependence on hydrocarbons, and transform the Kingdom into a hub for tourism, technology, logistics, and renewable energy.

**Vision 2030:** Flagship projects such as the futuristic city of NEOM continue despite logistical and financial challenges. At the same time, the Kingdom has expanded its soft power through sports and culture, hosting high-profile golf and football tournaments, and securing the 2034 FIFA World Cup. Vision 2030 has also driven significant social and economic reforms, among the most notable being the steady

rise in female workforce participation, reflecting the broader social shifts that are redefining Saudi society while supporting long-term economic sustainability.

**Humanitarian:** The King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Aid (KSRelief) was established in 2015 and delivers aid internationally to victims of civil war and natural disasters. KSRelief has funded more than 2,400 projects in 92 countries, spending over \$6 billion. Projects included assisting Syrian patients living in the Zaatari Syrian refugee camp in Jordan and providing prosthetic limbs to Yemeni civilians wounded during the war. KSRelief also partnered with UNICEF and UNHCR to support families affected by war.



**Key Appointments:** The transfer of power from the sons of the founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdul-Aziz, to the new generation, which some feared would be an issue that would split the country, has been remarkably smooth so far. HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman is the second Crown Prince from the new generation appointed by King Salman. These appointees have brought changes in law which have had monumental social effects, changes such as allowing women in Saudi Arabia to move freely and drive, and the promotion of cinemas and music concerts.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Recent years have seen several Arab countries normalise relations with Israel, and Saudi Arabia has been keen to follow suit. The Israeli genocide in Gaza has complicated matters but political will to normalise relations with Israel remains. Saudi Arabia has condemned Israel's actions and demanded the establishment of a Palestinian state.

**Country:** UAE

**Born:** 11 March 1961 (age 64)

**Source of Influence:** Administrative, Development, Philanthropy

**Influence:** Military and political leadership

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (7)

2022 (7)

2024 (6)

*“The UAE and tolerance are two sides of the same coin and is an embodiment of people’s lifelong endeavour to achieve through history”*

**\$24.4**

billion military budget for 2025

**7**

emirates in the United Arab Emirates



ﷲ 9 ﷲ

*His Highness*

**President Sheikh Mohamed  
bin Zayed Al-Nahyan**

# HH President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan

## President of the UAE

HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan became the President of the UAE after his brother, Sheikh Khalifa, passed away in May 2022. He is the third son of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the widely respected first President of the UAE who ruled from independence in 1971 until his death in 2004.

**Military Leadership:** Sheikh Mohamed has transformed the military capabilities of the UAE not only through buying military hardware (over 80 F-16 jets), but also by developing the UAE's own military industry, both in terms of hardware and special forces. All of these have also been deployed in various conflicts, including Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Libya and Yemen. The UAE is an important centre for global weapons' trading, hosting the world's largest defence expos.



**Global Player:** Sheikh Mohamed has enjoyed excellent personal relationships with previous US presidents, managing to have his views heard on Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, Palestine, and the support of a young Saudi prince. Further, Sheikh Mohamed has shown that he is his own man by following policies that the US does not support publicly: the support of Libyan general Khalifa Haftar, the blockade on Qatar, and its involvement in Sudan. Involvement in other key issues shows that the UAE is punching above its weight in international affairs.

**Abraham Accords:** The UAE (along with Bahrain) normalised relations with Israel by signing the Abraham Accords Peace Treaty at the White House in September 2020 with the Israeli Prime Minister and the former American President Trump in attendance. An Israeli embassy was opened in July 2021 with the President of Israel in attendance as the UAE pushes ahead with a full normalisation strategy which has outraged Palestinians and their supporters.

**Economic Development:** With Abu Dhabi sitting on a 10th of the world's proven oil reserves, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan maintains immense political influence in the Muslim World as a leading member of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company—which directs development efforts for the UAE's role in the oil and gas industries. He also controls one of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds (\$2.5 tn). He has overseen a construction boom which includes man-made islands, entertainment parks and museum franchises of the Louvre and the Guggenheim.

**Sustainable Development and Conservationist:** Sheikh Mohamed has been a champion of sustainable development in Abu Dhabi as an advocate for the implementation of green technologies. He pledged \$15 billion for the development of clean energy through solar, wind and hydrogen power. He is also a keen falconer and is committed to protecting falcons and other species in the region.

**Philanthropy and Tolerance:** The Abu Dhabi Fund for Development celebrated its 50-year anniversary in 2021; it has given over AED 150 billion in development funding and investments in 97 countries. The UAE is home to a diverse workforce and has been keen to show respect to other religions and cultures. It has allowed various houses of worship to be built, and three synagogues have already been completed. In addition, in 2023, the Abraham Family House was inaugurated. Encompassing a mosque, a church, a synagogue and a forum for gathering and dialogue, this space welcomes people from all walks of life to exchange knowledge and practice their faith.

**The Gaza Genocide:** The United Arab Emirates has accused Israel of committing a genocide in Gaza and has warned that any annexation of the West Bank would endanger the Abraham Accords. It is committed to a two-state solution and has contributed to medical, food, and infrastructure support, while diplomatic channels have been leveraged to reduce hostilities and protect civilians.

**Country:** Malaysia  
**Born:** 10 August 10 1947  
(age 78)  
**Source of Influence:** Prime  
Minister of Malaysia  
**Influence:** Political  
**School of Thought:** Tradi-  
tional Sunni  
2025 (15)  
2024 (17)  
2023 (Hon Men)

On Gaza: *“Where have we  
thrown our humanity, why this  
hypocrisy?”*

1971

founded the Malaysian Islamic  
Youth Movement (ABIM).

879

islands in  
Malaysia



❧ 10 ❧

*His Excellency*  
Anwar Ibrahim

# HE Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim

## Prime Minister of Malaysia

HE Anwar Ibrahim became Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister in November 2022, leading the unity government under the Pakatan Harapan coalition. His path to the premiership was marked by decades of political turbulence — including imprisonment, exile, and leading opposition — and his rise is widely seen as a dramatic comeback in Malaysian politics.

**Beginnings:** Anwar's early life was rooted in Penang, Malaysia, where he was born to a Muslim Malay family. His parents' involvement in politics exposed him to the field at a young age. His political journey began during his years as a student at the University of Malaya in the late 1960s, where he gained recognition for his leadership qualities. In 1971, he founded and became the president of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia.

**Political Success:** Anwar's political career took off in 1982 when he accepted an invitation from then-Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamed to join the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). He quickly rose through the ranks, holding various ministerial positions, including Minister of Youth, Culture, and Sports (1983), Minister of Agriculture (1984), Minister of Education (1986-1991), and Minister of Finance (1991-1998). He also served as Deputy Prime Minister from 1993 to 1998.

**Trials and Tribulations:** Anwar Ibrahim's political journey has been a turbulent one, marked by both triumphs and setbacks. As a key figure in Malaysia's economic boom of the 1990s, he clashed with then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad during the 1997 financial crisis, leading to his dismissal in 1998. In 1999, Anwar was jailed on charges of corruption and sodomy, though his sodomy conviction was overturned in 2004 due to insufficient evidence. Despite being repeatedly imprisoned and released over the next two decades, including during his tenure as Leader of the Opposition from 2008 to 2015, Anwar remained resilient. A literary enthusiast, he found solace in reading Shakespeare's complete works four times in prison.

**Royal Pardon:** Anwar was finally released through Royal Pardon in 2018, a "travesty of justice" being cited as the reason. He almost immediately returned to Parliament and won a by-election by a huge majority, and again was Leader of the Opposition from 2018-2022 before becoming Prime Minister in November 2022.

**Academic Life:** Beyond his political career, Anwar has made contributions to academia, holding positions at institutions such as St. Anthony's College, Oxford, Johns Hopkins University, and Georgetown University. He is also a co-founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) established in the United States in 1981. Furthermore, he served as the Chancellor of the International Islamic University Kuala Lumpur from 1983 to 1988, and has received honorary degrees from institutions in Indonesia and the Philippines.



**Peace Mediator:** Anwar Ibrahim played an important role to ease tensions between Thailand and Cambodia after several days of border fighting. Anwar helped build trust between Bangkok and Phnom Penh, reinforcing Malaysia's image as a constructive peace broker in Southeast Asia.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Ibrahim has been a vocal supporter of the Palestinian right to resist occupation. His meetings with Hamas officials (including the late assassinated Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh) have drawn criticism from the USA. His social media posts offering condolences after the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh were taken down, prompting him to say: "Let this serve as a clear and unequivocal message to Meta: cease this display of cowardice and stop acting as instruments of the oppressive Zionist Israeli regime."

**Country:** Iraq

**Born:** 4 August 1930 (age 95)

**Source of Influence:** Scholarly, Lineage

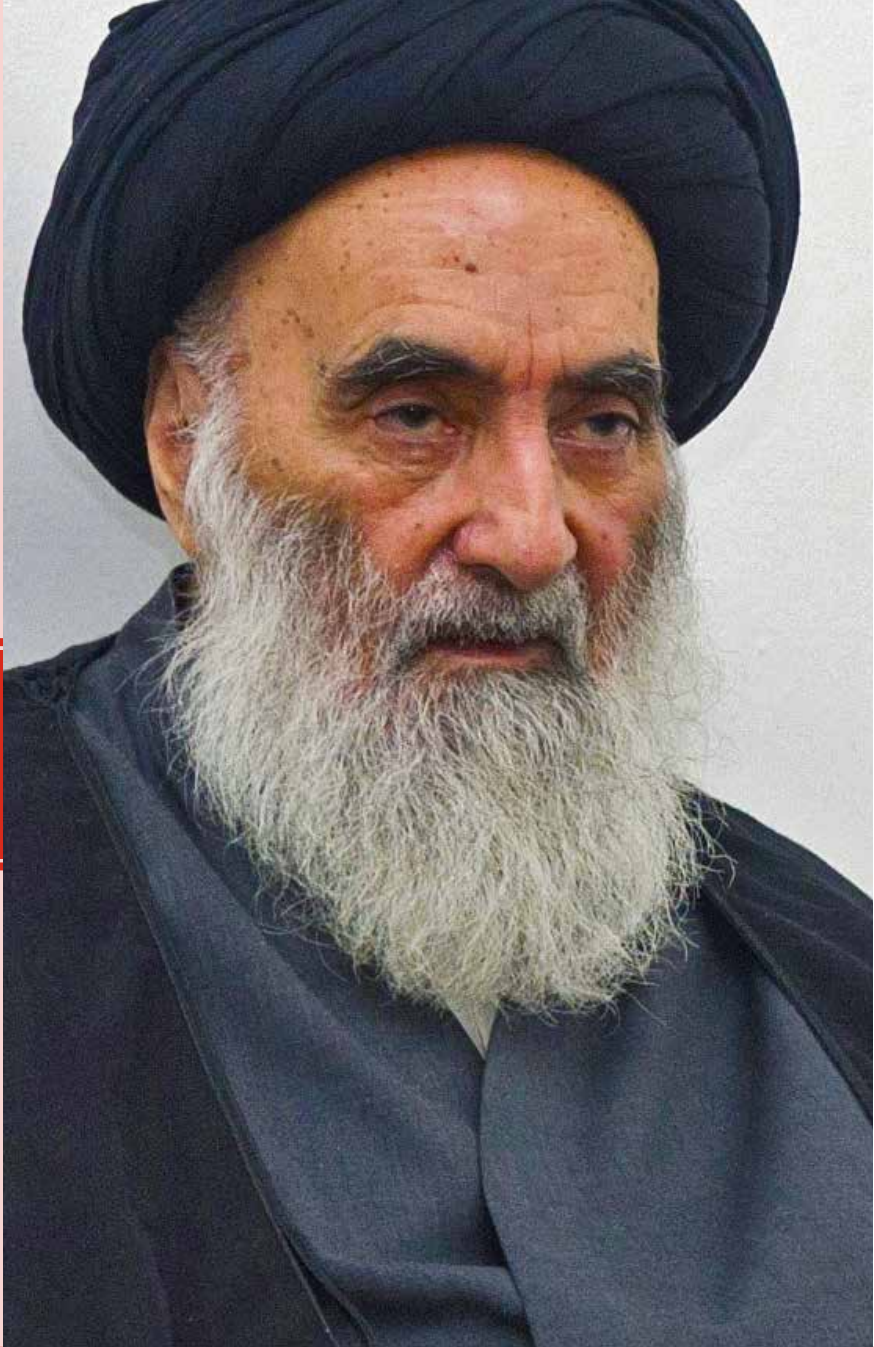
**Influence:** Highest authority for 21 million Iraqi Shia, and also internationally known as a religious authority to Usuli Twelver Shia

**School of Thought:** Traditional Twelver Shia, Usuli

2025 (9)

2024 (9)

2023 (9)



*“Women who go forth to the polling centres on election day are like Zaynab, who went forth to Karbala”*

**49** thousand. Number of students his office supports

**1960** the year he became a mujtahid

۞ ۱۱ ۞

*His Eminence*

Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hussein Al-Sistani

# HE Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hussein Al-Sistani

## *Marja of the Hawza*

Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Hussein Al-Sistani is the leading cleric and spiritual authority for Twelver (*Ithna 'Ashari*) Shia Muslims globally, widely respected for his religious scholarship, moral integrity, and role as a quiet but powerful voice in social, political, and humanitarian matters. He heads the Hawza Al-Ilmiyya in Najaf, Iraq, which remains one of the foremost centres of Shia learning.

**Preeminent Shia Cleric:** He comes from a family of distinguished scholars and began his religious studies in Mashhad before moving to Qom. There, he studied under leading clerics, but his formative years were spent in Najaf, Iraq, under the guidance of Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Al-Khoei. Following Al-Khoei's death in 1992, Sistani inherited his mantle of authority, rising to become the leading Shia cleric in Najaf and the most influential *marja'* globally.

**Marja Al-Taqlid:** Sistani's authority as *marja' al-taqlid* places him at the apex of Shia religious leadership. His followers—estimated at over 20 million across Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, South Asia, and the wider diaspora—look to him for rulings on matters of jurisprudence, ethics, and faith. He oversees a network of more than 2,000 religious schools, with Najaf as the epicentre of Shia learning. Through his role, Sistani has positioned Najaf as a counterbalance to Qom, emphasizing a quietist model of clerical authority.

**Financial Influence:** Sistani also has very significant financial clout. As a *marja* his followers give him a religious tax (*khums*, Arabic for one-fifth). The redistribution of this tax for the common good is one of the key roles of a *marja*. Much of this remittance is redistributed through the Al-Khoei Foundation—the largest Twelver Shia development organisation in the world that maintains a network of educational and humanitarian establishments for both Shia

and non-Shia Muslims. In 2022 it spent over \$100 million.

**Quietest Influence:** Significantly, Sistani is against the idea of *Velayat-e Faqih*, suggesting Shia clerics should not get involved in politics. Paradoxically, this approach has afforded him very strong influence as a religious leader unsullied by politics. Sistani has used his position of quietist authority to wield influence also as a peacemaker in turbulent, post-invasion Iraq. His comments about the political scene have been credited with bringing about stability at key moments. He has identified eliminating political corruption and improving public services as the main issues of the day. He has also issued strong statements against DA'ISH, calling on Iraqis to unite against the militants.

**Protecting Minorities:** Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani has played a significant role in Iraq's post-Saddam Hussein era, advocating for democracy and the protection of the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. His guidance has been instrumental in shaping the country's political landscape and promoting peaceful coexistence among its diverse population.

**Meetings:** Sistani rarely meets officials but made an exception for Iran's former President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif in March 2019. Pope Francis also visited Sistani's home in Najaf in March 2021 during the Pope's visit to Iraq.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Al-Sistani has specifically addressed the Muslim world, calling for unified efforts to stop the Israeli genocide in Gaza and to provide greater support to Palestinians. The cleric has criticised the lack of international accountability for Israel's crimes and blamed certain world powers for this failure.



**Country:** Morocco

**Born:** 21 August 1963 (age 62)

**Source of Influence:** Political, Administrative, Development

**Influence:** King with authority over 38 million Moroccans

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni, Maliki

2025 (10)

2024 (10)

2023 (7)

*“Our goal is for the benefits of progress and development to reach all citizens, in all regions, without discrimination or exclusion.”*

**175** million tourists to Morocco in 2024

**180** tonnes of aid to Gaza



12

*His Majesty*

King Mohammed VI

# HM King Mohammed VI

## King of Morocco

HM King Mohammed VI has reigned since July 1999, leading Morocco as both monarch and religious figure (*Amir al-Mu'minin*), in a lineage tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. His rule combines inherited religious authority, constitutional reform, and a modernising agenda that seeks both domestic stability and expanded regional influence.

**Four-Hundred-Year Alaouite Dynasty:** The 400-year-old Alaouite dynasty traces its lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It takes its name from Moulay Ali Cherif, who became Prince of Tafilat in 1631. It sees itself as a continuation of the Andalusian Golden Age of Islam, which was characterised by peaceful co-existence, intellectual and cultural exchange and development.

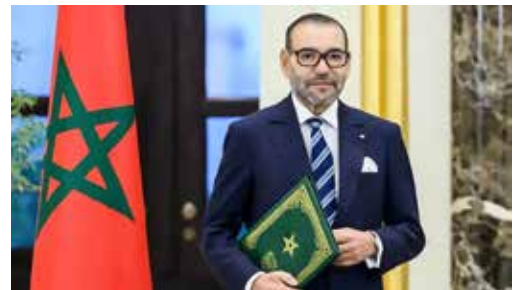
**Influence on Maliki Network:** Morocco is home to the oldest university in the world, Al-Karaouine. This university is the centre of the Maliki school of jurisprudence. Since early in his reign, King Mohammed VI has implemented the Mudawana family law code that gives rights to women in divorce and property ownership, as well as citizenship to children born from non-Moroccan fathers. He has also commissioned the Islamic Affairs Ministry to train women preachers, or *morchidat*, who are now active chaplains to Moroccans across the globe.

**Huge Influence over Muslims in Africa:** King Mohammed VI leads the largest African monarchy, with a population of 37.8 million. Besides political links, Morocco maintains strong spiritual ties with Muslims all over Africa. Morocco is the site of the tomb of a highly revered Sufi sheikh, Mawlana Ahmed ibn Mohammed Tijani Al-Hassani-Maghribi (1735-1815 CE), the founder of the Tijaniyya Sufi order, whose shrine attracts millions from across the continent. Morocco is also recognised as a source for the spread of Islam through West Africa.

**The Marrakesh Declaration:** The King invited hundreds of the Islamic world's leading scholars to gather for a three-day summit in Marrakesh in January 2016 to address the question of the treatment of religious minorities in Muslim-majority communities. Basing themselves on the Charter of Medina, also known as the Constitution of Medina, which was drawn up by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself, they issued calls for Muslim-majority communities to respect minorities' "freedom of movement, property ownership, mutual solidarity and defence". HM King Moham-

med delivered the inaugural address and pointed to the history of Islam's co-existence with other religions. This showed how Islam has enshrined the rights of religious minorities and promoted religious tolerance and diversity. (see page 152)

**Support for Jerusalem (Al-Quds):** The King and indeed all Moroccans show strong support for Palestinians and for Jerusalem. The Moroccan link with Jerusalem has been strong since Salah Al-Din's son endowed the Magharbeh Quarter, next to the Buraq Wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif, to North African pilgrims in 1193. This 800-year-old quarter was demolished by the Israeli authorities in 1967 after they captured East Jerusalem.



**Reform:** King Mohammed VI implemented major reforms in response to the Arab Spring protests. These included a new constitution which transferred many powers to a freely and fairly elected government. The King's gradual reforms were hailed as a model for other Arab countries to follow.

**Football:** Morocco will co-host the 2030 football world cup along with Spain and Portugal. This follows the ground-breaking performance of the Moroccan football team which saw them reach the semi-finals of the 2022 world cup and win a historic bronze medal at the 2024 Olympics.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Morocco, which normalised relations with Israel in 2020 under the Abraham Accords, has seen large demonstrations in support of Palestine. The Moroccan government has attempted to balance its ties with Israel and support for Palestinians, officially denouncing Israeli actions while maintaining diplomatic relations. The docking of an Israeli naval ship in Tangier provoked significant protests and criticism from anti-normalisation groups.

**Country:** Saudi Arabia

**Born:** 14 December 1956  
(age 70)

**Source of Influence:** Scholarly, Media

**Influence:** 53 published books, supervised IslamToday.net, and reached millions through TV

**School of Thought:** Moderate Salafi

2025 (11)

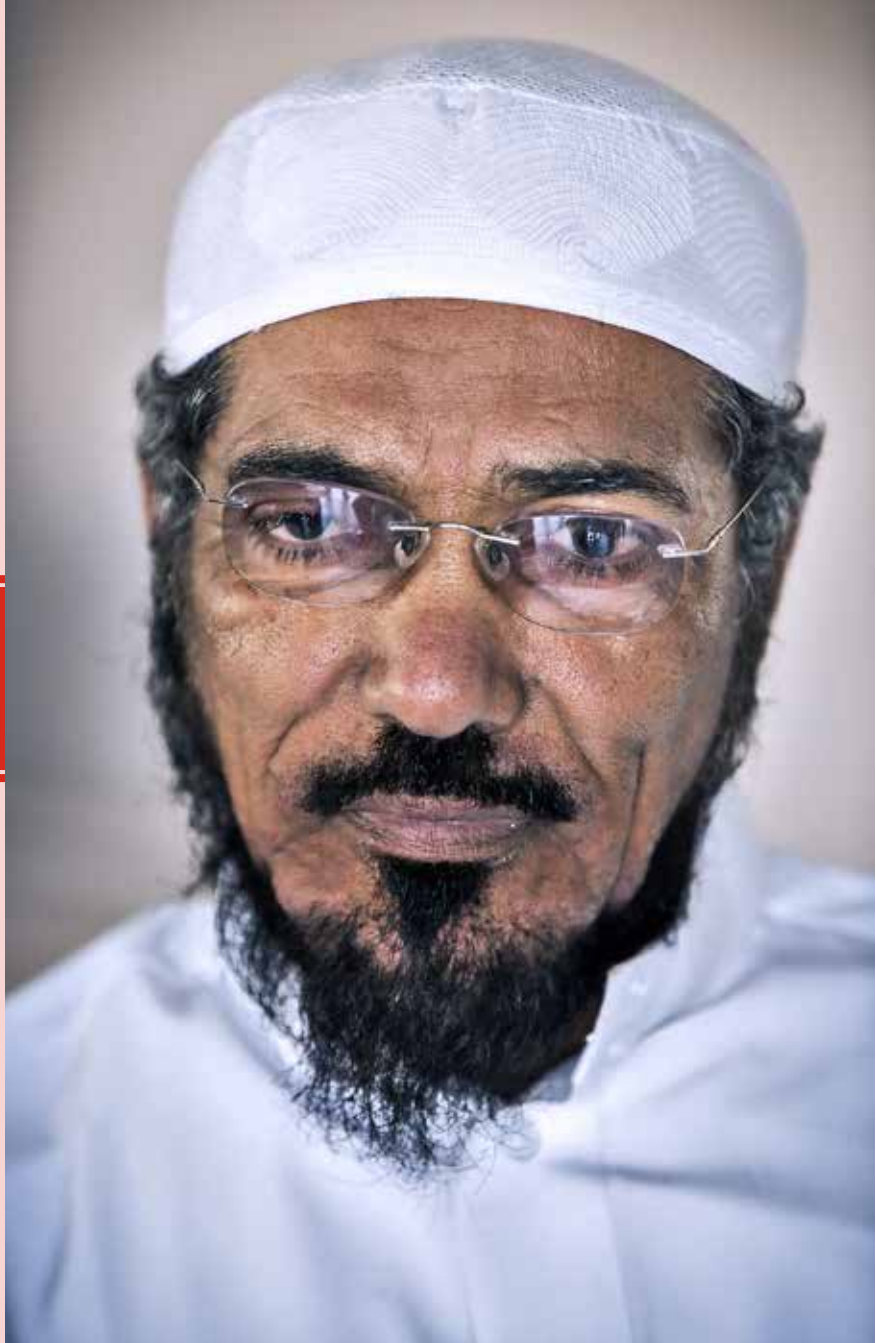
2024 (11)

2023 (12)

*“My enemies, I thank you! You are who trained me to be patient, to respond to the evil with the good and to overlook.”*

**8** is the number of years so far in second imprisonment

Over **50** number of books authored



﴿ 13 ﴾

*Sheikh*

Salman Al-Ouda

# Sheikh Salman Al-Ouda

## Scholar and Educator

A leading Saudi sheikh, Salman Al-Ouda is a former hard-line cleric turned advocate of peaceful coexistence. He became hugely influential due to his innovative reach in the Muslim world propagated via IslamToday.net and his persistent efforts at ministering to the needs of the global Muslim community. In September 2017, Al-Ouda was arrested by Saudi authorities along with 20 other Saudi clerics for tweets that were seen as offensive to the State. He is still imprisoned and endures months of solitary confinement.

**Key Scholar of Salafi Network:** Al-Ouda studied Islamic jurisprudence and principles of Islamic law at Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, later teaching at the Qassim branch. A gifted orator, he quickly gained recognition for his ability to connect classical Islamic learning with contemporary issues. In the 1980s, he became associated with the *Sabwa* movement, which called for political reform, greater accountability, and opposition to Western military presence in the Arabian Peninsula. His activism led to his first imprisonment from 1994 to 1999, alongside other clerics critical of government policies. After his release, al-Ouda's tone shifted markedly. Moving away from confrontation, he emphasized peaceful coexistence, inter-faith dialogue, and gradual reform. His writings and television appearances reached millions, particularly through IslamToday.net, a multilingual website he founded, offering Islamic educational resources in Arabic, English, French, and Chinese. By the 2010s, he had become one of the most followed Muslim scholars on social media, with over 22 million followers on Twitter alone.

**Ambassador of Non-violence:** In an effort to distance himself from alleged connections to perpetrators of terrorism, Al-Ouda is outspoken about the importance of inculcating love and mercy as opposed to violence (except in valid cases of self-defence) in the daily lives of Muslims. As a prominent member of the International Union for Muslim Scholars, he led the delegation in talks with Arab heads of state regarding the need for them to unite in opposition to Israel's siege of Gaza

in early 2009. He strongly condemned DA'ISH and also called for peace and unity between members of the GCC and Qatar.

**Arrested on Charges Against the State:** Al-Ouda was arrested in September 2017 and charged for what ostensibly seems to be nothing more than tweets urging Saudi Arabia and Qatar to end a diplomatic rift. He had earlier voiced concerns about Saudi Arabia's human rights record, but perhaps his true crime has been not to publicly endorse and support the recent changes happening in the Kingdom. Al-Ouda has been held in punishing conditions, often in solitary confinement and detained incommunicado.

**Unjust Arrest:** With the public prosecutor calling for the maximum penalty to be implemented, there have been serious fears that Al-Ouda could be executed at any time. There has been outcry from a whole range of organisations about what is seen as a grossly unjust imprisonment, trial and sentence. The International Union of Muslim Scholars, the European Muslim Forum and Amnesty International have all called on the Saudi government to release Al-Ouda and his two compatriots, Sheikh Ali Al-Omari and Sheikh Awad Al-Qarni, who are experiencing similar conditions of confinement.

**Health Concerns:** Al-Ouda's son, Abdullah Al-Ouda, stated that his father had "lost almost half of his ability to hear and see" in prison. He said that due to years of abuse and isolation, his father's physical and mental condition has been declining at an increasingly greater pace.



**Country:** Saudi Arabia

**Born:** 31 August 1985 (age 40)

**Source of Influence:** Political

**Influence:** De facto ruler of Saudi Arabia

**School of Thought:** Moderate Salafi

2025 (12)

2024 (12)

2023 (10)

*“Looking ahead, our resolve is stronger than ever. We will accelerate delivery, embrace every opportunity, and further elevate the Kingdom’s position as a global leader.”*

**85%** of the more than 1,500 initiatives under Saudi Vision 2030 have been completed or are on track

**200** thousand years of human habitation in the kingdom



۞ 14 ۞

*His Royal Highness*

Crown Prince Mohammed bin  
Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud

# HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud

## Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia

HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud is the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia. He is widely regarded as the Kingdom's de facto ruler and principal architect of its current political, economic, and social transformation. He is often referred to in western media as MBS.

**Meteoric Rise:** At the beginning of 2015, Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) was a relatively unknown prince outside Saudi Arabia. Following his father's accession to the throne in January 2015, he was quickly elevated to a series of senior posts, including Minister of Defense and head of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs. In June 2017, he was named Crown Prince after King Salman removed Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. In September 2022, he was appointed Prime Minister—a position traditionally held by the King—further consolidating his power.

**Catalyst of Change:** The Crown Prince has spearheaded sweeping reforms that have reshaped Saudi society. Restrictions on women have eased significantly: they can now drive, travel independently, and participate more fully in public life. Cinemas reopened in 2018, music festivals and international sporting events are regularly hosted, and Saudi Arabia is positioning itself as a cultural hub for the Arab world. His anti-corruption drive in 2017, which saw the detention of princes and business leaders at Riyadh's Ritz-Carlton, recovered billions in assets, though critics described it as a power-consolidation measure.

**Vision 2030:** Central to MBS's legacy is Vision 2030, an ambitious national strategy launched in 2016 aimed at diversifying the economy away from oil dependency. The plan envisions Saudi Arabia as a global investment powerhouse and innovation hub. Flagship projects include NEOM, a futuristic mega-city marketed as a centre for renewable energy, biotech, and AI; Qiddiya, a new entertainment and sports capital; and the Red Sea Project, aimed at positioning the Kingdom as a premier tourism destination. The Public Investment Fund (PIF), with assets exceeding \$900 billion, plays a key role in financing these ventures. Saudi Arabia also secured the right to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup, a central soft-power victory that cements its place in the global sporting landscape.

**International Relations:** MBS has overseen a recalibration of Saudi foreign policy. Under his leadership, Riyadh restored ties with Iran in March 2023 through Chinese mediation, reduced its direct involvement in the Yemen war, and reopened channels with Syria. Relations with the United States and Europe remain strained over human rights concerns and the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which U.S. intelligence agencies concluded was approved by the Crown Prince, though he has consistently denied ordering it. Nonetheless, he has successfully balanced ties with Washington, Moscow, and Beijing while projecting Saudi Arabia as a middle power with growing autonomy.



**Humanitarian and Philanthropic Engagement:** Through initiatives such as the Misk Foundation, established to empower youth and entrepreneurs, MBS has directed substantial resources toward social development. Saudi Arabia has provided billions in humanitarian aid: \$500 million to the UN's Yemen Response Plan, \$200 million to support Jordan hosting refugees, and over \$13 million to the domestic Ehsan platform for charitable giving.

**The Gaza Genocide:** MBS has repeatedly condemned Israel's bombardment as disproportionate and "collective punishment," while affirming Saudi commitment to Palestinian statehood based on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. The Kingdom has facilitated regional coordination to deliver aid into Gaza and lobbied Washington to press Israel on humanitarian access.

**Country:** Indonesia

**Born:** 17 October 1951 (age 73)

**Source of Influence:** Political

**Influence:** Leader of 285 million citizens and residents of Indonesia

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (18)

2024 (450)

2023 (450)

*“As long as I’m President, never assume that the great and the rich can do whatever they want. We are not afraid of your greatness or wealth.”*

Over:

**300** languages  
spoken in Indonesia

**82.9** million  
beneficiaries from the “Free Nutritious Meal” programme



15

*His Excellency*

President Prabowo Subianto

# HE President Prabowo Subianto

## President of Indonesia

Prabowo Subianto became Indonesia's eighth president, officially taking office on 20 October 2024, following his victory in the February 2024 elections, when he won approximately 58.6% of the vote. His inauguration marked the culmination of a political journey spanning decades of military service, political bids, controversies, and public reinvention.

**Background:** Prabowo Subianto, born 17 October 1951 in Jakarta, comes from a prominent Indonesian family. His father, Sumitro Djojohadikusumo, was an economist and minister under both presidents Sukarno and Suharto. Prabowo received his early education in Jakarta, London, and Malaysia before attending the Indonesian Military Academy. He rose through the ranks of the Indonesian Army, becoming a lieutenant general and commander of the Army's Strategic Reserve Command. Prabowo was also married to Suharto's daughter, Siti Hediati Hariyadi, from 1983 to 1998, further cementing his ties to Indonesia's political elite.

**Political Experience:** Prabowo's political career began in earnest after his military service. He founded the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) in 2008 and ran for vice president in 2009. He then ran for president in 2014 and 2019, losing both times to Joko Widodo. In a surprising turn of events, Widodo appointed Prabowo as Defence Minister in 2019, a position he held until his successful presidential campaign in 2024. Throughout his political career, Prabowo has positioned himself as a strong nationalist leader, emphasising economic development, food security, and a more assertive foreign policy.

**Past Controversies:** Prabowo's career has been marked by several controversies, particularly related to his military service. He was accused of human rights violations during Indonesia's occupation of East Timor and in the final days of Suharto's regime in 1998. Allegations include the kidnapping of pro-democracy activists and involvement in the violent suppression of protests. These accusations led to his discharge from the military in 1998 and a temporary ban from entering the United States. Prabowo has consistently denied these allegations, and

his supporters argue that he has never been formally charged or convicted of any crimes.

**Recent Challenges:** Since taking office, Prabowo has undertaken a major cabinet reshuffle in September 2025, replacing key figures like the Finance Minister and Security Minister in response to nationwide protests over issues such as police behaviour, cost of living, and income inequality. In parallel, the Constitutional Court is set to rule on legal challenges to new legislation passed in March 2025 that increases the military's involvement in civilian affairs—a move some see as undermining democratic norms.

**Other Notable Aspects:** Prabowo is known for his charismatic public speaking and his ability to connect with rural and working-class voters. He is also an accomplished equestrian, having represented Indonesia in international competitions. His family's wealth and business connections have been both an asset and a point of criticism throughout his career. As a new president, Prabowo faces the challenge of uniting a diverse nation and delivering on his campaign promises of economic growth and social welfare. His presidency is likely to mark a shift in Indonesia's domestic and foreign policies, potentially redefining the country's role in Southeast Asia and on the global stage.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Indonesia has strongly condemned Israel's conduct in Gaza, offering support to South Africa's genocide case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by submitting a legal advisory opinion.



**Country:** India

**Born:** 3 March 1964 (age 62)

**Influence:** Scholarly, Political, Administrative. 12 million members of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (14)

2024 (16)

2023 (15)

*"India is our homeland, and its defence is both our national and constitutional responsibility."*

**12** million

Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind followers

**1,700**

branch offices across India.



﴿ 16 ﴾

*His Excellency*

Maulana Mahmood Madani

# Maulana Mahmood Madani

## President of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind

Maulana Mahmood Madani is the President of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (JUH), one of the oldest and largest socio-religious organisations of Indian Muslims. He is a strong advocate for justice, communal harmony, and the constitutional rights of minorities. Known for his frank condemnations of terrorism, as well as his unyielding defence of Indian Muslims in the face of rising Islamophobia, Madani represents the continuation of a long legacy of religious scholarship and social activism.

**Lineage:** Maulana Mahmood's grandfather, Maulana Syed Hussain Ahmad Madani, was a great scholar of Islamic theology, teaching hadith in Madinah, and Deoband. He was the president of the JUH until his death in 1957 and was then succeeded by his son Asad Madani (Maulana Mahmood's father), who was president until his death in 2006.

**Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (JUH):** JUH was established in 1919 by leading Deoband scholars who argued for the concept of composite nationalism, believing that a nation should not be formed on the basis of one factor only (e. g. religion, ethnicity etc), but rather should be based on many factors. Maulana Mahmood has strived to keep this concept alive amid all the turmoil of nationalistic politics in India. After graduating from Deoband in 1992, he became actively involved in the JUH, organising conferences and meetings across the country which saw a rapid rise in membership. He became the General Secretary of JUH in 2001 and continued to invigorate the organisation. When his father passed away in 2006, a dispute arose between him and his uncle around the leadership of the organisation leading to a bifurcation.

**Activism:** He has advocated for Muslim rights in India and has been outspoken in his opposition to the misuse of the term "jihad" as a tool of terrorism in India. Following fatal bomb blasts in 2008, he mobilised Darul Uloom Deoband institutions to host events condemning terrorism as inherently un-Islamic. This had a major impact on the community. In addition to ideological work, Madani has been deeply involved in humanitarian relief, spearheading aid during natural disasters such as the Gujarat and Kashmir earthquakes. Under his leadership, JUH has expanded health, education, and social development projects, particularly in underprivileged Muslim communities.

**Legal battles:** Maulana Madani leads numerous le-

gal battles in various courts of the country fighting to secure the rights of Indian Muslims in cases covering Right to Citizenship, Right to Practise Religious Duties, as well as defending those Muslims who have been falsely implicated in terror cases. Madani has also consistently urged Muslims to remain engaged with the democratic process, encouraging youth participation in education, politics, and civic life. His speeches emphasise dignity, non-violence, and strategic unity in the face of communal challenges.



**Combating Islamophobia:** With RSS ideology growing ever menacingly, Maulana Mahmood Madani has supported a number of initiatives to counter the impact of hatred and religious-based crime against Indian Muslims. The JEIM (Justice and Empowerment Initiative for Indian Muslims) records cases of Islamophobia in a systematic manner and provides advocacy and other forms of assistance to the victims. This is the first such attempt by Indian Muslims to record such cases and present them to human rights organisations.

**The Gaza Genocide:** He has voiced support for Palestine and consistently criticised Israel's actions in Gaza, framing them as violations of human rights and international law.

**Country:** Nigeria

**Born:** 24 August 1956 (age 69)

**Source of Influence:** Lineage, Development, Administrative

**Influence:** Central figure for 116 million Nigerian Muslims

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni, Maliki; linked to the Qadiriyyah Sufi order by lineage

2025 (16)

2024 (18)

2023 (18)

*“Jihad simply means striving — striving to be a better Muslim, a better Christian, a better citizen, and a better human being. It is not about killing anyone. Islam abhors extremism...”*

20<sup>th</sup>

Sultan of Sokoto

Spiritual Leader of:

108

million Nigerian Muslims



﴿ 17 ﴾

*His Royal Eminence*

Amirul Mu'minin Sheikh As-Sultan  
Muhammadu Sa'adu Abubakar III

# HRE Amirul Mu'minin Sheikh As-Sultan Muhammadu Sa'adu Abubakar III

## Sultan of Sokoto

Amirul Mu'minin Sheikh As-Sultan Muhammadu Sa'adu Abubakar III is the 20th Sultan of Sokoto. As Sultan of Sokoto, he is the head of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Nigeria (SCIAN), which is the umbrella body for all Muslim organizations in the country, and is considered the spiritual leader of Nigeria's 108 million Muslims, who account for roughly 50% of the nation's population. Although the position of Sultan of Sokoto has become largely ceremonial, the holder is still a central figure for Nigerian Muslims.

**Military Man:** Sa'adu Abubakar succeeded his brother, Muhammadu Maccido, who died in a plane crash in 2006. Prior to this he served in the military, including commanding African peacekeepers in Chad. He retired as Brigadier General and was serving as Defense Attache to Pakistan when he became Sultan.



**Lineage Back to Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio:** The Sultan of Sokoto is the spiritual leader of Nigeria's enormous Muslim community. He gains this position by lineage. Abubakar is the 20th heir to the two-century-old throne founded by his ancestor, Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio. Dan Fodio (1754-1817 CE) was a scholar, leader of the Maliki school of Islam and the Qadiri branch of Sufism, and Islamic reformer of the 19th century. Dan Fodio believed that Islam should have a more central role in the life of the people of West Africa and led an uprising to institute the changes he sought. His figure and his writings are a very important chapter in the history of Islam in West Africa, and Abubakar, by lineage, holds a key place in West-African Islam, and particularly for the

Fulani and Hausa people who followed Dan Fodio.

**An Illustrious Family:** The position currently does carry with it some weight—though largely ceremonial since British colonial rule diminished its political significance. Much of this clout is derived from the respect that was earned by Siddiq Abu Bakar Dan Usman—17th Sultan and father of Abubakar—who held the Sultanate for over 50 years. The rule of Abubakar's father from 1938 to 1988 earned the position significant social capital and popularity with ordinary Muslims.

**Administrative Power:** Abubakar holds important administrative influence in Nigerian religious life. Abubakar is the titular ruler of Sokoto in northern Nigeria and is also the head of the Nigerian National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs. Leadership of this council means that the Sultan of Sokoto remains the only figure that can legitimately claim to speak on

behalf of all Nigerian Muslims. This role has become increasingly influential over the years with a rise in interreligious tensions between Nigeria's Muslim-majority north and Christian-majority south. The Sultan of Sokoto is also the Chancellor of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, one of the largest universities in Nigeria, with over 40,000 students.

**Interfaith Initiative:** The Sultan has started many initiatives to counter and reduce the influence of Boko Haram. He has also worked to strengthen Muslim-Christian ties by inviting an international joint Muslim-Christian Delegation to visit Nigeria. In 2019, he was appointed Co-Moderator of the Council of Religion for Peace (CRP).

**Country:** Mauritania

**Born:** 1935 (age 90)

**Source of Influence:** Scholarly

**Influence:** Significant influence as a leading contemporary scholar of Islamic Jurisprudence

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni (Maliki)

2025 (17)

2024 (19)

2023 (16)

*“The destinies of mankind are united, and their pathways are shared because we have all been created from the same clay.”*

2

ministerial posts in the 1970s

250

is the number of religious leaders made who made a statement at The Marrakesh Declaration.



﴿ 18 ﴾

*His Eminence*

Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah

# HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah

## President of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies

Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah is one of the world's most respected Muslim scholars, widely recognised for his deep Islamic scholarship, piety, and global advocacy for peace. Uniquely, his authority transcends divisions within the Muslim world—he is held in esteem by Sunnis across various schools, Sufis, and even by Salafi institutions. This rare stature allows him to play a pivotal role in fostering dialogue within the Muslim world and with global religious communities.

**Early Life and Education:** Born in 1935 in Timbédra, Mauritania, Sheikh bin Bayyah was raised in a household renowned for scholarship. His father, Sheikh Mahfoudh bin Bayyah, chaired the Conference of Mauritanian Scholars established after independence, instilling in him a lifelong dedication to Islamic learning. He studied in Mauritania's traditional *mahadhir* (centres of learning), where students immersed themselves in the full spectrum of Islamic sciences.

**Judicial and Academic Career:** Sheikh bin Bayyah rose to prominence as a jurist and statesman. He served as a Judge at the High Court of Mauritania, later becoming Head of Sharia Affairs at the Ministry of Justice. His dual expertise in both classical Islamic law and contemporary governance earned him respect in policy and legal circles. After moving to Saudi Arabia, he became an instructor at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, where he trained a generation of scholars. His fatwas, often disseminated through Saudi institutions, are considered authoritative across much of the Muslim world. He also served as Deputy Head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, working alongside Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi before resigning in 2013 and in 2018, he was appointed Chair of the UAE Fatwa Council,

**Author and Thinker:** Sheikh bin Bayyah has written extensively on Islamic legal theory, modern jurisprudence, and minority rights (*fiqh al-aqalliyat*). His works provide guidance for Muslims living in non-Muslim-majority countries, offering a framework for faithful living while engaging positively in pluralistic societies. His writings on *maqasid al-shariah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) emphasise justice, mercy, and the preservation of life and dignity—principles that underpin his calls for peace and coexistence.

**Diplomat and Global Advocate:** Bin Bayyah is an active member of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, the jurisprudential body of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which advises Muslim states on religious and ethical matters. His influence extends into diplomacy: in 2013, he visited the White House, where he urged stronger protection for civilians in Syria and Myanmar. That same year, he met Bill Gates during the Global Vaccine Summit in Abu Dhabi, signalling his commitment to humanitarian causes beyond strictly religious matters.

**Peacebuilding and Interfaith Initiatives:** Sheikh bin Bayyah is the driving force behind the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies (founded in Abu Dhabi, 2014), which brings together Islamic scholars to counter extremism and foster peaceful coexistence. He also founded the Muslim Council of Elders, which includes senior religious authorities such as the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. Among his most notable contributions is the Marrakesh Declaration (2016), which affirmed the rights of religious minorities in Muslim-majority nations, drawing inspiration from the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Charter of Medina. In 2019, he launched the New Alliance of Virtue, reviving the Prophet's ﷺ pre-Islamic pact of *Hilf al-Fudul* as a model for interreligious solidarity. These initiatives promote shared values across the Abrahamic faiths and have been welcomed by Christian and Jewish leaders alike. The American Jewish Committee (AJC), for example, translated his declarations into Hebrew to encourage dialogue in Israel and beyond.

**Criticisms and Controversies:** Despite his achievements, bin Bayyah has faced criticism, particularly for his close ties with the United Arab Emirates, whose government funds many of his initiatives. Critics argue that his support aligns too closely with the UAE's foreign policy, especially regarding conflicts in Yemen and Libya. Some view his departure from the International Union of Muslim Scholars and shift toward the UAE as politically motivated. Bin Bayyah and his supporters counter that his mission is to prioritise peace and stability, distancing Islam from violent extremism and sectarian politics.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah has condemned Israel for violating the most fundamental principles of humanity and Islamic ethics.

**Country:** Indonesia

**Born:** 16 February 1966 (age 59)

**Source of Influence:** Administrative, Political, Education

**Influence:** Leader of approximately 90 million members of the Nahdlatul Ulama

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (16)

2024 (20)

2023 (19)

*“Religion is often used as a justification and even a weapon for conflict”*

**28k** is the number of NU Islamic boarding schools

**99** years since Nahdlatul Ulama was founded.



﴿ 19 ﴾

*Sheikh*

Yahya Cholil Staqf

# Yahya Cholil Staquf

## General Chairman of Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama

Yahya Cholil Staquf serves as the General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Central Board, the world's largest Muslim organisation with more than 90 million members and over 21,000 madrasahs. Under his leadership, the NU continues to champion a traditionalist, moderate, and compassionate form of Sunni Islam. Founded in 1926, the NU's teachings emphasise that the essence of Islam is universal love, mercy, and service to humanity. Staquf's influence extends across Indonesia and into the global stage, making him a central figure in shaping modern Islamic discourse.

**Personal Education and Lineage:** Born in Rembang, Central Java, Staquf comes from a distinguished family of Javanese ulema. His grandfather, KH Bisri Musthofa, was a revered scholar and author of numerous religious works, while his father, KH Cholil Bisri, was a leading NU figure and member of Indonesia's parliament. From an early age, Staquf was immersed in Islamic education and spiritual practice. He studied under KH Ali Maksum, a respected NU leader, and was deeply influenced by KH Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), the former NU chairman and Indonesia's first democratically elected president. Gus Dur's vision of pluralism, democracy, and religious tolerance continues to shape Staquf's leadership.

**Head of an Expansive Network:** The Nahdlatul Ulama's reach is vast. Its structure includes 30 regional boards, 339 branch boards, 12 special branches overseas, more than 2,600 representative councils, and over 37,000 sub-branches. Through this network, NU operates pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), universities, hospitals, and charities that impact millions of Indonesians. Staquf oversees this sprawling institution, guiding it through Indonesia's shifting political landscape. Under his leadership, NU continues to advocate for the doctrine of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah*, rooted in classical Islamic jurisprudence and Sufism, while adapting to the needs of modern society.

**Traditionalism and Social Reform:** Nahdlatul Ulama distinguishes itself from other Islamic movements in Indonesia, particularly modernist and Islamist groups, by upholding traditional practices while engaging in modern reform. Staquf promotes "Islam Nusantara" (Islam of the Archipelago), which emphasises Indonesia's unique cultural and historical

context in interpreting Islam. This model stresses tolerance, coexistence, and rejection of extremism. Under Staquf's leadership, NU continues to push for social justice, anti-corruption initiatives, women's empowerment, and poverty alleviation. Its schools and hospitals play a critical role in rural communities, embodying Islam's call to serve the vulnerable.



**National and International Role:** Beyond his role in NU, Staquf has been active in Indonesia's governance and diplomacy. He served on President Joko Widodo's Presidential Advisory Council, where he advised on religious and international affairs. Globally, Staquf has been instrumental in promoting NU's vision of a pluralistic and compassionate Islam. He co-founded the U.S.-based Bayt ar-Rahmah and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values in 2021, both designed to expand NU's intellectual and spiritual influence in North America, Europe, and the Middle East. His work aims to counter extremist ideologies by offering Islam Nusantara as a model of coexistence.

**Challenges and Legacy:** As General Chairman, Staquf faces challenges from rising religious intolerance in Indonesia, sectarian tensions, and global Islamophobia. Yet his leadership positions NU as a counterweight to extremism, offering a vision of Islam rooted in tradition, inclusivity, and peace. By combining grassroots engagement in Indonesia with international outreach, he is shaping the future of Islam Nusantara as a model of moderate religious authority for the Muslim world.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Staquf has spoken out strongly against Israel's assault on Gaza, describing the actions as inhumane and contrary to universal principles of justice. Under his leadership, NU has joined Indonesian civil society in condemning what it calls the "collective punishment" of Palestinians.

**Country:** Türkiye  
**Born:** 15 September 1971  
(age 54)  
**Source of Influence:** Political  
**Influence:** Head of Turkish  
Intelligence  
**School of Thought:** Tradi-  
tional Sunni  
2025 (23)  
2024 (24)  
2023 (450 lists)

*“If you don’t live in a secure environment, you yourself cannot be secure. But... security does not simply mean state security – it also means human security. That is, securing the lives of human beings, and ensuring their well-being.”*

**11** years

adviser to President Erdoğan

**₺17.4** bil-  
lion — the 2024 budget of  
Turkey’s National Intelligence  
Organization (MİT).



20

*Professor*

**Ibrahim Kalin**

# Professor Ibrahim Kalin

## Director of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT)

Professor Ibrahim Kalin is a prominent Turkish scholar, intellectual, and statesman who has become one of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's closest confidants. He was appointed Director of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT) in June 2023, marking a shift from his longstanding career as a presidential adviser and spokesperson into the heart of Turkey's security establishment. His trajectory reflects a rare combination of academic scholarship, political strategy, and cultural engagement, making him one of the most versatile figures in contemporary Turkish public life.

**Scholar and Intellectual:** Born in Istanbul, Professor Kalin pursued higher education with a focus on Islamic philosophy and cross-civilisational dialogue. After completing his undergraduate studies in Türkiye, he earned a master's degree from the International Islamic University of Malaysia before pursuing doctoral studies at George Washington University under renowned philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr. His dissertation, later published by Oxford University Press as *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Sadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition*, has been widely cited in academic circles. Kalin's scholarship extends to Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and the relationship between Islam and the West, positioning him as an intellectual bridge between traditions.

**Academic and Think Tank Leader:** From 2002 to 2005, Kalin served as a faculty member at the Department of Religious Studies at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 2005, he returned to Türkiye to establish the SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, one of the country's most influential think tanks. Between 2005 and 2009, Kalin directed SETA, shaping its mission to provide policy-relevant research on governance, security, and international affairs. He later held a fellowship at Georgetown University, strengthening his academic and diplomatic networks. Political Confidant of Erdoğan: Kalin's transition into politics began in 2009 when he was brought into government by then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. Despite Davutoğlu's eventual split with Erdoğan, Kalin retained and even deepened his influence within the administration. From 2014 until 2023, he served as Presidential Spokesperson and Senior Adviser to the President, becoming Erdoğan's public voice on both domestic and international mat-

ters. Kalin played a key role in negotiations during the Syrian conflict, mediating with global powers including the United States, Russia, and Iran. He has also been a central figure in shaping Türkiye's relations with the European Union, balancing assertive nationalism with pragmatic diplomacy.



**Director of National Intelligence (MIT):** In June 2023, Kalin was appointed Director of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization, succeeding Hakan Fidan, who became Foreign Minister. The move surprised some observers given Kalin's lack of military background. However, analysts argue that his intellectual rigour, diplomatic experience, and wide-ranging networks make him well-suited to lead an intelligence service that increasingly requires multidisciplinary approaches to hybrid warfare, cybersecurity, and global diplomacy. Since assuming his role, Kalin has maintained a low public profile, stepping back from his once-active social media presence where he had over three million followers.

**Cultural Contributions:** Beyond politics and scholarship, Kalin is also an accomplished musician. A skilled *bağlama* (long-necked lute) player, he has performed Ottoman classical and Turkish folk music in both formal and informal settings. His performances, available on YouTube, have garnered millions of views, highlighting his ability to connect with the Turkish public not only as a statesman but also as a cultural figure.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Professor Kalin has been one of the strongest voices in Türkiye condemning Israel's genocide in Gaza. He has accused Israel of committing war crimes, including the deliberate targeting of civilians, and has called on the international community to hold Tel Aviv accountable under international law.

**Country:** Yemen

**Born:** 22 May 1979 (age 46)

**Source of Influence:** Political

**Influence:** Leader of the Houthis

**School of Thought:** Traditional Shia

2025 (27)

2024 (39)

2023 (31)

*"All the sacrifices we offer for the sake of Allah are a source of pride, honour, and dignity"*

Over

**100** ships

attacked in response to the war in Gaza

**19.5** million

people were estimated to need humanitarian assistance and protection



21

*Sheikh*

Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi

# Sheikh Abdul-Malik Al-Houthi

## Leader of the Houthi

Sheikh Abdul-Malik al-Houthi is the leader of the Houthi political, religious, and militant movement, known officially as *Ansar Allah* (“Supporters of God”). Under his leadership, the Houthis have become the most powerful political-military force in northern Yemen and a key player in regional geopolitics.

**Zaydis:** The Zaydis, also known as “Fiver Shi’ism”, are a branch of Shia Islam that originated in the 8th century following a succession dispute. Their doctrine emphasises the need for an active and just imam who is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through his grandsons Hasan or Husayn, and who is willing to confront corrupt rulers. Centered in Saada, Zaydis form 35% of Yemen’s population (12 million), advocating social justice and resisting foreign influence. While a sect of Shia Islam, Zaydism is closer in many respects to Sunni Islam than to other Shia branches.

**Houthi:** The Houthi movement was founded in the early 1990s by Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi, Abdul-Malik’s elder brother, who was a Zaydi Shia scholar and outspoken critic of Wahhabism and the Yemeni government. The Zaydis, a Shia sect with deep roots in Yemen, ruled much of the country for over a thousand years until the republican revolution of 1962. Initially a revivalist religious and cultural movement, the Houthis gradually transformed into a political and military force after a series of armed confrontations with the central government in the 2000s.

**Taking Yemen:** Abdul-Malik al-Houthi assumed leadership after his brother’s death in 2004 during

clashes with government forces. He consolidated power during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, seizing control of Saada and Jawf provinces. In September 2014, his forces stormed the capital Sana’a, capturing key ministries and military installations. He has driven Al-Qaeda out of the regions which the Houthis have taken.

**Bombing Yemen:** In March 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, backed by the United States and other regional allies, launched a military intervention against the Houthis seeking to restore President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi to power. The war (2015-2022) resulted in more than 150,000 direct fatalities and contributed to over 200,000 additional deaths from famine, disease, and infrastructure collapse. The conflict left nearly 70 percent of Yemen’s population—over 27 million people—dependent on humanitarian aid. Cholera outbreaks infected over a million people, while shortages of food, medicine, and fuel created catastrophic conditions described by the UN as the world’s worst humanitarian disaster. Despite the devastation, the Houthis managed to maintain control over much of northern Yemen, including Sana’a, while expanding their influence through alliances, military resilience, and an ability to mobilise mass public support.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Yemen has witnessed regular pro-Palestinian rallies of over a million participants in Sana’a and other northern cities. In compliance with international law to stop a genocide, they launched a maritime campaign against commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, targeting ships with ties to Israel, the US, or their allies. To

date, they have attacked more than 100 vessels, seizing one and sinking two. Houthi drone and missile strikes on Israel, including hypersonic missiles by September 2025, have disrupted Eilat’s port, halting 80% of its trade. These actions have prompted retaliatory strikes by the US, UK, and Israeli forces against Yemeni ports and infrastructure, escalating regional tensions.



**Country:** Egypt

**Born:** 19 November 1954  
(age 71)

**Source of Influence:** Political

**Influence:** President of Egypt

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (20)

2024 (21)

2023 (40)

*"I would never stay in office against the will of the people. My ethics and patriotism do not allow me to do so"*

**6th** president of Egypt.

**118.4** million population of Egypt



22

*His Excellency*

President Abdel Fattah Saeed El-Sisi

# HE President Abdel Fattah Saeed El-Sisi

## President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Former Field Marshal Abdel Fattah Saeed El-Sisi was sworn into office as the 6th President of Egypt on 8 June 2014, having earlier that year resigned from his post as the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces. As a civilian, and as Deputy Prime Minister, Sisi won the presidential elections held in May 2014.

**Mega Projects:** Since taking power in 2014, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has pushed massive projects to modernise Egypt and boost its economy. The standout is the New Administrative Capital, a \$58 billion smart city 30 miles east of Cairo, designed to house 6.5 million people with sleek government buildings, Africa's tallest tower, and the region's larg-



**Post-Arab Spring:** Former Field Marshal Abdel Fattah Saeed El-Sisi removed Egypt's first democratically elected president (Mohamed Morsi (d. 2019)) from power in 2013 in response to street protests against the Muslim Brotherhood-led government. Outbreaks of violence ensued across Egypt that included the death of many hundreds of protesters at the hands of pro-military police at the Raba'a Al-Adawiya Square in Cairo. Sisi then ran for office himself and was sworn into office as President of Egypt on 8 June 2014. Sisi secured a third six-year term, winning 89.6% of the vote in the December 2023 election. This victory extends Sisi's presidency until 2030, after which he is constitutionally barred from running again.

**Challenges:** Under Sisi's leadership, Egypt has faced mounting economic difficulties. Inflation has moderated to 12% (from a peak of 26% in 2024), the Egyptian pound has plummeted (from 7 pounds per US dollar in 2014 to 48 in 2024), and the country is saddled with an international debt of more than \$157 billion. Ordinary Egyptians face rising food prices, unemployment, and declining living standards. Human rights organisations estimate that Egypt holds between 65,000 and 70,000 political prisoners, adding pressure from international watchdogs concerned with governance and rule of law.

est mosque and cathedral. By mid-2025, some ministries moved in, and Sisi held his third-term inauguration there in 2024. Another project, the 'New Delta', aims to turn 2.5 million acres of desert west of the Nile into farmland, with a sustainable city called Mostaqbal Misr to help feed Egypt. On the Mediterranean coast, Ras El Hekma, a \$35 billion tourism hub funded by the UAE, began construction in 2025 to draw visitors. Also, the \$30 billion El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant, mostly paid for by Russia, is progressing to deliver clean energy by 2030.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Since Israel's military campaign against Gaza escalated in late 2023, Egypt has played a pivotal role in humanitarian and diplomatic efforts. The Rafah Border Crossing has served as the primary entry point for humanitarian aid into Gaza, though Cairo has resisted pressure to allow mass displacement of Palestinians into Sinai, citing security concerns and the risk of permanently altering Gaza's demographics. Egypt, along with Qatar and Jordan, has spearheaded ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas, though progress has been slow. Politically, Sisi has condemned Israeli actions as disproportionate and called for the protection of Palestinian civilians, aligning Egypt with the Arab League's position and South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

**Country:** Egypt

**Born:** 3 March 1953 (age 72)

**Source of Influence:** Scholarly, Political

**Influence:** Leading Religious voice in Egypt

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (21)

2024 (22)

2023 (20)

*“Terrorism cannot be born of religion. Terrorism is the product of corrupt minds, hardened hearts, and arrogant egos, and corruption, destruction, and arrogance are unknown to the heart attached to the Divine.”*

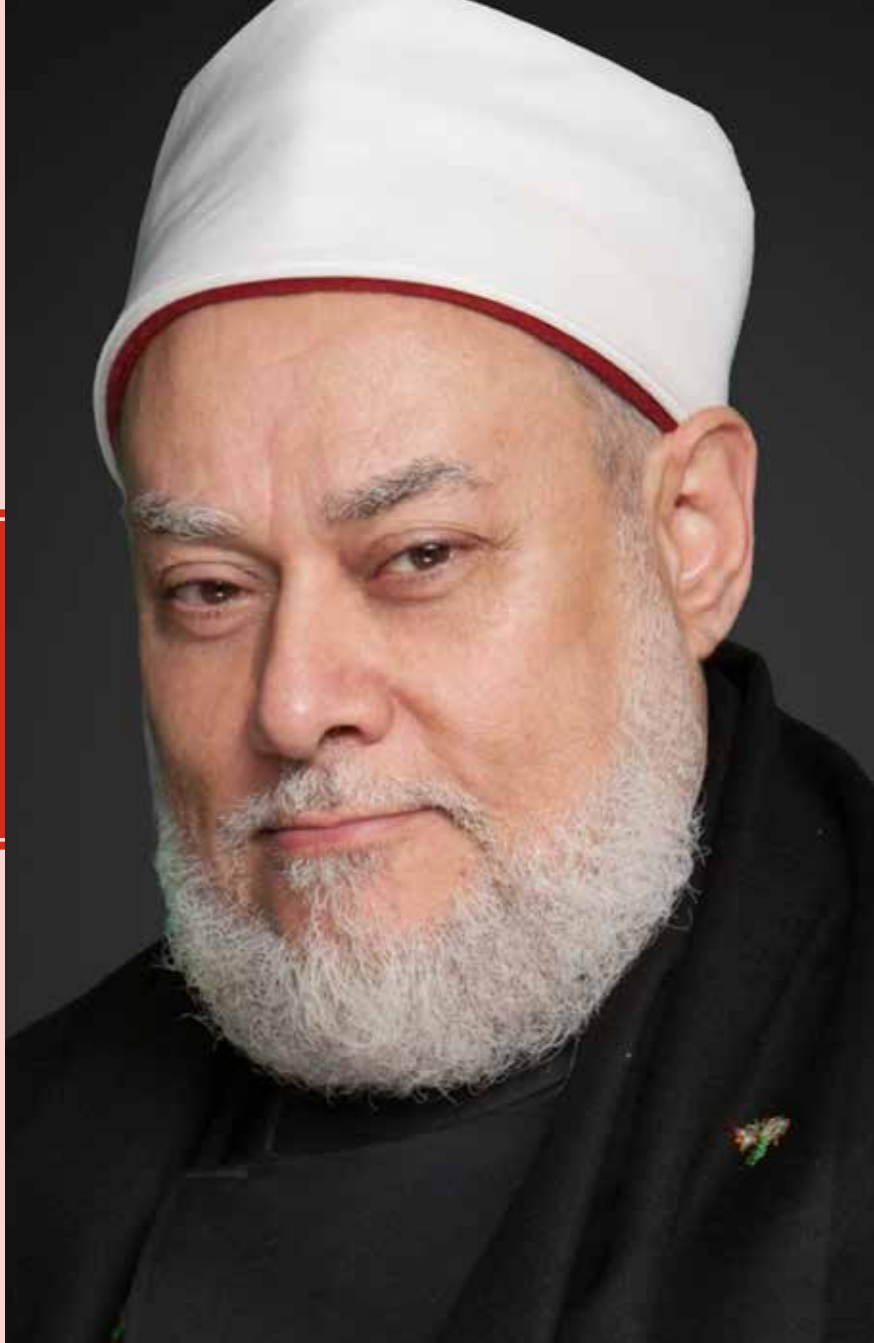
Over

50

books authored

8

million fatwas issued during his tenure at Dar-ul-Ifta in Egypt



❧ 23 ❧

*His Eminence*

Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa

# HE Sheikh Dr Ali Gomaa

## Former Grand Mufti of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Sheikh Ali Gomaa is one of the most influential contemporary Muslim scholars and the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, a position he held from 2003 until 2013. Even after retiring from this role, he has remained an active public figure, scholar, teacher, and spiritual guide, with his counsel in demand across the Muslim world.

**Egypt's Weight in Islamic Scholarship:** Ali Gomaa's scholarly influence is rooted in Egypt's central role in Islamic thought and law, especially through Al-Azhar University, where he served as professor of jurisprudence. Gomaa has authored more than 50 books and hundreds of articles on Islamic law, spirituality, and contemporary issues. He continues to be a member of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, the leading body of Islamic jurisprudence under the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). However, in 2021, he was dismissed from the International Union of Muslim Scholars, alongside Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah and Farouk Hamadeh, due to differing jurisprudential stances, reflecting divisions in global Islamic discourse.

**Visit to the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque Controversy:** On 18 April 2012, Sheikh Ali Gomaa, with HRH Prince Ghazi of Jordan, broke what had been a 45-year taboo in some parts of the Islamic World and visited Al-Aqsa Mosque in order to pray there and support the beleaguered Muslim community in Jerusalem. The visit was viewed as controversial in Egypt but set off a change of public opinion in the Islamic World that continues to this day. The Grand Mufti also visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was much appreciated by the Christian community of Jerusalem.

**Personal Popularity:** Gomaa was exceedingly popular as a mufti and remains ever-popular since his retirement, although some of his political statements and pro-military government stance after the Egyptian Revolution have dampened this support somewhat. Apart from appearing on popular broadcasts and satellite television programmes, he also revived the practice of informal "knowledge circles" at the Al-Azhar Mosque. At his very well-attended Q&A sessions after his Friday sermons, Gomaa makes a point of taking on anyone who tries to simplify or distort Islamic teachings without knowledge of its traditions. This has made him extremely popular with those who vehemently oppose political Islam as

well as also making him a target for some extremist Islamists.

**Popularised and Simplified Fatwas:** As Grand Mufti, Gomaa transformed Dar al-Ifra into a modern institution with global influence. He introduced a system of checks and balances for issuing fatwas, ensuring they were grounded in authentic scholarship. Under his leadership, Dar al-Ifra became internationally recognised for issuing contextualised and accessible rulings on issues ranging from finance to family law, reaching audiences far beyond Egypt.



**Spiritual Guide:** Ali Gomaa is also currently the Shaykh of the Siddiqiyya Shadhiliyya Sufi Order which he had registered as an official Sufi Order in Egypt in 2018. Although Dr Gomaa carries two other Shadhili chains: one from the late Shaykh Muhammad Zaki al-Din Ibrahim (d. 1998) and Dr. Hasan Abbas Zaki (d. 2014), he chose the order given to him by one of his main teachers: al-Sayyid Abdullah bin Siddiq al-Ghumari (d. 1993). This is a Darqawi branch of the Shadhiliyya whose chain of transmission is known as a chain of scholars and *mujtabids*. The Order is currently operating in six countries and has several thousand followers.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Sheikh Ali Gomaa has spoken forcefully on the ongoing war in Gaza, describing Israel's actions as violations of international law and crimes against humanity. Gomaa has further framed the Gaza crisis as part of a wider ethical struggle, warning against indifference to oppression and emphasising that justice and compassion are central Islamic obligations.

**Country:** Yemen

**Born:** 16 April 1971 (age 54)

**Source of Influence:** Scholarly, Lineage, Philanthropy

**Influence:** Preacher, Social Issues

**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

2025 (22)

2024 (23)

2023 (22)

*"The most precious thing in life is the ability to touch the hearts of those we love, and the worst is to hurt them without any apology that is met by forgiveness."*

38<sup>th</sup>

generation descendant of the Prophet ﷺ

10

is the age began studying under his teachers



﴿ 24 ﴾

*Sheikh Habib*

Ali Zain Al Abideen Al-Jifri

# Sheikh Habib Ali Zain Al-Abideen Al-Jifri

## Director General of Tabah Foundation, UAE

Tracing his lineage to the family of Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Habib Ali Zain Al-Abideen Al-Jifri is a leading Islamic scholar and prominent speaker in the Muslim world. Al-Jifri is Director General of the Tabah Foundation in the UAE, member of the board of Dar al-Mustafa in Yemen, member of the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan, and is affiliated with various other international Islamic organisations.

**Beginnings:** Habib Ali was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to a family with ancestral roots in Yemen. From his early childhood he was nurtured in the Islamic sciences by distinguished teachers, starting with his mother's great aunt, Safiyya bint Hasan Al-Jifri, a scholar of Islamic sciences and a spiritual educator.

**Ba Alawi School:** Al-Jifri is part of a tradition that has been based in Yemen for over 1,000 years. His numerous teachers include the late scholars and spiritual masters Habib Abdul-Qadir bin Ahmad Al-Saqqaf and Habib Ahmad Mashhur bin Taha Al-Haddad, as well as the current leader of the Ba Alawi, Sheikh Habib Umar (see p.70). Habib Ali often teaches at Dar al-Mustafa in Tarim, Yemen, and also travels all over the world meeting his students and giving lectures. The Ba Alawi school emphasises a balance between Islamic scholarship, spirituality, and social responsibility. Habib Ali's teachings highlight the necessity of embodying the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ in daily life, combining outward practice

with inward purification of the heart. His spiritual guidance is deeply rooted in Sufi principles of mercy, humility, and service.

**Think Tank:** Al-Jifri founded the privately funded philanthropic Tabah Foundation for Islamic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi, a non-profit institution that is a source of reputable work in Islamic research and thought. It applies traditional religious principles to analyse contemporary issues. Notably, Tabah has collaborated with UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) to govern a Zakat donation portal for refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, ensuring the process respects Islamic legal norms in giving to displaced people. Some of his opinions have inevitably become controversial such as when he made statements against popular revolutions during the Arab Spring due to his belief that the preservation of peace and reducing bloodshed is paramount.

**Worldwide Following:** Habib Ali's popularity has grown enormously over the past few years with over 15 million followers on different social media platforms. His inspirational speeches often leave many in tears, and his smile and gentleness touch all who meet him. He is constantly in demand and visits people from all socioeconomic levels, travelling the globe regularly. Despite not speaking English, he is in huge demand by English-speaking Muslims.

**The Gaza Genocide:** He has described the killing of civilians, destruction of infrastructure, and mass displacement in Gaza as crimes against humanity that demand a collective response.



**Country:** United States  
**Born:** 1 January 1960 (age 65)  
**Source of Influence:** Preacher,  
Social Issues  
**Influence:** Scholarly, leading  
Islamic voice for Eng-  
lish-speaking Muslims  
**School of Thought:** Tradi-  
tional Sunni  
2025 (24)  
2024 (25)  
2023 (23)

*“Everyone’s a believer when things  
are going fine. The real faith is  
when one becomes patient with  
tribulations.”*

# 1977

is the year when he converted  
to Islam

# 2008

is the year he co-founded  
Zaytuna College



# 25

*Sheikh*

Hamza Yusuf Hanson

# Sheikh Hamza Yusuf Hanson

## Teacher and Co-Founder of Zaytuna College

Sheikh Hamza Yusuf Hanson is one of the most influential Islamic scholars in the Western world. He is the President and co-founder of Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California—the first accredited Muslim liberal arts college in the United States—and is widely regarded as one of the foremost authorities on Islam in the West.

**Islamic Scholar:** In 1977, at the age of eighteen, Hanson converted to Islam. Thereafter, he spent over a decade learning Arabic and studying the Islamic sciences with some of the Muslim world's most prominent and well-respected scholars. He pursued knowledge in several countries, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco, and West Africa. In Mauritania, he studied and lived with the renowned polymath Murabit Al-Hajj Ould Fahfu (d. 2018). He continues to study with scholars and has earned several *ijazaat* in traditional Islamic sciences. In 1988, Hanson returned to the U.S. and began teaching Islamic Studies and leading Friday prayers at various mosques. He has also translated several Arabic works of prose and poetry. In addition to his traditional studies, he later earned a PhD from UC Berkeley/GTU in history with an emphasis on North and West-African intellectual history; he also holds undergraduate degrees in Religious Studies, English, and Nursing.



**Speaker and Educator:** A popular public lecturer, Hanson has given many broadly viewed interviews. Through speeches and teaching short intense study programmes, including the Deen Intensive, Rih-

la, and Reviving the Islamic Spirit, he has helped strengthen traditional Sunni orthodoxy in the West. A whole generation of English-speaking Muslims were inspired by his work to study Arabic and Islamic sciences and many of them have become teachers. His work has contributed to the development of a more confident and faithful Islamic identity in the vertiginous times of the 21st century.

**Advisor:** Yusuf has long been engaged in interfaith and policy circles. He has served as a U.S. Presidential adviser, a Federal Commissioner on Human Rights, and a participant in global initiatives including the UN, Vatican, and Religions for Peace “Ethics in Action” project. He was also a member of the World Economic Forum’s C-100, an interfaith dialogue initiative. Currently, he serves as Vice President of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, based in the UAE, under the leadership of his teacher Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah. He is also a member of the UAE Fatwa Council and sits on the boards of the Classical Learning Test and the Acton Institute. He was also appointed to serve on the advisory board of the Religious Liberty Commission by the President of the USA.

**Controversies:** Despite being in the public eye for over three decades, Hanson has managed to stay clear of most controversies and continues to reach a large,

diverse audience. Some criticisms have questioned his advice to a U.S. president, his ties to the UAE government, and the like, yet he remains one of the most beloved scholars in the world. Arguably, he is one of the most intellectually widely read and formidable Western Muslim scholars today.

**The Gaza Genocide:** Sheikh Hamza Yusuf has been outspoken about the devastation in Gaza.

He has described the killing of civilians, destruction of homes, and mass displacement as acts of genocide and a stain on global conscience.



## Sheikh Ahmad Tijani bin Ali Cisse

Leader of the Tijaniyya Sufi Order

Country: Senegal

Born: 1955 (age 70)

Influence: Spiritual Leader

School of Thought: Traditional

Sunni



## Sheikh Usama Al-Sayyid Al-Azhari

Minister of Awqaf (Religious Endowments)

Country: Egypt

Born: 16 July 1976 (age 48)

Influence: Scholarly

School of Thought: Traditional

Sunni

# 26

Rank (2025): 25

Rank (2024): 26

Rank (2023): 24

# 27

Rank (2025): 26

Rank (2024): 30

Rank (2023): 28

Sheikh Ahmad Tijani Ali Cisse is the current spiritual leader of the Tijaniyya Sufi order, the largest Sufi order in West Africa. He has held this position since 15 August 2008, when he was unanimously elected by leading members of the order.

**Lineage and Teachers:** Born in 1955, Sheikh Tijani Cisse is the son of Sheikh Ali Cisse, the closest disciple of Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse, and Fatima Zahra Niasse, Sheikh Ibrahim's daughter. After memorising the Qur'an in Medina-Baye, he began his career as a Qur'an teacher while pursuing his Islamic studies under the direct mentorship of his father and grandfather. He continued his formal studies in Al-Azhar University and continued it through extensive travels, where he engaged in religious debates and interfaith dialogue, further solidifying his scholarly credentials.

**The Grand Mosque in Medina-Baye:** As the Imam of the Grand Mosque at Medina-Baye (founded in 1937 by Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse), Sheikh Tijani Cisse is the spiritual heart of the Tijaniyya community. The mosque attracts millions of visitors every year and up to 2 million during Mawlid celebrations.

**Descendent of The Tijaniyya Founder:** The Tijaniyya is a Sufi order founded by Ahmad Al-Tijani Hasani, an Algerian, in the late 18th century. As the spiritual leader of the Tijaniyya, Cisse is considered to be the bearer of a spiritual inspiration called the *Fayda Tijaniyya* ("flood" or "overflow of spiritual grace"), giving him authority to carry on the teachings of Ahmad Al-Tijani Hasani. The Tijanis are characterised by strict following of the sunnah, recitation of spiritual litanies (*awrad*), individually and in gatherings, and an emphasis on developing an inner relationship with God.

Sheikh Usama Al-Sayyid Al-Azhari is a distinguished Azhari scholar, preacher, and academic who assumed the role of Minister of Awqaf in July 2024. He teaches Hadith, Logic and Islamic Creed at the renowned Al-Azhar Mosque's Riwaq Al-Atrak in Cairo, Egypt. He also holds a teaching post in the Faculty of Usul Al-Din and Dawah at Al-Azhar University, Egypt.

**Minister of Awqaf:** As Minister, Al-Azhari has launched several initiatives: strengthening training and qualification programmes for imams and preachers, including female preachers; reviving traditional Islamic schools (*kuttub*); renewing religious discourse; fostering collaboration between the Ministry of Awqaf, Dar al-Ifta, and Al-Azhar; and increasing the presence of religious guidance in youth centres, universities, and clubs.

**Scholar:** He is widely regarded as one of the most influential voices advocating for, and actively working towards, new interpretations rooted in Islamic tradition, while addressing contemporary realities. Among his contributions are the development of a relational map of Shariah sciences and their connections to other fields of knowledge, the establishment of "Islamic hermeneutics", the revival of the tradition of auditing religious sciences and ensuring their transmission through a verified chain of transmission as a standard of authenticity, and exploring the Qur'anic accommodation of diverse civilisations, among others.

**Diplomacy:** He led Egypt's hosting of the General Assembly of the Union of Arab Awqaf, using the occasion to reaffirm Egypt's rejection of forced displacement of Palestinians and calling for a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. He has also been publicly recognised for strengthening ties with Muslim communities abroad and was awarded the Medal of Pride by the Mufti of Russia.

Sheikh Mustafa Hosny

Televangelist

Country: Egypt

Born: 28 August 1978 (age 47)

Influence: Preacher

School of Thought: Traditional

Sunni



HE Captain Ibrahim Traoré

Interim President of Burkina Faso

Country: Burkina Faso

Born: 14 March 1988 (age 37)

Influence: Political

School of Thought: Traditional

Sunni



Rank (2025): 28

Rank (2024): 27

Rank (2023): 26

28



Mustafa Hosny is a televangelist and Islamic preacher who presented his first show in 2004 and has gone on to become a household name.

**Changing Careers:** Mustafa Hosny started his career in sales and changed careers to become a full-time preacher after receiving a certification from the Institute of Training Preachers, an affiliate of the Egyptian Awqaf Ministry.

**Preacher:** Mustafa Hosny delivers sermons and lectures worldwide and currently has presented more than 53 programmes on TV and radio. He also delivers weekly sermons and lectures at Yousef El-Sahaby and El-Hosary mosques and Friday sermons at Al-Bilal Mosque compound in Cairo. In 2023 Sheikh Mustafa launched a series of episodes on the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ entitled '*Noor: A Journey Through the Life of the Messenger of God*'. The series translates the classical sources of the Seerah and makes them accessible to contemporary Muslims, particularly the young.

**Humanitarian:** Some of his activities include combating drug addiction amongst youth. He is a supporting member for the Children's Cancer Hospital campaign in Cairo and delivers seminars and campaigns for the Life Clear of Smoking Association in Egypt. He also supports blood donation campaigns.

**Social Media:** He has nearly 91 million followers on different social media platforms, including 7 million subscribers on YouTube alone where his videos have over 850 million views. He has weekly live broadcasts on social media where he tries to make classical Islamic texts accessible to his viewers. He also devotes a portion of his broadcasts to questions and answers where he answers things from the proper way to pray to questions about personal problems and challenges. His softly spoken style has greatly endeared him to the public.

29



Captain Ibrahim Traoré rose to power in September 2022 after leading a coup that ousted Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba. He was sworn in as transitional President the following month, becoming the youngest leader in Burkina Faso's history.

**New Hope:** Traoré has advanced a pan-African and sovereignty-focused agenda, emphasising national control over natural resources, especially gold, as well as agricultural self-sufficiency and infrastructure development. His rhetoric often draws on the legacy of Thomas Sankara, invoking themes of anti-imperialism and national dignity. These policies and ideals resonate strongly with the country's youth, who see him as a break from dependency on former colonial powers and a symbol of renewal.

**Challenges:** Traoré initially pledged democratic elections by July 2024, but ongoing insecurity led his transitional charter to extend the period by 60 months, potentially delaying a return to civilian rule until 2029. The volatile security environment in the Sahel continues to test his administration, leaving citizens balancing hopes for stability with concerns about authoritarian drift.

**Global Popularity & Western Response:** Beyond Burkina Faso, Traoré has become a prominent figure in African youth movements and pan-Africanist discourse. He is celebrated at rallies and on social media as a champion of sovereignty and resistance to neocolonialism, with his speeches widely circulated across the continent. However, his leadership has also made him a target; he has survived numerous assassination attempts since 2022, underscoring the dangers he faces amid domestic and international tensions. Western governments, particularly France, have expressed concern over his expulsion of French troops and diplomats, his alignment with Russia, and democratic delays.



**HE Ilham Aliyev**  
**President of Azerbaijan**  
**Country:** Azerbaijan  
**Born:** 24 December 1961 (age 64)  
**Influence:** Political  
**School of Thought:** Modern Sunni

30

Rank (2025): 30  
 Rank (2024): 31  
 Rank (2023): 450 lists

President Ilham Aliyev is the 4th President of Azerbaijan, serving since October 2003, and winning a fifth term in February 2024, securing 92% of the vote. He is the son of Heydar Aliyev, who was president from 1993 to 2003. He is an advocate of a moderate cultural Islam for Azerbaijan's 10.2 million Muslim citizens, about 80% of whom are Shia.

**Early Life:** Aliyev completed a PhD in history at Moscow State Institute of International Relations, where he remained as a lecturer from 1985 to 1990. From 1991 to 1994 he was involved in various business enterprises, then became vice president of the Azerbaijan oil and gas company, entering into politics in the late 1990s.

**Prosperity from Oil:** Azerbaijan, endowed with abundant oil reserves, has experienced a period of prosperity and stability that has positively impacted its people. The country's economic growth has driven advancements in banking, construction, telecommunications, and particularly in the oil and gas sectors, which serve as pillars of Azerbaijan's economy. These developments have contributed to improved infrastructure, job creation, and enhanced public services, benefiting the broader population.

**Foreign Policy:** During President Aliyev's tenure, Azerbaijan strengthened its ties and cooperation with the European Union (EU), developed economic relations with Russia, and cooperated with NATO. He also established close relations with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and was elected the chair of the Turkic Council in 2019.

**Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict:** Nagorno-Karabakh, recognised internationally as part of Azerbaijan, has a majority Armenian population and is partially controlled by the breakaway Republic of Artsakh, which is not recognised by any UN member states. A war in 2020 resulted in Azerbaijan's victory.



**Al-Habib Muhammad Luthfi bin Yahya**  
**Preacher**  
**Country:** Indonesia  
**Born:** 10 November 1947 (age 78)  
**Influence:** Scholarly, Spiritual  
**Guide**  
**School of Thought:** Traditional Sunni

31

Rank (2025): 31  
 Rank (2024): 33  
 Rank (2023): 30

Habib Luthfi is currently *Ra'is 'Amm Jam'iyyah Abli Thariqah Al-Mu'tabarah Al-Nahdliyah* (Head of the Association of Recognised Sufi Orders), Head of MUI Middle Java, and the spiritual leader of the Ba Alawi *tariqah* in Indonesia. He is also a leading figure in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Muslim organisation in the world with over 90 million members. He was appointed to Indonesia's Presidential Advisory Council in December 2019.

**Ba Alawi:** The Ba Alawi are descendants of the Prophet ﷺ who migrated to Hadramaut in Yemen early on in Islamic history. They played a major role in bringing Islam to the Far East, including Indonesia and Malaysia, and they hold high prominence to this day. They emphasise the importance of inward sincerity coupled with the study of religious sciences, especially as espoused by Imam Al-Ghazali.

**Seeker of Knowledge:** Habib Luthfi started his quest for knowledge early in life, and first studied under the tutelage of Ba Alawi teachers in Indonesia. He then travelled to Makkah and Madinah for further education and received authorisation (*ijazaat*) in all the traditional fields of learning including, hadith, and sufism (*tasawwuf*). His authorisation to be a spiritual master comes from more than one *tariqah* (spiritual brotherhood).

**Preacher and Spiritual Guide:** Habib Luthfi has published numerous books on Islamic theology, mysticism, and law. He is also a regular speaker at Islamic conferences and events around the world. Habib Luthfi has established thousands of schools, mosques, and *zawiyahs* (spiritual centres) in Indonesia. He has garnered a following numbering in the millions, emphasising the importance of spiritual practices, particularly the recitation of litanies (*awrad*). His 2025 Maulid events in Pekalongan drew over 100,000, reinforcing NU's moderate voice.

Maulana Tariq Jamil

Scholar and Preacher

Country: Pakistan

Born: 1953 (age 72)

Influence: Scholarly, Preacher

School of Thought: Sunni, Tablighi Jamaat



Sheikh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi

Scholar and Spiritual Guide

Country: Syria

Born: 7 May 1963 (age 62)

Influence: Scholarly

School of Thought: Traditional Sunni



Rank (2025): 32

Rank (2024): 34

Rank (2023): 32

32



Maulana Tariq Jamil is a prominent Deobandi scholar who is also one of the most popular preachers in Pakistan. He belongs to the Tablighi Jamaat group and his lectures focus on the subject of self-purification, avoidance of violence, observance of Allah's commands and pursuing the way of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

**Background:** After completing pre-medical studies, Maulana Tariq was admitted to the King Edward Medical College in Lahore. It was there—under the influence of members of the Tablighi Jamaat—that his focus changed to Islamic education. His Islamic training is from Jamia Arabia, where he studied Qur'an, Hadith, Sufism, Logic, and Islamic Jurisprudence. Maulana Tariq's background in the sciences allows him to explain Islamic matters in a way that appeals to modern urban Muslims. Additionally, his simple lifestyle and eloquence in Urdu, as well as his fluency in Arabic, spread his fame across the Muslim world.

**Tablighi Jamaat:** Founded in 1927 by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi in India as an apolitical revivalist movement, Tablighi Jamaat urges Muslims to revive basic faith practices through 3- and 40-day tours. Affiliated loosely with Deobandi thought, it targets broad audiences, eschewing politics for personal reform. Spread by South Asian diaspora, it claims 80–100 million adherents globally. Annual *ijtemas* (gatherings) in Raiwind, Pakistan (1.5–2 million attendees) and Tongi, Bangladesh (3–5 million), exemplify its mass appeal.

**Influence:** In addition to running a madrasa in Faisalabad, Pakistan, Maulana Tariq continues to travel extensively and deliver lectures around the world. He has been very effective in influencing all kinds of people, ranging from businessmen and landowners, to ministers, actors, and sports celebrities, and his social media videos garner billions of views.

Rank (2025): 33

Rank (2024): 35

Rank (2023): 34

33



Sheikh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi is one of the most influential Muslim scholars of the modern age, known for his intellectual depth, spiritual authority, and global reach. A descendant of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through Moulay Idriss II, he carries a prestigious Damascene scholarly lineage.

**Background:** Sheikh Al-Yaqoubi was born in Damascus and was trained in Islamic sciences by his father, who was an imam and instructor at the Grand Umayyad Mosque. Sheikh Al-Yaqoubi followed in his father's footsteps and was appointed as a Friday Speaker at the age of 18, and an Instructor at the Fatwa directorate at the age of 23.

**Against Extremism:** He was one of the first scholars to speak against DA'ISH, denouncing its atrocities and showing that its actions are un-Islamic. His book *Refuting ISIS* (now in ten languages) has become essential reading, providing theological arguments against extremists and calling on mainstream, traditional followers to combat them. His criticism of the Syrian government's response to protests made his stay in Syria untenable, so he had to flee the country in 2011, eventually seeking refuge in Morocco where he is still based.

**Educator:** Sheikh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi is a globally influential educator and spiritual luminary, guiding thousands of imams, scholars, and students through his Sacred Knowledge initiative, founded in 2011. His dynamic public speaking, amplified by frequent media appearances on platforms like BBC and Al Jazeera, delivers a moderate, inclusive Islam that counters extremism and fosters unity. His public teachings include complete recitations of *Sabih Al-Bukhari*, Imam Busiri's *Qasidat al-Burda* (The Poem of the Mantle), and Imam Al-Jazuli's *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, a revered litany of prophetic blessings, which he has also translated.



Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr  
 Philosopher and Professor  
 Country: USA  
 Born: 7 April 1933 (age 92)  
 Influence: Scholarly  
 School of Thought: Traditional Shia



Dr Timothy Winter (Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad)  
 Scholar  
 Country: UK  
 Born: 1960 (age 65)  
 Influence: Scholarly  
 School of Thought: Traditiona Sunni

34

Rank (2025): 34  
 Rank (2024): 36  
 Rank (2023): 35

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr is University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University. He remains one of the most influential Muslim scholars in the world for his work on Islamic tradition and philosophy. He is the only Muslim to be included in the Library of Living Philosophers and has written over 50 books and over 500 articles.

**Background and Career:** Nasr was born in Iran and raised in a house of scholars and physicians. He was sent to school in the USA, won a scholarship to MIT for undergraduate studies in physics, and obtained a doctorate in the history of science and philosophy from Harvard. He returned to Iran in 1958 where he swiftly rose through academic ranks to become Vice-Chancellor of Tehran University and then President of Aryamehr University.

**Reviver of Tradition:** Nasr's work has covered the most important areas of contemporary Muslim thought from classical Islamic philosophy, Islamic science, Sufism, critique of modernity, interfaith relations, Islam-West relations, and the environmental crisis. Nasr was the first Muslim scholar ever to be invited to give the prestigious Gifford Lectures, which were later published as *Knowledge and the Sacred*. Books such as *The Encounter of Man and Nature* (1968) critique the rise of a secular, modern conception of nature as inert matter to be conquered by modern technology, and attempt to revive a sacred notion of nature.

**Legacy:** For Nasr, the quest for knowledge, specifically knowledge which "liberates and delivers him from the fetters and limitations of earthly existence", has been and continues to be the central concern and determinant of his intellectual life. His work has helped to introduce the Islamic tradition to a wider audience and to promote understanding between different cultures and religions.

35

Rank (2025): 42  
 Rank (2024): 44  
 Rank (2023): 44

Professor Timothy Winter, better known as Sheikh Abdal Hakim Murad, is one of the most respected Muslim intellectuals of the contemporary age. Born in London in 1960, he converted to Islam in 1979 and has since combined deep traditional learning, studying at Al-Azhar University and under prominent scholars in the Muslim world, with an academic career and community engagement that has influenced Muslims worldwide.

**Academic:** He is the Sheikh Zayed Lecturer of Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University and Director of Studies in Theology at Wolfson College. He has published and contributed to numerous academic works on Islam and among his best-known works are translations from Imam Al-Ghazali's *Ihya'*, a series of aphorisms (*Commentary on the Eleventh Contentions*) and his most recent book, *Travelling Home: Essays on Islam in Europe* and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. His writings emphasise Islamic orthodoxy, spirituality, and the challenges of modernity.

**Community:** Sheikh Abdal Hakim is also the founder and Dean of the Cambridge Muslim College, which trains imams and scholars to engage with contemporary issues while rooted in traditional learning. He was a driving force behind the creation of Cambridge Central Mosque, Europe's first eco-mosque, which opened in 2019 as a model of sustainable architecture and community engagement.

**Educator:** He has inspired a generation of English-speaking Muslims and is widely sought after in interfaith dialogue. He continues to play a pivotal role in bridging Islamic scholarship with the modern world, offering a vision of faith rooted in tradition yet responsive to the ethical challenges of today.

HE Samia Suluhu Hassan

President of Tanzania

Country: Tanzania

Born: 27 January 1960 (age 65)

Influence: Political

School of Thought: Sunni



HE Sheikh Uthman Taha

Calligrapher

Country: Syria

Born: 1934 (age 91)

Influence: Calligrapher

School of Thought: Sunni



Rank (2025): 35

Rank (2024): 37

Rank (2023): 38

36



Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan is Tanzania's sixth and first female president, sworn in on 19 March 2021 following the death of John Pombe Magufuli.

**Politician:** Born in 1960 in the Sultanate of Zanzibar, she ran for public office in 2000 and was elected as a special seat member to the Zanzibar House of Representatives. In 2010, she was elected to the National Assembly and was appointed as the Minister of State for Union Affairs. In 2015, she became the first female vice-president in the history of Tanzania after John Magufuli was elected president. The same pair won the 2020 elections.

**President:** Assuming office, Hassan swiftly reversed Magufuli's COVID-19 denialism, mandating vaccines nationwide—she publicly received hers in August 2021. She lifted bans on opposition rallies, released leaders like Tundu Lissu and Freeman Mbowe, and eased media restrictions. Diplomatically, she diffused Kenya tensions over Bagamoyo Port and boosted tourism via UAE partnerships. In July 2025, she inaugurated the Kigongo-Busisi Bridge (East Africa's longest) and Kwala Dry Port, enhancing trade. CCM nominated her for the October 2025 elections, where she seeks a full term.

**Key Challenges:** The economic reforms have bolstered the economy and her leadership style has increased confidence all round. Tanzania's GDP growth rate has averaged 6% per year since Hassan took office, inflation has fallen and foreign exchange reserves have increased. Tourism has also seen record increases. Some constitutional reforms were passed in March 2024, but more critical ones have been delayed till after the 2025 general elections.

Rank (2025): 37

Rank (2024): 38

Rank (2023): 36

37



Uthman Taha is an internationally acclaimed Arabic calligrapher who has handwritten the *Mushaf Al-Madinah*, which is the copy of the Qur'an issued by the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, and thus read by hundreds of millions of Muslims.

**Background:** Taha was born in a rural area near Aleppo. His father, a calligrapher in the Ru'ah script, taught him early skills, and from childhood he showed interest in Arabic scripts. He attended the University of Damascus and earned a BA in Sharia. He additionally studied Arabic language, decorative arts, painting, and calligraphy under several masters: Muhammad Ali Al-Mawlawi, Ibrahim Al-Rifai, Muhammad Badawi Al-Deryani, Hashim Al-Bagh-dadi, among others. He obtained his certification (*ijazah*) in calligraphy from Turkish master Hamid Al-Amidi in 1973.

**Copying the Qur'an:** The written copy of the Qur'an is known as a *mushaf*, and it took Taha approximately three years to copy one out. He wrote his first copy in 1970 and in total has written out over ten copies. The most significant one was the one assigned to him in 1988 by the King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an in Madinah. This copy is the one printed by the King Fahd Complex and distributed to millions of pilgrims every year. It is the most common copy of the Qur'an available worldwide. Taha has copied out six different textual variants including *Warsh* (used in Morocco and Algeria), *Hafs* (worldwide), *Duri* (Africa and Sudan), and *Qalun* (Libya).



**Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi**  
 President of Ennahda Party  
**Country:** Tunisia  
**Born:** 1941 (age 84)  
**Influence:** Political, Scholarly  
**School of Thought:** Sunni



**Mohamed Salah**  
 Footballer  
**Country:** Egypt  
**Born:** 15 June 1992 (age 33)  
**Influence:** Influencers and Sports  
**School of Thought:** Sunni

38

Rank (2025): 38  
 Rank (2024): 40  
 Rank (2023): 37

Ghannouchi is one of the world's leading Islamic thinkers and one of the most influential Arab politicians in the post-Arab Spring period. Authoring over 20 books, he has led a life filled with imprisonment, exile, and governance.

**Politics:** Ghannouchi co-founded Ennahda Movement ('Renaissance') in the 1970s and was imprisoned several times before being forced into exile. Ennahda is a political party based on Islamic values and supports the concept of a multi-party democracy. In 2012 he received the Chatham House Prize for "the successful compromises each achieved during Tunisia's democratic transition" and in 2016 he received the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for "promoting Gandhian values outside India".

**Post-Arab Spring:** With the fall of President Ben Ali, Ghannouchi returned to Tunisia in January 2011 having spent 20 years in exile. He led the Ennahda Party to victory in the October 2011 national elections. In 2014, Ghannouchi quit government and handed power over to a technocratic government. When elections were held later that year, Ennahda, without Ghannouchi leading them, came second to the Nidaa Tounes party. The 2019 elections produced a deeply fragmented parliament with the government collapsing just five months into its term. Ghannouchi, who was elected speaker of parliament, narrowly won a vote of confidence in July 2020.

**Imprisonment Again:** Since 2021, following President Kais Saïed's suspension of parliament and consolidation of power, Ghannouchi has been targeted by the judiciary. He was arrested in April 2023. In February 2024, he was sentenced to three years in prison, then in February 2025, in a major new verdict, he was handed an additional 22 years in prison for alleged conspiracy linked to a media-PR firm case and in July 2025 a court added yet another 14-year sentence on charges of plotting against state security.

39

Rank (2025): 39  
 Rank (2024): 41  
 Rank (2023): 39

Mohamed Salah is an Egyptian football player of global fame with over 102 million social media followers.

**International Player:** He began his professional career in Egypt in 2010 before moving to Europe, eventually establishing himself at Liverpool FC, where he enjoyed record-breaking seasons. His 2017–18 campaign was especially spectacular, and he played a central role as Liverpool claimed the Premier League title in 2019-20 after a 30-year wait, and then winning it again in 2024-25.

**Popularity:** His affable nature and polite manners have won him many fans across the globe, and none more so than in his native country of Egypt where he has donated to various charitable causes. In the March 2018 Egyptian presidential elections, over a million people struck out the two names vying for the presidency and inserted Mohamed Salah's name, making him an unofficial runner-up in the election.

**Singing in the Terraces:** His footballing exploits during his time at Liverpool FC have had the unprecedented effect of football fans singing positive songs about Muslims. "If he's good enough for you, he's good enough for me. If he scores another few, then I'll be Muslim too. Sitting in the mosque, that's where I wanna be! Mo Salah-la-la-la, la-la-la-la-la-la-la."

**Gaza Genocide:** In August 2025, Salah challenged UEFA's tribute to Suleiman al-Obeid, a Palestinian footballer dubbed the "Palestinian Pelé," who was killed by Israeli forces while awaiting humanitarian aid in Gaza. UEFA's tribute acknowledged Obeid's hope and inspiration for children but omitted who killed him. Salah responded on social media: "Can you tell us how he died, where, and why?"

## Sheikh Muqtada Sadr

Scholar and Politician

**Country:** Iraq

**Born:** 4 August 1974 (age 51)

**Influence:** Political, Social Issues

**School of Thought:** Shia



Rank (2025): 40

Rank (2024): 42

Rank (2023): 41

# 40



The son of the late Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadiq Al-Sadr, and son-in-law of Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, Muqtada is a highly influential leader who inherited control over large social institutions that serve millions in Baghdad.

**Serving the Poor:** He has focussed on serving Iraq's poor Shia Muslims and has had complete freedom to work in many parts of Iraq, especially Sadr City, a district in Baghdad named after his father. He provides access to healthcare, food, and clean water. He has raised issues of corruption, high unemployment and poor government services.

**Politics:** He gained prominence after the US invasion of Iraq by creating the Mahdi Army, an armed insurgency movement that formed its own courts and system of law enforcement. This is now known as Saraya Al-Salam. Through it he has concentrated on campaigning against corruption in Iraq, criticising the government openly about this. He has worked for Shia-Sunni unity, and in 2017 called for Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad to step down, and also met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

**Power-Broker:** The Sadrist-led coalition won 73 seats in the 2021 elections, beating the Iranian-backed coalition, but he was unable to form a government, and so Sadr withdrew his coalition and quit politics a year later. There were violent clashes between the supporters of the two coalitions which led to fears of an all-out, intra-Shia civil war, but Sadr played a prominent role in preventing this. In early 2025, while signaling a return by urging supporters to update voter records, he officially declared his movement would boycott the November 2025 parliamentary elections, citing persistent corruption.

## Maulana Nazar ur-Rehman

Amir of Tablighi Jamaat

**Country:** Pakistan

**Born:** 1929 (age 96)

**Influence:** Preacher,

Administration of Religious Affairs

**School of Thought:** Sunni, Tablighi Jamaat



Rank (2022): 41

Rank (2024): 43

Rank: (2023) 42

# 41



Maulana Nazar ur-Rehman is the 4th Amir of the Pakistani Tablighi Jamaat. He succeeded Hajji Abdul-Wahhab who passed away in November 2018, age 96.

**Leader:** Maulana ur-Nazar Rehman previously served as Deputy Amir, and was one of three individuals named by his predecessor as a potential successor. His leadership of the Pakistani chapter follows a 2016 global split within the Tablighi Jamaat over leadership, with a separate faction centered in India headed by Maulana Saad Kandhalvi.

**Dawah:** The Tablighi Jamaat is active in over 150 countries and is known for organizing small groups of followers who travel to Muslim communities, encouraging them to uphold their religious duties. This practice of *dawah*, or inviting others to fulfill their religious responsibilities, is regarded as a cornerstone of the faith, helping the Tablighi Jamaat build a massive membership base numbering in the hundreds of millions. The organisation has deep connections to the prominent Islamic institution, Darul Uloom Deoband in India, where its founder, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhelvi, studied before establishing a following in Pakistan.

**Mass Appeal:** The Tablighi Jamaat enjoys mass appeal among Pakistanis, diaspora South Asians, and beyond, drawing in a range of followers, including notable Muslim leaders, politicians, actors, and sports stars. Its broad acceptance is partly due to its apolitical stance and its identity as a spiritual revivalist movement that condemns violence and distances itself from any militant groups. Annual gatherings in Raiwind, Pakistan, draw close to 2 million participants, while those in Biswa, Bangladesh, attract over 3 million, reflecting the organisation's significant reach and enduring influence.



**HE Ibrahim Saleh Al-Hussaini**  
**Scholar**  
**Country:** Nigeria  
**Born:** 12 May 1938 (age 87)  
**Influence:** Scholarly,  
 Administration of Religious Affairs  
**School of Thought:** Sunni



**HE Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada**  
**Leader of the Taliban**  
**Country:** Afghanistan  
**Born:** 1 January 1966 (age 59)  
**Influence:** Leader of Taliban which governs 44 million  
**School of Thought:** Deobandi/  
 Taliban

42

Rank (2025): 43  
 Rank (2024): 45  
 Rank (2023): 45

Sheikh Dr Ibrahim Saleh Al-Hussaini is currently the head of the Supreme Council for Fatwa and Islamic Affairs in Nigeria and a member of the Muslim Council of Elders which embraces prominent scholars.

**Early Studies:** Sheikh Ibrahim was born in Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria in 1938 and started his quest for knowledge at a very young age by accompanying his father, Sheikh Muhammad Al-Salih bin Yunus Al-Nawwy. He lost his father at the age of seven, and completed his initial studies at the Supreme Islamic Institute in Nigeria and then studied at the hands of renowned scholars in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, India, Pakistan, Senegal, Niger and Sudan.

**Scholar:** Sheikh Ibrahim lectures in the fields of *tafsir* (exegesis) and hadith as well as Islamic Sciences, jurisprudence and ethics. He has authored over 100 written works. He has held several significant positions, some of which are: founder and mentor of the Islamic Renaissance Organization, Adviser to the Federal Government on its Islamic Affairs since 1992, Assistant Secretary-General for African Affairs in the World Islamic People's Leadership 1989, among others.

**Education:** He opened the Sheikh Sharif Ibrahim Saleh Islamic Centre, which focuses on teaching and research. Its aim is to "promote a better understanding of contemporary challenges and how to face and handle such challenges in today's world".

43

Rank (2025): 44  
 Rank (2024): 46  
 Rank (2023): 49

Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada was named the leader of the Taliban in 2016 after a US drone strike killed the previous leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour. Akhundzada is known primarily as a religious leader who ran schools from which many of the Taliban have graduated. He is rarely seen in public and there are no confirmed video recordings or photos of him.

**Mujahideen and Taliban 1.0:** Akhundzada is a former member of the Mujahideen, who fought against the Soviet Union's invasion during the 1980s. However, during that time, he was known more for his religious guidance rather than military leadership. He continued in the position of religious counsellor during the formation of the Taliban in the 1990s and, after the Taliban captured the western Farah province, he was put in charge of reducing crime in the area. Later on, he took on the position of head of the military court, arbitrating disputes among Taliban members. After the US invasion in 2001, he became both head of the Taliban's council of religious scholars, and a teacher in a village near the Pakistani border for 15 years.

**Taliban 2.0:** The Taliban regained power in Afghanistan in August 2021 after the collapse of the US-backed Afghan government, but the new regime remains unrecognised internationally. Western countries have also imposed sanctions and banking restrictions, including freezing \$7 billion of Afghan central bank assets. The Taliban have brought security and peace to the country, repaired infrastructure, and reduced corruption in customs and tax collection. Their strict anti-narcotics campaign has significantly cut opium production. They have also imposed severe restrictions on women's and girls' rights, including bans on secondary and university education. Political parties have been banned, and journalists face severe restrictions.

Sheikh Muhammad Ilyas  
Attar Qadiri

Preachers & Spiritual Guides

Country: Pakistan

Born: 12 July 1950 (age 75)

Influence: Spiritual Guide and  
Preacher

School of Thought: Traditional  
Sunni Barelvi



HE Mahmoud Abbas

President of Palestine

Country: Palestine

Born: 15 November 1935 (age 90)

Influence: Political

School of Thought: Sunni



Rank (2025): 45

Rank (2024): 47

Rank (2023): 50

44



Rank (2025): Hon Men

Rank (2024): Hon Men

Rank (2023): Hon Men

45



Sheikh Qadiri is an Islamic scholar belonging to the Qadri Razawi order and is the leader of Dawat-e-Islami, a global religious organisation spread over 195 countries and operating in over 100,00 mosques and Islamic centres. Sheikh Ilyas Qadiri studied for 22 years under the former Grand Mufti of Pakistan, Sheikh Mufti Waqar ud-Din Qadri Razavi. He has authored over 30 books, including *Faizan-e-Sunnat*, on the merits of good deeds.

**The Barelvis:** Dawat-e-Islami was formed by followers of the Barelvi school. Barelvis follow the teachings of Imam Ahmed Raza Khan (1856-1921), a polymath known reverentially as Ala Hazrat, who left a huge corpus of writings. A key message of this corpus is having sufficient veneration of the Prophet ﷺ and it is the perceived lack of this which has often led to criticism of the Tablighi Jamaat and the Deobandi movements, despite all following the Sunni Hanafi school of jurisprudence. Imam Ahmad Raza was buried in his hometown, Bareilly, from which his movement takes its name.

**Dawat-e-Islami:** Ilyas Qadiri was head of the youth wing of Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP) when he was chosen to head the newly formed Dawat-e-Islami in 1981 in Karachi. This movement quickly spread to all parts of Pakistan and soon all around the world.

**Global Following:** The subcontinent diaspora has carried the movement globally and it is estimated that it has over 200 million followers in over 195 countries. It is non-political, emphasising the love of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as the key component of faith. It centres on the propagation of Islamic knowledge and manages two main activities: the Jamiat-ul-Madina chain of religious schools, and the non-commercial Madani TV channel.

Mahmoud Abbas, widely known as Abu Mazen, is the President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). A co-founder of Fatah, he played a central role in the Oslo Peace Process, standing alongside Yasser Arafat at the White House in 1993 for the signing of the Oslo Accords.

**President:** Elected President of the PNA in 2005 for a four-year term, no presidential elections have been held since. The Fatah-Hamas split in 2007 led to Abbas's Fatah movement controlling the West Bank, while Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip. Abbas is a political pragmatist and has advocated for an independent Palestinian state through negotiations with Israel, rejecting armed struggle. However, this approach has yielded little progress, leaving him unpopular with some of his constituents.

**Succession:** In March 2025, he announced long-delayed legislative elections and the following month, he appointed Hussein al-Sheikh, Secretary-General of the PLO Executive Committee, as Vice President—cementing him as Abbas's likely successor.

**UNGA 2025:** Abbas addressed the UN General Assembly via video link after the US revoked his visa to enter the country along with dozens of other Palestinian officials. During his speech, he accused Israel of "war of genocide, destruction, starvation and displacement" against Palestinians in Gaza. He also rejected the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, stating it does not represent the Palestinian people. He vowed that Hamas would not have a role in governing Gaza and called on the group to disarm.

**Recognition:** The State of Palestine is recognized by 157 of the 193 United Nations member states, (approximately 81%) including the high profile recognition of various Western states in 2025.



**HE Khaled Mashal**  
**Political**  
**Country:** Palestine  
**Born:** 28 May 1956 (age 69)  
**Influence:** Political  
**School of Thought:** Traditional  
 Sunni



**HE Ahmed Al-Sharaa**  
**Interim President of Syria**  
**Country:** Syria  
**Born:** 29 October 1982 (age 43)  
**Influence:** Political  
**School of Thought:** Sunni

46

Rank (2025): 450 lists  
 Rank (2024): 450 lists  
 Rank (2023): 450 lists

Khaled Mashal is a co-founder of Hamas and one of its most prominent political leaders, shaping the movement for over three decades.

**Early Life and Political Development:** After the 1967 Six-Day War, Mashal's family moved to Kuwait, where he studied physics at Kuwait University and became active in Islamic student groups. He later worked as a physics teacher before devoting himself to political activism.

**Leadership in Hamas:** Mashal co-founded Hamas in the late 1980s and rose through its ranks, becoming chairman of its Political Bureau in 1996 following the assassinations of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi. He led the movement in exile for over 20 years, balancing armed resistance with political strategy. A 1997 Israeli assassination attempt in Amman dramatically raised his profile and cemented his role in Palestinian politics. After stepping down in 2017, Mashal remained a senior figure, and in 2021 was elected to head Hamas's diaspora office, expanding international outreach.

**Diplomatic Engagements:** He has negotiated key ceasefires, including the 2014 and 2021 Gaza truces, and engaged with mediators like Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey to secure humanitarian aid and prisoner exchanges. In 2025, Mashal led talks in Doha for a Gaza ceasefire, advocating for reconstruction and an end to Israel's blockade amid the ongoing genocide. During the negotiations, the delegation narrowly survived an assassination attempt when Israel bombed their location in Qatar.

**Return to Prominence:** Following the assassinations of Ismail Haniyeh (2024) and Yahya Sinwar (2025), Mashal re-emerged as acting leader of Hamas's political bureau. Mashal remains one of the most visible faces of Hamas's external leadership, symbolizing its effort to balance resistance, diplomacy, and international legitimacy.

47

Rank (2025): 450 lists  
 Rank (2024): 450 lists  
 Rank (2023): 450 lists

Ahmed Al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, is the interim president of Syria, appointed in January 2025 after the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime. His ascent marks one of the most dramatic political transformations of the post-Arab Spring era, as he moved from militant commander to head of state.

**Rise to Power:** Al-Sharaa first came to prominence during the Iraq War, where he fought with Al-Qaeda in Iraq. In 2012 he founded the al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliate that became one of Syria's most powerful rebel groups. In 2016, he severed formal ties with al-Qaeda and rebranded his faction as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), positioning it as a Syrian nationalist force. Despite this, he remained on US and UN sanctions lists, with a \$10 million bounty on his head until his political transition.

**From HTS Leader to President:** Following the regime's collapse in December 2024, Al-Sharaa emerged as the consensus choice of opposition forces. In January 2025, he was formally named interim president at the Syrian Revolution Victory Conference, pledging to unify the country, end factionalism, and rebuild shattered institutions.

**International Engagement:** In September 2025, he became the first Syrian leader in nearly six decades to address the UN General Assembly, where he emphasized reconstruction, reconciliation, lifting sanctions, and restoring Syria's international role. He pledged to seek peaceful coexistence with neighbors, voiced support for Palestinian rights, and called for a new era of diplomacy.

**Challenges Ahead:** Al-Sharaa faces the task of reconciling his militant past with his role as statesman. Reports of sectarian tensions and his history of authoritarian governance in Idlib remain points of criticism. Nevertheless, his leadership signals a new and uncertain chapter for Syria.

Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas

Scholar

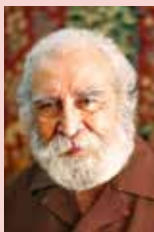
Country: Malaysia

Born: 5 September 1931 (age 94)

Influence: Scholarly

School of Thought: Traditional

Sunni



Rank (2025): 46

Rank (2024): 48

Rank (2023): HM

48



Professor Tan Sri Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is a polymath rooted in traditional Islamic sciences. He is known for his work in theology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, and literature. He is particularly celebrated for pioneering the concept of the “Islamisation of knowledge”.

**Background:** Al-Attas was born in Bogor, West Java. He received his early education in Sukabumi and Johor Bahru. He later studied at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, England and, subsequently, at the University of Malaya, McGill University (MA) and the University of London (PhD), focusing on Islamic philosophy, theology and metaphysics.

**Scholar:** Tan Sri Syed Naquib has written over 30 books in the fields of Islamic philosophy, theology and metaphysics, history, literature, art and civilization, and religion and education. He is among the few contemporary scholars who is also thoroughly rooted in the traditional Islamic sciences. His magnum opus is *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* and his latest book (2023) is *Islām: The Covenants Fulfilled*. In October 2024 He became the second Malaysian to have been awarded the title of Royal Professor (Profesor Diraja).

**Institutions:** He was responsible for the conceptualization of the Islamic University, which he initially formulated at the First World Conference on Muslim Education, held in Makkah (1979). In 1987, Tan Sri Syed Naquib founded and directed the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), which is a major, global academic institution. He has inspired a generation of new scholars including Professor Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, who is the current holder of The Distinguished Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Chair of Islamic Thought at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

Professor Mustafa Abu Sway

Scholar

Country: Palestine

Born: 1958 (age 67)

Influence: Scholarly

School of Thought: Traditional

Sunni



Rank (2025): 49

Rank (2024): 50

Rank (2023): 450 lists

49



Professor Abu Sway is a scholar who lectures globally as well as in the heart of Jerusalem, Palestine, at Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, where he also reads from Imam Ghazali’s *Ihya’ Ulum ud-Din*, making it accessible to English-speaking Muslims. He is a member of the Hashemite Fund for the Restoration of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, and the Islamic Waqf Council in Jerusalem.

**Scholar:** Professor Abu Sway earned his PhD from Boston College (1993), with his dissertation entitled: *The Development of Al-Ghazali’s Genetic Epistemology*. He is author of three books on Imam Al-Ghazali: *Islamic Epistemology: The Case of Al-Ghazali, Fatawa Al-Ghazali* (Arabic) and *A Treasury of Al-Ghazali*. He has dozens of published articles on other topics such as interfaith relations, Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem.

**Academic Appointments:** Professor Abu Sway was appointed as the first holder of the King Abdullah II Integral Professorial Chair for the Study of Imam Ghazali’s Work at Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and at Al-Quds University in 2012. He has also been Professor of Philosophy and Islamic Studies at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, and Dean of the College of Dawah and Usul Al-Din, and College of the Qur’an and Islamic Studies from 2014-2020.

He taught at the International Islamic University in Malaysia (1993-96) and was a visiting Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at the Wilkes Honors College at Florida Atlantic University (2003-4), as well as a Visiting Professor of Islamic Studies at Bard College, New York. (2008-10).

**Speaker:** He is frequently invited to give lectures worldwide and his ability to address controversial and sensitive topics with a calm and clear delivery makes him a rare and influential voice, capable of leaving a lasting impact on a wide range of audiences.



HE Muhammad Yunus  
 Chief Advisor of Bangladesh  
 Interim Government  
**Country:** Bangladesh  
**Born:** 28 June 1940 (age 85)  
**Influence:** Political  
**School of Thought:** Sunni

50

Rank (2025): 50  
 Rank (2024): 450 Lists  
 Rank (2023): 450 Lists

Muhammad Yunus is a Bangladeshi politician, Nobel Peace Prize winner, economist, entrepreneur, and civil society leader who is currently serving as the Chief Advisor to the Bangladesh interim government.

**Interim Political Leader:** When Bangladeshi president Shahabuddin dissolved the parliament in August 2024 after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed fled the country, he nominated Muhammad Yunus to serve as the head of the interim government of Bangladesh, acceding to student demands. Yunus has pledged to organise a constituent assembly to draft and adopt a new, democratic and inclusive constitution that ensures the inviolability of human dignity.

**“Banker to the Poor”:** Yunus established the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in 1983 to help people escape from poverty by providing loans on terms suitable to them and by teaching them sound financial principles. Grameen Bank spearheaded a world movement to eradicate poverty through microlending. Replicas of the Grameen Bank model operate in over 100 countries. For this, Yunus was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. He is also the recipient of the American Presidential Medal of Freedom, among many other prestigious awards and honours.

**Social Leader:** Yunus has served on the UN Expert Group on Women and Finance and on the board of directors of the United Nations Foundation, a charity for UN causes. Yunus founded The Yunus Centre in Dhaka—a think tank for social business working in the field of poverty alleviation and sustainability.

**Challenges:** Amid challenges like US tariffs and minority violence accusations, Yunus has released political prisoners, lifted rally bans, and bolstered digital infrastructure for inclusive growth. He vows a new constitution via constituent assembly, with elections slated for early February 2026.

# THE TOP 50 INS & OUTS

## PASSED AWAY

- HE Sheikh Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Aal Al-Sheikh, Grand Mufti of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (29)
- HH Shah Karim Al-Hussayni, The Aga Khan IV, 49th Imam of Ismaili Muslims (32)
- HE Yahya Sinwar, Head of Hamas Political Bureau (new)

## OUTS

- Dr Amr Khaled (47 to Hon Men)

## INS

- HE Captain Ibrahim Traoré, Interim President of Burkina Faso (new) 29
- HE Mahmoud Abbas, President of Palestine (Hon Men to 45)
- HE Khaled Mashal, Palestine (450 lists to 46)
- HE Ahmed Al-Sharaa, Interim President of Syria (450 lists to 47)

HONOURABLE  
MENTIONS

HE Grand Ayatollah  
Abdullah Jawadi Amoli

Scholarly  
Iran

Born: 1933 (age 92)

Grand Ayatollah Amoli is a leading theologian and interpreter of the Qur'an. He is a prolific scholar, having published over 300 articles and books. He is most well-known for his commentary of the Qur'an, *Tafsir al-Tasnim*, which has been widely lauded by his peers. Amoli has remained a very public figure throughout his career, having led a diplomatic mission to the former USSR, and continues to speak publicly on current affairs especially against corruption in government.



HE Grand Ayatollah  
Mohammad Ishaq Al-Fayadh

Scholarly  
Iraq

Born: 1930 (age 95)

Grand Ayatollah Al-Fayadh, originally from Afghanistan, is one of the four *maraji* of the Hawza Seminary in Najaf, Iraq—one of the two most important seats of learning in Twelver Shiism. Fayadh is known for his quietist approach to politics and is well-respected especially amongst the Shia population of South Asia.



Dr Aref Ali Nayed

Scholarly  
Libya

Born: 31 December 1962 (age 63)

Dr Aref Ali Nayed is a Libyan public figure, a renowned scholar in the field of Islamic Theology (*kalām*) and Philosophy, and a leading pioneer of inter-faith relations. He was former Ambassador of Libya to the UAE, former Special Envoy of the President of the Libya House of Representatives to USA, UK, European and African Unions, and led the Libya Stabilisation Team in 2011—and has since played a vital and positive role in the revitalisation of the Libyan political track. Nayed is the Founder and Chairman of two leading think tanks: Kalam Research & Media (KRM); and the Libya Institute for Advanced Studies (LIAS). He is also currently a Senior Advisor to the Cambridge Interfaith Programme at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Divinity, and a member of the High Academic



Council of the Muhammad bin Zayed University for the Humanities in Abu Dhabi UAE. He was former professor at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (Rome), and a former professor at the International Institute for Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC, Malaysia).

Professor Akbar Ahmed

Scholarly  
Pakistan

Born: 15 January 1944 (age 81)

Professor Akbar Ahmed is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University in Washington, DC and the former Pakistani High Commissioner to the UK and Ireland. He is also a Distinguished Professor, Trustee of the Parliament of World Religions and Member of the Advisory Board, Senator Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Belfast. In addition to his academic and public sector careers, Ahmed has produced a number of noteworthy films and authored more than a dozen award-winning books. He produced the *Jinnah Quartet* and the feature film, *Jinnah* (1998). Ahmed's play, *Gandhi and Jinnah Return Home* was performed on stage and the film of the play shown at several venues. His latest book *America at the Crossroads* was published in late summer 2025.



Dr Ingrid Mattson

Scholarly  
Canada

Born: 24 August 1963 (age 62)

Dr. Ingrid Mattson is the London and Windsor Community Chair in Islamic Studies, and the Founder and Director of the Centre for Islamic Theology, Ethics and Spirituality (CITES) at Huron University College at Western University in Canada. Previously she had worked for 14 years as Professor at the Hartford Seminary, and served as Director of the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. In 2001 she was elected vice president of ISNA and in 2006 she was elected president. She is the author of the highly acclaimed *The Story of the Qur'an*. Dr Mattson also founded a project to uphold the sacred inviolability (*hurma*) of those who enter Muslim spaces from exploitation and abuse by those holding religious power and authority. The Hurma Project is establishing professional oversight for imams, chaplains, mosque boards and others.



## Aisha Bewley

Scholarly

USA

Born: 1948 (aged 77)

Aisha Bewley is a scholar, author, writer and one of the most prolific and accomplished translators of classical Islamic works from Arabic to English. Since converting to Islam in 1968, she has spent the decades faithfully learning the Islamic tradition and making available its key texts to the global English-speaking Muslim community, often in collaboration with her husband. She was born in 1948 in the United States, obtained an MA in Near Eastern Languages from the University of California and then spent a year at the American University in Cairo. She started her traditional Islamic learning in a Dar al-Ulum and continued her journey following the teachings of Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Habib of Meknes (passed away 1972) under the late Sheikh Abdalqadir al-Murabit (passed away 2021).



## HE Imran Khan

Political

Pakistan

Born: 5 October 1932 (age 73)

Imran Khan, an international cricketer-turned-statesman, became Pakistan's Prime Minister in 2018 on promises of reform and accountability. His tenure ended in April 2022, when he became the first PM ousted via a no-confidence vote. Khan has consistently alleged foreign and institutional manipulation, particularly by the military, in his removal, decrying Pakistan's hybrid civil-military system. Arrested in August 2023, Khan has faced multiple convictions. Most recently, in August 2025, Pakistan's Supreme Court granted him bail in eight cases related to the 9 May, 2023 riots, though he remains detained on another conviction. Despite his imprisonment, Khan commands substantial support in the country, PTI secured most seats in the 2024 general election, as well as with the large and powerful Pakistani diaspora. His challenges are seen as part of the inevitable results of trying to change a system rife with corruption and of trying to reduce the role of the military.



## Sir Sadiq Khan

Political

United Kingdom

Born: 8 October 1970 (age 55)

Sir Sadiq Khan, the son of a London bus driver, has served as Mayor of London since 2016, now enjoying an unprecedented third consecutive term following his 2024 re-election with 43.8% of the vote. Before that, he was a human-rights solicitor, Chair of Liberty, Wandsworth Councillor, and Labour MP for Tooting (2005–2016). As mayor, Khan has championed universal free primary school meals, breaking down stigma and delivering over 43 million meals to 287,000 children. He advanced environmental equity through the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), strengthening public transport and pursuing net-zero by 2030, insisting that clean air is a human right. In recognition of his public service, he was knighted in the 2025 New Year Honours. As a Muslim of Pakistani heritage, Khan emphasises that his identity enriches his commitment to all Londoners. Amid vocal attacks from far-right groups, he remains steadfast in uniting the city's diverse communities.



## Alhaji Dr Sanusi Lamido

Sanusi

Administration of Religious Affairs

Nigeria

Born: 31 July 1961 (age 64)

In 2024, Sanusi became the 16th Fulani Emir of Kano, the second highest Muslim authority in the land (the Sultan of Sokoto being the first) and the spiritual leader of the Tijanniyah Sufi order. He had already served as the 14th Emir before being de-throned by the Governor of Kano in 2020. Sanusi is the former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) (2009-2014) and a respected Islamic scholar who has won numerous awards. He has pointed out corruption in previous governments, pushed for an end to child marriage and been targeted by Boko Haram.



Mufti Abul Qasim Nomani  
Administration of Religious Affairs  
India

Born: 14 January 1947 (age 78)

Maulana Mufti Abul Qasim Nomani is the *Mohtamim* (Vice-Chancellor) and Shaikh al-Hadith of Darul Uloom Deoband in India.

He was elected as *Mohtamim* on 23 July 2011. Darul Uloom Deoband is the founding institution of the Deobandi school of thought and continues to serve as its global centre, currently housing around 5,000 students. Mufti Abul Qasim Nomani graduated from Darul Uloom Deoband in 1967, and he was appointed a member of its Majlis Shura (Governing Body) in 1992. He is the spiritual successor (*khalifah*) of the renowned scholar Hadhrat Mufti Mahmood Hasan Gangohi, and is widely respected for his deep scholarship in Hadith, spirituality, and his dedicated leadership of one of the most influential Islamic seminaries in the world.



Dr Mohammed Bechari  
Administration of Religious Affairs  
France

Born: 16 April 1967 (age 58)

Dr Mohammed Bechari is a leading figure in the landscape of European Islam. He heads a variety of organisations that seek to better represent French and European Muslims in the wider society as well as working to empower their own communities. He is the Secretary General of the UAE-based World Muslim Communities Council, president of the French National Federation of Muslims, one of the leading entities organising Islam in France. He is also the secretary general of the Islamic European Conference, a Europe-wide umbrella organisation that seeks to be a single entity representing European Muslims at the European level. Bechari is the founder of the Avicenna Institute in Lille and member of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) in Vienna.



HH Prince Rahim Aga Khan V (new)

Administration of Religious Affairs  
United Kingdom

Born: 12 October 1971 (age 54)

His Highness Prince Rahim al-Hussaini Aga Khan V ascended as the 50th hereditary Imam of the Shia Nizari Ismaili Muslims on 4 February 2025, following the passing of his father, His Late Highness Prince Karim al-Hussaini Aga Khan IV, (aged 88). He guides an estimated 12-15 million followers across 25 countries, from Central Asia to East Africa, Europe, and North America. He is also steward of the \$13 billion Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) founded by his father in 1967. The AKDN is a collection of over 200 development and humanitarian agencies that work to improve the lives of people in over 30 countries. The network is widely known for its architectural and cultural work, including projects that revitalise historic cities. Some projects include the renovation of the Old City of Aleppo and the Al-Azhar Park in Cairo. The Aga Khan's foundation maintains a strong and enduring presence in developing countries: building health care capacity, promoting economic development in rural areas, and helping improve educational opportunities.



Dr Amr Khaled  
Preachers & Spiritual Guides  
Egypt

Born: 5 September 1967 (age 58)

Amr Khaled has been a televangelist to the Islamic world since 1998. He communicates through his TV shows and web campaigns using Islamic ethics in order to inspire, foster community development, tolerance and inter-cultural relations. Khaled is credited with the launch of the first Muslim reality TV show 'Mujaddidun' on Dubai Television. His website is translated from Arabic into nearly 20 languages and his videos have racked up over 383 million views on YouTube. He has over 46 million subscribers on his various social media. Community Development: Khaled's goal is to encourage community development in the Muslim world by its own people with religious faith as the guiding inspiration, something he believes should be linked to interfaith dialogue, tolerance and moderation.



## Sheikh Nuh Keller

Preachers & Spiritual Guides

Jordan

Born: 1954 (age 71)

Sheikh Nuh Ha Mim Keller is a scholar of traditional Islamic sciences, who studied with sheikhs in Jordan and Syria. He possesses a number of *ijazaat* in various disciplines, most notably as an authorised sheikh of the Shadhili Sufi Order. He teaches from his *zawiya* in Jordan, as well as at annual gatherings all over the world. As a translator and author, he has produced several seminal works. These include: *Reliance of the Traveller*, a classic manual of Islamic Sacred Law that was the first Islamic legal work translated into a European language to receive certification from Al-Azhar University; *Sea Without Shore*, a manual of Islamic mysticism (Sufism); the *Chain of Gold* edition of *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, the most famous and celebrated book of praise and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace); and, most recently, a new translation of the Qur'an, entitled *The Quran Beheld*, which has been described as "the first reliable plenary translation of the Qur'an into English".



## Dr Muhammad Al-Arifi

Preachers & Spiritual Guides

Saudi Arabia

Born: 16 July 1970 (55)

Dr Al-Arifi is a well-known scholar and lecturer from Saudi Arabia. He is a founding and honorary member of various *dawah* organisations, as well as being a member of their advisory committees. He is also a Professor at King Saud University of Riyadh. He takes a special interest in Hadith literature and has received licenses for the chains of transmission for various Hadith texts from a number of scholars. He has over 42 million followers on social media.



## Dr Zakir Abdul Karim Naik

Preachers & Spiritual Guides

India

Born: 18 October 1965 (age 60)

Dr Zakir Abdul Karim Naik is a popular preacher and comparative religion specialist in the mould of the legendary Ahmed Deedat. Naik challenges leaders of other faiths to public debates that are broadcast around the world on Peace TV—a satellite channel that he helped to found. In 2015, he was awarded the King Faisal International Prize for Services to Islam. Since 2016 he has been resident in Malaysia but is being investigated by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on incitement to terror and money-laundering charges. India has requested extradition so he might stand trial on those charges. In 2021, Naik launched Al Hidaayah, a new platform with educational content from renowned Islamic speakers from all over the world. His YouTube channel has close to 277 million views and he has over 24 million Facebook followers.



## HM Queen Rania Al-Abdullah

Social Issues

Jordan

Born: 31 August 1970 (age 55)

Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah is the wife of HM King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein, but is also in her own right an educational activist with global appeal. Through sheer hard work, she has developed one of the largest virtual followings of any Muslim in the world (over 38 million followers), and she defends and humanises Islam and Arab causes in and to the West as effectively as any Muslim scholar in the world. She is the initiator and key leader behind the launch of several educational initiatives such as the Jordanian Madrasati, 'My School', a project for the development of Jordan's public school system. In 2017, Queen Rania received the Global Trailblazer Award and the Fellowship Award from Fashion for Relief in recognition of her humanitarian efforts towards children caught in conflict. She has played a crucial role in challenging the misrepresentation of Palestinians in Western media and public discourse since the latest war on Gaza started.



## Ahed Tamimi

Social Issues

Palestine

Born: 31 January 2001 (age 24)

Ahed Tamimi is a Palestinian who has become a globally recognized icon for resistance to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In 2017, she confronted Israeli soldiers who entered her yard in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh, and then proceeded to slap and kick them. Her mother was recording the incident and later the video went viral. A few days later, at night, the Israeli army's own camera documented soldiers entering her house, handcuffing and arresting Tamimi. She was then subject to interrogation, a fate common to most Palestinian youth living under occupation, detained for three months and sentenced to eight months in jail. Her mother was also imprisoned but never charged. Ahed was released after serving eight months as a political prisoner and received worldwide support for highlighting the oppressive life faced by Palestinians. She has recently published a book entitled *They Called Me a Lioness*. In the current war, she was arrested early November 2023 and released after several weeks as a result of a hostage deal between Hamas and Israel.



## Sami Yusuf

Arts & Culture

United Kingdom

Born: 19 July 1980 (age 45)

Sami Yusuf is an internationally renowned British composer, producer, vocalist and master musician who has created a revolution in the music industry. Sami Yusuf's works are often inspired by traditional musical systems and mystical poetry that enlighten and inspire the listener. For the past several years, his focus has been on revivifying and promoting musical heritage and he has demonstrated a unique ability to engage contemporary audiences with his dramatically staged performances of his compositions inspired by centuries-old traditions. Performing at sold-out venues on six continents, his music appeals to all age groups, ethnicities and beliefs across the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and North America. With downloads of over a billion, Sami Yusuf has released nine studio albums to date, has over 45 million albums sold, and has 20 million followers across his social media platforms. The artist is also known for his extensive involvement in global charitable initiatives.



## Sheikh Abdul-Rahman Al-Sudais

Qur'an Reciters

Saudi Arabia

Born: 10 February 1960 (age 65)

Al-Sudais is the chief of the Imams at the Grand Mosque of Makkah. He memorised the Qur'an at the age of 12, and studied shariah at Riyadh University, Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, and Umm al-Qura University. Al-Sudais is also popular for his sermons and stance on peaceful conflict-resolution. In 2005, he was named by the Dubai International Holy Qur'an Award (DIHQQA) Organising Committee as its 9th annual "Islamic Personality Of the Year" in recognition of his devotion to the Qur'an and Islam. In 2017, Al-Sudais supervised the film *One Day In The Haram*, a film about the Haram in Makkah, told through the eyes of the workers.



## Bisan Owda

Media

Palestine

Born: 11 February 1997 (age 28)

Bisan Owda, raised in Gaza, is a renowned journalist, activist, and filmmaker whose work spans gender equality with the United Nations (UN) and climate change initiatives with the European Union (EU). She has produced content for Roya TV, created educational videos for YouTube, and works with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). From the onset of the onslaught of Gaza, Bisan began documenting life in Gaza, capturing the struggles of its people—struggles that mirror her own experiences. Her house was bombed, she became displaced, and she witnessed the devastating Al-Shifa Hospital airstrike. Bisan's impactful work has earned widespread recognition. Last year, she received a Peabody Award in the News category for her Al Jazeera Media Network show, 'It's Bisan from Gaza and I'm Still Alive'. In July, her documentary of the same name was nominated for the 45th News and Documentary Emmy Awards for Outstanding Hard News Feature Story: Short Form. Despite criticism from the pro-Israel groups, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS) defended its decision to nominate her, acknowledging the significance of her work.



## Mehdi Hasan

Media

United Kingdom

Born: 10 July 1979 (age 46)

Mehdi Hasan is a British journalist, broadcaster and author, celebrated for his incisive reporting and uncompromising interviews. He began his career at the *New Statesman* before serving as Political Editor at *HuffPost UK*, and later gained international recognition hosting 'Head to Head' and 'UpFront' on Al Jazeera English. In the U.S., he fronted 'The Mehdi Hasan Show' on Peacock and MSNBC, where his relentless questioning of political leaders earned widespread acclaim. Following the show's cancellation in 2024, Hasan launched Zeteo, an independent media venture. His coverage of the Gaza genocide and critiques of Western media bias have cemented his reputation as one of the most vital voices on Palestine in global media.



## Bassem Youssef

Media

United States of America

Born: 22 Mar 1974 (age 51)

Bassem Youssef is an Egyptian-American comedian, political satirist, and former cardiac surgeon who emerged as a media force during Egypt's 2011 Arab Spring. He created and hosted the groundbreaking satirical news show 'Al-Bernameg' ("The Programme"), earning widespread influence and the nickname "the Jon Stewart of the Arab world". In 2013, *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World, and he received the International Press Freedom Award for his fearless journalism. In recent years, Youssef has become a prominent voice on the Gaza conflict. His viral interview on Piers Morgan Uncensored in October 2023 garnered over 17 million views and marked a pivotal moment in Western media discourse on Palestine. On 2 May 2024, Trinity College Dublin awarded him the Gold Medal for Outstanding Contribution to Public Discourse. Youssef maintains significant social media reach, with approximately 26 million followers across platforms.



## Sadio Mané

Celebrities & Sports

Senegal

Born: 10 April 1992 (age 33)

Sadio Mané is a Senegalese footballer globally renowned as one of the best footballers in the world. He had been instrumental in Liverpool's success (2016-2022) winning the Champions League in 2019 and then ending a 30-year wait to win the Premier League in 2020. He also played for the Senegal team which reached the 2020 African nations cup final. He moved to the Saudi Pro League club Al Nassr from Bayern Munich. He is seen making supplication before the start of each match and performs a prostration every time he scores a goal. He is well known for his modest and humble personality, and has donated significant amounts of his personal wealth to develop the infrastructure in his hometown of Sedhiou. He transformed his childhood village of Bambalia—a village in the south of Senegal—with a number of charitable works, including building a new hospital, school, mosque, sports stadium and other infrastructures.



## Khabib Nurmagomedov

Celebrities & Sports

Russia

Born: 20 September 1988 (age 37)


Khabib Nurmagomedov is a former mixed martial artist. As well as being the youngest Russian wrestler in history to compete in the UFC, he was also the first Russian and Muslim to win a UFC title. He was the Lightweight UFC champion holding the longest undefeated streak in MMA history with 29 wins before retiring in March 2021. He is ethnically from the Russian republic of Dagestan and has chosen the nickname "the eagle" to pay homage to this region. This has won him great support amongst many Muslim youth not only in Dagestan but also in Chechnya and other ex-soviet Muslim-majority countries. His appeal is not limited to these as he has managed to transcend ethnic complexities and become one of Russia's most popular sportsmen. He has 43 million followers on social media.



# THE AMMAN MESSAGE

[www.AmmanMessage.com](http://www.AmmanMessage.com)

*‘[T]he best resource for those who wish to travel along the straight path in their words and their actions, and in their spiritual and religious life.’*

— The Grand Sheikh of the Azhar, Sheikh Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi , 2006.


The Amman Message started as a detailed statement released the eve of the 27th of Ramadan 1425 AH / 9th November 2004 CE by H. M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein in Amman, Jordan. It sought to declare what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not. Its goal was to clarify to the modern world the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam.

In order to give this statement more religious authority, H. M. King Abdullah II then sent the following three questions to 24 of the most senior religious scholars from all around the world representing all the branches and schools of Islam: (1) Who is a Muslim? (2) Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (*takfir*)? (3) Who has the right to undertake issuing *fatwas* (legal rulings)?

Based on the fatwas provided by these great scholars (who included the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ayatollah Sistani, and Sheikh Qaradawi), in July 2005 CE, H. M. King Abdullah II convened an international Islamic conference of 200 of the world’s leading Islamic scholars (*ulema*) from 50 countries. In Amman, the scholars unanimously issued a ruling on three fundamental issues (which became known as the ‘Three Points of the Amman Message’):

- They specifically recognised the validity of all 8 *mathhabs* (legal schools) of Sunni, Shia, and Ibadhi Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (Ash’arism); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true Salafi thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
- Based upon this definition they forbade *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.
- Based upon the Mathahib they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam.

These Three Points were then unanimously adopted by the Islamic World’s political and temporal leaderships at the Organization of the Islamic Conference summit at Makkah in December 2005. And over a period of one year from July 2005 to July 2006, the Three Points were also unanimously adopted by six other international Islamic scholarly assemblies, culminating with the International Islamic Fiqh Academy of Jeddah, in July 2006. In total, over 500 leading Muslim scholars worldwide—as can be seen on this website—unanimously endorsed the Amman Message and its Three Points.

This amounts to a historical, universal and unanimous religious and political consensus (*ijma’*) of the Ummah (nation) of Islam in our day, and a consolidation of traditional, orthodox Islam. The significance of this is: (1) that it is the first time in over a thousand years that the Ummah has formally and specifically come to such a pluralistic mutual inter-recognition; and (2) that such a recognition is religiously legally binding on Muslims since the Prophet  said: My Ummah will not agree upon an error (Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, Kitab al-Fitan, Hadith no. 4085).

This is good news not only for Muslims, for whom it provides a basis for unity and a solution to infighting, but also for non-Muslims. For the safeguarding of the legal methodologies of Islam (the *mathahib*) necessarily means inherently preserving traditional Islam’s internal ‘checks and balances’. It thus assures balanced Islamic solutions for essential issues like human rights; women’s rights; freedom of religion; legitimate jihad; good citizenship of Muslims in non-Muslim countries, and just and democratic government. It also exposes the illegitimate opinions of radical fundamentalists and terrorists from the point of view of true Islam. As George Yeo, the Foreign Minister of Singapore, declared in the 60th Session of the U. N. General Assembly (about the Amman Message): “Without this clarification, the war against terrorism would be much harder to fight.”

# THE 450 LISTS

# 🌀 The Lists 🌀

## Scholarly

page 141

These scholars, thinkers, and educators are well-respected leaders who have made significant contributions to the study and cultivation of Islamic knowledge and Muslim culture.

## Political

page 150

These leaders possess high positions of power over substantial groups of people and exert influence from their status, reputation, or political clout.

## Administration of Religious Affairs

page 160

These agents of change are responsible for founding and/or directing institutions that influence the religious affairs of Muslims.

## Preachers & Spiritual Guides

page 167

Preachers rely on charisma to inspire millions through multimedia while spiritual guides traditionally teach through live study circles and individualised directives to their disciples.

## Philanthropy, Charity & Development

page 174

These activists work in the field, affecting the world through poverty alleviation programmes, emergency aid, charitable giving, sponsorships of various initiatives for people and communities to become self-reliant.

## Social Issues

page 177

These individuals address various social issues such as health, education, women's rights, the environment, human rights and conflict resolution.

## Business

page 189

These entrepreneurs head and direct key organisations in the business world pushing innovation and financial development forward.

## Science & Technology

page 194

These are the main figures from the world of science and technology.

## Arts & Culture

page 199

These are artists and cultural ambassadors whose work has become part of people's daily lives.

## Qur'an Reciters

page 209

The recitation of the Qur'an is a special art that is valued by Muslim communities across the world. The word al-Qur'an literally means 'the recitation' referring to its origins as an oral text.

## Media

page 211

In an age of impulsive news and innovative media, these personalities have garnered influence from their activity in the media world.

## Influencers & Sports Stars

page 215

These instantly recognisable figures have a huge public following due to their prominence in popular culture and sport.

## Top Extremists

page 219

These individuals are responsible for heinous acts and controversial statements that are rejected by Muslim orthodoxy, separating them clearly from others engaged in armed conflict.

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### ALGERIA

#### **Cherif, Mustapha**

Professor Mustapha Cherif is Professor of Philosophy and Islamic Studies, specialising in international relations and dialogue between cultures. Cherif has written numerous works on religion, civilization and dialogue between cultures. He has held many senior academic and diplomatic positions including Algerian Minister of Higher Education and Ambassador to Egypt. He was awarded the UNESCO-Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture and the Ducci Foundation Peace Prize in 2013. He is also a member of the World Catholic-Muslim Forum and a permanent delegate at the Arab League.

### BAHRAIN

#### **Yaquby, Nizam**

Sheikh Nizam Yaquby was trained in the Islamic sciences in Bahrain and Makkah, studying under some eminent sheikhs, before going on to study at McGill University. He sits on a plethora of shariah advisory boards and has been a visiting lecturer at Harvard University. He is a highly sought-after expert with an immense breadth of experience with the Muslim community, and has led a team which issued a fatwa supporting a cryptocurrency.

### IRAN

#### **Amoli, Grand Ayatollah Abdullah Jawadi**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 132

#### **Dabashi, Professor Hamid**

Professor Hamid Dabashi is the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York. Dabashi has authored over 20 books, delving into subjects such as religion, literature, cinema, and philosophy, establishing himself as a leading voice in contemporary Middle Eastern studies. His scholarly work is complemented by his role as a public intellectual and anti-war activist, frequently contributing essays on current affairs to platforms like Al Jazeera. Dabashi

has also made significant contributions to cultural preservation, most notably through founding Dreams of a Nation, a Palestinian film project dedicated to safeguarding Palestinian cinema. His latest work, *Mashya and Mashyana Unearthed: Myth, Metonymy and the Unknowing Subject*, continues his exploration of myth and narrative, offering profound insights into the human condition. Dabashi's influence extends across disciplines, making him a pivotal figure in the global discourse on culture, politics, and philosophy.

#### **Damad, Ayatollah Dr Seyyed Mostafa Mohaghegh**

Ayatollah Damad is one of very few high-level clerics in Iran to have been educated in international law in the West. Damad is a forceful advocate for a more progressive interpretation of shariah. He is a very well-respected scholar, and is currently a professor in the Faculty of Law at Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran. In October 2010, at the Pope's behest, he addressed the Synod in the Vatican, stressing the Muslim view towards Christians as one of friendship, trust, and mutual understanding. He was honoured as a prominent figure of humanities in Iran at the 8th Farabi International Award ceremony in 2017.

#### **Shirazi, Grand Ayatollah Nasir Makarim**

Grand Ayatollah Shirazi is a leading theologian teaching at the Qom Seminary, one of the two most important centres of learning for Twelver Shia. He is most influential for his *Tafsir Al-Amthal*, which is a very popular, simplified commentary of the Qur'an. He has also spearheaded the creation of schools and magazines devoted to young people. He has been outspoken in his support for Palestinians and for Iran to respond to any aggression against it.

#### **Sobhani, Grand Ayatollah Jafar**

Grand Ayatollah Sobhani is a leading member of the Council of Mujtahids at the Qom Seminary, one of the two most important centres of learning in Twelver Shiism. He is the founder and Director of the Imam Sadiq Institute in Iran and was previously a member of the Society of Seminary Teachers at Qom. His work in all areas of the Islamic sciences is widely known and receives critical attention. Sobhani is a prolific writer, having published over 300 scholarly works.

## IRAQ

### **Fayadh, Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Ishaq**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 132

### **Al-Najafi, Grand Ayatollah Bashir**

Grand Ayatollah Bashir Al-Najafi is one of the four *maraji'* of the Hawza Seminary in Najaf, Iraq, and one of Iraq's most powerful Shia clerics. As a *marja'* of the Hawza in Najaf, Iraq's premier Shia institution, Najafi holds a position of immense authority. Najafi, originally from Pakistan, holds less sway amongst Iraq's population than the other *maraji'* but has significant clout in South Asia.

### **Al-Qaradaghi, Professor Ali Muhiddin**

Professor Al-Qaradaghi is the Secretary General of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) and Professor of Jurisprudence at Qatar University. He holds key positions in various Islamic Fiqh organisations as well as being on shariah supervisory boards for several banks. He is also President of the Board of Trustees of the University of Human Development in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, where he was born. He has written more than 30 works.

### **Al-Sadr, Ayatollah Al-Faqih Seyyed Hussein Ismail**

HE Ayatollah Al-Faqih Seyyed Hussein Ismail Al-Sadr is the most senior Shia cleric in Baghdad, Iraq. He heads the Ayatollah Seyyed Hussein Ismail Al-Sadr Foundation Trust, which runs humanitarian, development, and peace and reconciliation projects in Iraq. His role as a social leader and humanitarian has increased significantly during the recent hostilities in Iraq. The issue of reconciliation and dialogue between Iraq's different religious and ethnic communities has featured heavily in the Ayatollah's recent efforts.

## JORDAN

### **Khasawneh, Sheikh Abdul Karim**

Sheikh Khasawneh has served Jordan in his capacity as a religious scholar and mufti in various roles. He is a former Mufti of the Jordanian Armed Forces, served as the Grand Mufti of Jordan between 2010-2017, and subsequently from 2019-2023. Khasawneh is also a member of the Jordanian Ifta Council and a member of the board of the World Islamic Sciences and Education University (WISE).

## LEBANON

### **Derian, Grand Mufti Abdul Latif**

Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian became Grand Mufti of Lebanon in 2014 after having held several high-level posts, including director of the previous Grand Mufti Muhammad Rashid Qabbani's office. He taught Shariah at the Beirut Arab University and at the Institute of Islamic Studies. He serves as a member of the Shariah Board of Lebanese Islamic Bank and the Chairman of Shariah Committee of Al-Baraka Bank, Lebanon. He has done much to combat terrorism and extremism in the region, and in confronting aberrant and radical fatwas. He has also authored several books on Islam.

## LIBYA

### **Nayed, Dr Aref Ali**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 132

## MOROCCO

### **Abdurrahman, Professor Taha**

Professor Taha Abdurrahman is a Moroccan philosopher famous for his work on the creation of an ethical humanistic modernism on the basis of the ethics and values of Islam. Abdurrahman has won the Moroccan Book Prize twice, and was awarded the ISESCO Prize for Islamic Philosophy in 2006. He is the President of the Wisdom Circle of Thinkers, Morocco, and a member of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS). He launched his latest book *The Philosophy of Siyar: Moral Justification* in Ankara, Türkiye in June 2024.

## OMAN

### **Al-Khalili, Sheikh Ahmad**

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Khalili is the Grand Mufti of Oman. He was born, and lived, in Zanzibar until the end of the Al-Said rule (1964) and then moved to Oman along with many others of Omani heritage. He is a strong advocate for religious tolerance and works hard to ensure harmony between the different religious schools of thought in Oman. He has been a vocal supporter of Yemen and Iran's response to Israeli attacks.

## PALESTINE

### **Nusseibeh, Professor Sari**

Professor Sari Nusseibeh comes from one of Jerusalem's oldest and most prominent families, having a 1300-year presence in the city. He earned his degrees at Oxford and Harvard (Ph.D. '78) and is a retired professor of philosophy. While based in Palestine his academic career included short fellowships and lectureships at various international universities and research centres. He served as president of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem for 20 years, and is now associated with Notre Dame University's academic campus in Jerusalem. He has published widely and holds several honorary doctorates and awards, including the Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award.

## SAUDI ARABIA

### **Al-Awni, Dr Hatim**

Dr Hatim Al-Awni is the General Supervisor of the International Committee for the Support of the Final Prophet (ICSFP). He has also served in a number of academic and political capacities, including the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia for two separate terms. While his academic research includes dozens of publications, perhaps his greatest contribution is the awakening of Salafi introspection in Saudi Arabia. His widely read articles have pointed out clear connections between militant extremism and core Salafi texts. He also writes extensively on rapprochement between Islamic schools of thought, particularly between Salafi and Traditionalist (Ash'ari and Maturidi) approaches.

### **Al-Fawzan, Sheikh Salih Bin Fawzan**

Sheikh Al-Fawzan is considered to be the most senior scholar of the Salafi movement in Saudi Arabia. He is a member of the Council of Senior Scholars and the Committee for Fatwa and Research. He has authored over 35 books and is one of the major muftis in the country. He participates in the highly influential Saudi radio programme '*Noor ala ad-Darb*' ('Light upon the Path') along with other scholars. He was appointed as the new Grand Mufti in October 2025.

### **Al-Madkhali, Sheikh Rabe ibn Haadi 'Umayr**

Sheikh Rabe ibn Haadi 'Umayr Al-Madkhali is one of the most radical thinkers in the Salafi movement. He is an influential writer and speaker whose influence has led to an independent faction within Salafism. Al-Madkhali's adherents are known as Madkhali

Salafis and make up one of the most significant and influential branches inside the Salafi movement. A former head of the Sunnah Studies Department at the Islamic University of Madinah, Al-Madkhali is a scholar who has authored over 30 works in the fields of Hadith and Islamic disciplines.

### **Al-Saffar, Sheikh Hassan Musa**

Sheikh Hassan Musa Al-Saffar is a Saudi Shia reformist leader who has made significant progress in communicating with Salafi leaders and other senior officials in Saudi Arabia. This is important as sectarian differences throughout the Muslim world are used to foster tension and hostilities between those communities.

## SYRIA

### **Al-Nabulsi, Dr Mohammed Rateb**

The son of a well-known Syrian religious scholar, Dr Rateb Al-Nabulsi was professor at Damascus University until the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011. He has represented Syria all over the world in many Islamic conferences. Muslims know him through his lessons, orations, symposiums, and interviews broadcast on radio and television. He has written a number of Islamic books, many of which have been translated into English. In addition to studying in his native Syria, he has also studied in Ireland and France.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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## ERITREA

### **Said, Sheikh Faid Mohammed**

Professor Sheikh Faid Mohammed Said was born and raised in Eritrea, where he received his foundational Islamic education under the tutelage of Sheikh Hamid, the Senior Judge of the Shariah Court in Asmara. He later moved to Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah to study under Sheikh Atiyyah Mohammed Salim before earning his PhD in Islamic Studies from the Islamic University of Minnesota (USA). He has contributed to the Journals of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy and to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) Encyclopedia of Moderation. Additionally, he is a regular columnist for *Makka Newspaper* (Saudi Arabia) and BusinessPress UAE. He currently serves as a university professor, General Secretary of the Fatwa and Islamic Affairs

Commission, and Imam and Khateeb of the Central Mosque in London. He is also an active member of the Executive Committee and Chair of the Religious Board at AMMALE (Alliance of Mosques, Associations, and Muslim Leaders in Europe).

## ETHIOPIA

### **Idris, Hajji Omar**

Hajji Omar Idris is a mufti and leader of Ethiopian Muslims, who represent 40% of Ethiopia's population. Widely respected, he is a proponent of Muslim unity and was elected as President of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council in May 2019, marking the first peaceful transition of leadership since the council was formed.

## GAMBIA, THE

### **Jah, Ambassador Professor Omar**

Professor Omar Jah is a religious scholar with extensive international experience. He has taught in various educational institutions around the world including in Canada, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. He has also served as ambassador for the Gambia, and held senior positions in the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in Jeddah, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Currently, he is serving as President of the Shaykh Abdallah Jah Charitable Foundation (SAJCF). He has been awarded the Order of the Republic of Sudan; Order of King Abdulaziz, 1st Class (Saudi Arabia); Order of the Republic of the Gambia; and Commander of the Republic of the Gambia. He has published a number of important works on Islam in Africa. Two recent publications are: *Sufism and the 19th Century Reform Movement in West Africa* and *The Footprints of a Soldier of Islam*.

## MAURITANIA

### **Al-Shanqiti, Sheikh Muhammad**

#### **Al-Hasan bin Al-Diddu**

Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hasan bin Al-Diddu Al-Shanqiti is a Mauritanian scholar, author, writer, and poet. He is the President of O'lama Information Centre, and the President of Abdallah ibn Yasin University. He is also head of the country's Centre for the Development of Scholars. In 2014 he was the Vice President of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS). He has licenses (*ijazaat*) from various Islamic scholars authorising him to teach all the

major hadith collections. His lessons on social media have been gaining significant traction.

## NIGERIA

### **Zakzaky, Sheikh Ibraheem**

Sheikh Ibraheem is the leading force behind the most influential Shia movement in Nigeria and heads its Islamic Movement. The movement has witnessed rapid growth and is based on the model of Hezbollah, focusing on social services, education, charity, etc, but also including military training. In December 2015, the Nigerian Army raided his residence in Zaria, massacred hundreds of his followers, killed three of his sons and held him under state detention before being released. He spent five months receiving medical treatment in Iran, before returning home in February 2024 and being welcomed by thousands of supporters.

## SOUTH AFRICA

### **Esack, Professor Farid**

Professor Farid Esack is a traditionally trained scholar and an accomplished academic who has taught in several international universities, including Harvard, and Columbia, Hamburg and Gadjah Mada. Esack is arguably the world's leading Islamic Liberation theologian and has had several of his many works on Islam translated into twenty languages. He was appointed as gender-equality commissioner by Nelson Mandela. Through the organisation, The Call of Islam, Esack played a leading role in the struggle against apartheid. He is an advocate of interreligious solidarity against all forms of injustice and has worked extensively to support Muslims infected with HIV. In 2018 he was awarded the Order of Luthuli, South Africa's highest civilian order for his contribution to scholarship and work for justice. He is currently based in the Department of Religion Studies at the University of Johannesburg.

### **Moosa, Professor Ebrahim**

Dr Ebrahim Moosa is the Mirza Family Professor of Islamic Thought and Muslim Societies in the Keough School of Global Affairs, the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, and in the Department of History at the University of Notre Dame. His interpretive and historical research on questions of tradition, ethics, and law includes two monographs as well as several edited and co-edited books. His prize-winning book, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination*,

was awarded the Best First Book Prize in the History of Religions by the American Academy of Religion. He is the author of *What is a Madrasa?* (2015). Moo-sa is also regarded as a prominent public intellectual. In 2007 he was invited to deliver the King Hasan Lecture (*Durus Hasaniiyah*) to HM King Mohammed VI of Morocco in Arabic. He currently directs the Madrasa Discourses project, advancing scientific and theological literacy amongst young theologians (madrasah graduates) in South Asia.

## UGANDA

### **Mamdani, Professor Mahmood**

Dr Mamdani is the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government in the Departments of Anthropology and Political Science at Columbia University in the United States, and was Director of the Makerere Institute of Social Research in Kampala, Uganda. He is a leading public intellectual. He is the former President of the Council for Development of Social Research in Africa in Dakar, Senegal. Mamdani is well-known for his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War and The Roots of Terror*, which became significant in liberal policy circles in the US. He called out Colombia University's heavy-handed approach towards students protesting against the genocide of Gaza. His most recent book *Neither Settler Nor Native: the Making of Permanent Minorities* was published by Harvard University Press.

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## Asia

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## AZERBAIJAN

### **Pashazade, Sheikh ul-Islam Haji**

#### **Allahshukur Hummat**

Sheikh Pashazade is the Grand Mufti of Azerbaijan, the elected Mufti of the Caucasus region, and Chairman of the Religious Council of the Caucasus. Pashazade is also the world's only Sunni-Shia Grand Mufti, giving each group religious edicts (fatwas) according to their own legal methodology (*madhab*), reflecting Azerbaijan's Sunni-Shia mix. He co-chaired the World Summit of Religious Leaders, held in Azerbaijan in April 2010. He has been spearheading Azerbaijan's initiatives of promoting dialogue between faiths within the region and internationally. He played a pivotal role in gaining formal recognition for the Church of Latter Day Saints in

Azerbaijan in 2024.

## INDIA

### **Nadwi, Dr Bahauddeen Muhammed Jamaluddeen**

Professor Bahauddeen Muhammed Nadwi is the founding Vice Chancellor of Darul Huda Islamic University, Kerala, India. He has authored a number of books, treatises, edited volumes, and translations in Arabic, English and Malayalam, spanning Qur'anic sciences, Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith, education, Sufism, Comparative Religion, Arabic Language and Literature, and Islamic History. He is the Editor-in-Chief of an international 'Journal of Islamic Studies', and a member of regional (Kerala), national, and international organisations. Dr. Nadwi's students play leading roles in educational, developmental, and transformative initiatives globally.

## INDONESIA

### **Bisri, Kyai Haji Achmad Mustofa**

Kyai Haji Achmad Mustofa Bisri (also known as 'Gus Mus') is widely revered as a religious scholar, poet, novelist, painter, and Muslim intellectual. A graduate of Al-Azhar, he is a former Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Supreme Council and has strongly influenced the NU's (Nahdlatul Ulama) social and political development over the past 30 years. He heads the prestigious Raudlatul Tholibin Islamic Boarding School in Rembang, Central Java. Mustofa Bisri's role in combining spirituality with artistic expression is widely admired in Indonesia, where he is regarded as a cultural icon. Often called the 'President of Poets', he is celebrated for his courage in defending artistic and religious freedom in the face of radical onslaughts.

## MALAYSIA

### **Al-Akiti, Dato Dr Muhammad Afifi**

Dato' Dr Afifi Al-Akiti, FRSA, is a Shafi'i jurist, trained theologian, and philologist. He is a Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and teaches Islam at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, Oxford University's oldest faculty. He is the first-ever Malaysian to be appointed to such a position in this famous university. His areas of expertise are Islamic theology, law, finance, and science. Al-Akiti is internationally acclaimed for his 2005 fatwa, *Defending the Transgressed by Censuring the Reckless against the Killing of Civilians*, written in response to the 7

July London bombings. In 2024, he was appointed by the Conference of Rulers in Malaysia to be a member of the National Islamic Council (MKI). In that same year, he was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He was awarded a Datukship by HRH The Sultan of Perak in 2012.

#### **Bakar, Professor Osman**

Professor Osman Bakar is currently Rector and Al-Ghazali Chair of Epistemology and Civilization Studies and Renewal at the International Islamic University Malaysia and Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Science at the University of Malaya. He is also the President of Islam-Confucianism Dialogue Society. He previously held posts at Universiti Brunei Darussalam and Georgetown University, Washington DC. Dr Bakar is author and editor of 43 books and numerous articles on various aspects of Islamic thought and civilization, especially Islamic science and interreligious and inter-civilizational dialogue. Several of his writings, especially his best-selling work, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*, have been translated into a dozen languages. He has served as advisor and consultant to a variety of international academic and professional organisations, including UNESCO, the Qatar Foundation, and The European Science Foundation. He was awarded a Datukship by the Malaysian King in 2000.

#### **Kamali, Professor Mohammad Hashim**

Dr Kamali was Dean and Professor at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) and the International Islamic University in Malaysia. He then served as Founding CEO of the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies in Malaysia (2008-2022) and is currently Very Distinguished Fellow of that Institute. Since June 2025, he serves as an Advisory Board Member of ILSAF. He is the world's leading expert on comparative studies between Islamic and modern law. Kamali has received many international awards in recognition of his intellectual and academic contributions towards serving Islam and Muslims. He was conferred with the Darjah Dato' Paduka Mahkota Perak (DPMP) Award (Title "Dato") from His Royal Highness Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah in 2020. Kamali worked on the new constitutions of Afghanistan in 2003, of the Maldives in 2004, and of Somalia in 2010.

## **PAKISTAN**

#### **Ahmed, Professor Akbar**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 132

#### **Hashmi, Dr Farhat**

Dr Farhat Hashmi is an influential Islamic teacher, public speaker, and scholar. She is a prominent name in the burgeoning field of the role of women in Islam. In addition to the academic aspects of Islamic teachings, Hashmi also focuses on its relatable and practical aspects, thereby ensuring that her message resonates with a multitude of women across the globe. She holds a PhD in Hadith Sciences from the University of Glasgow, Scotland. She is the Founder of Al-Huda International, a non-profit institute founded in 1994. Al-Huda promotes Islamic learning and serves in the field of social welfare, and has branches across Pakistan as well as internationally.

#### **Tahir-ul-Qadri, Sheikh Dr Muhammad**

Sheikh Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri is a Professor of law and the founder of Minhaj-ul-Quran International Worldwide and the Minhaj Welfare Foundation. Tahir-ul-Qadri has authored some 550 published works and given more than 6,000 lectures on various subjects which are aired on international satellite channels. He has over five million social media followers. In March 2010, Qadri issued a 600-page fatwa declaring that terrorists and suicide bombers are unbelievers. He has continued to be outspoken against terrorists. He is based in Canada.

## **SINGAPORE**

#### **Aljunied, Professor Khairudin**

Professor Khairudin Aljunied is a globally recognised specialist in the field of intellectual history. He has held professorships and chair positions at Georgetown University, Columbia University, University of Malaya, University of Brunei Darussalam, International Islamic University of Malaysia, and the National University of Singapore. His research examines the dynamic interactions between Southeast Asia and global Islam. A prolific scholar-activist who features regularly in the media and documentaries, he has published fourteen books with a large range of international presses. His published books include: *Contemplating Sufism* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2025) and

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## Europe

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### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

#### **Cerić, Sheikh Dr Mustafa**

Dr Mustafa Cerić was schooled at the Gazi Husrev Beg Madrasa in Sarajevo, Al-Azhar University and the University of Chicago (PhD in Islamic Studies). He became an imam in Zagreb in 1987 and was the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1993-2012. He taught Islamic Theology at ISTAC, Kuala Lumpur. Dr Cerić is an advocate of cross-cultural engagement as well as a peace activist. He is the co-recipient of the 2003 UNESCO Felix Houphoet Boigny Peace Prize for Contribution to World Peace. In 2006, he issued the 'Declaration of European Muslims' and in 2008, he led the Muslim delegation of the 'A Common Word' initiative to the Vatican. Dr Cerić is currently the President of the Assembly of the Bosnian Academy of Arts and Sciences, a member of the International Scientific Board of the Imam Maturidi International Scientific Research Centre under the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, as well as an active member of many local and international scholarly organisations and societies.

#### **Mahmutćehajić, Professor Rusmir**

Dr Rusmir Mahmutćehajić is a Bosnian academic, author, and former statesman. Considered one of Bosnia's leading intellectuals and public figures, he is the foremost advocate of the idea of a diverse Bosnia. His fields of academic expertise include philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, political theory, and literary theory and criticism, with a special focus on the impact of the ideologies of modernity on oral and modern literature. A scholar of the Muslim intellectual tradition and a contributor to contemporary Muslim thought and the liberal interpretation of Islam, Professor Mahmutćehajić served his country as Deputy Prime Minister and as Energy Minister through the process of independence and much of the war that followed (1991-95). He was one of the key actors responsible during those years for organising the successful defence of Sarajevo and of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign state. For the past 27 years, he has been President of International Forum Bosnia, a non-governmental organisation and think tank dedicated to the development of critical

thought and a plural society in Bosnia. He is the author of more than 30 books in Bosnian, some 12 of which have been published in multiple languages, and author of several hundred academic articles and essays. His most recent books include *The Horizons of the Praised: On Man, the Worlds, and God*; *The Genocidal Anti-Bosnian Ideology*; and *The Mystery of Hasan Aga's Wife*. He is a full member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts and a member of the Brill editorial committee for the philosophy of religion and world religions.

### RUSSIA

#### **Gaynutdin, Mufti Sheikh Ravil**

Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gaynutdin is a Moscow-based scholar. Among various academic roles, he is Grand Mufti of Russia and Chairman of the Union of Muftis of Russia. He is probably the single most important figure in the schema of Russian Islam. As a member of the Russian President's Council for Coordination with Religious Organizations, he is a key figure in relations between the Kremlin and Russia's Muslim population. In December 2024 he was awarded the Order of Public Diplomacy.

### SWITZERLAND

#### **Ramadan, Dr Tariq**

Dr Tariq Ramadan is a prominent European Muslim intellectual and author on Islam in public life. He was Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University and has held academic positions worldwide. In February 2018, he was accused of raping two women and arrested pending trial; in 2020, two further accusations were added. The French justice system was criticized for its treatment of him, including solitary confinement despite his multiple sclerosis. In June 2023, a Swiss court cleared him of rape and sexual coercion, seemingly ending a six-year legal battle. However, in September 2024, a Swiss appeals court overturned that acquittal and sentenced him to three years in prison (two suspended). He still faces additional allegations in Switzerland and France, which he continues to deny, claiming they are politically motivated.

### TÜRKIYE

#### **Karaman, Professor Hayrettin**

Professor Karaman is one of the most prominent scholars of Islam in Türkiye, and the pre-eminent

scholar of Islamic law (shariah) there. He publishes popular academic texts extensively and writes a weekly column in the newspaper *Yeni Safak* ('New Dawn'). His long career in academia has garnered him much respect. At the pinnacle of his career, Karaman was a dean at Türkiye's premier university, Marmara University. He left this position at the height of the headscarf controversy in 2001.

### **Şentürk, Dr Recep**

Dr Recep is an academic and sociologist of religion, and is presently the Dean of the College of Islamic Studies at Hamad bin Khalifa University in Doha, Qatar. He is also President of Usul Academy, a higher education institution that aims to deliver a classical madrasah education as well as contemporary subjects within an Islamic framework. He is the founder of Ibn Haldun University and was its president from 2017 to 2021. He obtained degrees from Marmara University and Istanbul University before obtaining a doctorate from Columbia University, New York. He is a strong advocate of non-western sociological theories, following the genre of Ibn Khaldun. His work focuses on social networks, human rights, and modernisation in the Muslim world. He has authored several books, including: *Open Civilization, Modernization and Sociology, and Sociologies of New Religions*.

## **UNITED KINGDOM**

### **Abdel Haleem, Professor Muhammad**

Professor Muhammad Abdel Haleem is a much-loved Director of the Centre of Islamic Studies at SOAS, University of London, and Editor of the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. He was awarded an OBE in 2008 in recognition of his services to Arabic literature and interfaith understanding. He is a Member of the Conference of Academy of the Arabic Language, Cairo, and was awarded an honorary doctorate in Islamic Studies from the University of Jordan in 2006. Born in Egypt, Abdel Haleem memorised the Qur'an (this was a prerequisite for entry to Al-Azhar University) before starting his further education. He has many publications including a widely acclaimed translation of the Qur'an.

### **Hellyer, Dr Hisham**

Dr Hisham A. (HA) Hellyer, a scholar of Arab world affairs, geopolitics, and religion, is senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (UK) and the Center

for American Progress (USA). Prof Hellyer was appointed adjunct Professor at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and Professor of Islamic Thought at Bayan College, where he teaches in coordination with the Chicago Theological Seminary. Elected fellow of the Royal Historical Society and Royal Society of Arts, Dr Hellyer has held posts at Harvard University, Brookings, Carnegie, Warwick, and the American University in Cairo. Previously, he was fellow at Cambridge University's Centre of Islamic Studies, Azzawia Institute's first senior scholar, and Cambridge Muslim College's first professorial fellow. A prolific media commentator on international media outlets, his 9 books include *Muslims of Europe: the 'Other' Europeans, A Revolution Undone: Egypt's Road Beyond Revolt, and A Sublime Path: the Sufi Way of the Makkan Sages*.

### **Mangera, Dr Mufti Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf**

Dr Mufti Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera is a British Muslim scholar educated in both the Islamic and Western traditions. He has memorised the Qur'an and studied with accomplished scholars in the UK, South Africa, India, and Syria. He holds a PhD from SOAS and has served as an imam in the UK and USA. He is the founder of Whitethread Institute, a post-graduate institute for Islamic scholars. He works on scholarly publications through White Thread Press ([www.whitethreadpress.com](http://www.whitethreadpress.com)) with many of his lectures being available on [www.zamzamacademy.com](http://www.zamzamacademy.com).

### **Sardar, Ziauddin**

Ziauddin Sardar is considered one of the top intellectuals in Britain and has been described as "Britain's own Muslim Polymath" by *The Independent* newspaper. He has authored and edited over 60 books covering a range of fields from Muslim thought, science policy, futures studies to history, philosophy and cultural relations. Sardar is credited with forming the postnormal times theory and serves as the Director of the Centre for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies. He has worked for *Nature*, the *New Scientist*, Channel 4 television and was a columnist on the *New Statesman* for twelve years. He has worked on numerous ground-breaking initiatives representing British Asian and Muslim communities, producing programmes for national TV, and serving on official Commissions and Forums. Currently he is the Director of International Institute of Futures Studies at the International Islamic University Malaysia, edits the quarterly *Critical Muslim*, and works as an advisor to

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## Oceania

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### NEW ZEALAND

#### Hayward, Professor Joel

Professor Hayward has taught Islamic Studies in elite institutions, including the Royal Air Force College (UK), of which he served as Dean for five years, Khalifah University (UAE), the National Defence College of the UAE, and the Cambridge Muslim College, which he also headed. He is now Dean of the Sycamore Leadership Academy. He weaves together classical Islamic knowledge and methodologies and the source-critical Western historical method to make an innovative yet carefully reasoned sense of complex historical issues that are still important in today's world. They include: *Warfare in the Qur'an* (2012), *War is Deceit: An Analysis of a Contentious Hadith* (2017), *Civilian Immunity in Foundational Islamic Strategic Thought* (2019), and *The Leadership of Muhammad ﷺ: A Historical Reconstruction* (2021) and his latest book (2022) is *The Warrior Prophet: Muhammad ﷺ and War*. The last two titles have won international awards.

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## North America

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### CANADA

#### Mattson, Dr Ingrid

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 132

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

#### Ahmad, Dr Saiyad Nizamuddin

Dr Saiyad Nizamuddin Ahmad is The Prophet Muhammad University Professor of Shia Islam Studies at Florida International University (FIU). He holds additional roles at the University of Exeter and at Mufid Academic Seminary, Virginia, as well as having taught in Egypt, Malaysia and the UAE. Dr Ahmad earned his MA and PhD in Islamic Studies from Princeton University. He also studied with traditional masters, completing both the Shia and Sunni canon, receiving *ijazaat* in numerous sciences and disciplines. His

critical edition of the Arabic text of Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* is highly regarded. He also was the first to offer a complete course of lectures on René Guénon's *The Reign of Quantity* and the *Signs of the Times* on his acclaimed YouTube channel, which is devoted to a dazzling range of subjects.

#### Bewley, Aisha

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 133

#### Jackson, Dr Sherman

Dr Jackson is the King Faisal Chair in Islamic Thought and Culture and Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture and American Studies and Ethnicity, and the Director of the Center for Islamic Thought, Culture and Practice (CITCAP) at the University of Southern California. He is a well-respected scholar and author of works dealing with Islam, shariah, Islamic jurisprudence and theology, and Islam in the African-American Muslim community. Jackson is the co-founder of the American Learning Institute for Muslims (ALIM) and has been featured on the *Washington Post-Newsweek* blog 'On Faith' and the *Huffington Post*. He is a former member of the Fiqh Council of North America and a former professor of Law, Near Eastern Studies, and Afro-American Studies at the University of Michigan. Among his proudest moments was his delivery of the eulogy at the funeral of the great American Muslim Muhammad Ali.

#### Qadhi, Dr Yasir

Dr Yasir Qadhi is one of very few professors of Islamic studies who is also a classically trained scholar (Yale University and the Islamic University of Madinah respectively). Currently he is the Dean of The Islamic Seminary of America, the Resident Scholar of the East Plano Center, Texas and a former professor at Rhodes College, Memphis, TN. He has established a reputation as a cleric who appreciates the cultural impact that Muslims have to face in the US and is prepared to address sensitive topics head on, but bringing nuance. He is also renowned for reaching out to media outlets and mainstream Americans of different religions to promote a better understanding of Islam, and to challenge stereotypes about Muslims in the US.

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### IRAN

#### **Ebtekar, Dr Masoumeh**

Dr Ebtekar was the first female Vice President of Iran. A scientist, journalist and politician, she frequently writes on environmental, political, social, and women's issues in Persian and English. She is one of the founding members of the reformist Islamic Iran Participation Front and served as Head of the Environmental Protection Organization under Rouhani and Khatami. Her accolades include the Energy Globe Foundation Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award, being named one of the seven 2006 Champions of the Earth by the United Nations Environment Program, and one of 50 environmental leaders by *The Guardian* newspaper. In 2016, Dr Ebtekar was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Political Science by the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Korea. In August 2017, Ebtekar was appointed as Vice President of Women and Family Affairs, a post she held until 2021. She holds a PhD in immunology, a subject she still teaches at Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran.

#### **Pezeshtkian, HE President Masoud**

President Masoud Pezeshtkian is the 9th President of Iran, having taken office in July 2024 following the death of the previous president in a helicopter

accident. He was a Member of the Consultative Assembly from 2008 to 2024, and Minister of Health and Health Education from 2001 to 2005. The President is a qualified heart surgeon, having studied at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences and Iran University of Medical Sciences. His medical specialisation led him to become the President of Tabriz University from 1994 to 1999. He served in the Iran-Iraq War, as both fighter and doctor, between 1980 and 1988. Unlike his predecessors, he is seen as a moderate and reformer, seeking a more conciliatory approach.

### IRAQ

#### **Barzani, Masoud**

Barzani entered the political arena at the young age of 16 under the wing of his late father and became the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in 1979. He played a major role in shaping the new Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. He has been the main force fighting DA'ISH and is adamant about establishing an independent Kurdish state. He was President of the Iraqi Kurdish Region from 2005-2017, but had to resign because of fierce regional opposition to the referendum he held in September 2017 for Kurdish independence (there was overwhelming support for an independent Kurdistan). There are approximately 8 million Kurds living within the Kurdish region in Iraq, 15 million in Türkiye, 10 million in Iran, and over 3 million in Syria.

## The Muslim Council of Elders

[www.muslim-elders.com](http://www.muslim-elders.com)

The Muslim Council of Elders is an independent international body that was established on 21 Ramadan 1435 Hijri (18 July 2014) in order to promote peace in Muslim communities. The goal of the Muslim Council of Elders is to create secure societies that respect knowledge and scholars; to encourage dialogue, tolerance, respect for others, and peace; to restore the role of scholars by using their expertise to improve muslim societies; and to help eliminate causes of fragmentation and promote conciliation.

The council consists of Muslim scholars, experts and dignitaries known for their wisdom, sense of justice, independence and moderateness. They work together to promote peace, to discourage infighting, and to address the sources of conflict, divisiveness, and fragmentation in Muslim communities.

Based in the United Arab Emirates' capital, Abu Dhabi, the council is the first institutional body that aims to bring the Islamic nation together by extinguishing the fire that threatens Islam's humanitarian values and tolerant principles, and putting an end to the sectarianism and violence that have plagued the Muslim world for decades.

The Muslim Council of Elders was formed as a result of the recommendations of The Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, and it is a joint initiative by Grand Imam Sheikh Dr Ahmad al-Tayyib, the Sheikh of al-Azhar, and the forum's chairman scholar Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah.

### **Al-Sudani, Mohammed Shayya**

Mohammed Shayya Sabbar Al-Sudani is the current Prime Minister of Iraq. Previously, he served as the Governor of Maysan Province (2009-2010) as well as the Human Rights Minister (2010-2014). He was nominated for the post of prime minister during a year-long political crisis and succeeded in forming a government in October 2022 despite Muqtada Al-Sadr's opposition. The latter has rallied against excessive Iranian and USA involvement in the governance of Iraq. In July 2023, after Sweden approved a planned Qur'an-burning, Al-Sudani expelled the Swedish ambassador to Iraq and revoked work permits for Swedish companies.

### **ISRAEL**

#### **Salah, Sheikh Raed**

Sheikh Raed Salah is head of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel. He is widely respected in the Islamic world as a religious leader. From 1989 to 2001, Salah also served as the Mayor of Umm Al-Fahm, an Israeli-Arab city. He is frequently arrested and imprisoned by the Israeli government and, in February 2020, a court in Israel sentenced Salah to 28 months in prison for "inciting to terror", much of which was spent in solitary confinement. In December 2021, he was released from prison after having served 16 months of his sentence.

### **JORDAN**

#### **Abu Rashta, Ata**

Ata Abu Rashta is the global leader of the Islamic political party Hizb ut-Tahrir. Having worked closely with the organisation's founder, Taqiuddin Al-Nabhani, Abu Rashta gained prominence in Jordan during the First Gulf War when he contested the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In 2003, he became the leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Hizb-ut Tahrir is popular in the Levant, the former Soviet Union, South and Southeast Asia, and Western Europe.

#### **HRH Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah**

Named Crown Prince in 2009, HRH Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah is the eldest son of His Majesty King Abdullah II, making him heir to the throne. HRH holds the rank of First Lieutenant in the Jordanian Armed Forces, and has accompanied his father on several military and political occasions. His efforts to develop the Jordanian youth community started with the Haqeq (achieve) initiative, an

activity targeting school-aged children. In 2015, Crown Prince Hussein became the youngest person to chair a UN Security Council meeting and in 2017 he delivered Jordan's address at the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. He married in 2023 and became a father in 2024.

### **KUWAIT**

#### **HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah**

HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah became the Emir of Kuwait in 2023. Born in 1940, he spent most of his career in Kuwait's security and intelligence apparatus, culminating in his role as deputy chief of the Kuwait National Guard. His appointment as Crown Prince in 2020 at the age of 80 marked him as the world's oldest crown prince. As Emir, he has taken bold steps, including dissolving the National Assembly and suspending constitutional articles to address political deadlock.

### **LIBYA**

#### **Haftar, Khalifa**

Khalifa Haftar rose to prominence after the uprising against the late General Gaddafi, and was the person who announced that the Libyan government had been suspended. A leading figure in Libya's military establishment, Haftar became a major general in the Libyan Army in 2011. Haftar's Libyan National Army is at odds with the UN-recognised government and seized control of Libyan oil ports in 2018. The UAE, Egypt, and Russia continue to support Haftar whereas the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) is headed by Prime Minister Abdoul Hamid Dbeibeh and is supported by Türkiye and Qatar.

### **OMAN**

#### **HRH Sultan Haitham bin Tariq**

Sultan Haitham bin Tariq ascended the throne on 11 January 2020 after the passing of his cousin, Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Previously, Sultan Haitham served as Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and as Minister of Heritage and Culture from 2002, a position he held until his inauguration as Sultan of Oman. In his first speech to his nation, Sultan Haitham promised to "follow the path of Sultan Qaboos and build upon it". Sultan Haitham is a passionate sportsman and was the first to head the Oman Football Association in the early 1980s. He is

# The Marrakesh Declaration

[www.marrakeshdeclaration.org](http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org)

## In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

Executive Summary of the Marrakesh Declaration  
on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly  
Muslim Majority Communities

25th-27th January 2016

WHEREAS, conditions in various parts of the Muslim World have deteriorated dangerously due to the use of violence and armed struggle as a tool for settling conflicts and imposing one's point of view;

WHEREAS, this situation has also weakened the authority of legitimate governments and enabled criminal groups to issue edicts attributed to Islam, but which, in fact, alarmingly distort its fundamental principles and goals in ways that have seriously harmed the population as a whole;

WHEREAS, this year marks the 1,400th anniversary of the Charter of Medina, a constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad, God's peace and blessings be upon him, and the people of Medina, which guaranteed the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith;

WHEREAS, hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals from over 120 countries, along with representatives of Islamic and international organisations, as well as leaders from diverse religious groups and nationalities, gathered in Marrakesh on this date to reaffirm the principles of the Charter of Medina at a major conference;

WHEREAS, this conference was held under the auspices of His Majesty, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, and organised jointly by the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs in the Kingdom of Morocco and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies based in the United Arab Emirates;

AND NOTING the gravity of this situation afflicting Muslims as well as peoples of other faiths throughout the world, and after thorough deliberation and discussion, the convened Muslim scholars and intellectuals:

DECLARE HEREBY our firm commitment to the principles articulated in the Charter of Medina, whose provisions contained a number of the principles of constitutional contractual citizenship, such as freedom of movement, property ownership, mutual solidarity and defence, as well as principles of justice and equality before the law; and that,

The objectives of the Charter of Medina provide a suitable framework for national constitutions in countries with Muslim majorities, and the United Nations Charter and related documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are in harmony with the Charter of Medina, including consideration for public order.

NOTING FURTHER that deep reflection upon the various crises afflicting humanity underscores the inevitable and urgent need for cooperation among all religious groups, we

AFFIRM HEREBY that such cooperation must be based on a "Common Word," requiring that such cooperation must go beyond mutual tolerance and respect, to providing full protection for the rights and liberties to all religious groups in a civilised manner that eschews coercion, bias, and arrogance.

BASED ON ALL OF THE ABOVE, we hereby:

Call upon Muslim scholars and intellectuals around the world to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of "citizenship" which is inclusive of diverse groups. Such jurisprudence shall be rooted in Islamic tradition and principles and mindful of global changes.

Urge Muslim educational institutions and authorities to conduct a courageous review of educational curricula that addresses honestly and effectively any material that instigates aggression and extremism, leads to war and chaos, and results in the destruction of our shared societies;

Call upon politicians and decision makers to take the political and legal steps necessary to establish a constitutional contractual relationship among its citizens, and to support all formulations and initiatives that aim to fortify relations and understanding among the various religious groups in the Muslim World;

Call upon the educated, artistic, and creative members of our societies, as well as organisations of civil society, to establish a broad movement for the just treatment of religious minorities in Muslim countries and to raise awareness as to their rights, and to work together to ensure the success of these efforts.

Call upon the various religious groups bound by the same national fabric to address their mutual state of selective amnesia that blocks memories of centuries of joint and shared living on the same land; we call upon them to rebuild the past by reviving this tradition of conviviality, and restoring our shared trust that has been eroded by extremists using acts of terror and aggression;

Call upon representatives of the various religions, sects and denominations to confront all forms of religious bigotry, vilification, and denigration of what people hold sacred, as well as all speech that promote hatred and bigotry; AND FINALLY,

AFFIRM that it is unconscionable to employ religion for the purpose of aggressing upon the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries.

Marrakesh

January 2016 , 27th

also chairman of the “2040 Oman Vision” and was described by *The Economist* as “outward-looking and Western-oriented”.

## PALESTINE

### **Barghouti, Mustafa**

A physician by profession, Mustafa Barghouti is co-founder of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society and has served as a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Known for his efforts to promote Palestinian statehood, he is also critical of both Israeli policies and internal Palestinian governance issues. Barghouti’s roles include serving as the General Secretary of the Palestinian National Initiative (PNI), also known as al-Mubadara, and he has been a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council since 2006. Additionally, he is a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Council. He also served as Minister of Information in the Palestinian unity government in 2007. He has made numerous appearances on various media outlets since the start of the Gaza genocide.

## SUDAN

### **Abdalla, Asma Mohamed**

Asma Mohamed Abdalla became Sudan’s first female Minister of Foreign Affairs in early September 2019 in Sudan’s Transitional Cabinet. Previously she had served as ambassador and worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before being dismissed after the 1989 *coup d’état* which brought Omar Al-Bashir to power. She left Sudan and lived in exile, doing work for IS-ESCO and UNICEF amongst other organisations. During the 2018-19 Sudanese protests, Abdalla joined the Forces of Freedom and Change.

## TUNISIA

### **Saied, HE President Kais**

President Kais Saied ran as an independent candidate with broad political support and popular appeal to win the presidential election in 2019. With economic conditions not improving, protests were dealt with in a heavy-handed manner, and then in July 2021 Saied suspended parliament and dismissed the Prime Minister. A year later a new constitution was adopted through a referendum (30% turnout) and December 2022 parliamentary elections recorded the lowest turnout in history (9%). With opposition figures being imprisoned and media pressured, most fear that

Tunisia is returning to a pre-Arab Spring type rule. He won a second term by a landslide in the October 2024 Presidential elections, which had an elector turnout of 28%.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

**HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum**  
HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum is the constitutional monarch of Dubai, as well as the Prime Minister and Vice President of the United Arab Emirates. In 1995, as Crown Prince of Dubai, his chief objective was to make Dubai a resort and business destination. To that end, he helped develop Palm Islands, the Burj Al-Arab hotel, the Burj Khalifa skyscraper, the Dubai World Cup and the Godolphin Stables. He has also launched multiple charity initiatives from Dubai, such as “Dubai Cares”, which has reached over 18 million beneficiaries in 53 countries since its inception in 2007. As well as his outstanding political and business achievements, he is also an author, a poet and a world-class horseman.

### **Al-Qasimi, Sheikha Lubna**

Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid bin Sultan Al-Qasimi was the first woman to hold a ministerial post in the UAE (Minister of Economy from 2004-2008), going on to hold a further three ministerial posts (Minister of Foreign Trade (2008-2013), Minister of International Cooperation and Development (2013-2016), and being the UAE’s first Minister of State for Tolerance (2016-17)). In 2000, she founded Tejari, the Middle East’s first business-to-business online marketplace which now has franchises in Kuwait, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. She was also President of Zayed University between 2014-18.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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## NIGERIA

### **Tinubu, HE President Chief Bola Ahmed**

Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu became the 16th President of Nigeria after winning presidential elections in February 2023. A member of the Social Democratic Party since 1991, he was forced into exile from 1994-1998 when Nigeria fell to a dictatorship. Upon his return he was elected the governor of Lagos State from 1999 to 2007, initiating new road constructions amongst other achievements. After leaving

office in 2007, he played a key role in the formation of the All Progressives Congress and supported former President Buhari in his successful 2014 and 2019 campaigns. Since becoming President himself, he has taken significant actions, such as removing fuel subsidies, suspending the governor of the central bank and retiring 150 major generals in an effort to reduce the power of the military over state security.

## SENEGAL

### **Faye, HE President Bassirou Diomaye**

Faye became the 5th President of Senegal in April 2024, as the General Secretary of the PASTEF political party. Hailing from Western Senegal, Faye's traditional village upbringing deeply influenced his values and leadership style. After studying law in Dakar, he embarked on a career as a tax inspector in the Tax and Estates department. As President, Faye has committed to battling corruption and overhauling Senegal's economy. A staunch advocate of left-wing Pan-Africanism, he is focused on reclaiming Senegal's sovereignty and has vowed to end the "French economic stranglehold" on the country.

## SOMALIA

### **Adam, Fawzia Yusuf Haji**

Fawzia's influence stems from the fact that she was the first woman to be named Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Somalia (2012-2014). She had a significant role in revitalizing the Somali economy by recovering national assets that were frozen, as well as signing an agreement with Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan for bilateral cooperation. A similar agreement was also signed with China. Fawzia launched a TV channel named RAAD TV aimed at providing a better image of the unstable and war-torn Somalia. She ran in the 2022 Somali presidential election, but lost to Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. In January 2024, she was nominated by Somalia for the position of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

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## *Asia*

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## AFGHANISTAN

### **Baradar, Abdul Ghani**

Baradar is the political head of the Taliban and

Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs of Afghanistan. Baradar fought against the Soviet invasion until their withdrawal in 1989, then set up a madrasah in Kandahar with his former commander, Mullah Mohammad Omar, which produced the Taliban. During the Taliban's first time in power (1996-2001), Baradar held a number of key posts, including that of Deputy Minister of Defence. In 2010, Baradar was imprisoned in Pakistan and only released after the Trump Administration started talks with the Taliban in 2018. He then became the Taliban's chief ambassador and spoke directly to President Trump.

## CHINA

### **Kadeer, Rebiya**

Kadeer is the de facto leader of the movement for social justice for the 15-million-strong Uyghur ethnic-population of China. She was formerly a successful businesswoman and philanthropist in China but was imprisoned in 1999 for leaking state secrets and now lives in exile in the United States. Before her arrest, Kadeer was running the 1,000 Families Mother's Project which helped Uyghur women start businesses. She now works closely with both the World Uyghur Congress and the Uyghur American Association. She is well-known for her work in Europe and North America publicizing the plight of the Uyghur ethnic group, and is partially responsible for raising the issue both in China and abroad. The Chinese government sees Kadeer as an agitator.

## INDIA

### **Farooq, Dr Mohammad Umar**

Dr Mirwaiz Muhammad Farooq, the 14th Mirwaiz of Kashmir, inherited his father's mantle in 1990 at age 17 following the assassination of his father. By 20, he had founded and became Chairman of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, a coalition of pro-freedom parties in Jammu and Kashmir. Throughout his career, he has been a persistent advocate for the Kashmiri people, raising their plight at the United Nations, the European Parliament, and the International Olympic Committee, while promoting dialogue with both India and Pakistan to achieve a peaceful resolution. After being placed under house arrest in August 2019 amid political upheaval in the region, Dr Farooq was allowed to leave in September 2023. Farooq remains a key voice for Kashmiri aspirations, bridging religious leadership with active engagement in human rights and regional diplomacy.

## INDONESIA

### **Parawansa, Khofifah Indar**

Khofifah Indar Parawansa is serving her second term as Governor of East Java, having previously held the role from 2019 to 2024. A seasoned politician, she earlier served as Deputy Speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives and later as Minister of Social Affairs. Known for her commitment to social reform, Parawansa has been a strong advocate for inter-faith unity, promoting programmes that strengthen tolerance and cooperation across religious communities. As Minister, she spearheaded a nationally recognised campaign to close red-light districts, providing alternative livelihoods and skills training for women affected. She also served as chairwoman of Muslimat NU, the women's wing of Nahdlatul Ulama. A popular public figure, she has cultivated an extensive online presence with more than 2 million social media followers, through which she actively engages citizens and promotes her reformist agenda.

### **Sukarnoputri, Megawati**

Megawati Sukarnoputri is the daughter of Indonesia's first President, Sukarno. She served as Vice President from 1999-2001 and then became Indonesia's first female president (from 2001 to 2004) and the fourth woman to be the leader of a Muslim-majority nation. She was mentor to former president Joko Jokowi Widodo (2014 and 2019 winner). She is the current head of the PDI-P party.

### **Widodo, HE Joko**

Joko Widodo, widely known as Jokowi, served as Indonesia's 7th President from 2014-2024. This had been preceded by a successful stint as Governor of Jakarta from 2012 to 2014, where he earned widespread acclaim for his accessible leadership style and commitment to public service. During his presidency, Jokowi focused on ambitious infrastructure projects, economic reforms, and poverty alleviation programmes. His signature '*blusukan*' approach - impromptu visits to local communities - became a hallmark of his leadership, reinforcing his image as a leader in touch with the people. In a significant political move towards the end of his term, Jokowi threw his support behind Prabowo Subianto's presidential bid, notably by endorsing his own son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as Prabowo's vice presidential running mate. This strategic alliance between Jokowi and his former rival Prabowo marked a dramatic shift in Indonesia's political dynamics, effectively bridging

previous political divides and significantly influencing the 2024 election outcome.

## KAZAKHSTAN

### **Tokayev, HE President Kassym-Jomart**

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev became Kazakhstan's second president in 2019, succeeding Nursultan Nazarbayev after his 28-year rule. In early 2022, widespread protests triggered calls for reform, and Tokayev responded by proposing a 'New Kazakhstan' agenda. A constitutional referendum held in June 2022 approved sweeping changes, with roughly 77% voter approval, that curbed presidential powers, bolstered parliamentary authority, banned relatives from government posts, and stripped Nazarbayev of his 'Leader of the Nation' status. That same period saw the capital revert from Nur-Sultan back to its original name, Astana. In November 2022, Tokayev won a snap election, securing 81.31% of the vote amid 69% turnout, earning a single seven-year term under the new constitutional rules. The vote has given him a clear mandate to continue his reform path.

## MALAYSIA

### **Mohamad, HE Mahathir**

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was Malaysia's Prime Minister from 1981-2003, winning five consecutive elections, overseeing rapid modernisation and economic growth while promoting liberal Muslim values. He established key institutions, including the International Islamic University of Malaysia, which has become a global hub for Islamic scholarship. His long rule, however, was also marked by criticisms of curtailed civil liberties and the political trials faced by his former deputy, Anwar Ibrahim. Mahathir re-entered politics in 2017, forming a new party and leading the Pakatan Harapan coalition to victory in 2018. At 94, he became the world's oldest serving head of government, holding office until February 2020. Beyond Malaysia, Mahathir has long been a powerful voice for Muslims globally, outspoken on issues of Palestine, Islamophobia, and the need for economic independence in the Muslim world. His calls for Muslim unity and self-reliance continue to resonate internationally. In July 2025, he celebrated his 100th birthday.

### **Wan Ismail, Datuk Seri Wan Azizah**

Datuk Seri Wan Azizah Wan Ismail made history as Malaysia's first female Deputy Prime Minister (2018–2020), also serving as Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. A medical doctor by training, she worked in public hospitals for 14 years before entering politics in support of her husband, Anwar Ibrahim, when he became Deputy Prime Minister in 1993. Her political journey has been closely intertwined with his, particularly after his dismissal and arrest in 1998. Stepping into the national spotlight, Wan Azizah became the founding president of the People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat), helping to build opposition alliances that reshaped Malaysia's political landscape. Over the years, she has been elected to parliament multiple times and continues to serve actively, representing Bandar Tun Razak since November 2022. She is widely respected for her role in advancing women's leadership and democratic reform in Malaysia.

### **PAKISTAN**

#### **Khan, Imran**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 133

#### **Munir, General Syed Asim**

Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir Ahmed Shah is Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, appointed in November 2022. A descendant of a religious and scholarly family, he is the first army chief in Pakistan's history to be a *Hafiz al-Quran*, having memorised the entire Qur'an. A career officer, he previously headed both Military Intelligence and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), though his tenure at the latter ended after differences with then-Prime Minister Imran Khan, who has since been imprisoned during Munir's leadership. In May 2025, following the India-Pakistan conflict, Munir was promoted to Field Marshal, becoming only the second officer in Pakistan's history, after Ayub Khan, to attain the rank. He now leads at a time of political and economic turbulence, navigating unprecedented public criticism of the military's influence on governance while confronting the challenge of redefining civil-military relations in Pakistan's future.

#### **Sharif, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz**

Shehbaz Sharif became Pakistan's 24th Prime Minister in March 2024, having previously served as the 23rd Prime Minister from 2022 to 2023 following a

no-confidence motion against former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Brother of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, he has had a long and influential political career, including three terms as Chief Minister of Punjab (1997, 2007, 2013) and leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). Sharif's tenure has focused on governance, economic stabilization, and navigating Pakistan's complex civil-military relations. His political journey has faced significant challenges, including arrest in 2020 on corruption and money-laundering charges, leading to months in detention before being granted bail in April 2021.

### **PHILIPPINES**

#### **Gutoc-Tomawis, Samira**

Samira Gutoc-Tomawis is a strong advocate for minorities and peace in the Philippines. She has pushed policies for Muslims that turned into law such as Eid holidays. She has particularly strong support in Marawi City, where she runs relief missions to civilians still suffering the results of the five-month battle in Marawi between government forces and DA'ISH supporters in 2017. She chairs the NGO Ako Bakwit dedicated to displaced persons. She has been critical of the delayed rehabilitation of the city ravaged by the war and the continued imposition of martial law in Mindanao. She served as a member of the Regional Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and a member of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission. In 2019, she ran for the Senate and placed 25th. In 2021, she joined Aksyon Demokratiko's national executive board, but was unsuccessful in her bid for the senate in 2022.

#### **Misuari, Nur**

Nur Misuari began his campaign through the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) in the 1970s, which later became the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Under Misuari's leadership the MNLF challenged the government until the Tripoli Agreement was negotiated in 1976. Misuari was charged in connection to the deadly 20-day attack in Zamboanga city in September 2013, which left nearly 200 people dead; but in 2016, Misuari was granted a temporary suspension of his arrest and asked for his help in the peace negotiations in Mindanao. In late 2019, President Duterte appointed Nur Misuari as Special Economic Envoy on Islamic Affairs to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Despite recent pressure to arrest Misuari, he continues to work toward peace with the Philippines' government

and has offered to deploy MNLF fighters to help defeat the DA'ISH-backed Maute Group.

## SINGAPORE

### **Rasheed, Zainul Abidin**

Rasheed is Singapore's Ambassador to Kuwait and the Special Envoy of the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Middle East. In 2017, he was appointed to the Board of Trustees at the Nanyang Technological University of Singapore. He previously served as Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs for Singapore and mayor of the city-state's North Eastern district. Rasheed's activities focus on Singapore's diplomatic relations with the Muslim world and sharing Singapore's expertise in inter-cultural and inter-religious relations with nations that have substantial Muslim populations. Rasheed is widely known domestically, having held numerous positions of leadership throughout his career in journalism, organised labour, and representation of Singapore's large Muslim community.

## UZBEKISTAN

### **Mirziyoyev, HE President Shavkat**

In 2023 President Shavkat Mirziyoyev won his third (although officially it is his first under the new constitution which limits presidents to two terms in office) election, a seven-year term, winning 87% of the vote. Since succeeding the authoritarian Islam Karimov (who ruled for 25 years before he died in office), President Shavkat has introduced gradual reform including restricting the power of the security services, encouraging foreign trade and investment and allowing more political freedom. He has looked to better relations with neighbouring countries as well as the USA, China and Russia. Shavkat served as Prime Minister from 2013-2016 before being elected President.

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## *Europe*

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## KOSOVO

### **Osmani-Sadriu, HE President Vjosa**

Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu was elected the 5th President of Kosovo in 2021, running on an anti-corruption platform. A law graduate, she has been involved in politics from an early age including being elected

to the Assembly of Kosovo, holding the position of Speaker and also serving as acting president. She experienced the effects of war in her hometown and went on to help prepare the legal work for Kosovo's independence. As President she is willing to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

## RUSSIA

### **Kadyrov, HE President Ramzan**

Ramzan Kadyrov is the President of Chechnya and the son of the former president, rebel leader and mufti, Akhmad Kadyrov. In 2016, Kadyrov was re-elected with nearly 98% of the vote. He has overseen a massive reconstruction of Chechnya, and has held several important international Islamic conferences, including one that attempted to define Sunni Islam in 2016. A Putin loyalist, who was recently promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General in the National Guard, he has offered key support in the war on Ukraine.

## TÜRKIYE

### **Davutoğlu, Ahmet**

Ahmet Davutoğlu was Prime Minister of Türkiye from 2014, before differences with President Erdoğan saw him resign in 2016. He is a political science academic who was appointed Ambassador, Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister in rapid succession. In 2019, Davutoğlu resigned from the AKP accusing it of falling into a culture of corruption. He then launched a new political party, the Future Party, becoming its first leader, and now hopes to build it into a political force.

## UNITED KINGDOM

### **Khan, Sir Sadiq**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 133

### **Mahmood, Shabana (new)**

Shabana Mahmood is a British-Pakistani lawyer-turned-politician who has become one of the most senior Muslim women in UK public life. Born in Birmingham in 1980, she studied law at Oxford and qualified as a barrister in 2003 before entering politics. In 2010, she was elected MP for Birmingham Ladywood. Mahmood rose steadily through Labour's ranks, serving in shadow ministerial posts

before returning to prominence in 2021 as National Campaign Coordinator and later Shadow Justice Secretary. Following Labour's 2024 landslide victory, she was appointed Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, making history as the first Muslim woman to hold the role. She introduced reforms on prison overcrowding and defended judicial equality. In September 2025, she was promoted to Home Secretary, becoming the first Muslim woman to lead a great office of state.

#### **Shah, Naseem**

Naseem Shah, more commonly known as Naz Shah, has been Labour MP for Bradford West since 2015. She served as the Shadow Minister for Crime Reduction, before resigning over the Labour Party's stance on a Gaza ceasefire proposal. She has previously held shadow ministerial posts of state for Women and Equalities (2018-20) and Community Cohesion (2020-21). She is a strong voice for victimised groups and community groups. She has championed the voice of the British Muslim community on the issues of Kashmir and Palestine and has spoken powerfully in the House of Commons in defence of the Prophet (PBUH).

#### **Warsi, Baroness Sayeeda**

Baroness Warsi was Britain's first Muslim Cabinet Minister. From May 2010 to September 2012 she was the Chairman of the Conservative Party, and a Minister without Portfolio in David Cameron's Cabinet. From 2012 she served as Minister of State for Faith and Communities and Senior Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. She resigned from her post in August 2014, citing her disagreement with the UK Government's policy over the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict. Baroness Warsi is involved in a number of charities and educational institutions, and remains an authoritative and powerful voice on the issue of Islamophobia. In 2017, Baroness Warsi published her first book, *The Enemy Within: A Tale of Muslim Britain*. In 2024, her second book, *Muslim's Don't Matter* was released. She is also co-host of the political reality show 'Make Me Prime Minister', and a regular presenter on daytime TV. In 2024 she launched her Podcast, *A Muslim and A Jew Go There*.

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## *Oceania*

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### **AUSTRALIA**

#### **Husic, Ed**

Ed Husic made history in 2010 as the first Muslim elected to the Australian Federal Parliament. He further broke new ground in 2013 by becoming the first Muslim sworn into the federal government front-bench, taking his oath on the Qur'an. In 2022, Husic was appointed Minister for Industry and Science in Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's cabinet, a position he held until May 2025. In May 2025, Husic was removed from the cabinet during a factional reshuffle within the Labor Party. Despite this, he remains the Member of Parliament for Chifley and continues to serve on the backbench. Husic has maintained his advocacy for Muslim communities and interfaith dialogue, notably participating in the March for Humanity in Sydney in August 2025, a large protest highlighting the plight of Palestinians in the Gaza conflict.

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## *North America*

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### **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

#### **Carson, André**

André Carson was the second Muslim to be elected to the US Congress. He was first elected to Congress in 2008, and is now serving his eighth two-year term as representative of Indiana's seventh congressional district. Alongside national issues, he has spoken against Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory, voted against a House resolution condemning the BDI movement and, at the end of July 2022, he announced a bill to investigate the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

#### **Ellison, Keith**

Keith Ellison was the first Muslim to serve in the US Congress. He represented the Fifth Congressional District of Minnesota from 2007-2019 before deciding to run for attorney general rather than congress. He was duly elected as the 30th Attorney General of Minnesota becoming the first Muslim in the US to win statewide office, and he was re-elected in 2022. Ellison has been an outspoken advocate for American Muslims, and his trips to the Muslim world have

garnered international support for his outreach.

### **Omar, Ilhan**

Ilham Omar has been the US Representative for Minnesota's 5th congressional district since 2019, (having received the largest percentage of the vote of any female candidate for US House in state history). She is vocal in her support for the working class, students, the environment, Palestinians and other causes. Former President Trump tweeted against her on numerous occasions resulting in death-threats from white supremacists. Born in Mogadishu, Somalia, to a Somali father and Yemeni mother, Omar came to the USA in 1995 at the age of 13. She excelled in studies and started work as a community nutrition educator whilst also working as a campaign manager. She is the Director of an association that advocates for women from East Africa to take on civic and political leadership roles.

### **Tlaib, Rashida**

Rashida Tlaib continues to serve as the U.S. Representative for Michigan's 12th Congressional District, a position she has held since 2019. Tlaib is a founding member of the progressive 'Squad' and is known for her advocacy on issues such as workers' rights, environmental justice, and Palestinian rights. Born in Detroit to Palestinian immigrant parents, Tlaib made history in 2008 as the first Muslim woman elected to the Michigan State Legislature. She has been vocal in her opposition to the Israeli onslaught

in Gaza and held up a 'war criminal' sign when Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu addressed Congress.

### **Mamdani, Zohran (new)**

Zohran Kwame Mamdani is an Indian-Ugandan-American politician and member of the New York State Assembly, representing parts of Queens. A member of the Democratic Socialists of America, he is one of a growing number of Muslim elected officials shaping progressive politics in the United States. Mamdani advocates for affordable housing, workers' rights, and racial justice, and represents a new wave of American Muslim public service rooted in social equity.

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## *Caribbean*

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### **GUYANA**

### **Ali, Dr Mohamed Irfaan (new)**

Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali is the President of Guyana and the first Muslim to hold the office. A development economist by training, his administration has overseen rapid economic growth due to Guyana's emerging oil sector. He emphasizes inclusive development and has promoted interfaith harmony in one of South America's most religiously diverse countries. Dr Ali represents a rare instance of Muslim political leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean.

وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةٌ وَعِلْمٌ

Ghafir 40, 7

You embrace all things in [Your] mercy and knowledge.

# ADMINISTRATION OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### EGYPT

#### **Ayyad, Grand Mufti Nazir Mohamed**

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi appointed Nazir Mohamed Ayyad as Egypt's new Grand Mufti for a four-year term, following a recommendation from the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayyeb. Ayyad succeeds Shawki Allam, who served as Grand Mufti since 2013. A respected scholar in Islamic jurisprudence, creed, and philosophy, Ayyad previously held the position of secretary-general of Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy. Known for his moderate stance, he actively promotes interfaith dialogue and combats extremism and Islamophobia. As Grand Mufti, Ayyad will lead Egypt's Dar Al-Ifta, the institution responsible for issuing fatwas and providing Islamic legal guidance on various matters impacting both personal and public life.

#### **Badie, Dr Mohammed**

Dr Mohammed Badie succeeded Mohammad Mahdi Akef as the 8th Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in January 2010. Following the military coup against Morsi's leadership, he was one of many Muslim Brotherhood leaders arrested. Badie—whose son was shot dead during one of the counter-protests against the coup—was sentenced to death in April 2015 along with 13 other senior Muslim Brotherhood members. He is currently serving multiple life sentences in prison.

### IRAN

#### **Rashad, Professor Ali Akbar**

Professor Ali Akbar Rashad founded the Research Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, and has been its President since its establishment in 1994. He is a philosopher and a scholar in the fields of philosophy of religion and Islamic studies. In addition to translations and ongoing research, he has written over 35 books and 69 articles. He is also active in international scholarly activities and conferences, particularly in the field of interfaith dialogue.

### MOROCCO

#### **Al-Tawfiq, Ahmad**

Al-Tawfiq is the Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in Morocco and a strong supporter of Sufi groups. He is a writer for the Association of Moroccan Authors for Publication, as well as the Vice President of the Moroccan Association for Historical Research. Al-Tawfiq is an advocate of interfaith dialogue, and is currently on the board of World Religious Leaders for The Elijah Interfaith Institute.

### PALESTINE

#### **Hussein, Sheikh Muhammad Ahmad**

Sheikh Hussein was appointed the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in 2006. Previously, he had been the manager and imam of the Blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. He is an outspoken critic of the Israeli occupation, and has personally defended the Al-Aqsa Mosque from settlers and the Israeli army. In July 2018, Hussein issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims from selling or transferring any land in Palestine to Jews.

#### **Sabri, Sheikh Dr Ekrima Sa'id**

Sheikh Sabri is the head of the Supreme Islamic Council and former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine. He remains an imam of the Blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, where he preaches regularly. Sabri is well-respected in Palestine for his forthright views on Israel. He has been at various times banned from entering Al-Aqsa Mosque and arrested, the latest being in August 2024 for mourning assassinated Hamas Political Bureau chief, Ismail Haniyeh.

### SAUDI ARABIA

#### **Altwajri, Dr Abdulaziz Othman**

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri served as Director General of ISESCO and ex officio Secretary General of the Federation of Universities of the Islamic World (FUIW) from 1991 to 2019. A distinguished academic, writer, poet, and senior lecturer, he shaped Islamic education, culture, and science for three decades. Under his leadership, he championed cultural dialogue, rapprochement between jurisprudential

schools of thought, and the alliance of civilizations. Dr Altwajiri is a member of leading international organisations, including the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and the Nizami Ganjavi International Center. Honoured by 26 countries and awarded ten honorary doctorates, he remains a highly respected voice in global Islamic intellectual and cultural discourse, influencing policy, education, and interfaith engagement across the Muslim world.

#### **Al-Issa, Dr Mohammad ben Abdel Karim**

Dr Al-Issa was appointed Secretary-General of the Muslim World League in 2016. Prior to that he had served as Minister of Justice and Head of the Supreme Council for Justice. The Muslim World League is an NGO which was founded in 1962 and is based in Makkah. It propagates Saudi teachings worldwide as well as carrying out social work. Al-Issa visited the Vatican in 2017 where he met the Pope and in 2020 led a delegation of Islamic scholars to visit Srebrenica in Bosnia, and Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. He is also President of the International Islamic Halal Organization. He has continued high-profile international trips to promote messages of harmony and interfaith cooperation.

#### **Al-Malik, Dr Salim M**

Dr Salim M Al-Malik was appointed as the Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) in May 2019 (replacing Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwajiri). Dr Salim has a PhD in Allergy and Clinical Immunology, and a PhD in Pediatrics. He has previously held various senior positions in Saudi Arabia. ISESCO is based in Rabat, Morocco and strives to strengthen cooperation among member states in educational, scientific, and cultural research, making Islamic culture the focal point of educational curricula at all levels.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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### **CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

#### **Diakité, Sheikh Aïma Ousmane**

Sheikh Ousmane Diakité has been President of the Superior Council of Imams of Côte d'Ivoire (COSIM) since 2021. A lawyer and professor, he oversees over 26,000 imams in a country where Muslims constitute 42.5% of the population of 30 million. Known as the 'Imam of the Middle Way' for his skill

in mediation and compromise, Diakité is a staunch advocate of interfaith dialogue, continuing the legacy of his predecessors. He emphasizes collaboration between Christian and Muslim leaders to combat societal challenges such as moral decline, drug abuse, and organised crime.

### **KENYA**

#### **Khalifa, Sheikh Mohammed**

Sheikh Khalifa is the Organizing Secretary of the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya. He addresses various social issues, as well as encouraging Kenyans to campaign peacefully in general elections and to engage in politics on the basis of issues rather than along tribal affiliations.

### **NIGERIA**

#### **Ahmad, Abdrahman Olanrewaju**

Sheikh Abdrahman Olanrewaju Ahmad is the National Missioner of the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria, a 96-year-old Islamic organisation established for the purpose of educational, moral, and social development for Muslims. The organisation boasts millions of members, with its achievements spanning Nigeria's faiths and ethnicities.

#### **Bayero, Aminu Ado**

Aminu Ado Bayero held the position of 15th Emir of Kano from March 2020 to May 2024 before being dethroned by the Kano state government. His father had been the 13th Emir (1963-2014) but was succeeded by a nephew, who was subsequently dethroned in 2020, allowing Bayero to claim the title. The Emir of Kano is historically the second most important Muslim position in Nigeria after the Sultan of Sokoto. The Emir of Kano serves as the leader of the Tijani sufi order in Nigeria. The Kano State Government filed a suit asking the state High Court to stop the 15th Emir, Bayero, and four other Emirs of Karaye, Bichi, Rano and Gaya from parading themselves as Emirs.

#### **Oloyede, Professor Ishaq Olarewaju**

Professor Ishaq Olarewaju Oloyede is the Secretary General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council. He also serves as the President of the Association of African Universities (AAU), and is the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ilorin.

### **Sanusi, Alhaji Dr Sanusi Lamido**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 133

## **SENEGAL**

### **Mbacké, Serigne Mountakha**

Serigne Mountakha Mbacké was appointed the eighth Caliph of Senegal's Mouride Brotherhood in January 2018, following the death of his predecessor, Serigne Cheikh Sidi Moukhtar Mbacké, at the age of 94. He is the grandson of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the Sufi founder of the brotherhood, who passed away in 1927 and is buried in Touba, the spiritual heart of the Mouride community. Under Serigne Mountakha's leadership, the brotherhood continues to exert significant influence in Senegal's social, economic, and political life, with its members actively participating in business, agriculture, and public affairs. The Grand Magal of Touba, the annual pilgrimage commemorating Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, attracts millions of devotees each year on 18 Safar, reinforcing the spiritual and communal unity of the Mouride tariqah. Serigne Mountakha has emphasized education, economic development, and the preservation of Mouride traditions, ensuring the brotherhood's continued prominence in Senegalese society and beyond.

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## *Asia*

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## **INDIA**

### **Ahmad, Sheikh Abubakr**

Sheikh Abubakr Ahmad is President of the Islamic Community of India, Founder and Chancellor of Jamia Markaz Saqafathu Sunniyya, one of the leading educational and humanitarian institutions in India, and General Secretary of the All India Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama. He is often referred to by his epithet Abul Aytam ('Father of Orphans') for his service to orphans and the destitute. He advocates peaceful co-existence, social harmony and its international propagation and has set up thousands of cultural centres and educational institutes in India. Sheikh Abubakr has authored and published more than 60 books on a variety of topics in Arabic, Urdu and Malayalam. In July 2023 he was awarded the Hijra Award in Malaysia.

### **Al-Bukhari, Sayyid Ibraheemul Khaleel**

Sayyid Ibraheemul Khaleel Al-Bukhari is the Founder and Chairman of Jamia Ma'din (Ma'din Academy), Kerala, India. It is an umbrella body of various educational and charity ventures where 25,000 students are enrolled for different courses from primary to research level. He is an advisor to the International Interfaith Harmony Initiative, Malaysia; the Vice President of the Muslim Educational Board of India, New Delhi; General Secretary of Kerala Muslim Jama'at, the apex body of Muslim community in Kerala; and the President of Sunni Management Association. He is also the Managing Editor of *Armonia Journal* (armoniajournal.com) and has penned 22 books in various languages.

### **Kandhalvi, Maulana Saad**

Maulana Saad Kandhalvi is the great-grandson of Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) missionary movement and the grandson of its second ameer. He is currently the head of the TJ centre in Nizamuddin, New Delhi, India. A recent falling out with other leaders has led to some clashes between rival followers and a fatwa issued by Deoband criticizing Maulana Saad's leadership has led to further ramifications worldwide including at Biswa Ijtema, Bangladesh, the second largest religious gathering in the world.

### **Nomani, Mufti Abul Qasim**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 134

### **Noorie, Maulana Shakir Ali**

Maulana Noorie is the President of Sunni Dawate Islami, a non-political religious organisation in Mumbai, India. Its Annual Congregation is one of the largest Sunni Muslim assemblies held in India, attracting around 300,000 people annually into the heart of Mumbai, India's financial capital. There are approximately 50 institutions under his leadership providing knowledge to more than 7000 students. Maulana Muhammed Shakir Noorie has authored over 40 books which are published in many languages. He has initiated several human welfare campaigns including: women empowerment through education, feeding and clothing the poor and downtrodden, counselling assistance to the youth, and a programme against drug abuse and intoxicants.

### **Owaisi, MP Janab Asaduddin**

Barrister Asaduddin Owaisi is an eminent Indian

parliamentarian and has served as President of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) since being elected in 2008. Under Owaisi's stewardship, the party won seven assembly seats in 2009 then in 2014. In 2019, he started his fourth term being elected to the 17th Lok Sabha (House of the People). An outspoken parliamentarian, Owaisi has been instrumental in persuading the Indian government to establish the Ministry of Minority Affairs to look after the welfare of religious minorities in India, including Muslims. He has over fifteen million social media followers.

#### **Kandhalvi, Maulana Zuhair ul-Hassan**

Maulana Zuhair ul-Hassan Kandhalvi is a leader of the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) group. He was born and raised in Nizamuddin, New Delhi and completed his Islamic studies in Saharanpur. His late father Zubair Ul-Hasan was one of three leaders appointed as members of the leadership council. The TJ has faced unprecedented divisions of late with Maulana Zuhair's followers clashing with followers of Maulana Saad Kandhalvi over who leads the TJ.

### **INDONESIA**

#### **Achyar, Miftachul**

Miftachul Achyar became the *Rais 'Aam* (Supreme Leader) of the country's largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), after the resignation of Ma'ruf Amin (who became Vice-President of Indonesia 2019-24). The NU was established in 1926 and claims a 90-million membership. It is a charitable body funding schools and hospitals as well as organising communities to help alleviate poverty. Under Akhyar's leadership, NU continues to promote Islam Nusantara, a moderate, inclusive, and contextually Indonesian interpretation of Islam that emphasizes tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and compassion. Akhyar's tenure also reinforces NU's role in shaping public discourse on religious harmony, civic responsibility, and ethical governance, ensuring the organisation remains a guiding force in both Indonesia's socio-religious landscape and the wider Muslim world.

#### **Amin, Maruf**

Maruf Amin was the running mate of Joko Widodo in the 2019 general elections and served as the Vice-President of Indonesia. He is an Indonesian Islamic scholar who was chair of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia and general guide of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Islamic organisation (he

resigned in late 2018). Amin's early education was at a boarding school established by NU founder Hasyim Asyari, before receiving his bachelor's degree in Islamic philosophy. He then started his lifelong activities of working in *dawah* (religious propagation) and politics, finding success in both. Amin remains a respected figure in Indonesian Islamic scholarship and politics, frequently participating in discussions on Islamic economics and social issues. His legacy includes promoting moderate Islam and advocating for the integration of Islamic principles in Indonesia's economic development.

#### **Nashir, Dr KH Haedar**

Dr KH Haedar Nashir is the current Chairman of the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second-largest Islamic organisation, with an estimated 30 million members. He was first elected to this position in 2015 and was re-elected for the 2022–2027. He has held various leadership roles within Muhammadiyah, including Secretary of the Central Board and Editor-in-Chief of *Suara Muhammadiyah* magazine. Under his leadership, *Muhammadiyah* continues to focus on promoting moral and spiritual ideals through social activities, including education, healthcare, and community development. The organisation strongly opposes syncretism while promoting interfaith relations, reflecting its commitment to a moderate and progressive interpretation of Islam. In recognition of his contributions, Dr Haedar was honoured with the Bintang Legiun Veteran Republik Indonesia (LVRI Star) in July 2024, the highest honour from the Indonesian Veterans Legion, acknowledging his dedication to preserving the values of Indonesia's independence and supporting the development of the LVRI as an institution.

### **MALDIVES**

#### **Saeed, Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali**

Dr Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed has been serving as Minister of Islamic Affairs since November 2023, a post that he previously held from 2012-18. He is *hafiz* of the Qur'an, a licensed lawyer, and former Chancellor of the Islamic University of Maldives (IUM). Dr Saeed was central to the establishment of the Maldives Hajj Corporation, the Maldives Islamic Bank Pvt Ltd, and a *waqffund*. He is a member of the Sharia Advisory Council of the Central Bank of the Maldives. Dr Saeed has authored many articles and books on religious issues and has spoken at forums

in nine countries.

## PAKISTAN

### **Naeem ur Rehman, Hafiz**

Hafiz Naeem was elected the sixth President of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan in April 2024, having served as the President of Jamaat-e-Islami Karachi from 2013-2024. Naeem holds a degree in Civil Engineering from NED and a Master's in Islamic History from Karachi University. His political journey began with the Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba in the 1990s, eventually joining Jamaat-e-Islami in 2000. Naeem has been a vocal advocate for Karachi's rights, leading protests against K-Electric and campaigning for improved city infrastructure. Naeem has maintained a strong political presence over the years, culminating in his election as Jamaat-e-Islami's national leader.

### **Naqvi, Ayatollah Syed Sajid Ali**

Ayatollah Syed Sajid Ali Naqvi is a prominent Pakistani Shia Islamic scholar and political leader, currently serving as the Patron-in-Chief of the Shia Ulema Council (SUC) of Pakistan. He has held this position since 1988, following the assassination of his predecessor, Allama Arif Hussain Hussaini. Ayatollah Naqvi is also the founder and leader of Islami Tehreek Pakistan (ITP), a political party that emerged from the banned Tehreek-e-Jafaria Pakistan (TJP). The TJP was initially founded in 1979 to represent the Shia community's interests but was banned twice before transitioning into the ITP. The ITP continues to operate as the political wing of the SUC. His influence extends beyond Pakistan's borders, as he has been a vocal critic of global geopolitical issues affecting the Muslim world.

## SRI LANKA

### **Rizwe, Mufti Mohammed Ibrahim Mohammed**

Mufti Rizwe heads the ACJU, the Supreme body of Islamic theologians in Sri Lanka, established in 1924 and representing nearly 10,000 scholars through 155 branches in 24 districts. A specialist in Islamic Jurisprudence, he pioneered the introduction of Islamic insurance, interest-free banking, and halal certification in Sri Lanka. His initiatives such as the Maktab Preliminary Islamic Education System, Careline Islamic Counseling, and the Mahmood Institute for Skill Development of Ulama have benefitted the wider community. Internationally recognised, he was honoured with the title 'Rosa Mira – The Rose of

the World' at the International Islamic Conference, Kazan (2023). He delivered a special address at the UN Social Forum in Geneva on religious tolerance and cooperation (2023) and addressed the 16th UN Minority Forum on peaceful coexistence and the Madeena Charter (2023).

## TAJIKISTAN

### **Abdulkodirzoda, Mufti Saidmukarram**

Mufti Saidmukarram Abdulkodirzoda has served as the state Grand Mufti of Tajikistan since 2010, leading the Shuroi Ulamo (Council of Scholars), which is the sole fatwa-issuing body in Tajikistan. He is also the Director of the Islamic Center of Tajikistan and has represented the country at the International Islamic Fiqh Academy since 2012. Born in 1963, Mufti Abdulkodirzoda studied a bachelor's and master's in Hadith and Tafsir from the International Islamic University of Islamabad, and a doctorate in Tajik literature from the National University of Tajikistan. In September 2024, he was injured in an attack with a machete near the central mosque in Dushanbe. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that he sustained minor injuries and did not require hospitalization.

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## *Europe*

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## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### **Kavazović, Husein**

Sheikh Husein Kavazović has been the 14th *Raisul-ulum* (Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina) since 2012. Kavazović had pushed for cooperation with other religious communities and a wider "incorporation of women into the work of the Islamic religious community". His sphere of influence is primarily with the community of 2.5 million Bosniak Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Bosniak diaspora, who number approximately 1.5 million. He speaks Bosnian, Arabic, and English.

## BULGARIA

### **Hadzhi, Mufti Mustafa Alish**

Sheikh Hadzhi is Bulgaria's Chief Mufti. Bulgaria has been referred to as "Istanbulgaria" because of the importance of Turkish-Bulgarian relations. Hadzhi is the leader of the Muslim community in a

predominantly Christian state with a large influx of Muslims. He defended his community from extreme nationalists who went so far as to attack mosques and worshippers.

## FRANCE

### **Bechari, Dr Mohamed**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 134

## GERMANY

### **Köhler, Ayyub Axel**

Köhler is former chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. He has written numerous articles, primarily for Islamic magazines such as *Al Islam* of the Islamic Centre of Munich, and *Al Fajr* of the Islamic Centre of Hamburg. He also published newsletters for the Muslim League around the issue of the integration of Islamic ways of life into German society.

## ITALY

### **Pallavicini, Imam Yahya Sergio Yahe**

Imam Yahya Pallavicini is a prominent figure in European relations with the Muslim world. He is Vice President of COREIS (The Islamic Religious Community), Italy, Chairman of EULEMA, the European Muslim Scholars Council, and a former advisor for Islamic affairs to the Italian Minister of Interior. Pallavicini is also the Imam of the Al-Wahid Mosque of Milan in Via Meda, where he organises the training of imams in Italian. His father was the late Sheikh Abd Al-Wahid Pallavicini, the noted preacher and Head of the Ahmadiyyah Idrissiyyah Shadhiliyyah brotherhood in Italy.

## KOSOVO

### **Ternava, Sheikh Naim**

Sheikh Naim Ternava is the Grand Mufti of Kosovo. He is the leading religious figure in Kosovo, which emerged after an ethno-religious war resulted in widespread loss of life and destruction. Ternava is a key figure in the attempts of the country's Muslim population to overcome the horrors of war. He was instrumental in the creation of the Inter-Religious Council Organization for Interfaith Relations.

## RUSSIA

### **Nasibullahoglu, Sheikh Cafer**

Sheikh Cafer Nasibullahoglu is the Imam of St Petersburg Mosque. He is also the Mufti of St Petersburg, home to almost one million Muslims. His diverse congregation consists of Muslims of Tatar, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik, and Arab origins, among others. The sermon at St Petersburg mosque is often conducted in Arabic, Tatar, and Russian.

## SERBIA

### **Dudić, Grand Mufti Mevlud**

Grand Mufti Mevlud Dudić has been serving the 700,000-strong Serbian Muslim population (approximately 11% of the country's population) in his current role since 2014. Previously, he held positions as Director of the Gazi Isa-beg madrasah, Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Rector of the International University, all three in Novi Pazar. He has also served on Government Commissions, and is currently a member of the government commission for religious education. He has written hundreds of papers and is the author of the monograph: *The Gazi Isa-beg madrasah: The Al-Azhar of Sandžak*. Fluent in Arabic, English and Albanian, Dudić enjoys good relations with Muslim religious scholars the world over and is a member of the main global Islamic organisations.

## UNITED KINGDOM

### **HH Prince Rahim Aga Khan V (new)**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 134

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## *Oceania*

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## AUSTRALIA

### **Alsuleiman, Imam Shadi**

Imam Shadi Alsuleiman is an Australian-born imam who has strongly connected with the Muslim youth and helped integrate the Muslim community with wider Australian society. Alsuleiman is the President of the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC), Australia's Muslim peak body which represents over 300 imams from each of the Australian States and Territories. It is also the body that elects the Mufti

of Australia. He's an international speaker with many followers on social media and has also established one of Australia's largest youth and community centres known as the UMA.

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## North America

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### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

#### Mohammed II, Warithudeen

Warithudeen Mohammed II is the eldest son of Imam W Deen Mohammed, the leader of the Nation of Islam who in 1976 transformed it into an orthodox and mainstream Sunni Islamic movement. He is President of The Mosque Cares, a charitable organisation established by Imam W Deen Mohamed. The organisation sponsors classes in Qur'anic Arabic and financial literacy, as well as informational sessions in health and nutrition, and business and entrepreneurial initiatives.

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## Caribbean

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### BARBADOS

#### Bulbulia, Suleiman (new)

Suleiman Bulbulia is the secretary of Barbados Muslim Association and is a weekly Columnist for *Barbados Today*. He was the former member of the Religious Advisory Committee on National Affairs, appointed by the Prime Minister and Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs to advise the Government on matters of national importance from a religious perspective.

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## South America

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### ARGENTINA

#### Hallar, Muhammad Yusuf

Hallar is an active figure in Argentina, and is involved in community development for Muslims. He has conducted comprehensive research on Muslims in Latin America and holds a number of positions including Secretary-General of the Islamic Organization of Latin America and the Director of the Office

of Islamic Culture. He is also a member of the Expert Committee on Minority Rights for the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

### BRAZIL

#### Bukai, Sheikh Mohamad

Sheikh Mohamad Bukai was born in Syria and studied at Al-Azhar University. He has been living in Sao Paulo since 2007 and is known for his soft speech, kind nature and splendid character. He has previously served as sheikh of the Liga Islamica do Pari and is the Imam of the Mesquita Brasil in Sao Paulo and Director of Religious Affairs of the Uniao Nacional das Entidades Islamicas. His page on Facebook often airs live transmissions of his Friday *khutbahs* as well as short videos on Islam.

### ECUADOR

#### Suquillo, Professor Juan

Professor Juan Suquillo is the President and Co-founder of the Islamic Centre in Quito. He received the 'National Hero' award in recognition for his services to Ecuador. He is also the General Secretary for the Interfaith Council CONALIR fighting for religious rights and anti-discrimination. His books in Spanish have been popular and Suquillo is regarded as a bridge and reference for Latino Muslim leaders and scholars.

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### ALGERIA

#### **Al-Khairi, Sheikh Abdul-Nacer**

Sheikh Abdul-Nacer is a master of the Shadhili *tariqah*, and has a wide following in his native Algeria, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, and various European countries where his students come from all walks of life. He emphasizes the recitation of the Qur'an, as well as abundant *salawaat* (praying for the Prophet Muhammad). He is a descendant of the famous Sufi of Prophetic lineage, Abdul Salam ibn Mashish of Morocco.

### EGYPT

#### **Abdelkafy, Sheikh Dr Omar**

Sheikh Abdelkafy is an Egyptian preacher and *dawah* practitioner. A well-respected *hafiz* of the Qur'an, he is also the Director of the Qur'anic Studies Centre at the Dubai International Holy Qur'an Award. In addition to working in his native Egypt, he travels abroad to help Muslim communities, working specifically with the Muslim community in Canada.

#### **Amr, Dr Khaled**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 134

#### **Masoud, Moez**

Moez Masoud is an Egyptian preacher, television and radio presenter, and activist who focuses on the fields of contemporary spirituality, interfaith dialogue, and Islam in the modern world. Masoud has a following of over 25 million on various social media sites, including YouTube videos, Facebook and X. Masoud participated in the post-Tahrir "Egyptian National Dialogue" and has continued that dialogue on socio-political issues in Egypt from within the perspective of traditional Islam.

### IRAQ

#### **Kubaisi, Sheikh Dr Ahmed**

Sheikh Kubaisi is a very popular Sunni cleric and preacher in Iraq. He advocates the end of foreign

occupation in Iraq and the institution of an Islamic state. To this end, he is a spokesperson of the Sunni Ulema Council, an important association of Sunni Muslim scholars in Iraq. Kubaisi has been residing in the UAE for several years and despite health issues continues to be active, and leads prayers that are televised worldwide from the state mosque of Abu Dhabi.

### JORDAN

#### **Keller, Sheikh Nuh**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 135

### SAUDI ARABIA

#### **Al-Arifi, Dr Muhammad**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 135

#### **Al-Qarni, Dr Aaidh**

Dr Aaidh Al-Qarni is a prominent Saudi scholar, author, and activist preacher, best known for his popular self-help book *Don't Be Sad*. Dr Al-Qarni has garnered a substantial following through a preaching career which spans various modes of broadcast media. In 2019 he apologized on Saudi TV for his past preaching, calling his prior understanding of Islam "hardline" and apologizing for his past ties with Qatar. He said that he now agrees with the Islamic understanding of Crown Prince MBS. He has over 20 million followers on social media.

#### **Al-Shugairi, Ahmad**

Al-Shugairi is a televangelist with a huge following around the world. He is at the forefront of a religious revivalist movement that is influencing young people across the Middle East. Best known for his TV programme 'Khawatir' (2005-2015), Al-Shugairi took a break for a number of years before launching 'Seen' in 2021, which is proving to be every bit as successful. With no formal Islamic training and an MBA, his popularity comes from repackaging a balanced understanding of Islam for his throngs of fans of all ages. He has over 56 million fans across social media platforms.

## GHANA

**Sharubutu, Sheikh Dr Osmanu Nuhu**

Sheikh Dr Osmanu Nuhu Sharubutu is an Islamic scholar, National Chief Imam and Grand Mufti of the Republic of Ghana, Eminent Member of the National Peace Council of Ghana and Founder of The SONSETFUND, IPASEC, Sabiilu-Salaam Qurani Memorization Institute and the SONS-NPC (Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu National Peace Conference). Aged 106 years old in 2025, he is still actively working hard and tirelessly on religious, social and educational issues, helping to promote disadvantaged and vulnerable communities in Ghana. This has enabled him to transcend religious boundaries and be respected by all sectors of the country.

## MALI

**Hamahoullah, Mohamed Ould Cheikh**

Mohamed Ould Cheikh Hamahoullah, popularly known as Bouyé Haïdara, is a revered Sufi leader whose influence extends across West Africa. At 85, he continues to guide millions from his *zawiyah* in Nioro du Sahel, Mali. As the heir to the spiritual legacy of his father, Sheikh Hamahoullah, Bouyé Haïdara leads the Hamallism branch of the Tidjane brotherhood, a movement that gained prominence through its resistance to French colonialism. His following, estimated at 5-10 million talibés, testifies to the enduring appeal of Sufi traditions in the region. Bouyé Haïdara's teachings bridge historical anti-colonial sentiment with contemporary spiritual guidance. His influence transcends religious spheres, making him a key figure in Mali's social and political landscape.

## MAURITANIA

**Khairy, Cheikh Ould**

Cheikh Ould Khairy is a spiritual guide and representative of the Tariqah Tijaniyah with thousands of students across Africa and the world. He is also an educator who has inspired many across the world with his teachings and personal practice. In addition to his teaching, he has focused on building mosques, schools and orphanages.

**Bauchi, Sheikh Dahiru Usman**

Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi of the Tijaniyya Sufi order is celebrated for his hundreds of Qur'anic schools which specialise in producing *huffaz* (memorisers) of the Qur'an. His public exegesis of the Qur'an, delivered in Hausa every year during the month of Ramadan, attracts thousands. Additionally, millions of West Africans listen to it on the radio or buy recordings. He has critically engaged with puritanical Islamic schools of thought since the early 1980s. In July 2014, he escaped a suicide bombing attack which killed 23 people.

**Katsina, Sheikh Yakubu Musa**

Sheikh Yakubu Musa Katsina is a popular preacher in Nigeria. He is also the leader of the Izala revivalist sect in Katsina. The Izala, or Jama'at Izalatil Bid'iya wa Iqamatus Sunnah (Movement Against Negative Innovations and for Orthodoxy) is an activist salafi movement that calls for a return to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and a true practice of Islam. His family comes from Katsina, the predominantly Muslim city in northern Nigeria, and he is outspoken against corruption in the country.

**Maqari, Sheikh Professor Ibrahim Ahmad**

Sheikh Maqari completed his studies at Al-Azhar in 1999 and then his doctorate at Bayero University Kano in 2009. He has lectured across Nigeria as a Professor of Arabic and linguistics. Sheikh Maqari has multiple published books and articles in international journals, and is a member of the Assembly of Muslims in Nigeria, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, and Founder of Tazkiyyah Educational Resource Center.

## ZIMBABWE

**Menk, Mufti Ismail Musa**

Dr Ismail Menk is the Mufti of Zimbabwe under the Majlisul Ulama Zimbabwe, an Islamic educational and welfare organisation that caters to the needs of the country's Muslims. Mufti Menk is well-known internationally and is often invited to give lectures. His ability to relate religious principles to contemporary settings has made him particularly influential amongst the Muslim youth. He is humble and affable, endearing himself to those who cross his path. His eloquence, wit and humour are traits loved by many non-Muslims as well. He has more than 35

million followers across social media and his Youtube videos have garnered over half a billion views.

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## Asia

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### INDIA

#### **Azmi, Hazrat Allama Maulana Qamaruzzaman**

Hazrat Allama Maulana Qamaruzzaman Azmi is the Khalifa of the son of Imam Ahmed Raza Khan. A world-renowned scholar and an eloquent speaker, he has inspired and guided millions of followers globally. According to the *Times of India*, he is regarded as one of the most influential Islamic leaders of the modern era. At just 18 years of age, he founded Al-Jameatul-Islamia, which today stands recognised as one of India's leading Islamic universities. For 60 years, he has dedicated his life to building mosques, colleges, universities, and organisations across the world, contributing immensely to the preservation and promotion of Islamic scholarship and education.

#### **Madani, Maulana Syed Arshad**

Maulana Madani is the President of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, a group which strongly opposed the creation of a separate Muslim state of Pakistan. In 2006, Maulana Syed Arshad Madani succeeded his brother, Maulana Syed Asad Madani, but since 2008, the group has been split into two factions. Maulana Arshad is also a noted scholar. He is the Principal of Darul Uloom Deoband and Vice President of All India Muslim Personal Law Board. He also supervises much social work and heads a number of Islamic seminaries and bodies and is an advisor to eight international Islamic schools.

#### **Naik, Dr Zakir Abdul Karim**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 135

#### **Saifuddin, Syedna Mufaddal**

Saifuddin is the 53rd *Dai Al-Mutlaq* ('Unrestricted Missionary') of the Dawoodi Bohra, a subgroup within the Mustaali, Ismaili Shia branch of Islam. He succeeded—but not without dispute—to the office after his father, Syed Mohammed Burhanuddin, passed away in 2014. In 2017, he inaugurated the 14-acre Nairobi campus of Aljamea-tus-Saifiyah, a Dawoodi Bohra institute of higher learning. Kenyan President Kenyatta awarded him the Elder of the

Order of the Golden Heart as a result. He also met Egyptian President El-Sisi in 2016 and donated 10 million EGP to the Long Live Egypt fund. He is the spiritual leader of 2-5 million people living in 100 countries. He is also the Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Miliya Islamia University.

### INDONESIA

#### **Gymnastiar, Abdullah Aa Gym**

Abdullah Gymnastiar, widely known as Aa Gym ('Elder Brother Gym'), rose to national prominence in the early 2000s as one of Indonesia's most beloved Islamic preachers. His warm and practical preaching focused on *Tawheed* (the Oneness of Allah) and *Manajemen Qolbu* ("heart management"), a concept promoting emotional awareness, self-reflection, and inner growth. He gained a wide national following through television, radio, books, and public lectures, and his influence led to invitations from political parties to consider leadership roles. As of 2025, he has more than 20 million followers across social media platforms, continuing to draw attention with messages of faith and sincerity.

#### **Shihab, Quraish**

Quraish Shihab is an Indonesian expert on Qur'anic exegesis who regularly preaches on national television. He is noted as a progressive scholar who teaches Qur'anic exegesis using context and simple language. He is an author of many Islamic books, including *Tafsir Al-Misbah*. He served as Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs in 1998 and also as Chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council since 1984. Shihab was also a director of State Islamic University, Syarif Hidayatullah, 1992-1998. He is a co-founder and active member of the Muslim Council of Elders, working towards world peace. He was awarded a medal for his achievements by Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly in 2020.

### MALAYSIA

#### **Awang, Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi bin**

Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi bin Awang is the current President of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party or PAS. He was recently appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Ambassador to the Middle East with ministerial status. He is also the Vice President of the International Union of Muslim Scholars. He was former Chief Minister of the state of Terengganu in Malaysia from 1999-2004, Member of Parliament

for Marang Terengganu, and a state lawmaker for Rhu Rendang. He has written several books related to democracy and politics in Islam. Awang's Friday morning lectures at Rusila Mosque, Marang, drew thousands of people.

### **MrGlani, Sheikh Dr Mahmoud**

Born in Madinah to a family of Prophetic lineage, Sheikh MrGlani himself belongs to the Shadhili Sufi *tariqah* but strongly emphasizes the need to recognise all authentic Islamic Sunni Sufi *tariqahs* and sheikhs. His teachings emphasize the need to establish love for the Prophet. To this end, he has founded a number of *zawiya*s around the world to re-establish the practice of regular and abundant *dhikr* and *salawaat*. For the past several years, he has been delivering a series of widely attended public lectures titled 'Divine Gifts on the Path to Allah' in major Malaysian cities and universities. He encourages people around the world to rediscover and practise their core human values, to oppose colonial and oppressive thinking, and to espouse mutual respect and tolerance among followers of all the heavenly religions.

## **MYANMAR**

### **Aung, Khalifa U Thein Win**

Gulam Siddique Saraka Ré Wahedi, better known as Khalifa U Thein Win Aung, succeeded his father as the religious leader of KAFTG Garana Organization and Islamic Sufi Tariqah League Myanmar. He studied under teachers in India and Iraq as well as his father. Every year, he actively leads hundreds of religious gatherings across the country serving over 200,000 Myanmar Muslims as a spiritual master. During anti-Muslim riots he helped many of those affected with food and shelter as well as organising meetings with other faith leaders.

## **PAKISTAN**

### **Bukhari, Khanum Tayyaba**

Bukhari is one of very few female religious scholars in Pakistan and has significant influence. She is a sought-after speaker who excels in six languages: Urdu, Arabic, Persian, English, Punjabi, and Sirai-ki. She also has a large following in Europe, North America, and Australia. Ms Bukhari is the founder of Bukhari Relief Foundation, a well-known, non-governmental charitable organisation that helps people all over Pakistan who have been displaced by major natural disasters.

### **Ghamidi, Javed Ahmad**

Javed Ahmad Ghamidi is a Pakistani public intellectual and Qur'an scholar. He is the founder of Al-Mawrid Institute of Islamic Sciences and its sister organisation, Danish Sara. He was a member of the Council of Islamic Ideology and, in 2009, Ghamidi was awarded Sitara-i-Imtiaz, the third highest civilian honour of Pakistan. He appears regularly on TV shows and has a large middle-class professional following.

## **SINGAPORE**

### **Alattas, Syed Hassan bin Muhammad bin Salim**

Syed Hassan, more affectionately known as Habib Hassan, has been a pillar of strength and unity in building religious harmony in Singapore and throughout Southeast Asia. He has condemned acts of terrorism and has been the force behind bringing Islam together with other religions in Singapore. In 2024, Imam Syed Hassan was conferred the second highest national award in Singapore, the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his outstanding contributions to strengthen interfaith harmony and social cohesion in Singapore.

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## *Europe*

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## **ALBANIA**

### **Naçi, Elvis**

Naçi is an Albanian Imam and Director at the Islamic Community of Albania. He is extremely popular in Albania and regularly appears as a guest on talk shows. He also has an active Facebook and Youtube profile. In 2019, he was named Man of the Year by several magazines in Albania.

## **GREECE**

### **Metso, Mufti Djemali**

Mufti Djemali Metso was one of the muftis in Greece's Western Thrace cities of Komotini and Xanthi who were retired compulsorily by the Greek government recently. The Western Thrace region of Greece is home to a Muslim Turkish minority of around 150,000 people, and Mufti Metso had served the community for over 30 years in his capacity as Mufti of Komotini. He still enjoys a close relationship with the community, who look upon him as not

only a mufti but as a spiritual leader.

## TÜRKIYE

### **Haqqani, Sheikh Mehmet Adil**

Sheikh Mehmet Adil Haqqani is the successor and global leader of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, named after the celebrated Sheikh Nazim Al-Haqqani (passed away on 7 May 2014). He is the eldest son of Sheikh Nazim, and was born and raised in Damascus, Syria, while his father was studying there under his own sheikh, Sheikh Abdullah Fa'izi Dagستاني. With an uncanny resemblance to his father, and a soft, humble approach, Sheikh Mehmet is currently teaching and helping thousands of students worldwide.

### **Topbaş, Osman Nuri**

Osman Nuri Topbaş is an author, philanthropist, and spiritual leader of a Naqshbandi Sufi order based in Istanbul. His group is known as Eronkoy (named after the town where he was born) and, like other sufi groups in Türkiye, focuses heavily on charitable work. He has written works on history, literature, religious sciences, and poetry. Translations of his works span 43 languages, including English.

## UNITED KINGDOM

### **Babikir, Sheikh Ahmed**

With his gentle and warm disposition, Sheikh Babikir is a popular figure in the UK. He studied Islamic Sciences in Sudan and is fully authorised in a host of Islamic disciplines, including fiqh, hadith, creed, and Sufism. He holds an undergraduate degree in mathematics and a Masters in Management from the University of London. He has contributed widely to UK society through social, charitable, and educational initiatives. He was the Headmaster of Islamia Primary School for many years, and is currently the Director and Founder of Rumi's Cave, a community hub in West London.

### **Ali, Zeeshan; Dawah, Ali; Hijab, Mohammed & Tzortzis Hamza**

Zeeshan Ali, Ali Dawah, Mohammed Hijab and Hamza Tzortzis are well-known debaters and public speakers who discuss topics such as religion, politics and society on their social media platforms. They directly engage with controversial topics through a da'wah lens, interfaith debates and social commentary, and have garnered millions of online views.

They are part of a new wave of British Muslim voices aiming to defend Islamic beliefs in the digital age, particularly among disaffected or curious youth. Through structured courses with institutes like the Sapience Institute or just through their social media channels like Smile 2 Jannah, they have instilled confidence in young Muslims on how to navigate and address the intellectual and social challenges of modernity.

### **Nakshawani, Ammar**

Dr Sayed Ammar Nakshawani is a prominent Islamic scholar, author, and speaker renowned for his dynamic lectures and scholarly contributions to contemporary Shia thought. A British-Iraqi academic, he holds a PhD in Islamic Studies and has lectured globally on theology, history, and interfaith dialogue, particularly emphasizing the legacy of Ahl al-Bayt. Dr Nakshawani has served as a visiting scholar at institutions like Columbia University and was instrumental in the formation of the Imam Ali Chair for Shia Studies at Hartford Seminary. He has been a vocal advocate for social justice and youth engagement. His accessible approach to Islamic scholarship, combined with his media presence and global outreach, has made him a significant influencer in modern Islamic discourse.

### **Pirzada, Sheikh Muhammad Imdad Hussain**

Sheikh Muhammad Imdad Hussain Pirzada has served the global Muslim community for over half a century. He is a leading voice in literature, education, the training of scholars, and community and charity work. Following his acclaimed 5-volume commentary, *Qur'an: The Sublime Word in Arabic, Urdu and English*, and his 10-volume commentary, *Bukhari: The Sublime Tradition*, for which he was honoured in 2019 at the Imam Bukhari Complex in Samarkand, his latest research is pioneering in the field of leadership and *seerah* literature. Through Jamia Al-Karam, the institution and school he founded in 1985, hundreds of male and female British Muslim scholars have studied under his tutelage, who today serve as imams in more than 150 mosques in major cities as well as chaplains, teachers and community leaders in the UK and across Europe. He is founder of Muslim Charity, a relief and development NGO working in over 17 countries, and he is President of the World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates (UK).

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## North America

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### CANADA

#### **Philips, Dr Abu Ameenah Bilal**

A notable Jamaican-Canadian Muslim convert and Islamic scholar, Dr Bilal Philips is founder of the first accredited Islamic university in India in 2009: Preston International College, Chennai. However, he is most notably the Founder and Chancellor of the Islamic Online University AKA International Open University (iou. edu. gm), which currently has over 450,000 registered students studying accredited English-medium degree courses in Islamic Studies (shariah), Education, Psychology, Banking and Finance, IT and Business Administration, and a BA in Arabic language and literature. The IOU has the distinction of having the most diverse student body of any university in the world. Dr Bilal also reaches mass Muslim audiences through his television appearances on global satellite channels like Peace TV, Huda TV, and Islam Channel as well as through his official Facebook page. He has over ten million social media followers.

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

#### **Alshurafa, Ousama (new)**

Ousama Alshurafa is known for his work on life's purpose and the hereafter within Islamic theology. He is the author of *The Afterlife Manual: Every Muslim's Guide to Happily Ever Hereafter* and founder of Muslim Hub Club, a global platform serving over 150,000 members. Alshurafa combines a diverse academic background with religious scholarship: a bachelor's in biomedical and electrical engineering, a master's from Harvard University, and an *Ijazah* in Qur'anic recitation (*Hafs 'an 'Asim*). His teachings highlight how intentions, faith, and actions shape eternal destiny. Using relatable metaphors such as the "matrix" of choices and perceptions, he connects classical Islamic wisdom to modern challenges. Through books, lectures, podcasts, and courses, he guides global audiences to prioritize spiritual clarity, ethical conduct, and alignment with divine purpose over fleeting worldly pursuits.

#### **Al-Ninowy, Sheikh Dr Muhammad bin Yahya**

Sheikh Dr Muhammad Al-Ninowy is a Syrian-American scholar, author, and medical doctor based in Atlanta, Georgia, whose lineage is traced back to the

Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him). In addition to a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Georgia and a Doctor of Medicine degree, he is a traditionally trained *muhaddith* (scholar of Hadith). He is the founding director of Madina Institute and Seminaries, The Center for Non-Violence and Peace Studies, and the charitable organisation Planet Mercy, with campuses in the USA, Canada, the UK, South Africa, Malaysia, and Norway. Al-Ninowy also leads a Sufi school that follows the Sufism of Ahl-Al-Hadith. He was appointed by the Sultan of Malaysia in 2020 to serve as a member of the board of directors of the Islamic University and also serves as a visiting professor at several universities. An upcoming book is titled *Nonviolence: A Fundamental Islamic Principle*.

#### **Shakir, Imam Zaid**

Imam Zaid Shakir is a senior faculty member and co-founder of Zaytuna College, Berkeley, California, the first accredited Muslim undergraduate college in the USA. Shakir accepted Islam in 1977 while serving in the United States Air Force. He obtained a BA in International Relations and later earned his MA in Political Science. In 2001, he graduated from Syria's Abu Noor University with a BA in Islamic Studies. He is one of America's top Islamic scholars, a voice of conscience, and a compelling force for the improvement of race relations for non-Muslims in America. He co-founded the New Brunswick Islamic Center, formerly Masjid al-Huda in NJ, Masjid Al-Islam in New Haven, CT, and the Lighthouse Mosque, in Oakland, CA. He led the funeral prayer for the late boxing champion and human rights icon, Muhammad Ali. Inspired to work with religious groups on sustainable living and climate change, he is a Green Faith partner in action for the earth.

#### **Suleiman, Imam Omar**

Imam Omar Suleiman is the President of Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research and a professor of Islamic Studies at Southern Methodist University. He started his journey of Islamic learning in the year 2000 and studied in various countries in the Middle East as well as Malaysia. He has become a hugely popular speaker, delivering regular online lectures which have reached millions, as well as writing frequently for various media outlets. In the 2000s, he was noted on a national level as being a strong advocate of community service, interfaith dialogue, and social justice, and was awarded for his outstanding civic achievement by the Mayor and City Council of New Orleans.

### Wahhaj, Imam Siraj

Siraj Wahhaj is Imam of the Al-Taqwa Mosque in Brooklyn, a prolific lecturer, community activist, the leader of the Muslim Alliance in North America, and former Vice President of ISNA. He first became famous for his successful efforts in fighting drugs and crime in his neighbourhood. In 1991, he became the first Muslim to recite the Opening Prayer of the Qur'an (*Al-Fatihah*) at the US House of Representatives. Brooklyn Borough President, Marty Markowitz, proclaimed 15 August, Siraj Wahhaj Day in honour of his "lifetime of outstanding and meaningful achievement".

### Younis, Dr Haifaa

Sheikha Haifaa Younis is the Founder and Chairman of Jannah Institute, an educational platform dedicated to nurturing Islamic knowledge, spirituality, and personal development for women. Through enriching courses, the institute empowers women to deepen their faith and connection with Allah. She currently teaches Year of Knowledge, a full-time foundational Islamic Studies programme, and also conducts individual courses, retreats, and workshops in Irvine, CA. Dr Sheikha Haifaa's passion lies in helping Muslim women take Islamic teachings off the page and into their daily lives. Dr Haifaa is also an American Board Certified Obstetrician and Gynecologist with roots from Iraq. She graduated from the Mecca Institute of Islamic Studies and Al-Huda Qur'an Memorization School (Jeddah) and holds an *ijaza* in Hafs through Asim from Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah.

## Caribbean

### TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

#### Hosein, Sheikh Imran

Sheikh Imran N Hosein is an Islamic scholar specialising in contemporary interpretations of Islamic eschatology. Having given up his career as a diplomat in 1985 to dedicate his life to the mission of Islam, Sheikh Imran is a tireless missionary who often travels for two to three years at a time in the cause of Islam and calls for Muslims to retreat to faith-based eco-villages until such time as Imam Mahdi appears. He is also a commentator on international monetary economics, and advocates the establishment of free-markets and currency with intrinsic value as a means of savings and aversion of a pending collapse

of the "world of paper money". He has very popular videos on YouTube with millions of views, especially related to eschatology, politics, and the economy.

## South America

### BRAZIL

#### Hammadeh, Sheikh Jihad

Sheikh Jihad Hammadeh has a long history of contributions to dawah in Brazil. He is the religious adviser to ANAJI—the National Association of Islamic Jurists. His educational background includes a theological course at the Islamic University of Madinah, a bachelors in history and a masters in social communication. Besides being Vice President of the Uniao Nacional das Entidades Islamicas, he presides over two other Islamic institutions. He regularly appears on national TV in Brazil and other media outlets speaking about Islam and has also worked as a consultant for two Brazilian soap operas on the theme of Muslims and Muslim-majority countries.



Al-Tahrim 66, 11

My Lord, build for me a home near You in Paradise

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# PHILANTHROPY, CHARITY & DEVELOPMENT

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### IRAQ

#### **Al-Khoei, Sayyed Jawad**

Sayyed Jawad Al-Khoei is the head of the Dar Al-Ilm religious seminary of the Al-Khoei Institute in Najaf, Iraq, a leading center that integrates traditional Islamic seminary education with contemporary interfaith dialogue initiatives. Sayyed Jawad Al-Khoei pursued his early Islamic studies at the Hawza of Qom, Iran, before returning to Najaf in 2003 to continue his education. He holds a bachelor's degree from the University for Islamic Studies in London (2008) and a master's degree in Islamic theology from the University of Islamic Studies in Amman. In addition to his role at the Al-Khoei Institute, Sayyed Jawad Al-Khoei serves as the UNESCO Chair for the Development of Interreligious Dialogue Studies in the Islamic World at the University of Kufa. As a researcher in Islamic Affairs, Sayyed Jawad has authored various studies and articles on religious minorities in Iraq and the need for intra and interfaith dialogue.

### JORDAN

#### **HM Queen Rania Al-Abdullah**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 135

### LEBANON

#### **Al-Sadr, Rabab**

Rabab al-Sadr Charafeddine is the current president of the Imam al-Sadr Foundation, established in 1962 by her brother, Imam Musa al-Sadr. The foundation focuses on empowering marginalized communities, particularly women and orphans, through education, vocational training, and healthcare services. Born in 1944, in Qom, Iran, Rabab moved to Lebanon at the age of 15 where she pursued a doctorate in philosophy with a dissertation on "The Practical Philosophy of Imam Musa al-Sadr." In 2017, she was honored with the Grand Cross of the Order of Malta for her

humanitarian efforts. She remains a vocal advocate for interfaith dialogue and social justice, emphasizing the importance of moral values, ethics, and citizenship in her work.

### QATAR

#### **HH Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser Al-Missned**

Her Highness Sheikha Moza is the mother of the current Emir of Qatar, and Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. The Foundation has brought some of the leading US university programmes to Qatar. It also promotes international research, and provides scholarships around the world. Sheikha Moza also serves as the President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs and is Vice Chairperson of both the Supreme Education Council and the Supreme Health Council. She plays a very active role in promoting a wide range of issues at home, in the Gulf region, and internationally.

### SAUDI ARABIA

#### **AbuSulayman, Muna**

Muna AbuSulayman was the first Saudi woman to become an iconic TV personality and is internationally recognised as a leader in the fields of philanthropy, media and social impact. She is one of the founding co-hosts of the social issues show 'Kalam Nawaem', which was ranked number one across the Arab World for eleven years in a row. She was also chosen as the first Saudi UN Goodwill Ambassador for the UNDP as well as a Young Global Leader at the World Economic Forum in the same year while managing one of the largest Muslim foundations. AbuSulayman has successfully launched, managed, and scaled multiple businesses and is running a Social Impact investment fund and consultancy that focuses on finding "Big Ideas that Work" to solve problems in education, gender inequalities, sustainability and social cohesion.

#### **Al-Jasser, Dr Muhammad Sulaiman**

Dr Al-Jasser assumed office as Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank Group in 2021. He has

held a multitude of senior positions in Saudi Arabia and since January 2022 has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Regional Center of Quality and Excellence in Education–UNESCO. Dr Al-Jasser holds a PhD in economics and a Master's degree in economics from the University of California and a Bachelor's degree in economics with honours from San Diego State University. Dr Al-Jasser has received several medals and awards, most notably the King Abdul Aziz Medal of the First Order in 2001 and Senegal's most prestigious National Order of the Lion in January 2023.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

### **Al-Ghurair, Abdul-Aziz (new)**

Abdul Aziz Al-Ghurair is a UAE-based philanthropist and businessman. Chairman of Mashreq Bank and founder of the Abdul Aziz Al-Ghurair Refugee Education Fund, he has committed millions towards education initiatives for displaced youth in the Arab world. He is a leading voice for strategic philanthropy in the region, emphasizing impact, innovation, and scalability. His work reflects a deep commitment to humanitarian values and regional stability through education.

### **Al-Qasimi, Sheikha Bodour (new)**

Sheikha Bodour bint Sultan Al-Qasimi is a prominent Emirati philanthropist, publisher, and cultural leader. As founder of Kalimat Foundation and Kalimat Publishing Group, she champions children's literacy, inclusive education, and publishing access, particularly for visually impaired youth. She has also served as President of the International Publishers Association, the first Arab woman to hold the post, advocating for freedom to publish and global literacy equity.

### **HH Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi**

Sheikh Sultan is the Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah. He had the educational vision to start University City in 1997, which includes the American University of Sharjah, the University of Sharjah, and other colleges. Since, his vision has inspired neighbouring emirates and countries to emulate his endeavour to bring world-class university education to the region. He is known for his philanthropic activities and has endowed chairs for Arabic and Islamic studies in Western universities (e.g. Exeter University). He is a great promoter of the arts and culture, with Sharjah boasting 16 galleries and museums, and he is also an

accomplished poet, writer and academic.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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## CHAD

### **Taha, Houssein Brahim**

Houssein Brahim Taha is the 12th Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the world's second-largest intergovernmental organisation after the United Nations. Taha's diverse experience includes a stint as Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2017, providing him with valuable insights into international relations. As the ex-officio Chancellor of the Islamic University of Technology, he also plays a crucial role in advancing Islamic education and technological development. Taha's leadership of the OIC places him at the forefront of addressing key issues facing the Muslim world, from political conflicts to economic development.

## SOUTH AFRICA

### **Sooliman, Dr Imtiaz Ismail**

Sooliman is the founder of Gift of the Givers Foundation. It is the largest disaster relief organisation of African origin on the African continent. His organisation has delivered over \$248 million in aid to 45 countries around the world. The organisation has also designed and developed the world's first and largest containerized mobile hospital, which has been deployed in Bosnia. It also runs 24 development projects in South Africa and Malawi. He was awarded South Africa's Order of the Baobab for distinguished service in April 2010. In 2016, he received the Global Citizen Award from Henley and Partners in London and has received ten honorary doctorates.

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## *Asia*

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## INDIA

### **Premji, Azim**

Premji is an Indian business tycoon and philanthropist who was the Chairman of Wipro Limited, a leader in the software industry, and remains non-executive director of the board. In 2011, he was awarded Padma Vibhushan, the second highest

civilian award by the Government of India. In 2013, he signed the Giving Pledge, agreeing to give away at least half of his wealth and has given away billions in charity since then. The Azim Premji Foundation supports programmes that reach more than 2.5 million children.

### **Qasmi, Maulana Badruddin Ajmal**

Maulana Badruddin Ajmal is a prominent Indian businessman who runs the Ajmal Group of Companies, which sells attar perfume, oils, and textiles. He is a proponent and member of various social service organisations and is also a scholar of Islam, having studied at the Darul Uloom Deoband. Qasmi is also a politician who founded the Assam United Democratic Front political party. He is noted for his contributions to charitable hospitals, orphanages, and educational institutions, including a women's science college.

## **MALAYSIA**

### **Al-Bukhary, Syed Mokhtar**

Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary is one of the richest Malaysians. He owns a variety of companies including the Malaysian Mining Corporation, a behemoth that has been awarded multiple, multi-billion dollar projects. In 2020 he was awarded a 5G contract from the government, showing his political connections. He has established many humanitarian projects including rebuilding the lives of Afghan refugees, helping Pakistan's tsunami victims, and establishing an AIDS hospital in Uganda. He also supports many educational foundations and is the Founder of Albukhary Group of Companies.

## **PAKISTAN**

### **Rizvi, Professor Dr Adibul Hasan**

Dr Rizvi is one of Pakistan's leading humanitarians, having established the largest free health organisation in Pakistan. He works as a doctor and an administrator at SIUT in Karachi, which was founded in 1971 as an eight-bed unit but is now the largest health organisation in Pakistan. SIUT provides free and comprehensive services in urology, nephrology, transplantation, and liver-related diseases. He is the recipient of many awards for his life's work.

## **SINGAPORE**

### **Faizal, Mohamed**

Mohamed Faizal Mohamed Abdul Kadir serves on the Supreme Court of Singapore, where he is the first Muslim to be appointed to the Bench in several decades. He has served in various national capacities, including on the MUIS Appeal Board, and his contributions to public service and community development have been recognised through awards. On the international front, he was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. He is the first, and to date, only Asia-Pacific individual to be conferred the International Outstanding Leadership Award by the Association of Conflict Resolution, and was also named International Mediator of the Year by the UK Civil Mediation Council and the College of Mediators. A graduate of the National University of Singapore and Harvard Law School, he was appointed Senior Counsel in 2020, the first and only Muslim in Singapore to hold this distinction.

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## *Europe*

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## **UNITED KINGDOM**

### **El-Banna, Dr Hany**

Dr El-Banna is the founder of Islamic Relief, the largest Western-based international Muslim relief and development NGO. Established in 1984, the organisation provides assistance in over 45 countries worldwide. HM the late Queen Elizabeth honoured El-Banna's work, giving him an OBE for his services to the community. In 2015, Islamic Relief signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Union to tackle poverty in the continent.

### **Ismail, Sufyan**

Sufyan Gulam Ismail is an award-winning Entrepreneur and Philanthropist who retired from full-time business at the age of 38 to tackle Islamophobia. He is the founder of MEND and various other grass roots Islamophobia organisations which play a crucial role in protecting and preserving Islam and Muslims, both in the UK and internationally. Sufyan also part-authorised a text book on Islamic Finance which is taught in UK universities. Aside from his philanthropy, Sufyan oversees a Global Venture Capital business which specialises in Artificial Intelligence, Media, Sustainability, Carbon Credits, and more.

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### EGYPT

#### **Karam, Dr Azza**

Dr Azza Karam is President and CEO of Lead Integrity, the first multi-faith-inspired and women-led international management consultancy, with a Database of expertise on human rights, sustainable development, humanitarian relief, business and media. She served as the Secretary General of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (2019 to 2023). Prior international service includes nearly two decades at the United Nations (UNDP and UNFPA) where she founded and coordinated a UN Inter-agency Task Force on Religion and Diplomacy after serving as Coordinator of the Arab Human Development Reports. She is affiliated with the Ansari Institute of Religion and Global Affairs at Notre Dame University (USA), after serving as Professor of Religion and Sustainable Development at Amsterdam's Vrije Universiteit (The Netherlands). She was awarded an Honorary Degree by John Cabot University in 2022.

### IRAN

#### **Ebadi, Shirin**

Shirin Ebadi is a lawyer who, in 2003, became the first Iranian to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She is the founder of Children's Rights Support Association and has defended and supported the rights of children and women. Ebadi lectures about the human rights situation in Iran and espouses a liberal view of Islam appreciated by many Muslim feminists. Since the presidential elections of 2009, she has been forced to live in exile (in London) while her husband is barred from travelling out of Iran.

#### **Marandi, Professor Seyed Mohammad (new)**

Professor Seyed Mohammad Marandi is an Iranian academic and media commentator, known for his articulate defense of Iranian geopolitical positions in Western and international media. As a professor at the University of Tehran, his work spans literature, postcolonial studies, and political analysis. Frequently interviewed on major international outlets, he

provides an alternative narrative to dominant Western discourses on Iran, often spotlighting Western double standards. His commentaries and insights continued during the war against Iran and his calm demeanour and clear explanations have made him a leading voice defending Palestinian rights.

### IRAQ

#### **Taher, Dr Muhammad (new)**

Dr Taher's selfless work as part of the European medical team in Gaza went beyond the call of duty. Not only did he perform over 290 surgeries and treat more than 1,100 injured Palestinians under extreme conditions of scarcity and danger, but he also exemplified resilience, compassion, and dedication under the most difficult circumstances. Dr Taher, an Iraqi surgeon, became widely recognised in 2024–2025 for his extraordinary service as part of a European medical mission to Gaza during the ongoing humanitarian crisis. His work was marked by unwavering dedication, compassion, and professionalism in the face of airstrikes and medical shortages. Dr Taher's efforts not only saved lives, but also stood as a testament to the moral responsibility of medical professionals to serve humanity beyond borders and politics.

### MOROCCO

#### **Soufi, Nawal**

Nawal Soufi won the UAE 'Arab Hope Maker' Prize in 2017 and was awarded 1 million AED for her dedication to the cause of helping refugees. She arranged rescue missions for Syrian refugees fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea.

### PALESTINE

#### **Abuelaish, Dr Izzeldin**

Izzeldin Abuelaish is a Palestinian physician and internationally recognised peace and human rights activist devoted to advancing health and educational opportunities for women and girls in the Middle East. He is also known for using health as a vehicle for peace. Dr Abuelaish's book, *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey*—the story of his loss of his three daughters, Bessan, Mayar, and Aya, and their cousin Noor to Israeli shelling in 2009 and

his subsequent transformation—has achieved critical acclaim. Published in 2010 and translated into 17 languages, the book has become an international best seller. It is a testament to his commitment to forgiveness as the solution to conflict, and the catalyst towards peace. He has received a number of national and international awards for his work, including The Public Peace Prize in 2014.

#### **Abu Sarah, Aziz**

Aziz Abu Sarah is a Palestinian activist who is globally recognised for his work on peace and conflict resolution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He is a former Executive Director of the Centre for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. He was named as National Geographic Explorer in 2011, and a TED fellow in 2014. He was the First Intercultural Innovation Award winner, an award issued in partnership by the UNAOC and BMW. Aziz has published articles at *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Alarabiya*, *National Geographic* and others. His book, *Crossing Boundaries, a Traveler's Guide to World Peace*, was published in 2020.

#### **Al-Faqih, Judge Kholoud**

Faqih made history when she became the first female shariah judge in the Middle East (in Ramallah, Palestine). She has travelled internationally to speak about her struggles in succeeding in a male-dominated field, and has become an inspiration to many women outside the Middle East as well. She ranked number ten in the 100 Most Powerful Arab Women in 2012 by *CEO Middle East* and *Arabian Business* magazines. An award-winning documentary, *The Judge*, was made about her life in 2018.

#### **Al-Hroub, Hanan**

A school teacher from occupied Palestine who won The Global Teacher Prize in 2016, Hanan Al-Hroub started teaching traumatized Palestinian children who had faced violence, or whose parents had been shot in front of them. Hanan Al-Hroub instilled confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to live a normal childhood in her students. She published a book entitled *Play and Learn* that includes educational games that help children overcome the challenges they face.

#### **Tamimi, Ahed**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 136

## **QATAR**

#### **Al-Muftah, Ghanim**

Ghanim Al-Muftah is the embodiment of “Impossible is Nothing”. He was born with a caudal regression syndrome, a condition affecting the development of his lower spine. He has not let this affect his attitude to life and displays tremendous character in engaging in his interests and activities. He is a successful entrepreneur and motivational speaker, enjoying the following of over ten million people on social media and more than one billion views on his YouTube channel. At the 2022 football World Cup, Ghanim was appointed Qatar’s brand ambassador, and goodwill ambassador. He kicked-off the event by reciting from the Holy Qur’an and then went on to call for the world to embrace unity and diversity. In an iconic moment, he shared the stage with Morgan Freeman.

#### **HH Sheikha Aisha bint Faleh bin Nasser Al-Thani**

Sheikha Aisha Al-Thani is the Founder of the Doha Academy and Board Member of Reach Out to Asia, Qatar. She is also a member of the Qatar Supreme Education Council, the highest education authority in Qatar. She is a modernist development thinker who promotes a more pronounced and well-judged engagement with people of faith. Sheikha Aisha’s perspective resonates with the more concerted efforts by humanitarian organisations to look at the networks of people of faith as a solution to practical development problems.

#### **Al-Thani, Dr Abdulla bin Ali**

Dr Abdulla bin Ali Al-Thani is the President of the Hamad Bin Khalifa University in the State of Qatar, and is Chairman of the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE). Dr Abdullah, a member of Qatar’s ruling family and a former university professor, is the man at the centre of many of Qatar’s educational initiatives, and is leading the way to transform Qatar’s education system.

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

#### **Badawi, Samar**

Samar Badawi is a Saudi Arabian human rights activist. She has been arrested several times, imprisoned and been subject to a travel ban. She has campaigned for women driving, women voting and other women and human rights issues. She has received international recognition for her activism. Her arrest in 2018, alongside fellow activist Nassima Al-Sadah,

prompted a defence from Canada and then a response from Saudi Arabia leading to a major diplomatic falling out between the two countries. She was released from prison in June 2021.

#### **Al-Hathloul, Loujain**

Loujain Al-Hathloul is a leading Saudi women's rights activist known for defying the kingdom's driving ban and challenging the male guardianship system. Arrested in 2018, she spent over 1,000 days in detention, where she was subjected to torture according to her family and rights groups. In December 2020, she was sentenced to five years and eight months for "agitating for change," though conditionally released in February 2021. Despite her official travel ban expiring in 2023, authorities continue to block her from leaving Saudi Arabia. She remains a global symbol of resilience and reform.

### **UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

#### **Al-Ameri, Khalid**

Khalid Al-Ameri is a content creator with over 17 million followers on his social media platforms and over 2 billion views on his YouTube channel. His videos showcase humanitarian efforts as well global multiculturalism with the aim of promoting better understanding and harmony. Many of his videos have also looked at aspects of family life and love.

#### **Barakat, Maha**

Maha Barakat is Assistant Minister for Health and Life Sciences, UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She is Director-General of the recently established Front-line Heroes Office, which aims to support all front-line workers in the UAE. She also serves as the Board Chair of the RBM Partnership to End Malaria, having previously been the Director General of the Health Authority Abu Dhabi from 2013-2018. Prior to that she worked at the Imperial College London Diabetes Centre which she founded in Abu Dhabi. She was awarded an OBE in 2010 and given the Imperial College Medal in 2013. An outstanding academic with a PhD from Cambridge University, she serves on various boards and committees related to research and development issues in the medical field.

#### **Mattar, Dr Maryam**

Dr Maryam Mattar is Director General of the Community Development Authority (CDA), a newly launched Dubai government authority that takes responsibility for setting up and developing

frameworks for social development. She is also the founder and Executive Director of two non-profit civil associations: UAE Down's Syndrome Association and UAE Genetic Diseases Association. She has also initiated several national community outreach programmes such as UAE Free of Thalassaemia by 2012 and established a number of wellness centres. She received the Arab Women's Pioneer Award for Health Innovation 2019.

### **YEMEN**

#### **Karman, Tawakkol**

Karman was one of three women jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011. She is a Yemeni journalist and activist who has regularly led protests against the government. Over the past several years, she has campaigned for the release of political prisoners and advocated freedom of expression and other human rights. These activities have caused her to be jailed several times. She has repeatedly called for an end to US drone strikes in Yemen. More recently, she has spoken out against both the Houthi coup and the "Saudi-UAE occupation" of Yemen. Much of her work is done through the Tawakkol Karman Foundation.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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### **GAMBIA, THE**

#### **Bensouda, Fatou**

Bensouda has been serving as the Gambian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom since 3 August 2022. She is the former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, being the first African woman to hold such a position. She was the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor from 2012-2021, after having served as Deputy Prosecutor in charge of the Prosecutions Division of the ICC since 2004. She is the former Attorney General and Minister of Justice of The Gambia. In September 2020, the Trump administration named Bensouda a "specially designated national" forbidding all US persons and companies from doing business with her. The Biden administration revoked this in 2021.

# UN World Interfaith Harmony Week

[www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com](http://www.worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com)

In September 2010, His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan proposed a World Interfaith Harmony Week at the Plenary session of the 65th United Nations General Assembly in New York. This was a call to establish a week every year where people of all faiths, and those of no faith, would promote the message of *'Love of God, and Love of the neighbour'*, or *'Love of the Good, and Love of the Neighbour'*. The Draft Resolution for the World Interfaith Harmony Week was later written and presented by HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Chief Advisor to King Abdullah II for Religious and Cultural Affairs and Personal Envoy of King Abdullah II, before the United Nations General Assembly where it was unanimously adopted on 20 October 2010.

UN Resolution A/65/PV. 34; the World Interfaith Harmony Week, as it is called, recognises the first week of February of every year as a time when people of all faiths, and those of no faith, work together to promote and celebrate religious and cultural understanding and cooperation, to address each other in favourable terms drawn from their own traditions and to accept and respect 'the other' based on the foundations of *'Love of God, and Love of the Neighbour'*, or *'Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbour'*. Remarkably the World Interfaith Harmony Week excludes no one and includes and unites everyone.



## The HM King Abdullah II World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize

The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan established the World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize in 2013 to recognise the three best events or texts organised during the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week (first week of February) which best promote the goals of the World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Prizes are awarded to each event or text that is judged to have been most successful in promoting interfaith harmony and impacting religious understanding. Since 2014, this prize has been known as the King Abdullah II World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize. The prizes are:

- |        |                            |
|--------|----------------------------|
| First  | \$5,000 and a gold medal   |
| Second | \$3,000 and a silver medal |
| Third  | \$1,000 and a bronze medal |

In 2023, 1,065 events held in over 50 countries were registered on the site. They were arranged by groups as diverse as government agencies, social groups, schools, private individuals and of course the numerous interfaith organisations that exist worldwide.

In 2023 the winners were, first prize, Ethiopia Interfaith Forum for Development Dialogue and Action (EIFDDA), Ethiopia; second prize, Cross-cultural Ministry of Kolding Deanery in cooperation with the Office of Migrant Cooperation and Encounter with Other Religions of the Haderslev Diocese, Denmark; joint third prize, Afrogivenness Movement & Positive Youth Africa, Cameroon; and joint third prize, Oxford Interfaith Forum, UK



## GHANA

### **Ibrahim, Sheikh Mustapha**

Sheikh Mustapha Ibrahim is a religious scholar who has written over 20 books. He is among the few Islamic scholars in Ghana who have had the benefits of both classical Islamic training (the madrasah study circle) and the modern secular model. He founded the Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services (ICODEHS) in 1996 to help reduce the high level of poverty in society and empower the less privileged. In collaboration with several partner NGOs in the Arab and Muslim world, ICODEHS' humanitarian footprints have spread throughout Ghana and into 12 other countries in West Africa.

## MALAWI

### **Chabulika, Sheikh Dinala**

Sheikh Chabulika is the Muslim Association of Malawi's spokesperson. He is known as an Islamic rights activist and has taken it upon himself to present the need to address social issues as religious duties. Chabulika works on health and exploitation issues as well as building bridges with non-Muslims in Malawi. He also fought against the forced teaching of religious texts to school children.

## NIGER

### **Mindaoudou, Dodo Aichatou**

Mindaoudou is a former Nigerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation, and African Integrity. She has served the government since the mid-1990s and is also the former Secretary-General for the Network for Rural Law. Ms Mindaoudou has written extensively about economic development and women's issues. She is one of the most senior-level women politicians in West Africa having been the UN Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire, Head of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) from 2013-2017 and in 2020 she was appointed co-chair by the World Health Organization (WHO) of an independent commission to investigate claims of abuse by aid workers.

## NIGERIA

### **Ashafa, Imam Muhammad**

Imam Ashafa is the Co-director of the Muslim-Christian Interfaith Mediation Centre in the city of Kaduna (Northern Nigeria), a leading task force that

resolves conflicts across the country. He works with Christian Pastor James Wuye to promote peace between religions. Previously, both leaders encouraged hatred of others, but they changed their ways after being injured and affected by inter-religious violence. Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa have gained a worldwide audience and intense interest in their story by speaking about their successful work in resolving conflicts. In April 2013, they were awarded the first prize in the World Interfaith Harmony Week by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan. In 2025, Wuye and Ashafa were awarded the first Commonwealth Peace Prize.

### **Mohammed, Amina (new)**

Amina J. Mohammed serves as the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, a role she has held since 2017. A former Nigerian Minister of Environment, she continues to champion global sustainable development, climate action, and women's rights. In 2025, she played a key role in advancing the UN's mid-term review of the Sustainable Development Goals and promoting climate finance commitments for vulnerable nations. Widely respected for her diplomatic skill, Mohammed bridges diverse political and cultural divides to build consensus on pressing global challenges. She remains one of the most influential Muslim women in international governance today.

## SENEGAL

### **Kane, Zeinaba**

Zeinaba Kane is the President of Women of the Rassemblement Islamique du Sénégal (Alwahda), the largest Islamic organisation in Senegal, having over 40 Islamic associations operating within it. Kane works on the improvement of living conditions for rural women in Senegal. She has written many articles and is frequently interviewed by the media.

## SOMALIA

### **Dayib, Faduma**

Dayib is a development expert and a social change activist. In 2016, defying many death threats, she became the first woman to run for President of Somalia. Despite pulling out at the last minute, she has nevertheless raised awareness on the monumental roles Somali women continue to play in peacebuilding and statebuilding since independence. Born in Kenya to illiterate parents, she did not learn to read and write

until she was 14. At 17, she moved to Finland and completed two masters degrees before winning a fellowship to study public administration at Harvard.

### **Elmi, Asha Haji**

Asha Haji Elmi is a peace activist and a former member of the Federal Parliament of Somalia. In 2008, she won the Right Livelihood Award (known as the alternative Nobel Prize). She is an activist for women's rights and formed the Six Clan 125 movement when women were excluded from the peace process in Somalia that involved the five traditional clans. Elmi is also the founder of Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) and campaigns internationally against female genital mutilation in Somalia and in other areas of Africa.

## **SOMALILAND**

### **Ismail, Dr Edna Adan**

At the age of 85, in 2023, Dr Edna Adan Ismail was awarded the Templeton Prize in recognition of her decades-long work in humanitarian work and in health care. A nurse and midwife by profession, she has been a tireless healthcare advocate for women in her region, campaigning especially against FGM. She was the First Lady of Somalia, as the wife of Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, Prime Minister of a united Somalia in the late 1960s and also served as the Director of the Ministry of Health. In 1991 Somaliland separated from Somalia, reclaimed its sovereignty and the independence it had gained from Britain in 1960, prior to merging with former Italian Somalia. Since 1991, the Republic of Somaliland is peaceful and stable and has a functioning democratically elected government which is where Dr Edna Adan Ismail served as Somaliland's Foreign Minister between 2002 and 2006, and, at the same time, has founded the Edna Adan University and hospital in 2002 in the capital city of Hargeisa, Somaliland. The hospital has become a major referral hospital as well as a teaching hospital which has significantly improved maternity care, thus reducing maternal morbidity and mortality in one of the poorest countries in the world.

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

### **Pandor, Naledi**

Naledi Pandor is a distinguished South African politician, educator, and academic who gained international prominence for her role in advocating for an

International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation into alleged war crimes in Gaza. She called for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to be held accountable and potentially face an arrest warrant. Pandor has been a Member of Parliament (MP) for the African National Congress (ANC) since 1994 and has held several high-profile ministerial positions. These include Minister of International Relations and Cooperation (2019-2024), Minister of Higher Education and Training (2018-2019), Minister of Science and Technology (2014-2018), Minister of Home Affairs (2012-2014), and Minister of Education (2004-2009). Pandor converted to Islam during her university years upon marrying her husband, Sharif Joseph Pandor.

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## *Asia*

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## **AFGHANISTAN**

### **Joya, Malalai**

Malalai is a well-known activist, writer, and a former politician from Afghanistan. She was a Parliamentarian in the National Assembly of Afghanistan, later to be dismissed for publicly condemning the Afghan Parliament. She was the first ever to speak against the democratically elected Karzai administration and its western supporters, specifically the United States. She is renowned for her attempts to teach women and girls to read and write in the refugee camp where she resided during the Soviet-Afghan war. She fled Afghanistan after the Taliban took over and is now taking refuge in Spain.

### **Samar, Dr Sima**

Dr Sima Samar is a medical doctor who lived as a refugee for over a decade. She established the Shuhada Clinic to provide health care for fellow Afghan women refugees in Pakistan. Upon her return to Afghanistan she served as Minister of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan (2001 to 2003). She has established an institute of higher education and carries on human rights work both nationally and internationally. She was State Minister for Human Rights and International Relations in Afghanistan before the ministry was dissolved in 2020. Her Book *Outspoken: My Fight for Freedom and Human Rights in Afghanistan*, was long-listed for the 2024 Moore Prize.

## BANGLADESH

### Hossain, Dr Hameeda

Dr Hossain has published many books and articles relating to human rights and women's issues in Bangladesh and around the world. She is a founding member of Ain o Salish Kendra, a legal aid and human rights organisation. She received the Bangladesh Development Initiative's (BDI) Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021.

### Sultana, Razia

Razia Sultana is a Bangladeshi lawyer and human rights activist who has worked tirelessly for the Rohingya people. She interviewed hundreds of Rohingya women and published their accounts of sexual violence by the Burmese security forces. She is a coordinator of the Free Rohingya Coalition (FRC) and a director of the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO). She won the International Women of Courage Award 2019.

## CHINA

### Tohti, Ilham

Ilham Tohti is the most renowned Uyghur public intellectual in the People's Republic of China. For over two decades he has worked tirelessly to foster dialogue and understanding between Uyghurs and Chinese. Frequently harassed and arrested, in 2014 he was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of separatism. Much of the evidence against him included his teaching materials and interviews with foreign journalists. For his work in the face of adversity he was awarded the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award (2014), the Martin Ennals Award (2016), the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize (2019), and the Sakharov Prize (2019). Current reports estimate over a million Uyghurs have been detained in internment camps undergoing 're-education' and forced abortions and sterilization as the intensity of the Chinese crackdown on Muslim practice in the eastern region continues.

## INDIA

### Khan, Dr Saniyasnain

Saniyasnain Khan is the son of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan and a prolific author of children's books. He is best known for establishing Goodword Books in 1996. To date, he has written over 100 children's books, primarily focused on Islamic themes. His

works have gained international recognition and have been translated into numerous languages. Goodword's Qur'an translations are available in over 50 languages, with more than 15 million copies distributed worldwide, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Additionally, Khan serves as a trustee of CPS International, an organisation dedicated to promoting peace and spirituality.

## INDONESIA

### Siradj, Professor KH Said Aqil

Professor Siradj served as the Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman from 2010 to the end of 2021. He had previously served on Indonesia's National Commission for Human Rights and was a strong advocate for minority rights. He has an extensive academic background in the Islamic sciences and regards education as a tool for development. He founded the Said Aqil Centre in Egypt, a study centre that focuses on developing Islamic discourse, particularly in the Arab World. He is involved in various organisations addressing social and religious issues.

## MALAYSIA

### Anwar, Zainah

Zainah Anwar co-founded two ground-breaking women's groups to promote the rights of women living in Muslim contexts. She is the Co-Founder and Director of Musawah: A Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family. Prior to this, she founded and was Executive Director of Sisters in Islam, an organisation committed to gender issues and increasing respect for women. She is also a journalist who has contributed to the *New Straits Times* and *The Star*—the country's two main newspapers—and has written a book about Islam in Malaysia. She addressed the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos and delivered a keynote address at Harvard University titled 'Islam, Human Rights, and Activism'. *Newsweek* and *The Daily Beast* named Anwar one of the 150 women 'Who Shake the World'.

## NEPAL

### Siddiqui, Mohammadi

Mohammadi Siddiqui is a pioneering female Muslim politician, social worker, and human rights activist. She established the Fatima Foundation in 2003 to ensure Muslim women's rights on two related fronts: the personal daily struggle of women against

discrimination, and the social and legal practices that influence women's independence and access to basic rights. The foundation organises Muslim women's groups and works with religious scholars and women leaders to educate women and raise awareness of their rights in order to advocate for the practice of actual Islamic law and ensure social justice for women. The foundation also publishes books and translations of the Qur'an in the local language and provides services to the victims of domestic violence.

## PAKISTAN

### **Mazari, Muniba**

Muniba Mazari also known as the 'Iron Lady of Pakistan' is a prominent artist, a global motivational speaker, humanitarian, disability rights advocate, Pakistan's first wheelchair-bound female TV host, model and goodwill ambassador to UN Women Pakistan. Mazari derives her strength from a tragic car crash that took place in February 2008 when she was 21 that left her paralyzed from the waist down. Despite facing immense challenges, she refused to let her disability define her and embarked on an extraordinary journey of resilience and determination. Muniba Mazari serves as a powerful symbol of strength, courage, and resilience. Through her art, activism, motivational speaking, and television hosting, she continues to inspire people worldwide, demonstrating that disabilities cannot hinder one's spirit and capacity to achieve greatness.

### **Yousafzai, Malala**

Yousafzai's rise to prominence began tragically when the Taliban shot her in a school bus for encouraging girls to go to school in Swat. After the assassination attempt, Malala was flown to England, where she recovered and continued her schooling. She received high-profile support for her campaign to ensure that all children worldwide be schooled. In 2013, Yousafzai addressed the UN, received the prestigious Sakharov Prize, and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, which she co-received in 2014 at the age of 17, thereby becoming its youngest-ever recipient. She has been granted audiences with royalty and world leaders, and this along with her high-profile international exposure has led some in her native Pakistan to question whether she has overreached. Now graduated from Oxford University, books published and contracts from media companies, her global profile continues to rise.

## PHILIPPINES

### **Rasul-Bernardo, Amina**

Amina Rasul-Bernardo, an advocate for peace and democracy, is President and co-founder of the Philippine Centre for Islam and Democracy (PCID) and a columnist with *Business World*. Appointed Director of the Mindanao Development Authority, she was a member of the cabinet of former President Fidel V Ramos, former Commissioner for Women, former Director of the Development Bank of the Philippines, and Director of the Philippine National Oil Corporation. She led the organisation of the National Ulama Conference of the Philippines and the Noorus Salam (Light of Peace), a national network of female scholars and Muslim women civil society leaders. She also led the development of an Islamic Model for Peace Education for Mindanao. The UN Act for Peace Programme named her the Mindanao Peace Champion in 2010. In 2013, she won second place in the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize and in 2023 won the Intercultural Achievement Award in Austria.

## SINGAPORE

### **Izzuddin, Dr Mustafa**

Dr Mustafa Izzuddin's decades of voluntary leadership have churned out a range of sustainable socio-cultural programmes as well as being a leading voice in interfaith bridge-building. His foundation champions educational causes, including scholarships to university students. Izzuddin is also an academic with hundreds of published writings and presentations done in relation to Southeast Asia, and the nexus between Islam and International Relations. He became the first Singaporean to be designated an ASEAN Fulbright Fellow by the US State Department, and remains the only Singaporean to be awarded the prestigious fellowship on civilizational dialogue by ICESCO. He was presented with the national appreciation plaque by the President of Singapore for his services.

### **Yacob, HE Halimah**

Halimah Yacob became Singapore's eighth, and first female, President in September 2017. She decided against running for a second term in the September 2023 elections. As President she promoted initiatives for supporting a cohesive society, strengthening interfaith and recognising all workers who contribute to Singapore's growth. She has a strong international

profile, regularly meeting world leaders. She entered politics in 2001 and a decade later was appointed Minister of Community Development, Youth and Sports and later on Minister of Social and Family Development. She was elected Speaker of Parliament in 2013, becoming the first woman to hold the post.

## SRI LANKA

### **Ismail, Jezima**

An educator for over three decades, Jezima Ismail is the Chairperson of People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), President Emeritus and Founder of the Sri Lanka Muslim Women's Conference (SLMWC), Founder and Chairperson of the Academy of Adult Education for Women (AAEW), Member of the Board of Management for the Center for Human Rights at the University of Colombo, Coordinator of the Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum, Vice President of the Girl Guides Association, and a member of the Board of Directors of Helpage in Sri Lanka. In 1989, the Government of Sri Lanka conferred on her the title of Deshabandhu, the third highest national honour.

### **Marsoof, Justice Dr Saleem**

Justice Dr Saleem Marsoof is a former President of the Court of Appeal, a Judge of the Supreme Court and Acting Chief Justice. Throughout his career Justice Marsoof has played major roles in the fields of higher education and law reform as well as major contributions in the field of Company Takeovers and Mergers, Arbitration Law and Muslim Matrimonial Law. He is the founding President of the University of Colombo Muslim Majlis, Vice President of the YMMA Central and Chairman of the Zahira College Colombo Board of Governors.

## THAILAND

### **Sabur, M Abdus**

Sabur is the Secretary General and co-founder of the Asian Resource Foundation and the Asian Muslim Action Network. He is also Co-director of the School of Peace Studies and Conflict Transformation in Bangkok. In the 1990s, Sabur served as coordinator of the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD). He has edited a number of publications on peace and dialogue in Southeast Asia, including: 'Understanding Human Rights: Perspectives from South Asia', 'Interfaith Conference on the Culture of Peace', 'Globalization and Asian Perspectives for

an Alternative Development', and 'Towards Peace in Multi-Ethnic Asia'.

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## Europe

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## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### **Muftić, Elmedina**

Elmedina Muftić is a journalist, columnist, and socially engaged author, widely recognised for her writings on the genocide against Bosniaks, the role of women in society, and the importance of collective memory. She has published over 500 columns, with her work featured on numerous Bosnian-Herzegovinian and diaspora platforms.

## UNITED KINGDOM

### **Abu-Sittah, Dr Ghassan**

Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah is a British-Palestinian plastic and reconstructive surgeon specialising in craniofacial surgery, trauma-related injuries, and conflict medicine. His career has been marked by extensive work in conflict zones, particularly in Gaza, where he has provided critical medical assistance during numerous conflicts, including the ongoing Gaza genocide. His description of the horrors he saw in Gaza include testimony that he treated patients suffering from white phosphorus burns. He shared testimony with Scotland Yard and, in January 2024, met with International Criminal Court investigators in The Hague. He was elected Rector of the University of Glasgow in March 2024. His activism led to travel bans in Germany and France, later overturned by legal efforts. He was the main feature on the documentary: *A State of Passion*, which shows the brutal realities of genocide in Gaza.

### **Patel, Sir Mufti Hamid**

Sir Mufti Hamid Patel is Chief Executive of the education charity Star Academies, a multi-academy trust operating 35 schools which yield excellent results despite being located in deprived areas. He has led the trust since its inception, spurred by a passion to instil and realize the highest aspirations through excellent teaching, an inspiring curriculum and proactive pastoral support. He is a highly influential leader in the education sector and has national prominence as a faith and civic leader. He is well known for his influence on policy and practice. An honorary Professor

of Education at the University of Birmingham, he also serves as the Senior Board Member of Ofsted and Vice Chair of the National Institute of Teaching. In addition, he chairs the Education Honours Committee and the Confederation of School Trusts. His service to education was recognised by the award of CBE in 2015 and a knighthood in 2021.

### **Qureshi, Khawar**

Khawar Qureshi QC is one of the world's leading advocates on international arbitration, administrative and constitutional law, public international law and commercial litigation. He was the youngest advocate ever to have appeared before the International Court of Justice in 1993 for Bosnia's genocide case against Yugoslavia. From 1999 to 2006, he remained one of only 20 barristers which the UK Government had appointed for representing it in civil matters. He routinely appears at the International Court of Justice, most recently as the counsel for Pakistan in the Kulbhushan Jadhav case, the Indian spy convicted on charges of terrorism, espionage and sabotage. He has been a Deputy High Court Judge and Bencher of Middle Temple since 2014, as well as having taught Commercial Law, International Law and International Arbitration at Cambridge University, King's College, University of London.

### **Williams, Paul**

Paul Williams is behind the hugely influential 'Blogging Theology' social media platforms (primarily YouTube). A former evangelical Christian, Williams converted to Islam and began engaging in debates with people of differing creeds. His YouTube channel invites scholars and intellectuals to discuss their various areas of expertise. His own nuanced analysis, as well as his polite and sincere manner in understanding and presenting other views, have enabled him to build a significant following. In 2024, Williams founded Blogging Theology Academy in collaboration with philosopher and author Hasan Spiker. This online learning platform offers instruction in both the Islamic and Western philosophical and theological traditions via its flagship Advanced Diploma in the Western Tradition and Islamic Philosophy and Theology, as well as a growing array of short courses, in a variety of areas of Muslim interest.

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## *Oceania*

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### **AUSTRALIA**

#### **Chowdhury, Sheikh Tawfique**

Chowdhury is the Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Mercy Mission, one of the world's fastest-growing Muslim social enterprises. Its premier programme is the ALKauthar Institute, which offers courses in Islamic disciplines to the general public through a medium that is accessible to working professionals. When ALKauthar initially launched in 2005, its offerings were limited to Australia. ALKauthar Institute has since spread its reach across the Western world, South Africa, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia. A medical doctor by profession, Chowdhury studied Islamic theology in Madinah, specialising in Islamic finance, personal law, and Islamic medical ethics. He also runs a successful multinational IT company, and is a corporate trainer and business coach to many successful people worldwide.

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## *North America*

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### **CANADA**

#### **Dayrit, Flordeliza**

Flordeliza Dayrit is the co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of MuslimKids TV, a leading children's streaming platform for Muslim audiences. The service offers over 10,000 video titles, interactive games and eBooks and is available in more than 60 countries globally. She began her media career in 2004 as co-producer of the documentary series *A New Life in a New Land: The Muslim Experience in Canada*, worked in 2006 as an art director on TV projects in Cairo, and from 2007 wrote and directed the beloved YouTube series *Hurray for Baba Ali*. As a creative storyteller and media strategist, Dayrit has been instrumental in crafting values-based content that empowers children with positive Muslim identity through engaging narratives and cultural relevance.

#### **Elghawaby, Amira (new)**

Amira Elghawaby is Canada's first Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia. A journalist, human rights advocate and public speaker, she has long championed Muslim inclusion, anti-racism education, and media fairness. Elghawaby is a former

spokesperson for the National Council of Canadian Muslims and has worked with the Canadian Labour Congress. Her appointment to public office marked a milestone for Canadian Muslims, especially in tackling systemic bias and promoting pluralism.

### **Kutty, Faisal**

A leading North American lawyer, academic, and public intellectual, Faisal Kutty is a vocal advocate on issues of human rights, Islamic thought, global affairs, international law, religion and law, and national security. He is a lawyer, law professor, and writer. He is Associate Professor of Law Emeritus at Valparaiso University and an Affiliate Faculty Member at the Rutgers University Center for Security, Race and Rights. He also serves as counsel to a respected Toronto law firm with an international client base. He co-founded the Canadian Muslim Civil Liberties Association and served as its first legal counsel, and was previously vice chair and legal counsel to the Canadian Council on American Islamic Relations (now the National Council of Canadian Muslims). He is a regular contributor to *The Toronto Star* and *Newsweek*, a frequent keynote speaker, and a widely quoted commentator. He has written hundreds of op-eds, academic articles, papers, reviews, and essays on a wide range of topics.

## **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

### **Awad, Nihad**

Nihad Awad is the co-founder and Executive Director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the most prominent Muslim civil rights and advocacy organisation in the United States. As a signatory of *A Common Word Between Us and You*, he promotes interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Awad played a central role in coordinating the *Open Letter to al-Baghdadi*, mobilizing over 120 Muslim scholars to reject extremist ideology. He has condemned Western governments for complicity in the Gaza genocide and called for expanded Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) action. CAIR has also filed a lawsuit against the U.S. government for its support of Israeli genocide in Gaza.

### **Beydoun, Khaled A**

Khaled A. Beydoun is an associate professor of law at Arizona State University, and an extraordinary professor at the University of the Western Cape. His scholarship focuses on Islamophobia, civil liberties,

constitutional law, and racial injustice. His acclaimed books include *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* (2018) and *The New Crusades: Islamophobia and the Global War on Muslims* (2024), the latter offering a sweeping, global legal perspective on anti-Muslim prejudice. In February 2025, he released *Eyes on Gaza: Witnessing Annihilation*, a collection of essays and art that chronicles the genocide unfolding in Gaza in real time, melding personal narrative with analysis and 60 illustrations by Palestinian cartoonist Mohammad Sabaaneh. Beydoun has also been outspoken on the crises in Sudan and Congo, raising awareness for global humanitarian struggles.

### **Khan, Salman**

Salman Khan is a pioneer of online learning, having founded *Khan Academy* in 2008. The online educational website features more than 10,000 mini-lectures, free of charge, to anyone in the world. The videos are hosted on YouTube and teach a variety of subjects, such as: mathematics, history, healthcare, medicine, finance, physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, economics, cosmology, organic chemistry, American civics, art history microeconomics, and computer science. Khan published his international best seller, *The One World School House*, in October 2012. As of June 2025, the Khan Academy channel on YouTube has 8.96 million subscribers, and its videos have been viewed more than 2 billion times.

### **Mogahed, Dalia**

Dalia Mogahed is currently the CEO of Mogahed Consulting, having previously been the Director of Research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. She has also been a Senior Analyst and Executive Director at the Gallup Centre for Muslim Studies, as well as the Director of the Muslim West Facts Project. Former President Obama appointed her to serve on the Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, making her the first hijab-wearing Muslim woman to hold a White House advisory position. Mogahed has also held high positions in the US-Muslim Engagement Project and is co-author of the book *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. Mogahed is also the co-host with Imam Mohammed Magid of the *Quran Conversations* podcast.

### **Sarsour, Linda**

Linda Sarsour is a Muslim-American political strategist, author, and a prominent voice for social justice

and human rights. Of Palestinian descent, she was born and raised in New York City and has become a nationally recognised leader in grassroots organising and advocacy. Sarsour's debut book, *We Are Not Here to Be Bystanders: A Memoir of Love and Resistance* was published by Simon & Schuster. Sarsour is the executive director of MPower Change, a digital advocacy organisation that mobilizes Muslim communities for political and social impact. Known for her powerful voice on issues ranging from racial justice to civil rights, she has received numerous accolades for her leadership. These include the Daughter of Greatness Award from the Muhammad Ali Center and the Vanguard Award from the Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz Center. With her unwavering commitment to equity and justice, Sarsour continues to be a transformative figure, challenging systemic oppression and amplifying marginalized voices. Her work has solidified her place as a leading advocate in the American social justice landscape.

### Siddiqui, Dr Sohaira (new)

Dr Sohaira Siddiqui is the Executive Director of Al-Mujadilah Center and Mosque for Women in Doha and Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University in Qatar. The Al-Mujadilah Center was founded to foster a more inclusive Muslim society. The Mosque for Women is the first mosque in the Muslim world built only for women and has been shortlisted in 2025 for prestigious The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Middle East awards. Her seminal academic work focuses on the relationship between law, theology and political thought in classical Islam and contemporary Muslim societies. She is the author of *Law and Politics Under the 'Abbasids: An Intellectual Portrait of al-Juwayni* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and *Locating the Shari'a: Legal Fluidity in Theory, History and Practice* (Brill, 2019).

## Altafsir.com

[www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com)

Altafsir.com is a completely free, non-profit website providing access to the largest and greatest online collection of Qur'anic Commentary (tafsir or tafseer), translation, recitation and essential resources in the world.

It was begun in 2001 by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Jordan, being the brainchild of HRH Prince Ghazi, the Chief Advisor for Religious and Cultural Affairs to H. M King Abdullah II. Today the website is fully operational in Arabic and English and provides the original Arabic texts of 150 or more books of Qur'anic Commentary, Interpretation and Explanation (tafsir or tafseer), recitation (tajwid) tutorials and Hadith collections, and other fields, pertaining to the study of Qur'anic exegesis. Translations of the meanings of the Qur'an are currently available in 24 different languages, and in several cases more than one translation is available. The site also includes audio Qur'an recitations; resources on Qur'an syntax; resources on the Contexts of Revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl); resources on the meanings of words found in the Qur'an, and other works on the Qur'anic sciences. It contains over a million pages of Qur'anic Commentary and translation. Some of the texts presented here exist only as manuscripts and have never previously been published in book form despite their historical importance and influence. Altafsir.com is thus a complete website for the study of the Qur'anic Sciences.

In addition to presenting the standard Classical and Modern Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an (tafsir or tafseer) texts of all eight schools of jurisprudence, the site also contains works of various mystical, philosophical, linguistic and theological currents. Moreover, the first time in one place, comparative studies between the Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, Ja'fari, Zaydi, Ibadi and Thahiri schools can be carried out complete with multi-screen displays and search programs.

In 2012 altafsir.com added the highly praised *Love in the Holy Qur'an* as a free downloadable pdf, and received 8 million visits bringing the total number of visits to over 27 million visitors.

In 2013, the Prince Ghazi Trust for Qur'anic Thought put up a sister website with a special emphasis for mobile devices. You can now read tafsir wherever you go by visiting [www.GreatTafsirs.com](http://www.GreatTafsirs.com) and downloading the app for Android or iOS.

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**230** MILLION  
visitors to [altafsir.com](http://altafsir.com)

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### BAHRAIN

#### **Al-Zayani, Afnan**

Afnan Al-Zayani is the CEO of Al-Zayani Commercial Services (AZCS), a multimillion dollar corporation. She is responsible for the passing of personal status laws in Bahrain that ensure the protection of Muslim women's rights in divorce and custody proceedings, something she oversaw during her leadership of the Bahrain Businesswomen's Society (BBS). Subsequently, Al-Zayani led the Middle East and North Africa Businesswomen's Network. In 2010, she received the Leadership in Public Life Award from Vital Voices, a women's empowerment organisation. In 2016, she was honoured by the IWEC Foundation at the annual conference in Belgium.

### IRAN

#### **Ansari, Anousheh**

Anousheh Ansari is an Iranian-American engineer and entrepreneur, currently serving as the CEO of the XPRIZE Foundation, which designs public competitions to solve global challenges. A co-founder of Telecom Technologies and later Prodea Systems, she made history in 2006 as the first privately funded woman and first Iranian to reach space, flying to the International Space Station. A vocal advocate for women in STEM, Ansari co-founded The Billion Dollar Fund for Women. Her numerous accolades include the Space Pioneer Award from the National Space Society and the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. In 2017, she famously accepted an Academy Award on behalf of filmmaker Asghar Farhadi. She has also authored a memoir, *My Dream of Stars*.

### JORDAN

#### **Abu-Ghazaleh, Talal**

Abu-Ghazaleh is the Chairman and Founder of the Organization by his name. He is credited with introducing the concept of intellectual property to the Arab World. Abu-Ghazaleh has been selected as Deputy Chairman of the UN Global Compact, as well as being appointed by the UN as Chair of UN

Global Alliance for ICT and Development. He is the only person who is not from one of the G8 countries to be listed in the IP Hall of Fame in Chicago, US.

#### **Sadik, Randa**

Randa Sadik has been the CEO of Arab Bank since February 2022. Under her leadership, Arab Bank has demonstrated impressive financial performance, with its extensive network of over 600 branches spanning five continents contributing to its robust global presence. As of July 2025, Arab Bank Group's total assets had grown to \$75.2 billion, underscoring its financial strength in the competitive banking sector. She is also deputy chairman of the Oman Arab Bank and the Queen Rania Foundation.

### KUWAIT

#### **Al-Bahar, Shaikha**

Shaikha Al-Bahar has served as the Deputy Group CEO of the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) since 2014, playing a key role in the group's strategic growth. Under her leadership, the NBK Group's assets have grown, exceeding \$135 billion by March 2025. A strong advocate for women's empowerment in finance, Al-Bahar spearheaded the NBK RISE global women's leadership programme, which launched its second edition in November 2024. Beyond NBK, her influence extends through several board positions. Al-Bahar holds a degree from Kuwait University and has completed executive programmes at Harvard, Stanford, and Duke.

#### **Al-Ghunaim, Maha**

Al-Ghunaim is a pivotal figure in Arab and Kuwaiti banking and finance. In 1998, she founded Global Investment House, one of the most renowned companies in the Arab World. She is well-known for taking the company international and onto the London Stock Exchange in 2008, making it the first Kuwaiti company to be listed there. In 2018, GIH was acquired by Kamco Investment. Al-Ghunaim continues to serve on several boards and remains a highly influential figure in the regional financial sector.

## MOROCCO

### **Bouhia, Dr Hynd**

A Harvard PhD and Centrale Paris engineering graduate, Dr Bouhia began her career at the World Bank before serving as an economic advisor to Morocco's Prime Minister and as the Managing Director of the Casablanca Stock Exchange. She later launched the consulting firm Strategica. In 2015, Forbes recognised her among the most influential Arab women in business, and she was inducted into the Johns Hopkins Society of Scholars in 2018. She is the author of motivational books, including *Africa Girl*, *African Woman*.

## SAUDI ARABIA

### **Al-Amoudi, Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Ali**

Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Ali Al-Amoudi has a portfolio of businesses in oil, mining, agriculture, hotels, hospitals, finance, operations, and maintenance in various countries including Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia. His charitable and philanthropic works are substantial, especially in Ethiopia. In November 2017, Al-Amoudi, alongside several Saudi princes and other billionaires, was detained in an anti-corruption crackdown. He was eventually released in January 2019. In 2025, his net worth was estimated by Bloomberg Billionaires Index at approximately US\$10.3 billion.

### **Bin Laden, Bakr**

Bakr bin Laden, half-brother of the deceased Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, is the Chairman of the Saudi Binladin Group. Revenue of his company is estimated at \$6 billion. His company is responsible for construction projects in the Al-Haram Al-Makki in Mecca, such as the expansion and the *jamarat* projects. The group has been involved with several major projects in the country, including the King Abdullah Economic City, the King Abdul Aziz International Airport, and the King Saud University. In November 2017, he was detained, along with several Saudi princes and billionaires, on an anti-corruption drive. He spent three months at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Riyadh before being released in January 2018.

### **HRH Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal Al-Saud**

Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal is a prominent Saudi investor and philanthropist, best known as the founder and majority shareholder of Kingdom Holding Company. His fortune is built on strategic

investments across real estate, stocks, media, and hospitality. A long-time backer of social media, he has invested in platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Snapchat, and, as of 2025, became the second-biggest shareholder in Elon Musk's AI firm, xAI. Known for his wide-ranging philanthropy via Alwaleed Philanthropies, he made headlines for a pledge to donate his fortune to charity, including funding initiatives for Christian-Muslim understanding at Georgetown University. In November 2017, he was detained during Saudi Arabia's anti-corruption sweep but was released in January 2018 after an undisclosed financial settlement. In March 2025, his social media follower count on X reached 15 million.

### **Olayan, Lubna**

Lubna Olayan is the former CEO of Olayan Financing Company, where she oversaw its Middle East operations. A strong advocate for women's empowerment, she retired from her CEO role in 2019 but continued her strategic leadership by becoming the first Saudi woman to chair a publicly listed bank, the Saudi British Bank (SABB), following its merger with Alawwal Bank. She was re-elected as SABB's Chair for another three-year term in January 2023. Olayan's influence extends to global boards, including Schlumberger and the World Economic Forum Board of Trustees. She is also a trustee for academic institutions such as MIT and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST).

### **Al-Suhaimi, Sarah**

Al-Suhaimi is the first woman to chair the Saudi Arabian stock exchange (Tadawul), which is the largest in the Middle East. Additionally, she holds the position of CEO and Member of the Board of Directors of NCB Capital where, in 2014, she was tasked with reviving the flagging investment bank and raising morale in the workforce. Within two years she had reversed NCB Capital prospects and returned it to growth. Previously, she held the position of CIO at Jadwa Investment. She sits on the boards of the Saudi Arabian Airlines Public Agency, the Cultural Development Fund, and the Regional Voluntary Carbon Market company.

## SUDAN

### **Ibrahim, Dr Mohamed "Mo"**

Sir Mohamed "Mo" Ibrahim is a Sudanese-British entrepreneur and philanthropist who founded Celtel, a major African mobile phone company. Following the

company's sale, he established the Mo Ibrahim Foundation in 2006 to promote good governance and leadership in Africa. In 2007, he launched the Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, which awards \$5 million over 10 years and \$200,000 annually for life to democratically elected African leaders who have demonstrated exceptional leadership. The prize aims to curb corruption by ensuring leaders have financial security after leaving office. In the 2023 UK New Year Honours, he was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG) for his services to charity and philanthropy.

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

### **Alabbar, Mohamed Ben Ali**

Mohamed Ben Ali Alabbar is a member of the Executive Board of the Government of Dubai and the Director of the Department of Economic Development. Under his leadership Dubai has been one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. He has been successful in increasing the financial regulations requiring transparency, making Dubai a more attractive place to invest and do business in. He is one of the main assistants of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, and is the Managing Director of Emaar, one of the world's largest real estate companies.

### **Al Gurg, Raja**

Raja Al Gurg is Managing Director of the Easa Saleh Al-Gurg Group LLC (ESAG). Al Gurg is the first Emirati woman on the board of HSBC Bank Middle East Limited and is also on the advisory board of Coutts Bank, the wealth management division of the Royal Bank of Scotland Group. She also plays an active role in several philanthropic, social, and women's societies, including serving as Deputy Chair of the Dubai Healthcare City Authority and President of the Dubai Business Women Council. Her autobiography: *Raja Al Gurg - An Autobiography* was published at the end of 2019. In 2022, she was appointed as Honorary Pro-Chancellor at Heriot Watt University and in 2023 she was awarded the highest French civilian award: the Legion of Honour Chevalier (Knight).

### **Al-Jaber, Fatima**

Al-Jaber is an Emirati businesswoman and Chief Operating Officer of the Al-Jaber Group. She supervises more than 50,000 employees and manages around

\$4.9 billion in assets. She is also a regular speaker at economic conferences. Al-Jaber was the first ever Emirati woman to be elected to the Board of Directors at the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce in December 2009. She has received many awards and has been featured in Forbes and Arabian Business.

### **Al-Rostamani, Hana**

Al-Rostamani is the Group CEO of the First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB) and was responsible for turning the bank's focus towards a digital-first approach. Previously, she held the position of Independent Director in Emirates Integrated Telecommunication Company (Du) and Vice-chairperson of the Emirates Institute for Banking and Financial Services. She has over 20 years experience in the financial world and has been ranked first in Forbes Middle East's Power Business Women for three consecutive years (2023-2025).

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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## NIGERIA

### **Dangote, Alhaji Aliko**

Dangote is the Chairman and CEO of the Dangote Group, the largest industrial group in Nigeria. He is the richest man in Africa in 2025, with an estimated net worth of \$28 billion. In January 2009, Dangote was honoured for being the leading provider of employment in the Nigerian construction industry. In 2011, Dangote was also awarded Nigeria's second highest honour, Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger (GCON) by the President of Nigeria. As a philanthropist, he has donated to the National Mosque, the Presidential Library, and a host of charities. Dangote donated 200 million Naira towards curbing the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

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## *Asia*

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## BRUNEI

### **HM Sultan Hajji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah**

HM Hajji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah became the 29th Sultan of Brunei following his father's abdication in 1967. He became Prime

Minister following independence from the UK in 1984. This makes him both the world's longest-reigning current monarch and the longest-serving current head of state. He is also one of the wealthiest people in the world with a net worth of \$30 billion. His official residence has over 1,800 rooms and he maintains a car collection in the thousands. He owns many properties (via the Brunei Investment Authority) in the UK including the famous Dorchester Hotel.

## INDONESIA

### **Indrawati, Sri Mulyani**

Sri Mulyani Indrawati, a highly respected Indonesian economist, has served as Indonesia's Minister of Finance for three presidential administrations. Her latest appointment was on 21 October 2024, by President Prabowo Subianto. This makes her the first person to hold the finance minister position under three different presidents. After her first term as Finance Minister from 2005 to 2010, she was appointed Managing Director of the World Bank, where she served until 2016. During her initial tenure, she was credited with strengthening Indonesia's economy and navigating the 2008 global financial crisis. Returning as Finance Minister in 2016, she steered the economy through the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Thohir, Erick**

Erick Thohir is an Indonesian businessman and politician who has served as Indonesia's Minister of State Owned Enterprises and as a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) since 2019. He founded the Mahaka Group, a conglomeration that focuses on sports and entertainment in the print, radio, and television media. He also owns solely and in partnership several football and basketball teams in Indonesia and abroad. He is the president of SEABA (Southeast Asian Basketball Association).

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## *Europe*

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## TÜRKIYE

### **Sabancı, Güler**

Güler Sabancı is a distinguished Turkish businesswoman and philanthropist, widely recognised as a pioneering leader. While she was chairperson of the family-controlled Sabancı Holding for two decades, she stepped down from that role in March 2025.

Ban Ki-moon appointed Sabancı as a member of the Board of United Nations Global Compact, the UN's highest-level advisory body involving business, civil society, labour, and employers' organisations. She continues to chair the Sabancı Foundation, a leading private foundation in Türkiye, the Sakıp Sabancı Museum and is the founding president of Sabancı University. In 2024, she was awarded the Japanese "Order of the Rising Sun".

### **Ulukaya, Hamdi**

Hamdi Ulukaya is the founder and CEO of the multi-billion dollar yoghurt business, Chobani. He immigrated to the USA in 1994, purchased a yoghurt factory in 2005 and developed his own recipe based on his Kurdish ancestry and the eastern Turkish farm he grew up on. He has developed a humane working culture for his 2,000-plus employees. He focused on employing from the local community as well as refugees and has given his employees a 10% stake in the company. He has won numerous awards.

## UNITED KINGDOM

### **Aziz, Asif**

Asif Aziz is a billionaire property entrepreneur, philanthropist and diversity advocate. As the founder of Criterion Capital, he leads a real estate business with 1,000+ employees, which is projected to exceed £6bn AUM by 2027. Asif has earned numerous accolades, including the 'Entrepreneur of the Year' PROPS Award, an honorary fellowship from Goldsmiths, University of London, and the 'Tun Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad Leadership Award'. Asif established a family philanthropic foundation in 2015 and The Aziz Foundation has awarded 650+ scholarships to British Muslims across over 50 universities, and paid internships with prestigious partnerships. The Foundation also sponsors Europe's first Ramadan and Eid lights in London's West End, the Trafalgar Square Iftar, and the soon-to-open Piccadilly Community Centre. Through Criterion Capital and The Aziz Foundation, Asif continues to shape a future where British Muslims and broader communities thrive through compassion, cooperation and creative innovation.

### **Issa, Mohsin and Zuber**

Mohsin and Zuber Issa grew up in humble circumstances to parents who had migrated to the UK from India. They started working in a garage and then acquired petrol stations, owning over 6000 forecourts

(EG group), before acquiring the retail chain Asda and its 600-stores-plus, bringing it back into British ownership. Zuber sold his stake of Asda (22.5%) to focus on leading and managing the EG petrol sites, and spend more time on charitable endeavours. They are estimated to be worth over £6 billion.

### **Randeree, Shabir**

Randeree is an entrepreneur and philanthropist who was recognised for his efforts with a CBE in 2013. He is the Chairman of DCD Group, Deputy Chairman of Al Baraka Bank South Africa and Founder Director at IBB Bank plc. He is the Chair, The King's Trust International, former Chancellor of the University of East London, and former Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Woolf Institute. In July 2025, the UK government appointed the newly established British Muslim Trust (BMT) to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred, with Randeree appointed as its first Chair. The BMT was founded by the Randeree Charitable Trust and the Aziz Foundation, combining their decades of expertise in community initiatives.

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## *North America*

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### **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

#### **El-Erian, Mohamed**

El-Erian's career started at the International Monetary

Fund, where he worked for 15 years and served as deputy director. He also served as Managing Director at Citigroup in London and PIMCO, a global investment management firm and one of the world's largest bond investors, where he was CEO and CIO. He is currently Chief Economic Adviser at Allianz, the world's largest insurance company, and President of Queens' College, Cambridge University. El-Erian contributes to major economic publications such as the *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg*, *Business Insider*, *CNN*, and *Foreign Policy*. *Foreign Policy* named him on the list of the "top 100 Global Thinkers" for four years in a row. He has authored two *New York Times* bestselling books, sits on several boards, and received various professional and philanthropic awards.

#### **Khan, Shahid**

Khan moved to the USA from Pakistan in 1967, aged 16, graduated in Industrial Engineering and since then has gone on to become a billionaire businessman. His main company is Flex-N-Gate, which manufactures components for companies in the automobile industry. It currently has a revenue of over \$8 billion and a workforce of 27,000 employees. He is also the owner of the American national football league team, the Jacksonville Jaguars and the English football team, Fulham. More recently he has launched All Elite Wrestling, a professional wrestling entertainment company and is a major financial backer of Black News Channel, a 24-hour cable news channel.



Ghafir 40, 7

He hath prescribed for Himself mercy

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### EGYPT

#### **El-Baz, Farouk**

Farouk El-Baz is a geologist who worked with NASA on the selection of landing sites on the moon and the training of Apollo astronauts in visual observations and photography. He is well known for applying satellite images to groundwater exploration in arid lands. The Geological Society of America established two awards in his honour: the Farouk El-Baz Award for Desert Research (1999); and the Farouk El-Baz Student Research Award (2007). He has received numerous honours and awards, including Egypt's Order of Merit (First Class). El-Baz ranked number 51 in the Power 100 of Arabian Business. In 2019, the International Astronomical Union named an asteroid after Farouk El-Baz in recognition of his outstanding scientific contributions.

#### **El-Naggar, Dr Zaghoul**

Dr El-Naggar is an Egyptian geologist and scholar who writes and speaks on science and the Qur'an. He is a fellow of the Islamic Academy of Sciences, and is well-respected by the global scientific community for his work in geology. He has published close to 200 academic articles and scientific studies. He also works for the Arab Development Institute.

### IRAN

#### **Khademhosseini, Professor Ali**

Dr Khademhosseini is the CEO and Director of the Terasaki Institute in Los Angeles, one of the leaders in researching the use of nanotechnology for minimally invasive medical procedures. Formerly, Khademhosseini was the Levi Knight Professor of Bioengineering, Chemical Engineering, and Radiology at UCLA and a Professor at Harvard Medical School. He is the author of more than 650 peer-reviewed journal articles, editorials and review papers and holds more than 70 patents. He is the recipient of the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE); and every year since 2014 Khademhosseini has been selected by Thomson Reuters as one of the World's Most Influential Minds as

a Highly Cited Researcher. He has been awarded many more honours, such as the Mustafa Prize, the Pioneers of Miniaturization Prize from the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) and the Clemson Award of the Society for Biomaterials.

#### **Shokrollahi, Professor M Amin**

Dr Shokrollahi is a renowned Iranian mathematician working in the field of information communication. He is the inventor of tornado codes and one of the principal developers of raptor codes and chordal codes, which are specifically designed for communication on electrical wires between chips. Shokrollahi holds over 150 patents in the area of information transmission and was the Chief Scientist of Digital Fountain, which Qualcomm Inc acquired in 2009. He is the CEO and Founder of Kandou, a research firm in Switzerland specialising in improving speed and efficiency in communication between microchips. Shokrollahi has won multiple awards for his work, including the IEEE IT Best Paper Award (2002), the ISSCC Jan van Vessem Award (2014), and the Mustafa Prize (2017).

### JORDAN

#### **Amin, Tareq (new)**

Tareq Amin is recognised as one of the world's foremost innovators in telecommunications and artificial intelligence. A graduate of Portland State University in Electrical Engineering and Physics, he began his career at Intel before holding senior roles at T-Mobile and Huawei. At Reliance Jio, he spearheaded India's 4G revolution, serving hundreds of millions through automation and scalability. As CTO of Rakuten Mobile (2018–2023), Amin built the world's first fully virtualized, cloud-native mobile network using Open RAN, later serving as CEO of Rakuten Symphony and Rakuten Mobile. After briefly leading Aramco Digital, he was appointed CEO of HUMAIN in May 2025, a PIF-backed AI company chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. HUMAIN's initiatives include 500 MW data centers, an Arabic multimodal LLM, and partnerships with Nvidia, AWS, and Google Cloud. Named to TIME's 100 Most Influential in AI 2025, Amin champions ethical, human-centric AI aligned with Saudi Vision 2030.

### **Dajani, Professor Rana**

Rana Dajani is a Yidan Global Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a professor of molecular biology at the Hashemite University in Jordan. She has shaped national and regional stem cell laws and served on global scientific and UN councils, including as President of the Society for the Advancement of Science and Technology in the Arab World. She has been a visiting professor at Harvard, Yale, MIT, Cambridge, and the Jepson School of Leadership. A social entrepreneur and founder of We Love Reading, she has promoted literacy and community leadership by establishing over 8,000 libraries in 70+ countries. Dajani also champions women in STEM, leading award-winning mentorship programmes. Her honours include the UNESCO Literacy Prize, Nansen UNHCR Award, and fellowships from Fulbright, Eisenhower, Bosch, Ashoka, and Yale. Her book *Five Scarves* reimagines success through science, equity, and innovation.

### **SAUDI ARABIA**

#### **Al-Namankany, Dr Abeer**

Dr Al-Namankany made history when she developed a new standard for measuring patient anxiety and treating it with drug-free psychotherapy, thereby protecting patients from the risks of general anaesthesia and the side-effects of sedatives. She is the winner of six distinguished clinical and research awards from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry, the Emirates Medical Association, and others. In addition to her brilliant medical career, Dr Al-Namankany is also a social activist and a defender of women's and children's rights.

#### **Sindi, Dr Hayat**

Dr Hayat Sindi is a pioneer in the field of medical science with a number of significant groundbreaking scientific contributions. She is Advisor to the President of Saudi Arabia's Islamic Development Bank Group on Science, Technology and Innovation. She was the first female member of the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia, the first Saudi to complete her studies at Cambridge University in the field of biotechnology, and the first Arab to complete a doctoral degree in the field. Sindi has been appointed by UNESCO as a Goodwill Ambassador in recognition of her efforts in promoting science education in the Middle East and been chosen as National Geographic Emerging Explorer. Her other distinctions include

membership at the Clinton Global Initiative 2014 and receiving the Leadership in Civil Society Prize.

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## *Asia*

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### **INDIA**

#### **Hasan, Dr Hashima**

Dr Hashima Hasan is a key scientist behind the James Webb Space Telescope project, which is sending the earliest images of the universe we currently have. Educated at Aligarh, Mumbai and Oxford, she is widely published and has received numerous awards. She joined NASA in 1994 and has worked on various programmes cementing her reputation as one of the top scientists in the organisation.

### **INDONESIA**

#### **Afifa, Dr Nadhira Nuraini**

Nadhira Afifa, MD is an Indonesian medical doctor and public health consultant graduated from Harvard University. On a daily basis, she focuses on treating patients with nutrition-related issues. Nadhira also founded Limitless Foundation, a Jakarta-based non-profit organisation that aims to provide equitable access to education for young Indonesians. In her free time, Nadhira produces video essay series on her social media platforms, as well as contributing to national news media. She is currently a Clinical Nutrition Resident at the Universitas Indonesia.

#### **Mumpuni, Tri**

Tri Mumpuni spent 30 years improving rural communities in Indonesia through electrification initiatives based on developments with micro-hydroelectric power plants. She was presented with the Award for Community Power at the Ashden Awards in 2012. Mumpuni is the Executive Director of IBEKA, a non-profit organisation whose mission is to promote community development via the provision of local energy, mainly hydroelectricity, and also clean water. In 2021, then President of Indonesia, Mr Joko Widodo, appointed her as a member of the Board of Governors of the Indonesian Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN).

## MALAYSIA

### **Shukor, Dr Sheikh Muszaphar**

Dr Shukor, an orthopaedic surgeon by profession, was the first Malaysian in space. He trained at Star City in Russia and was subsequently selected into the Malaysia's Angkasawan programme, which sent him to the International Space Station in 2007. Images of him praying and celebrating Eid increased his popularity in the Muslim world. He is the Founder of 'Angkasawan Foundation' encouraging more students to become doctors and is the author of best-selling books including *My Way of Parenting* and *49th Rule*. Dr Shukor is currently at the National University of Malaysia UKM as a Research Fellow focusing on education and STEM. He has been to Gaza, Palestine twice for humanitarian aid.

## PAKISTAN

### **Professor Atta-Ur-Rahman**

Professor Atta-Ur-Rahman is one of Pakistan's most distinguished scientists. After obtaining his Masters degree in organic chemistry from Karachi University, he completed his doctoral degree at Cambridge University, where he remains a Fellow. He helped develop the higher education landscape in Pakistan and has received the highest national awards. In 1999, he became the first Muslim scientist to win the UNESCO Science Prize. In 2013, the largest Malaysian university, Universiti Teknologi Mara, named its Research Institute of Natural Products in honour of him. In 2014 he was awarded the International Cooperation Award, the highest award of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In 2016, he was elected as Emeritus Academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, thereby becoming the first scientist from the Islamic world to be granted this honour. The same year, Professor Rahman was appointed Co-Chairman of a United Nations Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation covering the member countries of UNESCAP.

### **Saif, Dr Umar**

Dr Saif created the first startup incubators in Pakistan: the Saif Center of Innovation. He was the first Pakistani to be named as one of the top 35 young innovators in the world by the MIT Technology Review (TR35) and the first Pakistani to receive a Google Faculty Research Award in 2011. He is also the founding Vice Chancellor of the Information Technology University in Punjab. In recognition

of his services to the country, in 2014 the Government of Pakistan conferred on him the *Sitara-i-Imtiaz* (Star of Excellence), one of the highest civilian awards in Pakistan. He served as a Federal Minister of IT, Science and Technology in Pakistan between 2023-2024 and introduced many landmark reforms during his tenure. His company aiSight.ai is one of the fastest growing AI companies in data analytics, with business operations in over 35 countries.

### **Siddiqi, Irfan**

Irfan Siddiqi is an award-winning pioneering scientist who is best-known for the development of the Josephson bifurcation amplifier. He was born in Karachi and moved to the USA where he studied at Columbia, Harvard and Yale universities. He is Director of the Advanced Quantum Testbed and Professor of Physics at the Quantum Nanoscience Laboratory (established by him) and the Department of Physics at the University of California, Berkeley. In 2021, he received the Joseph F Keithley Award and in 2024 was elected to the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

## THAILAND

### **Dahlan, Professor Dr Winai**

Professor Dr Winai Dahlan is the Founding Director of the Halal Science Center Chulalongkorn University (HSC) in Thailand, named the best innovation in the halal industry and the world's first halal science institution by Malaysia's Halal Journal. HSC promotes halal industry and commerce through digital platforms, namely SPHERE, HALPLUS, and scientific regional cooperation with halal laboratories in Indonesia, Malaysia and worldwide. Dr Winai Dahlan has produced many intellectual properties and written more than 50 books and several thousand articles on science and nutrition.

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## Europe

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## FRANCE

### **Guiderdoni, Dr Bruno Abd al Haqq**

Dr Guiderdoni is an astrophysicist and French convert to Islam. A specialist in galaxy formation and evolution, he has published more than 150 papers and organised many conferences on these subjects. Guiderdoni serves as Director of the Observatory

of Lyon. Besides his extensive writings on science, he has also published around 80 papers on Islamic theology and mysticism and the relationship between science and religion, and is now Director of the Islamic Institute for Advanced Studies.

## GERMANY

### Şahin, Dr Uğur

Dr Uğur Şahin is an immunologist who co-founded BioNTech, the company which developed one of the major vaccines against Covid-19. His family emigrated to Germany from Türkiye, where he studied medicine at the University of Cologne. He has worked as a professor and lecturer at various university hospitals across Germany. In 2008 Şahin founded BioNTech with his wife, Özlem Türeci and mentor, Christoph Huber. The main focus of his research work is the discovery of mRNA-based drugs for use as individualized cancer immunotherapies, but with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, BioNTech pivoted to using mRNA-based drugs towards fighting this new threat. By the end of 2020, BioNTech developed the BNT162b2 vaccine and reported a 95% efficacy against the Covid-19 disease and became the first mRNA drug approved for human use. Subsequently, Şahin entered a partnership with Pfizer pharmaceutical company to distribute it worldwide.

## TÜRKIYE

### Bayraktar, Selçuk (new)

Selçuk Bayraktar leads innovation in Turkish aerospace as CTO of Baykar Technologies, the company behind Bayraktar drones. In 2025, he continues to champion indigenous defense technology, youth tech education via Teknofest, and Türkiye's broader commitment to strategic autonomy. An MIT and Georgia Tech alumnus, Bayraktar's vision hinges on combining technical excellence with national pride. Admired as a Muslim tech pioneer, he symbolizes Türkiye's aspiration toward scientific leadership and self-sufficiency in key industries.

### Gelenbe, Dr Erol

Erol Gelenbe studied in Türkiye and the USA, and held Professorships at the University of Liege (Belgium), the University of Paris-Saclay and Paris-Descartes, and named Chairs at NJIT, Duke, the University of Central Florida in the USA and Imperial College London. A pioneer in the field of modelling and performance evaluation of computer networks,

the inventor of the random neural network, the G-networks, and the Cognitive Packet Network, he is currently Professor in the Institute of Theoretical and Applied Informatics of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and Chair of the Academia Europaea Informatics Section. Also affiliated with the University of Cote d'Azur, CNRS I3S (Nice), Research Professor at Yasar University, Izmir, Türkiye, and Honorary Professor University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, he has graduated 95 PhDs and received multiple fellowships, awards and honours for his work.

### İmamoğlu, Dr Ataç

Dr İmamoğlu is an award-winning physicist whose alma maters include the Middle East Technical University in Istanbul and Stanford. He was Professor at the University of California and then the University of Stuttgart before becoming the head of the research group on Quantum Photonics, at ETHZ (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), Switzerland. His academic interests are quantum optics, semiconductor physics, and nonlinear optics.

### Sancar, Dr Aziz

Sancar was co-awarded (along with Tomas Lindahl and Paul Modrich) the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2015 for his work on DNA repair. His contributions over the years have shed light on the processes of ageing, causes of cancer and how cells work. Sancar studied at Istanbul University before moving to the USA where he is currently Professor at the University of North Carolina. He is also a co-founder of a foundation which promotes Turkish culture and supports Turkish students in the USA (the Aziz and Gwen Sancar Foundation). He is the 2019 recipient of the Hyman L. Battle Distinguished Cancer Research Award.

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## *North America*

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## CANADA

### Ghilan, Dr Mohamed

Dr Mohamed Ghilan is a Canadian Muslim who has managed to combine a high degree of learning of modern science and traditional Islam. Born in Riyadh, to parents from Sudanese and Yemeni backgrounds, he attended high school and university after immigrating to Canada. In 2007 Mohamed

began his full-time studies in the Islamic Tradition after having made connections with several Muslim scholars. In May 2015, Mohamed earned a PhD in neuroscience at the University of Victoria, where he studied synaptic plasticity in Huntington's disease, as well as the effects and molecular mechanisms of stress on the brain in Fragile X syndrome. He hopes his research can eventually be used to develop new therapies which can be used to assist individuals with movement disorders or intellectual disabilities.

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### **Elgamal, Dr Taher**

Dr Taher Elgamal, widely known as the “father of SSL (Secure Sockets Layer)”, is a world-renowned, Egyptian-American cryptographer. In addition to being the driving force behind SSL, the technology used to secure web browsing online, his work is also used as the basis for Digital Signature Algorithm (DSA) adopted by the National Institute of Standards and Technology as the Digital Signature Standard (DSS). He is a recipient of the RSA Conference 2009 Lifetime Achievement Award and received the 2019 Marconi Prize with Paul Kocher.

### **Hatamleh, Dr Omar**

Dr Omar Hatamleh is the Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. With a career at NASA spanning over 27 years, Dr Hatamleh has been instrumental in shaping the organisation's AI strategies and fostering innovation across various missions. His extensive work has garnered him international recognition, including prestigious awards such as the NASA Innovation Award and the Silver Achievement Medal. He has co-authored *Between Brains*, a seminal work exploring AI's impact on society.

### **Khan, Dr Mehmood**

Dr Mehmood Khan, MB ChB, is Chief Executive Officer of the Hevolution Foundation, a global non-profit advancing healthspan science and biotechnology. He previously served as CEO and Executive Chairman of Life Biosciences, where he led efforts to address age-related decline, and held senior leadership roles including Vice Chairman and Chief Scientific Officer of Global R&D at PepsiCo and President of Global R&D at Takeda Pharmaceuticals. Dr Khan serves on the Board of Directors of Reckitt Benckiser and has advised multiple organisations, including NIST's Visiting Committee on

Advanced Technology and the Saudi National Biotechnology Strategy Steering Committee.

### **Siddique, Professor Teepu**

Professor Siddique is a neurologist and scientist known for his ground-breaking discoveries concerning genetic and molecular abnormalities. He was head of the team that discovered the cause behind the mysterious and deadly disorder known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). He studied at Dow Medical College in Karachi, where he earned his medical degree in 1973 before moving to the USA. He was a Professor of neurology and cell and molecular biology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine before becoming director of the university's division of neuromuscular medicine.

### **Ying, Professor Jackie Y**

Professor Jackie Y Ying is a world-renowned pioneer in nanotechnology, with a focus on applications for human health. Now Chief Innovation and Research Officer at King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Centre in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, she previously directed the NanoBio Lab at Singapore's Agency for Science, Technology and Research. Her extensive career includes serving as a Professor of Chemical Engineering at MIT. Ying's interdisciplinary research centres on nanostructured materials for catalytic and biomedical applications. Her work has led to numerous patents and publications, and her spin-off company SmartCells, Inc., was acquired by Merck for its groundbreaking insulin-delivery technology. She is an elected member of both the U.S. National Academy of Engineering and the National Academy of Inventors. In 2023, she received the prestigious King Faisal Prize in Science.

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*Middle East and North Africa*


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**ALGERIA****Mosteghanemi, Ahlam**

Ahlam Mosteghanemi is an Algerian poet and best-selling novelist, widely considered one of the most influential contemporary Arab authors. Her breakout 1993 novel, *Memory in the Flesh*, won the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature and has sold millions of copies worldwide. The book explores Algeria's struggle for independence and its post-revolutionary challenges. Mosteghanemi, who earned her PhD from the Sorbonne, was named the "Cultural Personality of the Year" at the Sharjah International Book Fair in 2024, acknowledging five decades of literary contributions. She has also been recognised by Forbes as one of the most successful and influential female Arab writers. In 2016, she was designated a UNESCO Artist for Peace.

**EGYPT****Al-Aswany, Alaa**

Alaa Al-Aswany is an internationally acclaimed Egyptian novelist known for his works examining contemporary Egyptian society. His breakthrough 2002 novel, *The Yacoubian Building*, critiques the corruption and social inequality of the Mubarak era. As a prominent pro-democracy, his books have been banned in Egypt, and he has been living in self-imposed exile. Despite this, he continues to be a prolific writer and political commentator. His latest novel, published in 2024, is titled *The Trees Walk in Alexandria*. Other notable works include *Chicago* (2007) and *The Republic of False Truths* (2021), a novel set during the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Al-Aswany has lectured at universities worldwide and currently offers creative writing workshops online. He has received over 20 international literary honours and awards for his work. His articles for *Deutsche Welle* and other publications continue to advocate for democracy and freedom of expression.

**Badreya, Sayed**

Badreya is an Egyptian-born actor who played significant roles in a number of Hollywood films such as

*Iron Man* and *The Dictator*. His production company Zoom in Focus emerged with the purpose of showing the world the Arab-American story. Much of his efforts in this regard have been published in prominent news outlets such as *The New York Times*, BBC, ABC, and Fox News. In 2024 he starred in the BAFTA-winning British short film *Jellyfish and Lobster*.

**Namira, Hamza**

Hamza Namira is an Egyptian singer and a songwriter who became known as the "Voice of the Revolution" after the 2011 Arab Spring in Egypt. His songs focus on subjects related to sociopolitical, humanist interest, hope, alienation and resistance against oppression. Namira enjoys a wide following and recently celebrated 1 billion views on his YouTube channel, in addition to having over 20 million followers on different social media outlets. He lived in exile after being accused of opposing the Egyptian regime but recently returned to Egypt where he settled and hosts concerts. Namira also participates in philanthropy working alongside organisations like Human Appeal International and United Muslim Relief.

**Waked, Amr**

Amr Waked is an Egyptian actor who has become a crossover star in Hollywood. Politically active with over 7 million X followers, Waked was involved in the street protests that eventually toppled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and was also active in the 2013 protests that led to the overthrow of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi. In 2019 an Egyptian military court sentenced him, in absentia, to eight years in prison for "publishing fake news and insulting state institutions". Since late 2021 Waked has been producing and presenting an award-winning documentary series on Al Jazeera called 'Decoded' (*Dahaleez* in Arabic) which has racked up millions of views on YouTube. He currently lives in Spain.

**El-Wakil, Abdel-Wahed**

Abdel-Wahed El-Wakil is an international architect and a contemporary icon of Islamic architecture. A student of the famous Hassan Fathy, El-Wakil has designed over 50 buildings around the world, including one for King Charles. He is the two-time recipient of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and received first prize for the design of contemporary mosque

architecture in Riyadh. In 2024 he was a recipient of The Institute of Classical Architecture & Art (ICAA) Arthur Ross Awards for Excellence in the Classical Tradition.

## IRAN

### Alidoosti, Taraneh

Taraneh Alidoosti was named as one of the best actresses of the decade by *Film Monthly* magazine and was the youngest person ever to win the Crystal Simorgh for Best Actress. She starred in *The Salesman* which won the Oscar for best Foreign Language Film in 2017. She boasts over 8 million followers on different social media networks. She was imprisoned briefly after taking part in demonstrations against the Iranian government and is currently under a travel ban.

### Farhadi, Asghar

Asghar Farhadi is an award-winning Iranian film director and screenwriter who explores the depths and complications of everyday relationships and themes of jealousy and trust in an evocative way and often includes strong female leads. He has won two Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film for his films *A Separation* (2012) (becoming the first Iranian to win an Oscar) and *The Salesman* (2016), as well as receiving a Golden Globe Award and numerous other awards. He famously did not attend the 2017 Academy Awards citing President Trump's travel ban as the reason. He sent two famous Iranian Americans to receive the Oscar on his behalf. In 2021, he received the Cannes Film Festival's Grand Prix for his film *A Hero*.

### Majidi, Majid

Majid Majidi is an Iranian film director whose films have won many international awards. His *Children of Heaven* was nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards. In August 2015, he released the first part of an intended trilogy on the life of the Prophet, with *Muhammad: The Messenger of God* being the most expensive film in Iranian movie history (\$40 million). His film *Sun Children* was shortlisted for the 2021 Oscars best foreign film.

### Nazeri, Shahram

Shahram Nazeri is a world-famous icon of classical Persian, folkloric Kurdish, and Sufi music. Hailed as "Iran's Pavarotti" by the *Christian Science Monitor*, Nazeri has released over 50 albums to date and

performed in major venues worldwide. In 2014, Nazeri received France's National Order of Merit.

## LEBANON

### Assaf, Roger

Roger Assaf is a prominent Lebanese director, actor, and playwright. With his actress wife Hanane Hajj-Ali, he co-founded the Al-Hakawati Theatre Company and the Shams Cultural Cooperative for Youth in Theatre and Culture, an organisation providing underprivileged individuals with a forum for self-expression through drama.

## MOROCCO

### Lalami, Laila

Laila Lalami is an award-winning novelist and essayist. Her many books include *The Moor's Account*, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and *The Other Americans*, a finalist for the National Book Award in Fiction. Her opinion pieces and political commentary appear regularly in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation*, and *The New York Times*. She has received a British Council Fellowship, a Fulbright Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, and has been honoured by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as a Young Global Leader. She is currently Professor of creative writing at the University of California at Riverside as well as being a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University.

## PALESTINE

### Abdelhamid, Marwan (Saint Levant) (new)

Marwan Abdelhamid, aka Saint Levant, maintains his status as a prominent Palestinian diasporic musical voice. In 2025, he dropped a new single blending Arabic, English, and French, reflecting themes of displacement, love and identity. His lyrics continue exploring the Palestinian struggle through intimate soundscapes. With growing recognition in global and Middle Eastern media, Saint Levant is widely seen as bridging mainstream and underground culture, providing an artistic lens into diasporic reality and Arab youth expression.

### Abu Toha, Mosab (new)

Mosab Abu Toha is a Palestinian poet, essayist, and founder of the Edward Said Library in Gaza. His debut poetry collection, 'Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear', received international acclaim, earning

a Palestine Book Award and a finalist spot for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Through literature, he documents the traumas of occupation and siege while preserving Palestinian identity and memory. He is also a contributor to major global publications like *The New Yorker* and the *New York Times*.

### **Al-Barghouti, Dr Tamim**

Dr Tamim Al-Barghouti is a Palestinian poet and columnist who has a weekly programme on AJ+ entitled 'Ma' Tamim'. Al-Barghouti has been nicknamed the 'Poet of Jerusalem' and has been compared to the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Tamim's rousing poetry is eagerly anticipated on social media. Al-Barghouti has a PhD in political science from Boston University and he has taught at the American University in Cairo, the Free University of Berlin and Georgetown University. His 2007 critically acclaimed poem 'Fil-Qudsi' (In Jerusalem), which he presented on the Emirati television show 'Amir al-Shu'ara' (Prince of Poets), has been watched by millions. His first book, *In Jerusalem and Other Poems* was translated into English and published by Simon & Schuster.

## **QATAR**

### **HH Sheikha Al-Mayassa Al-Thani**

Sheikha Al-Mayassa is the Chairperson of Reach Out To Asia, an NGO under the Qatar Foundation that contributes to the development of societies in Asia, including the Middle East. Its specific area of emphasis is improving the quality of both primary and secondary education in addition to achieving some of the goals of UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). She is the Chair of the Board of the Qatar Museums Authority and has spearheaded Qatar's recent massive investment in art. She was named as the most powerful person in the art world by *Art and Auction* magazine.

## **SUDAN**

### **Aboulela, Leila**

Leila Aboulela, FRSL is a novelist, playwright and short-story writer. She is the 2025 winner of the PEN Pinter Prize and the 2000 winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing. Leila is the author of six novels, among them *River Spirit*, *The Translator*, a *New York Times* 100 Notable Books of the year, *Minaret*, and *Lyrics Alley*, Fiction Winner of the Scottish Book

Awards. Her short story collection *Elsewhere, Home*, won the Saltire Fiction Book of the Year. Leila's work has been translated into fifteen languages, and her audio plays were broadcast on BBC Radio. Leila is Honorary Professor of the WORD centre at the University of Aberdeen.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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## **MALI**

### **Keita, Salif**

Known as the 'golden voice of Africa', Salif Keita is an Afro-pop singer-songwriter from Mali. His West African music is combined with influences from Europe and the Americas. In 1977 Keita received a National Order Award from Guianese President Sekou Toure. His music is very popular in the Francophone world, and more broadly in Europe. After a 40-plus-year career and having produced over 25 albums, Keita announced his retirement after his album 'Un Autre Blanc' was released in 2018; however 2024 has seen him back on tour and a new album *So Kono*, was released in 2025, with another one due next year.

## **NIGER**

### **Souleymane, Mahamadou**

Mahamadou Souleymane, known as Mdou Moutar, is a Tuareg songwriter, musician and actor from Agadez, Niger who became famous through a music trading network of cell phones and memory cards in West Africa. He is one of the first musicians to perform modern electronic adaptations of Tuareg guitar music. He reached a global audience when Sahel Sounds released his music on the Music from Saharan Cellphones: Volume 1 compilation. His fifth studio album 'Ilana' (The Creator), released in 2019 to international acclaim, has been called 'the most fiery psych-rock of the 21st century' and one of 'the 25 best psychedelic rock albums of the 2010s'. He also has the starring role in the 2015 film *Akounak Tedalat Taba Tazoughai*, which translates as "Rain the Colour of Blue with a Little Red in It". It is the world's first feature film in a Tuareg language.

## **NIGERIA**

### **Yahya, Maryam (new)**

Maryam Yahya is a celebrated actress and rising

activist within Nigeria's Hausa-language Kannywood film industry. Known for her compelling performances, she uses her public platform to promote women's empowerment, education, and the preservation of Hausa cultural identity. In recent years, she has spoken out on issues affecting Northern Nigerian youth, including unemployment and child marriage. Maryam's influence extends across social media, where she engages millions of followers in discussions on social change. Her combination of artistic excellence and civic engagement has made her an influential figure in the cultural and social life of Nigeria's Muslim community.

## SENEGAL

### N'Dour, Youssou

Youssou N'Dour is a legendary composer, singer and percussionist actively involved in social issues. His mix of traditional Senegalese mbalax with eclectic influences ranging from Cuban rumba to hip hop, jazz, and soul has won him an international fan base of millions. A member of the Mouride brotherhood, one of the large four Sufi orders in Senegambia, he often incorporated aspects of Islamic music and chants into his work. He wrote and performed the official anthem of the 1998 FIFA World Cup with Axelle Red "La Cour des Grands" (Do You Mind If I Play). He worked with the United Nations and UNICEF, and he started Project Joko to open internet cafés in Africa and to connect Senegalese communities around the world. He is the subject of the award-winning films *Return to Gorée* (2007) and *I Bring What I Love* (2008).

## SOMALIA

### Abdumajid, Iman

Iman Abdumajid was born Zara Mohamed Abdumajid in Mogadishu, Somalia in 1955. She is a supermodel, entrepreneur, and activist. She became a muse to many prominent designers, including Halston, Gianni Versace, Calvin Klein, Issey Miyake and Donna Karan. Iman started her own cosmetics firm in 1994, focusing on difficult-to-find shades for women and built the company into a \$25-million-a-year business. She has also appeared in several TV series and films. In 2010, she received a Fashion Icon lifetime achievement award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). Iman is also actively involved in a number of charitable endeavours including the Enough Project to end the global trade in

conflict minerals and played a key part in the public campaign against blood diamonds. She was married to David Bowie from 1992 until his death in 2016.

## SOUTH AFRICA

### Bhikha, Zain

Zain Bhikha is a South African singer-songwriter and a pioneer performer of English *nasheed* songs. He is a much-loved household name amongst Muslims worldwide. He is also known for his collaborative efforts with other prominent Muslim entertainers, including Yusuf Islam and Dawud Wharnsby-Ali. Bhikha writes and directs plays as well as holding creative expression workshops conducted specifically within schools. He has released over ten albums in his career spanning 30 years.

## TANZANIA

### Gurnah, Abdulrazak

Abdulrazak Gurnah was awarded the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature. He writes on culture and post-colonialism and is the author of ten novels, some of which have been shortlisted for the Booker prize, the Whitbread Prize and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Born in Zanzibar, Gurnah emigrated to Britain as a student in 1968, at the age of 20, and went on to become Professor of English and Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Kent.

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## Asia

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## AFGHANISTAN

### Hosseini, Khaled

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965. Following the USSR invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, his family was granted political asylum in the United States. Hosseini earned a medical degree in 1993. In March 2001, while practising medicine, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which launched his literary career. His books, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*, have been published in over 70 countries and sold more than 40 million copies worldwide. In 2006 Khaled was appointed a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. Inspired by a trip he made to Afghanistan with the UNHCR, he later established The Khaled

Hosseini Foundation, a nonprofit, which provides humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan. He lives in Northern California with his wife and two children.

### **Sayed, Aryana**

A singer, songwriter and TV personality, Sayeed emigrated from Afghanistan with her family at an early age due to the civil war. Her family eventually settled in Switzerland where, at the age of 12, she was admitted to a music school where she would often perform with a choir. She released her first music single in 2008 and soon went on to become a household name in Afghanistan. She has won numerous music awards and, in 2017, she was named "Voice of Afghanistan" by the Afghanistan National Television and Radio Network. She continued her musical success with a television career, where she judged at talent shows, such as Afghan Star and The Voice of Afghanistan. She fled the country when US troops withdrew and the Taliban took control.

## **AZERBAIJAN**

### **Qasimov, Alim**

Alim Qasimov is an Azerbaijani musician and one of the most recognised singers of Islamic folk music in the world. In 1999, he was awarded the prestigious International IMC-UNESCO Music Prize. Qasimov has recorded nine albums and performed in many concerts around the world. According to *The New York Times*, Alim Qasimov is simply one of the greatest singers alive. Back in 2010, Alim Qasimov was nominated for the United States National Public Radio's "50 great voices" series.

## **CHINA**

### **Noor Deen, Haji (Mi Guang Jiang)**

Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang Jiang is a renowned master of Arabic calligraphy. He was born in Yucheng in the Shandong Province of China in 1963. In 1997, Haji Noor Deen was awarded the Certificate of Arabic Calligrapher in Egypt, the first Chinese person to be honoured with this prestigious award. His work has been displayed—often as the first Chinese-Arabic artist—in galleries and museums around the world, including the British Museum, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the National Museum of Scotland, and Harvard University. His work focuses on writing Arabic using a combination of traditional Chinese calligraphic brushes with quick

organic strokes to fuse both the Chinese and Arabic arts uniquely. After ten years of preparation and persistent practice, he completed the transcription of the entire Qur'an in the traditional Chinese *Mushaf* style in 2021. Meanwhile, he published the *Guiding Criterion for Calligraphy* in the Chinese *Mushaf* in 2022.

## **INDIA**

### **Azmi, Shabana**

Azmi has been described as one of India's finest actresses of film, television, and theatre. She has been involved in over 150 movies, both in Hindi and foreign languages, many to international acclaim. During her extraordinary career, Azmi won the National Film Award for Best Actress five times and garnered several international honours. She has also received four Filmfare Awards. In addition to her successful career, Azmi is a social activist and supports issues such as women's rights, child survival, and fighting AIDS and injustice through the use of mainstream media. She was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador for India by the United Nations Population Fund in 1998. She is also a member of Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian parliament. In 2025 she was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 16th Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFes).

### **Khan, Aamir**

Aamir Khan is one of the leading stars of Bollywood. His phenomenal success has won him awards in India and acclaim abroad. His film *Lagaan* was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars while his venture *Dhoom 3* was the highest-grossing Bollywood film of all time. He is also a UNICEF brand ambassador, promoting child nutrition.

### **Rahman, Allah Rakha**

Rahman is a prolific composer, record producer, and musician for the Indian film industry. In 2011, *Time* described him as the world's most prominent and prolific film composer. He is the first Indian to receive a Golden Globe Award and two Academy Awards for the soundtrack of *Slumdog Millionaire*, a movie for which he also received two Grammy Awards. He was named CNN IBN Indian of the Year for 2009. He is the Global Ambassador of the Stop TB Partnership, a World Health Organization project. A street was named in his honour in Markham, Ontario, Canada. In 2024, Rahman was named Honorary President of Trinity Laban and received the XTIC Award for

Innovation in recognition of his VR film *Le Musk*.

## INDONESIA

### Nadia, Asma

Asma Nadia is a prolific Indonesian author, publisher, and creative consultant, renowned for her motivational books, novels, and short stories, which often focus on family and Islamic themes. She has authored over 100 books, with many achieving bestseller status and attracting large readership in Indonesia. Her work has been widely adapted, with over 14 of her books turned into movies, including the *Surga Yang Tak Dirindukan* trilogy, and seven into TV series. Nadia is a key figure in Indonesia's literary scene. She founded Forum Lingkar Pena and the "I Can Write Community" (*Komunitas Bisa Menulis*), which assists aspiring writers. This community has also established over 300 libraries for underprivileged children and youth across the country. She is the CEO of KBM for Kids. She is an international public speaker, a travel writer, and a former columnist for *Republika* daily newspaper. She uses her platform to address social issues. The royalties from her 2024 book *Sebelum Aku Tiada* were directed toward Palestinian relief.

### Rosa, Dr Helvy Tiana

Dr Helvy Tiana Rosa has written more than 80 books and is widely recognised as a pioneer of contemporary Islamic literature in Indonesia. Some of her works have been translated into various foreign languages, while others have been adapted into films. Over her 35-year career, she has received more than 50 awards in literature and women's empowerment. Helvy founded the Writing Community Forum Lingkar Pena in 1997, which is spread across more than 200 cities in Indonesia and abroad, and has helped to grow a number of prominent writers, particularly in the field of Islamic-themed literature. In addition to being a Creative Writing lecturer, she is also an Islamic film producer. Her latest film, *Gaza* (2024), was made as an effort to aid the recovery of Gaza, Palestine.

### Sulis

Born in 1990 in Java, Indonesia, Sulis grew to fame as a protege of the famous *nasheed* singer, Haddad Alwi. At nine years old, she released her first album with her teacher, Alwi, called 'Cinta Rasul Vol. 1.'. Millions of copies were distributed across Indonesia and she quickly gained popularity nationwide. This was later followed by six more albums in the Cinta Rasul

series. As part of the new wave of *nasheed* singers, she is known for incorporating guitars and drums in her tracks as backing instruments to her vocals.

## KAZAKHSTAN

### Kudaibergen, Dimash

Dimash (Dinmukhammed Kanatuly) Kudaibergen is a singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist with a wide vocal range, spanning from bass to soprano. He became an overnight sensation in China following an appearance at a popular singing show and has gained popularity since then, winning every major singing award in China, Russia and his home country of Kazakhstan. He's known for his charitable efforts in his own country and his hometown of Aktobe recently announced a museum dedicated in his honour. In 2024 he was named United Nations Goodwill Ambassador for Migration. He has nearly half a billion views on his YouTube channel.

## MALAYSIA

### Hamidun, Hafiz

Hafiz Hamidun is a prominent Malaysian *nasheed* singer, music producer, and entrepreneur, widely regarded as a significant figure in Islamic music in the Far East. He gained immense popularity after his solo career began in 2007, particularly with his successful *Zikir Terapi Diri* series of albums, which introduced a contemporary style to devotional music. He was a former member of the *nasheed* group UNIC before going solo in 2006. Hamidun has continued to be prolific in recent years. His album releases include *Zikir Terapi* (Acapella) (2021), and he released the single *Inni Tawakkaltu* in 2023. In 2024, he released singles including *Raudah* and *Zamzam*, and in 2025, he released a vocal version of *Zamzam*.

### Nurhaliza, Dato' Siti binti Tarudin

Dato' Sri Siti Nurhaliza is a Malaysian singer, songwriter, and businesswoman regarded as one of Asia's most successful artists. In 2024, she was named *Biduanita Negara* (National Songstress), the Malaysian government's highest honour for an artist. In 2025, she celebrated her 30th anniversary in music with the *Violet Skies* concert series. Her online presence includes over 14 million social media followers across various platforms. She has released 20 albums, with her latest, *Sitism*, released in June 2023. Her successful business ventures, including her SimplySiti beauty line, add to her considerable influence.

## PAKISTAN

### Ismail, Al-Hajj Siddiq

Al-Hajj Siddiq Ismail is a world-renowned *naat* and *hamd* reciter, philanthropist, and spiritual leader. He has been reciting for the past 50 years in over ten languages. Ismail has performed in the presence of presidents, prime ministers, governors, chief ministers, and foreign dignitaries. He was presented with Pakistan's national award, the *Sitara-i-Imtiaz*, and the prestigious Pride of Performance Award, which he donated to the victims of Swat and Malakand.

### Obaid-Chinoy, Sharmeen

Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy is a two-time Academy Award and multiple Emmy Award-winning filmmaker, journalist, and founder of SOC Films. She is also the founder of Patakha Pictures, a film fund dedicated to mentoring and supporting women filmmakers in Pakistan, and she leads the Neela Asmaan Residency, an artist residency programme dedicated to supporting creative practitioners from the Global South. She has been recognised with numerous honours, including the *Hilal-e-Imtiaz*, Pakistan's second-highest civilian award, the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, and she was awarded The Eliasson Global Leadership Prize of The Tällberg Foundation for 'Leadership in a Disrupted World'. She continues to shape global conversations through storytelling-bridging cultures, championing new voices, and redefining the power of narrative. In 2020, Sharmeen co-directed the 'Ms. Marvel' series for Disney+, bringing a Muslim superhero to the big screen. In 2023 it was announced that she would direct one of three new *Star Wars* films, making her the first woman and person of colour to direct an episode.

### Parveen, Abida

Abida Parveen is an internationally acclaimed vocalist, often referred to as "the Queen of Sufi mystic singing". She is the only woman to reach this level of influence in devotional music. She specialises in traditional *ghazals*, and often performs before stadium-sized audiences across South Asia and globally. In 2017, she was designated a Peace Ambassador by SAARC. In 2020, Parveen received the PISA Lifetime Achievement Award and in 2021 was awarded the highest civilian award, the *Hilal-e-Imtiaz*, by the President of Pakistan.

### Qadri, Muhammad Owais Raza

With millions of followers, Qadri is considered a

legend in the field of *naat* recitation. He is known for his passionate performances as well as his beautiful voice. A devout Muslim, he is particularly vocal on the subject of his love for the Prophet Muhammad. He has over 4 million followers on social media and his YouTube videos have over 90 million views.

### Sarwar, Syed Nadeem Raza (new)

Nadeem Sarwar remains Pakistan's most revered Shia Noha reciter, with his emotionally intense performances continuing to draw major audiences during Muharram. In 2025, his live and recorded sessions remain staples of Ashura commemorations across South Asia and diaspora communities. His poetic realism and vocal mastery reinforce spiritual identity and communal memory. For many, Sarwar's lamentations are integral to devotional practice, sustaining his influence across generations of Shia Muslims worldwide.

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## Europe

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## NETHERLANDS

### El Mouhandiz, Rajae

Rajae El Mouhandiz is a Dutch/Moroccan/Algerian interdisciplinary artist, producer, curator and policy advisor, with extensive experience in the arts/culture sector in the Netherlands and abroad. In 2005 she started her own label, Truthseeker records, and in 2015 she transformed it into Kahina Productions. In 2019 she launched Ellae Foundation, to counter the gender, culture and socioeconomic gap in the arts/culture sector. She combines these roles with advisory roles to various large cultural departments and institutions, specialised in music, performing arts, visual representation and interdisciplinary formats.

## SWEDEN

### Zain, Maher

Multi-platinum, award-winning Swedish singer, songwriter and music producer of Lebanese origin, Maher Zain is a household name across global Muslim audiences. Maher's debut album 'Thank You Allah' reached the number one spot on Amazon's World Music charts. He is the most popular Muslim artist on social media with 38 million fans and the most viewed Muslim artist on YouTube with over one billion views. Maher has performed in over 100 charity

concerts across 35 countries and is a high-profile supporter of UNHCR.

## TÜRKIYE

### Düzyatan, Engin Altan

Engin Altan Düzyatan is a celebrated Turkish actor and producer best known for his starring role in the globally acclaimed historical drama *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (Resurrection: Ertuğrul). The series, which tells the story of Ertuğrul Bey—father of Osman I, founder of the Ottoman Empire—has resonated with millions across the Muslim world for its powerful themes of justice, faith, and leadership. A graduate of Dokuz Eylül University's Theater Department, Düzyatan has built a versatile career in television, film, and theatre. Beyond acting, he is the founder of Alpha Production, producing projects that reflect cultural values and social impact. He is also deeply committed to humanitarian work. His clean water initiative in Africa has provided access to safe drinking water for over 100,000 people. In recent years, he produced two environmental documentaries addressing global issues such as plastic waste and water scarcity. Through both his artistic work and activism, Engin Altan Düzyatan continues to inspire audiences around the world.

### Pamuk, Orhan

Pamuk is one of Türkiye's most prominent writers and was the first ever Turkish Nobel laureate. His ten novels to date have been translated into over 60 languages and sold more than 13 million copies. His novels explore many aspects of Türkiye's rich cultural past and present as well as philosophical questions. As an academic and intellectual, his voice is important nationally and internationally and he has voiced opinions on Kurds, Armenia and the current presidency. He teaches at Columbia University, USA.

### Yalçın, Rabia

Rabia Yalçın is a Turkish fashion designer celebrated for her Haute Couture line, which features a distinctive synthesis of local and international cultures. Her creations are deeply inspired by Ottoman motifs. A respected figure on the European fashion scene, Yalçın is recognised for her influence on popular culture, particularly within the realm of modest fashion. Her work has been showcased internationally in places such as Damascus and Chicago, using fashion as a medium for intercultural dialogue and empowerment.

## UNITED KINGDOM

### Ahmed, Riz

Riz Ahmed is an acclaimed actor, musician, and activist celebrated for his dynamic performances in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, *Nightcrawler*, *Venom* (2018), and his Emmy-winning lead role in HBO's *The Night Of*. His portrayal in *The Sound of Metal* earned him a groundbreaking Best Actor Academy Award nomination. He co-wrote and starred in *Mogul Mowgli* (2020), exploring diasporic identity, and previously co-conceived the Oscar-winning short *The Long Goodbye*. A committed activist, he has campaigned for refugee causes—including Syrian and Rohingya aid—and challenged media stereotyping of Muslims, notably via a speech in the House of Commons and the widely referenced "Riz Test" for Muslim representation. Ahmed received the Excellence Award Davide Campari at the 2023 Locarno Film Festival, where his short film *Dammi* premiered; the film was later released globally on MUBI.

### Aslam, Syima

Syima Aslam is the CEO and Artistic Director of the Bradford Literature Festival (BLF); a 10-day literary and cultural celebration hailed as one of the most innovative and inspirational festivals in the UK. Since Aslam founded the festival in 2014, BLF has become the largest literature festival in the UK and awarded the title of 'Europe's Most Diverse & Inclusive Arts Festival'. BLF's reach extends across the UK and the world, having so far welcomed an audience of over 895,000 from 34 countries. In 2025 alone, BLF welcomed 187,366 audiences to over 750 events, ranging from discussions on the climate crisis, health and wellbeing, to world affairs and politics. Aslam has been made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Bradford. In 2022, she became a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in recognition of her achievements to date for services to literature.

### Islam, Yusuf

Formerly known as Cat Stevens, Yusuf Islam is a globally influential British musician and singer-songwriter. After a highly successful career in the 1960s and 70s, he converted to Islam in 1977 and left mainstream music for educational and philanthropic work, becoming a prominent figure in the arts and culture of the Muslim world. In the 2000s, he made a gradual return to music, releasing albums like 'An

### CANADA

#### Wharnsby, Dawud

Dawud Wharnsby is a Canadian artist, writer, and musician, recognised for his pioneering role in the English-language *nasheed* and spoken word genre. He is acclaimed for a spiritual folk style that has inspired a generation of English-speaking Muslims by promoting Islam through song and poetry. Beyond his solo career, Wharnsby is a member of the inter-faith band Abraham Jam, which uses music to celebrate unity among Abrahamic traditions. An active educator and advocate for simple living, he is also an artisan, television host, and frequent collaborator with other prominent artists. His work promotes inter-faith dialogue and spiritual awareness worldwide.

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

#### Aden, Halima

Halima Aden is a trailblazer in the world of fashion and beauty. She was the first ever contestant to wear a hijab and burkini in a USA pageant. She was the first hijab-wearing model to be signed by a major modeling agency and the first to appear on the front cover of *Allure*, *Vogue*, *Sports Illustrated* and *Essence* magazines wearing a hijab and burkini. Aden quit the industry in November 2020, citing that the profession was not compatible with her beliefs, but she seems to have returned a year later. All this is a far cry from her birth in a Kenyan refugee camp to Somali parents 28 years ago.

#### Chappelle, David Khari Webber

Dave Chappelle is an American stand-up comedian and actor best known for his satirical comedy sketch series *Chappelle's Show* (2003–2006). He has appeared in several films and TV series and has a \$20-million-per-release comedy-special deal with Netflix. Chappelle converted to Islam in 1991. Chappelle has received many awards and nominations for his work in stand-up and television including three consecutive Grammy Awards for Best Comedy Album. He has also received five Primetime Emmy Awards and one Screen Actors Guild Award. In 2019, Chappelle was awarded the prestigious Mark Twain Prize for American Humor. In 2025, he received the NAACP President's Award.

Other Cup' (2006) and 'Roadsinger' (2009). In 2014, he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and in 2019, he entered the Songwriters Hall of Fame. A vocal opponent of extremism, he received the Man of Peace award in 2004 from the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Committee. More recently, he released the album *King of a Land* in 2023 and is set to tour in 2025 in conjunction with his memoir.

#### Khan, Qaisra

Qaisra M. Khan is an internationally recognised curator and scholar of Islamic art. Educated at Cambridge and SOAS, she began her curatorial career at the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, and co-curated the British Museum's landmark *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam* (2012). Since 2015, she has been Curator of Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage at the Khalili Collections, London. Her recent publications include *Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage* (2022) and *The Anis al-Hujjaj* (2025). She recently co-curated *William Morris and Art from the Islamic World* (2025), an innovative exhibition exploring the profound influence of Islamic art and design on the work of the renowned British designer and Arts and Crafts pioneer. A sought-after lecturer and commentator, she serves on the advisory board of *History of Oriental Studies* (Brill) and is a recognised global voice on Islamic art.

#### Sanders, Peter

Peter Sanders is renowned for the photographic images he has created over the last 55 years, creating a archive of images that reflect a rich traditional civilization filled with warmth, humanity and compassion. He began his career in the mid-1960s amongst the now iconic musicians of that time. This was his springboard into his early travels throughout India then Morocco to document various faiths. These journeys led him to document on a deeper level, the Islamic world of peoples, architecture, geography and culture. In 2024 he published his 25 year project titled, *Heaven Earth and The Ten Thousand Things*, documenting the lives of Muslims in China. In 2025 Peter began to create the Peter Sanders Foundation which aims to preserve and showcase the beauty of Islamic Heritage past and present as a way of giving back and encouraging young creatives.

#### Yusuf, Sami

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 136

### Henry, Aisha Gray

Aisha Gray Henry is the Founder and Director of the non-profit publishing house, Fons Vitae, which specialises in the translation of classics from the spiritual heritage of Islam. It continues bringing out Imam al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* in English—now nearing completion—as well as an Educational Series based on these volumes for children, parents and teachers. The Books of Knowledge, Creed, Purity, Prayer, Zakat, Fasting, Hajj and the Banes of the Tongue are now available and being used worldwide in pilot and home schools. Resources can be found on the interactive website: [ghazalichildren.org](http://ghazalichildren.org). Translations into Urdu, Arabic, Indonesian, French, Uzbek, Spanish, Dutch, Finnish, German, Malay and other languages are complete or underway. The many other Fons Vitae titles are used as university texts, for interfaith involvement, and in Fons Vitae's prison outreach program.

### Wilson, Willow

Wilson is a writer and artist, notable for her works such as *Alif the Unseen*, which won the World Fantasy Award in 2013. She is also known for her comic series, *Ms. Marvel*, featuring a Muslim teenager who becomes a superhero. *Ms. Marvel* won the Hugo award for best Graphic Novel in 2015. Wilson has received multiple awards and nominations throughout her career and is currently contributing to Neil Gaiman's Sandman comic book series.

### Youssef, Ramy

Ramy Youssef is an Egyptian-American comedian,

actor, writer, and director best known for creating, co-writing, executive producing, and starring in the critically acclaimed Hulu series 'Ramy', which explores an Egyptian-Muslim family navigating identity in 21st-century America. His performance in the show earned him the Golden Globe Award for Best Actor – Television Series Musical or Comedy in 2020. 'Season 2', which premiered in 2020, introduced Mahershala Ali as a spiritual guide. Beyond 'Ramy', Youssef directed the standout second-season episode of 'The Bear', titled "Honeydew," earning a Primetime Emmy nomination for Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series. In 2025, he expanded his creative range by co-creating the animated sitcom '#1 Happy Family USA', which premiered on Amazon Prime Video.

### Zakariya, Mohamed

A machinist by training, American-born Mohamed Zakariya is a classically educated Islamic calligrapher who earned diplomas in three calligraphic scripts from the Research Center for Islamic History, Art, and Culture in Istanbul. His work has been collected and displayed worldwide, including most recently at the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar. Zakariya designed Eid holiday stamps for the US Postal Service in 2009, 2011 and 2013. He has been featured in several movies, including the 2002 PBS documentary *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*. Fons Vitae have recently published a book about him: *Mohamed Zakariya – A 21st-century Master Calligrapher*.

بِئْسَ عِبَادِي لَمَّا إِنِّي ابْنَا الْعَفْوَ وَالْحَمِيمَا

Al-Hijr 15, 49

Announce, (O Muhammad) unto My slaves that verily I am the Forgiving, the Merciful

# QUR'AN RECITERS

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### EGYPT

#### **Sobhi, Islam**

Sobhi is an Egyptian medicine graduate who started reciting Qur'an and uploading his videos on YouTube, now reaching more than 654 million views. His beautiful voice has attracted millions of followers, and the young reciter boasts more than 7 million followers on different social media outlets.

### IRAQ

#### **Al-Kurdi, Raad Muhammad**

##### **Abd al-Rahman Salih**

Raad Muhammad Al-Kurdi is from Kirkuk, Iraq. Raad began memorising the Qur'an at a young age and won many recitation competitions as a child. He obtained a traditional license in recitation from Sheikh Ibrahim bin Fadel Al-Mashhadani. At the age of 15 he became the imam of Imam al-Shafi'i Mosque in Kirkuk. Since gathering a following of over 3.5 million subscribers on YouTube, he has become a visiting imam at Al-Kharafi mosques in Sulaibikhat, Kuwait and often leads prayers during Ramadan at the Ahmad Al-Habbai Mosque in Dubai, UAE.

### KUWAIT

#### **Al-Afasy, Sheikh Mishary bin Rashid**

Al-Afasy is Imam at Masjid Al-Kabir in Kuwait, and is also a singer of Arabic-language *nasbeeds*. He has gained international acclaim through his innovative use of technology to promote Islam through two satellite channels, a website, and videos on YouTube. He has more than 49 million followers on social media.

#### **Al-Nufais, Sheikh Ahmed**

Sheikh Ahmed Al-Nufais is the Imam of the Grand Mosque of Kuwait. His expertise in Qur'anic recitation is particularly noteworthy, having trained under renowned scholars such as Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Akhdar and Sheikh Dr Abdullah Jarullah. He has successfully leveraged modern platforms to reach a wider audience with his YouTube channel garnering over 300 million views. He travels internationally to

lecture and has raised awareness about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

### SAUDI ARABIA

#### **Al-Ajmi, Sheikh Ahmad Ali**

Al-Ajmi is a Qur'an reciter from Khobar Province in Saudi Arabia. Prior to gaining prominence for his recitation style as an imam at mosques in Khobar and Jeddah, he studied Qur'anic interpretation in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

#### **Al-Ghamdi, Sheikh Saad ibn Said**

Al-Ghamdi has served as Imam to Muslim communities across the globe, and is currently the Imam of Kanoo Mosque in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Al-Ghamdi studied the fundamentals of Islam and hadith transmission, and is recognised as an influential Saudi theologian. In 2009, he was appointed by royal decree as a co-imam for the *taraweeh* prayers in the Al-Haram Al-Madani in Madinah.

#### **Al-Mueaqly, Sheikh Maher bin Hamad**

Al-Mueaqly is an imam at the Grand Mosque in Makkah. He left his career as a mathematics teacher to become a scholar in Makkah and is now a popular preacher and teacher of Qur'anic studies. He has over 150 million views on his YouTube channel.

#### **Al-Shatri, Sheikh Abu Bakr**

Al-Shatri is a leading reciter of the Qur'an. Although he studied accounting, he became increasingly influential for his recitation of the Qur'an at international Islamic events, particularly across the Middle East and in Saudi Arabia. He is now based in London.

#### **Al-Shuraim, Sheikh Saud ibn Ibrahim ibn Muhammad**

Al-Shuraim is a leading reciter of the Qur'an known for his unique recitation style across the world. He formally studied the fundamentals of Islam in Saudi Arabia before becoming a teacher, and subsequently became Imam of the Grand Mosque in Makkah for 32 years before retiring.

#### **Al-Sudais, Sheikh Abdul-Rahman**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 136

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## Asia

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### AZERBAIJAN

#### Dibirov, Muhammad (new)

Muhammad Dibirov is an Azerbaijani Qur'an reciter noted for his deep, resonant voice and emotive delivery. With a growing following across Central Asia and the Caucasus, Dibirov has contributed to the revival of Qur'anic learning and recitation in post-Soviet Muslim communities. He is often invited to international *tilāwah* events and is particularly admired for his adherence to classical modes and his mentoring of young reciters.

### INDONESIA

#### Hasballah, Muzammil

Muzammil Hasballah is from the Paya Tijue Village in Indonesia. He holds a degree in architecture from Bandung Institute of Technology. He began studying recitation at the age of four and later enrolled in Madrasah Ulumul Quran. During his secondary education, he won several recitation competitions. Because of his melodious recitation, he was given the position of imam at the mosque where he attended university. He began uploading videos of himself leading prayers

in the mosque and has gained millions of followers on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook.

#### Ulfah, Hajjah Maria

Hajjah Maria Ulfah is an internationally acclaimed reciter of the Holy Qur'an, and is the first woman to win an international Qur'an recitation competition. She has popularized the Egyptian style of recitation, and currently serves as Director of the Women's Department at Institut Ilmu Al-Qur'an in Jakarta. She also lectures at the Islamic University of Indonesia.

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## Europe

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### KOSOVO

#### Ibrahimi, Egzon (new)

Egzon Ibrahimi is a renowned Qur'an reciter from Kosovo whose melodious voice has earned recognition across the Balkans and beyond. He is known for his mastery of *tajwid* and *maqām*, performing at international Qur'an competitions and religious events. His recitations, often shared widely on social media, have introduced many in the West to the beauty of Qur'anic recitation and have strengthened Islamic identity in southeastern Europe.

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## Free Islamic Calligraphy

[www.FreeIslamicCalligraphy.com](http://www.FreeIslamicCalligraphy.com)



FreeIslamicCalligraphy.com is an established website that is doing much to make high quality Islamic calligraphy available more widely.

Having noticed that the Divine Names, key Qur'anic verses and sacred formulas were not available free online in the most perfect and beautiful styles of Arabic calligraphy, the Prince Ghazi Trust for Qur'anic Thought commissioned prize-winning calligrapher Mothana Al-Obaydi and other calligraphers to draw them and digitize them onto JPG, vector files and 'Word document' files so that they can be adapted, coloured and printed out by anyone according to their taste from the website. Thus, instead of paying for decorating their home with drawings or Western posters, or instead of paying for expensive name-brand calligraphy, any Muslim in the world can adapt the most beautiful pieces.

FreeIslamicCalligraphy.com is a non-profit website owned by the Prince Ghazi Trust for Qur'anic Thought, an Islamic charity (waqf) set up by HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal in 1433 AH / 2012 CE. of calligraphy and decorate his or her home with it for the price of a piece of a paper. This, God willing, will not only make people's homes more beautiful, but also their lives more beautiful as they see and remember God's Name more often.

The calligraphy pieces featured in this publication are used courtesy of [www.FreeIslamicCalligraphy.com](http://www.FreeIslamicCalligraphy.com).

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### ALGERIA

#### **Benganna, Khadija**

Benganna is an award-winning journalist who began her journey on an Algerian TV and radio station. She went on to become part of the founding team at Al Jazeera, where she remains as Senior News anchor and journalist. Benganna has covered major historical and political events, interviewed heads of state and key personalities in government. In addition to being a renowned journalist, Benganna has worked with the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees and boasts over 15 million followers on different social media outlets.

### EGYPT

#### **Mansour, Ahmed**

Ahmed Mansour is a journalist and TV presenter for Al Jazeera. He is best known for his coverage of wars, most prominently in Iraq and Afghanistan from where he published more than 1000 reports. He is also the presenter of a widely watched TV programme 'Bela Hodod' (Without Borders) and 'Shahed Ala Al-Asr' (A Witness to History). He was arrested in Berlin by German police at the request of the Egyptian Government, but was later released. Mansour has published 25 books.

### JORDAN

#### **Al-Fares, Ola**

Al-Fares is a Jordanian lawyer, TV presenter and journalist currently working for *Al Jazeera*. She has over 14 million followers on various social media outlets and has won several awards including: Young Arab Media Professionals Award (2009), Best Jordanian Media Award (2009), Creative Youth Shield (2010), Jordanian Model for Successful Youth (2011) and Arab Woman Of The Year (2015). She is considered to be one of the most influential media figures in the Arab world.

### KUWAIT

#### **Suwaidan, Sheikh Dr Tareq**

Dr Tareq Suwaidan is the CEO and owner of Gulf Innovation Group in Kuwait, and was the General Manager of Al-Resalah Satellite TV. An entrepreneur and TV personality, his shows rank among the highest in the Middle East. Suwaidan is also prominent as a motivational speaker and author of books on Islam. Suwaidan has over 20 million social media followers and uses the *seerah* as a source for leadership and strategic skills.

### PALESTINE

#### **Azaiza, Motaz**

Motaz Azaiza is a Palestinian photojournalist from Gaza, renowned for his impactful coverage of the Gaza genocide, which has earned him a significant social media following. Raised in the Deir al-Balah Camp, Azaiza graduated from Al-Azhar University in Gaza with a degree in English studies. His powerful photograph of a girl trapped in rubble was named one of *Time's* top 10 photos of 2023. Azaiza's work has earned him accolades, including being named GQ Middle East's Man of the Year and featuring on *Time's* list of the 100 most influential people of 2024. Despite facing immense personal loss and trauma, Azaiza continues to use his platform to raise awareness and support against the genocide.

#### **Khanfar, Wadah**

Khanfar was at the helm of Al Jazeera for eight years as Managing Director and Director General. During that time, the network transformed from a single channel into a media network. During this period, the Arab world witnessed historic transformation, including the Arab Spring. Khanfar, who resigned from the network in September 2011, has been named as one of Foreign Policy's Top 100 Global Thinkers of 2011 as well as one of Fast Company's Most Creative People in Business of the Year. Khanfar has a diverse academic background with postgraduate studies in philosophy, African studies, and international politics. He is currently the President of Al Sharq Forum. He recently had his book translated into English: *The First Spring: Political & Strategic Praxis of the Prophet of Islam* (ﷺ).

### **Khoudary, Hind**

Hind Khoudary has become one of the most recognised voices reporting from Gaza, using her social media platforms to shed light on the unfolding genocide. A graduate of the American International School in Gaza, Hind worked as a freelance journalist for Amnesty International and has been reporting for Al Jazeera English since 7 October 2023. With a large following on X and Instagram, her reporting is unflinchingly raw and often deeply emotional, fearlessly exposing the atrocities committed by Israeli forces in Gaza. Despite being offered a chance to leave Gaza with her family, Hind chose to stay, continuing her coverage even as over 240 journalists and media workers have been targeted, assassinated, and killed by Israeli forces. Her bravery has earned her a nomination for the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize, solidifying her status as a heroic figure in journalism.

### **El-Kurd, Mohammed, El-Kurd, Muna**

Mohammed el-Kurd is a Palestinian writer, poet, and activist from Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem. He rose to international prominence in 2021 alongside his twin sister Muna, documenting the eviction of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah through social media and media interviews—bringing global awareness to the issue and shifting media narratives about the conflict. That same year, the siblings were named to *Time* magazine’s 100 Most Influential People list. El-Kurd has consistently challenged mainstream media framing—labeling evictions as ethnic cleansing and critiquing biased coverage—and continues to speak out on the genocide in Gaza and Israeli apartheid systems. In 2025, El-Kurd released the book *Perfect Victims And the Politics of Appeal*. He serves as Palestine Correspondent for *The Nation*, has been named a cultural freedom fellow by the Lannan Foundation and received the Arab American Civil Council’s “Truth in Media” award.

### **Owda, Bisan**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 136

## **QATAR**

### **Al-Ruwaini, Nashwa**

Nashwa Al-Ruwaini is a pioneering media entrepreneur with over 30 years of leadership in the industry. As founder and CEO of Pyramedia Group, one of the region’s top media consultancy and production companies, she has shaped the Arab media landscape

through acclaimed shows like *Million’s Poet*, *Prince of Poets*, and her own talk show *Nashwa*. In addition to her media achievements, Nashwa is a successful businesswoman with ventures in real estate, food trading, event creation and management, media consultancy, and health sector investments. Her cross-industry impact has earned her recognition on Forbes Top 100 Most Powerful Arab Businesswomen list, as well as The Hollywood Reporter’s 25 Most Powerful Women in Global TV.

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

### **Al-Ibrahim, Waleed bin Ibrahim**

Waleed Al-Ibrahim is the founder and Chairman of the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), the Arab world’s largest media conglomerate. He launched MBC in 1991 as the region’s first independent Arabic satellite TV station. His media empire has since expanded to include more than a dozen channels, including the 24-hour news network Al Arabiya.

In late 2017, Al-Ibrahim was detained in a Saudi anti-corruption campaign and was held for three months at the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh. He was released after reaching a financial settlement with the government. In late 2023, MBC Group was publicly listed on the Saudi stock exchange. As of August 2025, Al-Ibrahim holds a 36% stake, while the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) owns 54%.

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## *Asia*

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## **AFGHANISTAN**

### **Mohseni, Saad**

Mohseni is a successful businessman, as well as the founder and head of the Moby Group, Afghanistan’s largest media company. The Moby Group has interests in television, radio, print, production, online news services, directories, IT&T, and retail. His story about trying to build an independent media organisation in Afghanistan is told in: *Radio Free Afghanistan: A Twenty-Year Struggle for an Independent Voice in Kabul*.

## **CHINA**

### **Hoja, Gulchehra**

Gulchehra Hoja was a prominent figure in various Chinese media, including producing and hosting

the first TV programme in Uyghur for children. With the Chinese crackdown on anything Uyghur, her image was banned on Chinese media and she was forced to flee the country. She has continued to speak out for the rights of the Uyghurs despite huge personal loss; 25 members of her family are currently held in ‘re-education’ camps which aim to remove all traces of Uyghur identity and replace it with the majority Han culture. In 2019 she received the Magnitsky Human Rights Award. In 2020, Hoja received the Courage in Journalism Award by the International Women’s Media Foundation. Her book: *A Stone is Most Precious Where It Belongs* is a memoir which is testament to the cultural genocide of the Uyghur people at the hands of the Chinese government.

## INDONESIA

### Mohamad, Goenawan

Goenawan Mohamad is a celebrated Indonesian poet, essayist, playwright, and journalist. He co-founded the influential weekly news magazine *Tempo* in 1971 and served as its editor. The magazine was an outspoken critic of corruption and authoritarianism and was closed down twice. He has received numerous international honours, including the CPJ International Press Freedom Award (1998), International Editor of the Year (1999), and the Dan David Prize (2006). Beyond journalism, he is a prolific literary figure, authoring poetry collections and essay volumes such as *Catatan Pinggir*, *Potret Seorang Penyair Muda sebagai Si Malin Kundang*, and *Tuhan dan Hal-Hal Yang Tak Selesai*. He continues to contribute his weekly essay column, *Catatan Pinggir*, and remains an influential voice in Indonesian culture and media.

## PAKISTAN

### Iqbal, Salman

Salman Iqbal is a distinguished media magnate who owns ARY Digital Network, Pakistan’s largest media network. His influence spans the Muslim World, including Pakistan, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Iqbal has been providing an independent and balanced perspective on critical issues facing the Muslim community along with promoting and enriching Muslim culture through ARY Digital’s diverse entertainment programming that resonates with both local and global audiences. As President of the World Memon Organization, he has made significant strides in healthcare and education. Iqbal’s

multifaceted contributions reflect his commitment to advancing media standards and addressing community needs, making him one of the most impactful and respected figures in the Muslim World today.

### Mir, Hamid

Hamid Mir is a prominent Pakistani journalist, columnist, and television host. Over his extensive career, Mir has gained recognition for his fearless reporting and outspoken stance against the Pakistani Establishment, advocating for press freedom and human rights. He has survived two assassination attempts and faced multiple bans from television. Mir began his journalism career with *Daily Jang* in 1987 and joined Geo News in 2002, where he still hosts the political talk show *Capital Talk*. He is one of the few journalists to have interviewed Osama bin Laden after the September 11 attacks. Despite threats and challenges, Mir continues to be an influential voice in journalism, both nationally and internationally. His work has earned him several prestigious awards, including the *Hilal-i-Imtiaz* and the SAARC Lifetime Achievement Award.

### Shakil-ur-Rahman, Mir

Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman is a prominent Pakistani media mogul—Founder, Chief Executive, and Editor-in-Chief of the Jang Media Group and the Geo TV network, both operating under the umbrella of Independent Media Corporation, Pakistan’s largest media conglomerate. In March 2020, Shakil-ur-Rahman was arrested by Pakistan’s anti-corruption agency over allegations involving a decades-old land transaction. He spent approximately eight months in detention before being granted bail by the Supreme Court in November 2020 and then in January 2022, an accountability court in Lahore acquitted him of all charges. The case was widely criticized by press freedom advocates as a politically motivated attack on independent media.

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## Europe

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## UNITED KINGDOM

### Hasan, Mehdi

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 137

### **Husain, Mishal**

Mishal Husain is a highly regarded British journalist, broadcaster, and author who worked at the BBC for over two decades before moving to Bloomberg in late 2024. She is best known for presenting the Today programme on BBC Radio 4 and anchoring national news bulletins. Husain's career highlights include interviewing prominent figures like Prince Harry and Meghan Markle following their engagement in 2017. Throughout her career, Husain has won numerous accolades, including the Charles Wheeler Award for Outstanding Contribution to British Journalism in 2024 and Broadcaster of the Year at the London Press Club Awards in 2015. She is a former judge for the Amnesty International Media Awards and remains an ambassador for the charity Mosaic. In 2024, she published her critically acclaimed family memoir, *Broken Threads: My Family From Empire to Independence*.

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## *North America*

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### **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

#### **Mohyeldin, Ayman**

Ayman Mohyeldin is an Egyptian-American journalist and political commentator based in New York with NBC News and MSNBC. He notably hosted the weekend evening show Ayman on MSNBC and Fridays on Peacock, before that was closed in April 2025. Since May 2025, he co-hosts The Weekend: Primetime, a panel discussion show airing on Saturdays and Sundays. A seasoned international correspondent, Mohyeldin has reported on pivotal events such as the 2008–09 Gaza War, being the only American broadcasting from Gaza, Saddam Hussein's handover, the Arab Spring, and the Euro-aidan uprising in Ukraine. Before joining NBC, he

served with Al Jazeera English and CNN. He has interviewed global figures like President Erdoğan and covered DAESH across multiple regions. *Time* magazine named him one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World in 2011, he received a Peabody Award, a Sigma Delta Chi Award, and other honours for his journalism, and has also been recognised as Journalist of the Year by *GQ* and *Esquire* magazines.

#### **Oz, Dr Mehmet**

Dr Oz first came to prominence in 2004 with appearances as a health expert on 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' before spinning off and hosting his own hugely popular television show. The show focused primarily on medical issues and healthy living and he often drew upon his Turkish heritage when giving advice. It aired its final episode in January 2022. Since then, Dr Oz, a cardiothoracic surgeon and a Columbia University Professor, has moved into politics, becoming the Republican nominee for the 2022 United States Senate election in Pennsylvania. He has co-authored, with Michael F Roizen, six *New York Times* best sellers, and has a regular column in *Esquire* magazine amongst others. He has almost 12 million followers on different social media outlets.

#### **Youssef, Bassem**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 137

#### **Zakaria, Fareed**

Fareed Zakaria is one of the United States' foremost public intellectuals. He was born in India where he completed his early schooling before moving to the USA. He hosts CNN's 'Fareed Zakaria GPS' and is a *Washington Post* columnist. Prior to this, he was Editor-at-Large for *Time* magazine and Editor of *Newsweek International* and *Foreign Affairs*. His latest book is: *Age of Revolutions: Progress and Backlash from 1600 to the Present*.

# INFLUENCERS & SPORTS

## *Middle East and North Africa*

### EGYPT

#### **Aboutrika, Mohamed**

Aboutrika is regarded as one of the best African football players of all time, having lifted 28 major titles, including three Africa Cup of Nations titles over his 16-year career. He has also been named UNDP Goodwill Ambassador and is widely followed, having almost 24 million fans on different social media outlets. He has criticized African fans for excessively following European football clubs and for European football not acknowledging African leagues and merely using the talent of their players. He currently works as a commentator for BEIN sports in Qatar.

### KUWAIT

#### **Suleiman, Hassan ('AboFlah') (new)**

Hassan Suleiman (better known as 'AboFlah') is a YouTuber, gamer, streamer, and philanthropist of Somali heritage. Raised in Kuwait, Hassan launched his channel in 2017, focusing on gaming entertainment, vlogs, challenges, and social-content that resonates with millions. He joined the content creator collective Galaxy Racer in 2020, expanding his reach across the Arab world. In January 2022, in a glass room at Burj Park, next to Burj Khalifa in Dubai, AboFlah livestreamed continuously for 268 hours, 14 minutes and 20 seconds, raising over US\$11 million to help more than 110,000 refugee families across Africa and the Arab region with vital winter aid. This livestream broke the Guinness World Records for longest live-stream video and most viewers for a charity donation live stream on YouTube.

### LEBANON

#### **El Saghir, Abir (new)**

Abir El Saghir is a Lebanese digital content creator and culinary influencer known for her viral food videos that celebrate Arab and global cuisines. With tens of millions of followers across platforms like TikTok and Instagram, she has become a cultural ambassador of Middle Eastern flavors to global youth audiences. Her engaging, family-friendly content promotes

Arab heritage and hospitality while reshaping perceptions of Arab women in media.

### MOROCCO

#### **Hakimi, Achraf (new)**

Achraf Hakimi is a professional footballer for Paris Saint-Germain and the Moroccan national team. Widely regarded as one of the best right-backs in the world, he played a pivotal role in Morocco's historic run to the 2022 FIFA World Cup semi-finals—the first African and Arab team to do so. Hakimi is also admired for his humility, religious devotion, and charitable giving, often seen as a role model for Muslim youth globally.

### PALESTINE

#### **Assaf, Mohammed**

Mohammed Assaf won first place in the popular TV programme 'Arab Idol 2013' after his final performance of *Ali al-Keffiyeh* ('Raise Your Keffiyeh'), a nationalistic Palestinian song and de facto anthem which has now garnered over 90 million views. Raised in Khan Yunus refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, he has become the face and voice of Palestinian youth and the voice of its people's suffering. Assaf became UNRWA's Goodwill Ambassador, was named Ambassador of Culture and Arts by the Palestinian National Authority, and was given a position with diplomatic standing by the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. He has over 22 million fans on social media. His song 'Dammi Falestini' was controversially removed from Spotify following pressure from a Zionist advocacy group; however, it was reinstated following a public backlash. The song has spread alongside the global protests against the genocide in Gaza.

### TUNISIA

#### **Jabeur, Ons**

Ons Jabeur is a Tunisian tennis player who made history in 2011 by becoming the first North African woman to win a junior Grand Slam title at the French Open. She reached the finals of both Wimbledon and the US Open in 2022, but lost both matches. She returned to the Wimbledon final in 2023 but suffered another defeat. Jabeur has achieved

a career-high ranking of world No. 2 in singles, becoming the first Arab and African woman to reach the Top 10 of the WTA rankings. She currently holds five WTA singles titles. As of August 2025, Jabeur's ranking was No. 74. She recently announced a hiatus from professional tennis in July 2025, citing a need to "rediscover" the joy in her life after struggling with injury and form.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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### SENEGAL

#### **Mané, Sadio**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page 137

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## *Europe*

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### DENMARK

#### **Nadim, Nadia**

Nadia Nadim is a Danish professional footballer and qualified surgeon, renowned for her remarkable journey from refugee to elite athlete and medical professional. Born in Herat, Afghanistan, in 1988, Nadim fled the country with her mother and sisters, seeking asylum in Denmark, where she began playing football at age 16. Her talent quickly propelled her to the Danish national team, where she earned over 100 caps and scored 38 goals before retiring in 2025. Nadim's club career spanned several countries, including Denmark, the United States, France, Italy and now Sweden. Parallel to her sports career, Nadim pursued medicine, graduating as a surgeon from Aarhus University in 2022. She is fluent in 11 languages and was appointed UNESCO Champion for Girls' and Women's Education in 2019.

### FRANCE

#### **Zidane, Zinedine**

Zinedine Zidane is a French footballing legend of Algerian descent. Born in a poor neighbourhood of Marseilles, he went on to become one of the greatest footballers ever, winning all major prizes on the personal, club, and country levels and winning player of the year three times. In 2018, Zidane, managing Real

Madrid, became the first manager in the history of football to win three consecutive UEFA Champions League titles. A few days after the victory, he resigned as Real Madrid coach. After Real Madrid's poor performance, the following season, Zidane returned and won the La Liga for the second time in his managerial career before leaving again. He was given a leading role in the opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympics.

### ITALY

#### **Lame, Khaby**

Khaby Lame is a Senegalese-born Italian who is currently the most followed Tik Toker in the world with over 162 million followers. His TikTok videos are mainly silent and mock overly complicated life hack videos. Although living in Italy since he was one, he was only granted nationality in 2022 (aged 22). He studied in a Qur'an memorisation school in Senegal for a year when he was 14 years old. In July 2025, Lame was named to the inaugural TIME100 Creators list, which recognises 100 of the most influential digital creators from around the world.

### RUSSIA

#### **Nurmagedov, Khabib**

Please read bio in Honourable Mentions section on page

### TÜRKIYE

#### **Güler, Arda (new)**

Arda Güler is a rising star in Turkish football and currently plays for Real Madrid and the Turkish national team. Known for his vision, technique, and agility, he has drawn comparisons to football legends despite his young age. Güler's rise from Fenerbahçe's youth academy to Europe's elite clubs has inspired young Turkish athletes. He is seen as a symbol of modern Turkish football excellence, balancing global ambition with strong national pride.

### UNITED KINGDOM

#### **Farah, Mohamed**

The most successful British athlete ever, Farah won the gold in the 5000m and 10,000m at the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games as well as six other global golds. Born in Somaliland but raised in the UK from the age of 8, Farah has captured the hearts of the British public with his hard work, success, smile

and warm personality. He is a popular role model to follow for people from all over the world, especially in the Muslim world. He was awarded a CBE in 2013 and knighted in 2017. He announced his retirement from running in 2023. His winning celebration, the 'mobot', is mimicked internationally.

### **Hussain, Nadiya**

Since winning the BBC's "The Great British Bake Off" in 2015, Nadiya Hussain has gone from being the most famous British baker to being a columnist, author and television presenter. She has produced a popular documentary giving insight into Bangladesh, her country of origin, as well numerous TV cooking series and cookbooks. She has become a household name and an instantly recognisable face in the UK, Bangladesh and for Muslims worldwide. She was bestowed with the honour of being asked to produce a cake for the 90th birthday celebrations of the late HM Queen Elizabeth II and has also received an MBE for services to broadcasting and the culinary arts.

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## *Oceania*

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### **AUSTRALIA**

#### **Jay, Lily (new)**

Lily Jay is an Australian-born digital trailblazer who has rapidly become one of the most influential Muslim voices online. She uses her platforms to present Islam in accessible, viral content that reaches millions. Her 2024 journey from atheism to Islam, sparked by AI-prompted explorations, positioned her as a unique bridge-builder between faith and modern audiences. Jay's videos tackling misconceptions on women's rights, interfaith harmony, and life's purpose have engaged millions worldwide, including a TikTok series on "Why Islam Feels Feminist," which drew over five million interactions and sparked cross-platform dialogue. In 2025, amid the Gaza genocide, she launched the "Lily Jay Foundation", directing aid for famine relief and amplifying Palestinian resilience through unfiltered documentaries, including collaborations with Mufti Menk. Combining tech-savvy influence with humanitarian action, Jay embodies a new wave of digital *dawah*.

## **NEW ZEALAND**

### **Williams, Sonny**

Sonny Williams is an international rugby player and former heavyweight boxing champion from New Zealand. Williams converted to Islam in 2008, and is the first Muslim to play for the legendary All Blacks. In 2013, he was judged the World's Best Rugby League Player at the annual RLIF Awards. He memorably gave away his World Cup winner's gold medal to a young supporter just after the 2015 final.

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## *North America*

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### **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

#### **Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem**

Abdul-Jabbar played basketball for 20 seasons for the Milwaukee Bucks and the LA Lakers before being honoured as one of the 50 Greatest Players in NBA History. In 2012, he was selected by the Secretary of State to be a US Global Cultural Ambassador and in 2016 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest US civilian honour. Abdul-Jabbar is also a best-selling author of 17 books and is a nine-time Columnist of the Year for his essays in *The Hollywood Reporter*. He has acted in numerous television series and movies including *Airplane*, *Game of Death* and FX's number one rated comedy, *DAVE*. He has also taken on activism in his later years, speaking out against Islamophobia and other forms of social injustice. In 2021, the NBA created the Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Social Justice Champion Award. He publishes weekly at [Kareem.substack.com](http://Kareem.substack.com)

#### **Hadid, Bella; and Hadid, Gigi**

Bella and Gigi Hadid, Palestinian-Dutch supermodel sisters, have emerged as influential voices for Palestinian rights in the global fashion industry. Their advocacy, particularly during the ongoing Gaza genocide, has significantly raised awareness about the Palestinian cause among their millions of followers. Bella, known for her more outspoken stance, has consistently used her platform to highlight Palestinian issues, even at the risk of losing modeling jobs. Gigi, while more reserved, has also made impactful statements condemning violence against civilians on both sides. Their \$1 million donation to Palestinian relief efforts and Bella's symbolic fashion choices at high-profile events demonstrate their commitment

to their heritage. Despite facing backlash and controversy, including criticism from the Israeli government, the Hadid sisters continue to leverage their celebrity status to bring attention to the Palestinian struggle.

### **Kattan, Huda**

Huda Kattan is a highly influential Iraqi-American entrepreneur and founder of one of the world's most iconic makeup brands. Born in 1983 in Oklahoma to Iraqi immigrant parents, she initially pursued a career in finance but eventually followed her passion for beauty. She launched Huda Beauty in 2013, which quickly expanded into a full range of beauty products, making her a global leader in the beauty industry. With over 78 million followers on social media, Huda is not only a beauty influencer but also a strong advocate for social justice. She has been a vocal supporter of Palestinian rights, speaking out despite backlash from pro-Israel groups. Huda's unwavering

stance for justice, combined with her entrepreneurial success, makes her a role model for both aspiring businesspeople and activists alike.

### **Tyson, Mike (Malik Abdul Aziz)**

Tyson won his first title in 1986 at 20 years old making him the youngest heavyweight champion in history. His dominance in the ring faded as his wild personal life grew out of control leading him to serve three years in prison, where he converted to Islam. After his release, he went on to regain his WBC and WBA titles. He retired in 2006 and was inducted in both the International Boxing Hall of Fame and the World Boxing Hall of Fame. After his retirement, Tyson went on to publish books and act in television and movies. In 2012, he launched a foundation for troubled youth. Though he has had episodes of controversial behaviour after retirement, his sincerity in trying to uphold the values of his religion and improve himself morally and spiritually inspire millions.



Ghafir 40, 7

Our Lord, You embrace all things in [Your] mercy and knowledge.

# TOP EXTREMISTS

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## *Middle East and North Africa*

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### JORDAN

#### **Al-Maqdisi, Abu Muhammad**

Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi (born Isam Muhammad Tahir Al-Barqawi) is a Jordanian-Palestinian Salafi leader who became a mentor for Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, the founder of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, while they were in prison together. Al-Maqdisi's writings are still a source of inspiration for many Salafi-Jihadis despite his criticism of the extreme violence of Al-Zarqawi and other jihadis. He is especially known for his book in which he declared *takfir* on the Saudi regime. Al-Maqdisi was found guilty on terrorism charges and sentenced to five years in prison by a Jordanian court.

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## *Sub-Saharan Africa*

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### SOMALIA

#### **Diriye, Ahmad**

Ahmad Diriye has been the Emir of Al-Shabaab since 2014, after US airstrikes killed the previous Emir (Ahmed Abdi Godane). When Diriye became advisor to Godane in 2013, he purged Al-Shabaab of its foreign fighters, and oversaw all the domestic policies of the group. Diriye adheres to *takfiri* ideology and strives to fulfil Godane's vision for Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab still carries out terrorist attacks in Mogadishu, Somalia, despite the presence of thousands of Somali government and African Union troops. They have targeted hotels and resorts as well as Ugandan and Kenyan troops.

# NEW ADDITIONS TO THE 450 LISTS

## POLITICAL

- Shabana Mahmood, UK
- Zohran Mamdani, USA
- Dr Irfaan Ali, Guyana

## ADMINISTRATION OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

- HH Prince Rahim Aga Khan V, UK
- Suleiman Bulbulia, Barbados

## PREACHERS & SPIRITUAL GUIDES

- Ousama Alshurafa, USA

## PHILANTHROPY, CHARITY & DEVELOPMENT

- Abdul-Aziz Al-Ghurair, UAE
- Sheikha Bodour Al-Qasimi, UAE

## SOCIAL ISSUES

- Professor Sayed Mohammad Marandi, Iran
- Dr Muhammad Taher, Iraq
- Amina Mohammed, Nigeria
- Amira Elghawaby, Canada
- Dr Sohaira Siddiqui, USA

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- Tareq Amin, Jordan
- Selçuk Bayraktar, Türkiye

## ARTS & CULTURE

- Marwan Abdelhamid (Saint Levant), Palestine
- Mosab Abu Toha, Palestine
- Maryam Yahya, Nigeria
- Syed Nadeem Raza Sarwar, Pakistan

## QUR'AN RECITERS

- Muhammad Dibirov, Azerbaijan
- Egzon Ibrahim, Kosovo

## INFLUENCERS & SPORTS

- Hassan Suleiman ('AboFlah'), Kuwait
- Abir El Saghir, Lebanon
- Achraf Hakimi, Morocco
- Arda Güler, Türkiye
- Lily Jay, Australia

# A Common Word

www.acommonword.com

The 'A Common Word Between Us and You' initiative (ACW) was launched on October 13th, 2007 initially as an Open Letter signed by 138 leading Muslim scholars and intellectuals (including such figures as the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Bosnia, Russia, and Istanbul) to the leaders of the Christian churches and denominations of the entire world, including His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. In essence it proposed, based on verses from the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Bible, that Islam and Christianity share, at their cores, the twin 'golden' commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving one's neighbour. Based on this joint common ground, it called for peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims worldwide, who together comprise over 55% of the world's population. ACW was and is an extended global handshake of interreligious goodwill, friendship and fellowship and consequently of world peace.

ACW is a document which uses religion as the solution to the problems of interreligious tensions. By basing itself on solid theological grounds in both religions—the twin Commandments to love God and love the neighbour—ACW has demonstrated to Christians and Muslims that they have a certain common ground (despite irreducible theological differences) and that both religions require them to have relations based on love not on hatred.

During the ten years since its launch ACW has become arguably the most influential interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians in history. It has provided a common ground on which thousands of Muslim and Christian religious leaders have been brought together through:

- Initiating a multitude of conferences, seminars, workshops, training programs, and university courses in Jordan, the Vatican, the USA (Yale University, Georgetown University and the College of William and Mary, Fuller Theological Seminary, ISNA, Oregon, Virginia, South Carolina, New Orleans), the UK (Cambridge University, Oxford University, Heythrop College and Lambeth Palace), Oman, Malaysia, Egypt, Sudan, Pakistan, the UAE, the Brookings Institute in Qatar, the Mediterranean Dialogue of Cultures, Germany (the Munich School of Philosophy), the World Council of Churches in Switzerland, the Philippines, and Australia.
- Being the subject of books, articles, PhDs and over 74 dissertations and reports.
- Founding the regular [every 3 years] Catholic-Muslim

Forum, which was first held at the Vatican in 2008, at the Baptism Site, Jordan, in 2011, and at the Vatican in November, 2014.

- Giving rise to a variety of other events, activities, initiatives and even legislative bills.

Thus HH Pope Benedict XVI, said of it (during the First Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim Forum held at the Vatican, 4-6 November 2008):

"The Open Letter 'A Common Word between Us and you' has received numerous responses and has given rise to dialogue, specific initiatives and meetings, aimed at helping us to know one another more deeply and to grow in esteem for our shared values."

Equally, HG Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said of it (in 2010):

"The appearance of the A Common Word [Open Letter] of 2007 was a landmark in Muslim-Christian relations and it has a unique role in stimulating a discussion at the deepest level across the world."

Insofar as Muslim-Christian relations are concerned, Professor Miroslav Volf of Yale University said of it (in 2011):

"The A Common Word Initiative is the most significant initiative in Muslim-Christian relations since *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council."

And in so far as Muslim initiatives towards Christians are concerned, Professor David F. Ford (Regius Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge, U. K. and Director of the Cambridge Interfaith Program) said of it (in 2011):

"The Open Letter A Common Word Between Us and You (2007) was probably the single most important initiative ever taken by Muslim scholars and authorities towards Christians."

The A Common Word initiative was awarded the UK's Association of Muslim Social Scientists Building Bridges Award of 2008; Prince Ghazi, Habib Ali Al-Jifri and Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric were awarded Germany's Eugen Biser Award for it in 2008, and Prince Ghazi was awarded the St Augustine Award for Interreligious Dialogue in the Mediterranean (Milan, Italy, 2012) and the Interfaith Harmony and Tolerance Prize by the International Islamic University of Malaysia, *Jamia Ma'din* and the National Unity and Integration Department, Malaysia.

هُوَ يُحْيِي ۖ وَيُمِيتُ  
وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Yunus 10, 56

He quickeneth and giveth death, and unto Him ye will be returned.

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رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي الْمُلْكَ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مَا أَرِيدُ  
فَاطِرَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنِّي مُسْلِمٌ وَاقِفٌ

My Lord, indeed You have given me of sovereignty and You have taught me the interpretation of events. Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Protector in this world and the Hereafter. Take me to You in submission and join me to the righteous

Yusuf 12 : 101

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# THE OBITUARIES

Sheikh Abdul-Aziz ibn  
Abdullah Aal Al-Sheikh

Political

Country: Saudi Arabia

Born: 30 November 1943

Died: 23 September 2025 (age 82)



Sheikh Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Aal Al-Sheikh was the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and a leading voice of the global Salafi movement.

Born in Riyadh on 30 November 1943, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz was a member of the revered Aal Al-Sheikh family, direct descendants of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, founder of the Wahhabi-Salafi tradition. For over two centuries, the Aal Al-Sheikh lineage has shaped the Kingdom's religious and judicial institutions, maintaining a close relationship with the ruling Al-Saud family.

Appointed Grand Mufti in 1999, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz served as the Kingdom's highest religious authority for over two decades. From his seat in Makkah, he became an influential figure in Islamic jurisprudence, guiding millions of adherents worldwide. His rulings emphasised a literal reading of the Qur'an and Sunnah, rejecting what he considered religious innovations, including birthday celebrations and cultural influences such as Turkish soap operas. He also condemned televangelists who encouraged practices outside traditional scholarship.

Sheikh Abdul-Aziz was a vocal critic of extremism, describing DA'ISH as "the number one enemy of Islam." His 2017 designation of Hamas as a terrorist organisation was both praised and criticised across the Muslim world, reflecting his willingness to speak on contentious matters. His tenure coincided with a period of profound change in Saudi Arabia. While clerical influence diminished, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz remained a central figure of religious authority until his passing.

HH Aga Khan IV Shah  
Karim Al-Hussayni

Political

Country: France

Born: 13 December 1936

Died: 4 February 2025 (age 88 years)



Shah Karim Al-Hussayni, the Aga Khan IV, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims, passed away in 2024 at 88 years of age. Born on 13 December 1936, in Geneva, Switzerland, to Prince Aly Khan and Princess Tajuddawlah, he was educated at Le Rosey and Harvard University, where he excelled in history. In 1957, at age 20, he succeeded his grandfather, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan III, to lead the Ismaili community into a new era. His ascension over his father and uncle symbolised a forward-looking vision for a globalized world.

For over six decades, the Aga Khan led an estimated 10–15 million Ismailis across 25 countries, guiding them with a message of pluralism, compassion, and intellectual engagement. Through the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), comprising over 200 institutions, he transformed lives in 30 countries, prioritising education, healthcare, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment. Iconic projects include the Aga Khan University, revolutionising medical education in Pakistan, and the restoration of Cairo's Al-Azhar Park and Aleppo's Old City, blending heritage with community upliftment. His initiatives empowered millions, particularly in marginalised regions of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, earning him accolades like Pakistan's Nishan-e-Imtiaz and Canada's Order of Merit.

A bridge between faith and modernity, the Aga Khan championed interfaith dialogue and gender equality, ensuring Ismaili institutions reflected inclusivity. His Diamond Jubilee (2017–2018) celebrated 60 years of leadership, marked by global initiatives to alleviate poverty and foster peace. A passionate skier and horse breeder, he balanced tradition with progress, leaving a legacy of human dignity and global unity. He is survived by his children, including Prince Rahim, who carries forward his vision.

## Yahya Sinwar

Political

Country: Palestine

Born: 29 October 1962

Died: 16 October 2024 (age 61 years)



Yahya Ibrahim Hassan Sinwar was the leader of Hamas in Gaza and a central figure of the Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. His life journey from refugee camp childhood, to decades in Israeli prisons, to political and military leadership reflected the broader Palestinian experience of dispossession, endurance, and struggle.

Born in Khan Younis Refugee Camp in southern Gaza, Sinwar's family were among the hundreds of thousands expelled during the 1948 Nakba. Growing up amid poverty and displacement, he was educated in local schools before studying Arabic at the Islamic University of Gaza, where he became active in Islamist student groups. His political activism intensified during the First Intifada, and in 1988 he was arrested by Israeli authorities and sentenced to four life terms on charges of involvement in militant operations. Sinwar spent 22 years in Israeli prisons, where he developed the intellectual and spiritual foundation of his leadership. He memorised the Qur'an, studied political and military strategy, and learned Hebrew, gaining insight into Israeli society and statecraft. Prison, he later reflected, was intended to "grind our will," but instead became "a sanctuary of worship and an academy of study." These years forged his reputation as one of Hamas's most disciplined and ideologically committed leaders. In 2011, Sinwar was released and he quickly reasserted his role in Hamas, initially focusing on internal security and organisational discipline. In 2017, he was elected leader of Hamas in Gaza, succeeding Ismail Haniyeh, and in August 2024, following Haniyeh's assassination in Tehran, he became the movement's overall leader. As Hamas's Gaza leader, Sinwar oversaw governance in a territory besieged by blockade and repeated military assaults. Beyond its political and military role, Hamas administered social services—schools, clinics, and welfare networks—vital to Gaza's survival under siege. Sinwar played a central role in the October 7, 2023 attacks, which triggered a devastating Israeli military campaign in Gaza. In October 2024, Sinwar was killed in Rafah during a firefight with Israeli forces. Fighting until his final moments, his last seconds of life have become iconic in cementing his legacy as a symbol of resistance against overwhelming odds.

## Hudayfa Al-Kahlout (Abu Obaida)

Political

Country: Palestine

Born: 11 February 1985

Died: 30 August 2025 (aged 40)



Hudayfa Al-Kahlout, known as Abu Obaida, was the spokesperson for Hamas' military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, with 85% of recruits being orphans whose parents were killed by Israeli forces. He completed a master's dissertation at the Islamic University of Gaza on 'The Holy Land between Judaism, Christianity and Islam'. Since the beginning of the Gaza genocide, his social media briefings gained increased prominence with his statements and appearances closely followed by both supporters and opponents. An Israeli airstrike killed him.

## Sheikh Abdellatif Belkaïd

Preachers & Spiritual Guides

Country: Algeria

Born: 1937

Died: 26 February 2025 (aged 88)



Sheikh Mohamed Abdellatif Belkaïd Al Idrissi Al Hassani, a revered spiritual luminary and guardian of Sufi traditions, passed away on 26 February 2025 in Algeria at the age of 88, leaving an indelible legacy in the realms of Islamic scholarship and mysticism. Born into a distinguished lineage of spiritual guides, Sheikh Abdellatif inherited the mantle of the Hibriyya tariqah—a branch of the ancient Idrissi Sufi order—from his father, Sheikh Belkaïd, continuing a chain of divine transmission that traces back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Renowned across Algeria, Egypt, and Europe, his *zawiya* in Algeria served as a vibrant hub for *dhikr*, Qur'anic exegesis, and moral guidance. Among his illustrious students were high-ranking Algerian officials, whose discreet attendance underscored his profound influence on governance and public service, as well as the eminent Egyptian scholar Sheikh Muhammad Mutawalli Al-Sha'rawi (1911–1998), who sought his counsel in the later years of his life. Sheikh Abdellatif's teachings emphasised the unity of the divine and the sanctity of knowledge, delivered through sermons that resonated in mosques, universities, and private gatherings. His travels to Europe introduced the tariqah's contemplative practices to diaspora communities, promoting interfaith dialogue and resilience amid modernity's challenges.

## Muhammed Fethullah Gülen

Preachers & Spiritual Guides

Country: Türkiye

Born: 28 January 1945

Died: 20 October 2024 (aged 83)



Fethullah Gülen was a Turkish preacher, intellectual, and educator who rose to prominence as the leading figure of the Nurcu movement, inspired by the teachings of Said Nursi (1878–1960). A gifted orator and writer, he emphasised faith, education, inter-faith dialogue, and social service. Through his guidance, a transnational network of schools, charities, and media outlets—often referred to as the “Hizmet” (Service) movement—was established, spanning over 160 countries and promoting both academic excellence and Islamic values. Initially supportive of Türkiye’s ruling AK Party in the 2000s, relations soured as the movement was accused of infiltrating state institutions. Following the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan accused Gülen and his followers of orchestrating the plot, a charge he consistently denied. The aftermath saw an unprecedented crackdown: over 500,000 people were detained, and tens of thousands dismissed from roles in education, the judiciary, police, and military.

Gülen lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania, USA, from 1999 until his death, where he continued to write and teach. His legacy remains deeply polarising: admired globally for promoting education and dialogue, yet condemned within Türkiye as the alleged mastermind of a divisive and turbulent chapter in its history.

## Sheikh Muhammad Hisham Al-Kabbani

Preachers & Spiritual Guides

Country: United States of America

Born: 28 January 1945

Died: 4 December 2024 (aged 79)



Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Al-Kabbani was a Lebanese-American Sufi scholar, spiritual leader, and a prominent figure in the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order. He served as its representative and guide in the West following the passing of his teacher Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil Al-Haqqani in 2014. In 1991, at the instruction of his shaykh, Kabbani moved to the United States. Over his nearly six decades of service to the Ummah, he established over 23 Sufi study and meeting centres in the U.S. and Canada, and founded an Islamic retreat and healing centre in Michigan. He was also

founder or chair of several organisations: the Islamic Supreme Council of America, As-Sunnah Foundation of America, Haqqani Educational Foundation’s American branch, and *Muslim Magazine*. Educated in Chemistry at the American University of Beirut, and Islamic law in Damascus, he merged scholarly rigour with deep spiritual training under Shaykh Nazim and Shaykh Abdullah Al-Daghestani. Kabbani’s legacy is marked by his advocacy for tolerance, peace, spiritual discipline, and resistance to extremism. His work leaves a durable imprint on contemporary Sufism, particularly in how traditional spirituality can exist in diaspora and address modern challenges.

## Santanina Tillah Rasul

Social Issues

Country: Philippines

Born: 14 September 1930

Died: 28 November 2024 (aged 94)



The first Muslim woman elected to the Senate of the Philippines, former Senator Santanina Tillah Rasul was also the founder and Chair of the Magbassa Kita (‘Let us Read’) Foundation Inc, which focuses on literacy and education. She is noted for her work on women’s empowerment, effective civil service, improved literacy for the Muslims of Mindanao, and equitable treatment of Muslims of the Philippines. She authored much landmark legislation, including the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act that empowered women. She also allocated development funds for women’s initiatives and opened the Philippine Military Academy to women. A peace champion, she was a member of the government panel during the peace talks with the Moro National Liberation Front that led to a peace agreement that was signed in 1996. In 2019 she was conferred the Tangang Sora Award.

## Master Hasan Çelebi

Arts & Culture

Country: Türkiye

Born: 1937

Died: February 24, 2025 (aged 88)



Master Hasan Çelebi was one of Türkiye’s most renowned calligraphers, celebrated for preserving and revitalising the classical Ottoman calligraphy tradition. Born in Erzurum, he devoted his life to the study and practice of Islamic calligraphy, becoming a disciple of leading masters such as Hamid Ayaç. His artistry, rooted in the styles of *thuluth* and *naskh*,

earned him recognition as a modern heir to centuries of Ottoman mastery. Çelebi's works were showcased in exhibitions across the globe, where he was honored as a cultural ambassador of Islamic art. Beyond his original compositions, he undertook significant restoration projects, including the revered calligraphic panels of Al-Masjid al-Nabawi in Madinah, the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, and many other historic mosques. He also trained a new generation of calligraphers, ensuring the continuity of the sacred art.

## Saleh Al-Jafarawi

Media

Country: Palestine

Born: 22 November 1998

Died: 12 October 2025 (aged 27)

Saleh Al-Jafarawi, a young Gazan multimedia artist, emerged as a powerful voice documenting the daily struggles and resilience of Palestinians in Gaza. His work as a photographer, YouTuber, and singer garnered him millions of followers on social media platforms. Saleh's unique ability to capture moments of strength and even joy amidst overwhelming adversity made him a beacon of hope for many. Despite being targeted and injured by an Israeli drone attack in February 2024 while covering a hospital evacuation, Saleh's resolve remained unshaken. His continued dedication to sharing Gaza's stories, even in the face of personal danger, increased his influence and impact, making him a vital chronicler of Palestinian life and resistance. He was killed by pro-Israeli gangs just after the announcement of the ceasefire in October 2025.



## Abdallah Schleifer

Chief Editor of the Muslim 500

Country: United States of America

Born: 1935

Died: 27 March 2025 (aged 90)

Abdallah Schleifer was the chief editor of *The Muslim 500*, journalist, scholar, and lifelong advocate of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. He passed away and was buried in his adopted country of Egypt. His life was a testament to curiosity, dialogue, and a profound commitment to understanding across faiths.

Born Marc David Schleifer in New York, he came of age amid the Beat movement of Greenwich Village. Inspired by poetry, jazz, and a spirit of spiritual inquiry, Schleifer embarked on a path that would trans-



form his life. Drawn to Sufi mysticism during travels to Morocco, he embraced Islam, taking the name Suleyman Abdallah Sharif, and dedicated his life to building bridges of understanding between peoples.

Over decades, Schleifer became a towering figure in Middle Eastern journalism. He served as Middle East correspondent for *Jeune Afrique*, special correspondent for *The New York Times*, Washington bureau chief for Al-Arabiya, and NBC News Cairo bureau chief. His work was marked by deep contextual insight and a refusal to reduce complex realities to simplistic narratives.

As a professor at the American University in Cairo, Schleifer shaped generations of journalists, establishing the Adham Center for Journalism Training and Research. His role as Chief Editor of *The Muslim 500* reflected his enduring belief in respectful dialogue, informed scholarship, and nuanced understanding of Islam's role in the modern world.

A passionate critic of the politicisation of religion, Schleifer championed universal truths rooted in love and respect. His life embodied the principle of dialogue as a path to peace. Abdallah Schleifer leaves behind a legacy of courage, compassion, and scholarship that will continue to inspire scholars, journalists, and peacemakers around the world.



Al-Baqara 2, 156

Surely we belong to God, and  
to Him we will return

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GUEST  
CONTRIBUTIONS

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# The Dalā'il al-Khayrāt: A Landmark in Devotional Literature

SHEIKH MUHAMMAD AL-YAQOUBI

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Within the vast ocean of Islamic literature, few works have permeated the daily lives of Muslims across continents, cultures and centuries, like the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* of Imām Muhammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 870 AH/1465 CE). More than a compilation of prayers for the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, it is a testament to a love so profound that it reshaped the entire spiritual landscape of the Muslim world, offering a unique response to the crises of its time and ours.

While scholars before him, like Qādī 'Iyād in his *al-Shifā* or contemporaries like al-Firūzābādī (d. 817 AH/1415 CE) and al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH/1497 CE), who authored magnificent works on the status of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the virtues of praying for him, their works were primarily for academia. Imām al-Jazūlī's genius lay in his revolutionary approach; he created the first dedicated prayer book for the masses. He did not write a dense theological treatise filled with citations, but a living, breathing manual of prayers designed for every ordinary Muslim, student and scholar.

## The Alchemy of Its Composition

There is no doubt that the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* was, up to a few decades ago, the most circulated book in the Muslim world. So, what lies behind its unparalleled popularity? The secret is an alchemical blend of qualities, masterfully woven into a single text. At its foundation, it is a book of *salawāt*, i.e. prayers; every line an invocation of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ, fulfilling a divine command to honour the Prophet and send God's blessings to him, and drawing immense spiritual reward. Yet it is also at the same time a book of *duā*, for through these very calls for blessings the reader prays for salvation, relief from poverty, protection from enemies and success in this life and the next. In this way, it truly lives up to its name: a guide to goodness.

But the *Dalā'il* is more than a prayer book. Imām al-Jazūlī poured his soul into its prose, turning it

into what can only be described as an encyclopaedia of love for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Within it, he included 201 of the Prophet's names, a number corresponding to the numerical value of one of God's Names, *al-Nāfi'* (The Creator of Good), subtly pointing to the immense benefit of this practice. This selection became so renowned that it was engraved on the front walls of the Holy Mosque of Medina in front of the shrine of the Prophet ﷺ. Alongside this, the text serves as a theological primer: woven into its eloquent invocations are the core tenets of Sunni creed, presented in a way that is accessible to all, without the need for formal study.

Perhaps most strikingly, the *Dalā'il* has also been regarded as a guide in itself. It is often said that for the one without a spiritual master, the *Dalā'il* takes the role of master. Its verses work quietly upon the heart, purifying it, treating its ailments, and cultivating the soul until it is ready for the ultimate gift: a vivid vision of the Prophet ﷺ in this life.

## The Dalā'il in Muslim Life

The impact of the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* extended far beyond the sphere of personal devotion. It reshaped the rhythm of Muslim society; merchants recited it in their shops before opening for trade, travellers carried it across seas and deserts for protection, and families gathered around it in their homes as a source of blessing. Its verses echoed in mosques, *zawāyā* and market-places alike, weaving a shared fabric of remembrance that transcended geography and language. The book became not just a manual of prayer, but a cultural anchor, a way of reaffirming identity and belonging in turbulent times. Its influence on manuscript culture, devotional art, and communal rituals ensured that it was not merely read but lived, binding communities together in collective love for the Prophet ﷺ.

## A Response to Crisis, A Call to Resilience

The *Dalā'il* was not born in a vacuum. Imām al-Jazūlī lived during an era of profound crisis. Islamic rule in



Andalusia was on the verge of collapse, Portuguese crusaders were attacking and occupying coastal cities of North Africa, and campaigns to distort the image of the Prophet ﷺ were rampant.

In this climate, the Muslim response was not merely military; it was cultural and spiritual. As others had done through poetry (like Imām al-Būsīrī's *Burda*), Imām al-Jazūlī chose prose. His method was powerful in its simplicity: They slander him, we praise him. The *Dalā'il* was a weapon of love deployed to strengthen the Muslim community's attachment to its source of guidance and grace, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It was understood that a community that honours its Prophet ﷺ is a community endowed with honour (*'izzah*), resilience and ultimate victory.

### The Miracle of a Woman and the Rise of a Legacy

The inspiration for the book is itself a glimpse into the unseen world that Imām al-Jazūlī frequented. The famous account tells of him, a renowned scholar, unable to draw water from a well for ablution. A young woman, a hidden saint, looked down and remarked, "You are a man of praiseworthy qualities but still you cannot find a way to draw water from a well!" She then spat into the well, causing water to rise to the top.

Astonished, Imām al-Jazūlī asked her by what means she achieved this level of spiritual power. She replied, "By invoking blessings for the Prophet ﷺ, the one who was obeyed by animals when he travelled in the wilderness." When he asked for the specific prayer she used, she instructed him instead to compile a book of such prayers. He did so, and upon presenting it to her, she confirmed that her invocation was within it. This miraculous encounter underscores a central theme; true spiritual power is accessed through love for the Prophet ﷺ.

From that moment, the *Dalā'il* became a spiritual treasure. Imām al-Jazūlī himself recited it three times daily during his fourteen-year retreat. His 13,000 disciples in the *Shādhilī* order adopted it as a daily practice. Soon after his death, it transcended its Moroccan borders, with dedicated masters (*Shaykh al-Dalā'il*) appointed in the holy mosques of Mecca, Medina, Cairo, and Istanbul. Wealthy patrons endowed funds in their wills to ensure its perpetual recitation. Master calligraphers from Türkiye to Indonesia vied to produce the most beautiful manuscripts, transforming the book into a supreme art form.

### A Living Testament for a Modern Ummah

Today, the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* remains as relevant as ever. In an age where the Prophet ﷺ is again subject to slander, with Muslims facing myriad challenges, it offers a timeless blueprint for response. It teaches us that defence is not only manifested in protest but in profound, consistent and beautiful devotion.

It calls the *Ummah* back to its heart; to love what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ love. It is a means of cultivating that love personally and collectively, promising spiritual prosperity, relief from difficulties, and, most importantly, a strengthened connection to the Source of all Goodness ﷻ.

The *Dalā'il* is more than a book; it is a journey and a guide for every Muslim seeking to navigate the wilderness of the modern world, with the light of the Chosen One ﷺ illuminating their path.

SHEIKH MUHAMMAD AL-YAQOUBI is one of the most influential Muslim scholars of the modern age, known for his intellectual depth, spiritual authority, and global reach. A descendant of the Prophet Muhammad g through Moulay Idris II, he carries a prestigious Damascene scholarly lineage.

# Islamophobia: A Global Issue

DR ABDULAZIZ ALTWAIJRI

---

Islamophobia is indeed a significant and growing global issue. It is defined as irrational fear, hatred, or prejudice against Islam and Muslims. Rooted in stereotypes, misinformation, or political manipulation, it manifests in rhetoric, policy, and acts of violence and discrimination.

Many Western countries, including the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, and the UK, have experienced a rise in Islamophobic rhetoric, policies, and violence. Indeed, these have entered mainstream politics and media. The rise of the far right parties in Europe with their racial and anti-Muslim narratives have played a large role in creating an atmosphere of hostility and fear from, and hatred towards, Islam and Muslims. This has led to policies that institutionalize prejudice and discrimination; like the “Muslim Ban” in the United States and the anti-burka laws in parts of Europe.

In Asia, Muslim minorities such as the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Uighurs in China, and Muslims in India face systematic discrimination, violence, and even state-sanctioned oppression. These injustices range from restriction on religious practice to mass displacement and internment.

While many African countries have large Muslim populations, some have witnessed anti-Muslim sentiment fueled by ethnic conflicts, terrorism, and extremist violence. In such contexts, entire communities may be stigmatized and made to pay for the actions of a few.

Islamophobia creates hostile environments for Muslims, as they are often subjected to verbal abuse, discrimination, and physical violence. Muslims are in many instances denied basic rights, such as education, freedom of religion, and even denial of citizenship. Deepening division and hate, some politicians deliberately exploit Islamophobic narratives to gain votes or distract from weak platforms, or economic or governance issues.

Islamophobic ideas run deeply and persistently through media and political discourse in many parts of the West, though the degree and form vary by country, political party, and media outlet. Here’s

a breakdown of how and where these ideas are embedded:

## **In Western Media, framing Muslims as a “threat”**

News coverage often associates Muslims with terrorism, extremism, or violence, especially after attacks involving individuals of Muslim background. Terms like “Islamic terrorism” are used freely, whereas comparable acts by Christians or Jews are rarely referred to as “Christian terrorism” or “Jewish terrorism,” reinforcing bias. Indeed, violent acts by non-Muslims are framed in non-religious terms and usually referred to as lone-wolf attacks, or acts committed by mentally unstable people.

## **Underrepresentation and Stereotyping**

Muslims are underrepresented in entertainment media. When portrayed, they are often depicted through negative and harmful tropes: the terrorist, the oppressed woman, or the religious fanatic.

In Western film and television, Muslims are seldom depicted as ordinary, normal members of society—neighbours, colleagues, or professionals—whose lives reflect the diversity of their real communities.

## **Sensationalism and Double Standards**

Media coverage often applies unequal scrutiny to acts of violence depending on the perpetrator’s background. Offences involving Muslims are swiftly framed through the lens of terrorism, while comparable acts by non-Muslims are more likely attributed to personal struggles or portrayed as isolated tragedies. In such reporting, the religious identity of Muslim suspects is frequently emphasised, whereas the faith of non-Muslim perpetrators is seldom highlighted.

## **In Western Politics, mainstreaming of Islamophobia**

In election campaigns in several Western countries, some politicians use overtly anti-Muslim rhetoric to appeal to right-wing and populist Movements and gain their votes. Policies targeting Muslims—such as the “Muslim Ban” in the U.S. or anti-burka laws in

parts of Europe—reflect institutional Islamophobia and normalize discrimination against Muslims.

### **Right-Wing and Populist Movements**

Far-right parties in Europe such as France's National Rally or Germany's AfD) regularly portray Islam as fundamentally incompatible with Western values. This rhetoric fuels conspiracy theories like the so-called "Great Replacement Theory," presenting Islam and Muslims as cultural and demographic threats.

### **Surveillance and Security Policies**

Muslim communities are disproportionately targeted by counter-terrorism laws, surveillance, and policing.

Programs like the UK's Prevent have been criticized for profiling Muslims and discouraging free speech and suppressing legitimate political and religious expression.

### **Evidence and Studies**

Media studies (e.g., University of Birmingham, 2019) found that over 60% of British media coverage of Muslims is negative. Pew Research consistently finds that Muslims face more discrimination than most other religious groups in the West. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented how laws and policies disproportionately target and harm Muslim communities, particularly post-9/11.

### **Nuance and Pushback**

Not all media or political actors are Islamophobic. There are many journalists, outlets, and politicians actively working to combat bias and promote inclusion. Social media and alternative platforms have allowed Muslim voices to challenge stereotypes and advocate for fairer representation. Anti-Islamophobia legislation and educational campaigns are gaining traction in places like Canada and some U.S. states.

Islamophobic ideas in Western media and politics are deep-rooted but not absolute. They often reflect historical biases, post-9/11 security fears, and populist politics—but they are also being actively challenged by civil society, scholars, and some political leaders. The struggle is ongoing, and awareness is rising.

Islamophobia in Western textbooks: In Western countries, Islamophobia in textbooks operates as a subtle yet powerful form of bias, shaping how generations of students perceive Islam and Muslims. Although overt hostility is rare in modern curricula, many textbooks still contain skewed narratives, selective omissions, and frame things in a way that quietly

reinforces Islamophobic ideas.

Here's a detailed look at how this appears in practice:

### **How Islamophobia Appears in Western Textbooks**

1. Selective Historical Narratives Islamic history is often reduced to military conquests or the "rise and fall" of empires. Contributions of Muslim civilizations in science, medicine, architecture, philosophy, and art are minimized or ignored. The Crusades are often presented from a Eurocentric lens, portraying Muslims mainly as enemies.
2. Association with Violence and Extremism Modern references to Muslims tend to emphasize terrorism, jihad, or radicalization. The concept of "jihad" is frequently misrepresented as synonymous with holy war, ignoring the stringent rules that govern it, and its broader spiritual meanings in Islam. Discussions about the Middle East or conflicts involving Muslims often lack context and nuance regarding colonialism, Western interventionism, or political and economic motivations.
3. Stereotyping and Cultural Reductionism Islam is sometimes presented as a monolithic religion, and its rich and dynamic diversity is ignored. Cultural practices (like dress codes or gender roles) are framed as oppressive without offering Muslim perspectives or comparative contexts. Muslim women are frequently portrayed as passive or oppressed, without highlighting agency, diversity, or the voices of actual Muslim women from within Muslim communities.
4. Omissions and Silencing Muslim communities in the West are often absent from social studies or citizenship education, reinforcing the idea of Muslims as "outsiders" or "foreigners." Positive Muslim role models in history, politics, or civil rights are rarely included or celebrated in public discourse.

### **Evidence from Studies and Reports**

"Islamophobia in the Curriculum" (Canada, 2017): Found that Canadian school curricula and textbooks often portray Islam through the lens of violence, oppression, and backwardness, lacking a balanced perspective. Runnymede Trust (UK): Reported that religious education books in the UK often misrepresent Islam as rigid and outdated, failing to capture its modern or diverse expressions. Studies by the Council on Islamic Education and the Institute for



Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) found distorted representations of Islamic teachings and history. Some textbooks used in U.S. schools have been challenged for including biased or factually incorrect material on Islam.

### **Consequences of Islamophobia in Textbooks**

The portrayal of Islam in biased textbooks carries far-reaching consequences. By embedding prejudice into learning materials, such narratives normalise discriminatory attitudes from an early age and foster fear and misunderstanding among non-Muslim students. For Muslim students, these depictions can be alienating, making them feel “othered” or misrepresented within their own classrooms. Over time, such patterns undermine the goals of multicultural education and hinder genuine efforts towards inclusion and mutual respect.

Reform and Pushback Community and academic advocacy has led to some curriculum changes in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. Teacher training programmes are increasingly incorporating anti-Islamophobia modules, equipping educators to address bias in the classroom. And some publishers, have begun revising textbook content—often prompted by public pressure or legal challenges, as seen in the actions of school boards in Texas and California.

What an Inclusive Textbook Should Do: An inclusive curriculum should present Islamic civilisation as an integral part of global history and culture, situating it alongside other great traditions in the human story. It must offer multiple perspectives, amplifying

the voices of Muslim scholars, artists, and activists, and address current issues—such as Islamophobia, immigration, and identity—with both sensitivity and depth. Equally important is the recognition of the diverse contributions of Muslims within Western societies, ensuring that their presence is portrayed as woven into the social, cultural, and intellectual fabric of the modern world.

To combat Islamophobia, it is essential to promote religious literacy and cultural awareness as a means of countering harmful stereotypes. The media carry a significant responsibility to avoid sensationalist or biased reporting that too often links Islam with terrorism. Equally urgent are legal measures that enforce anti-discrimination laws and protect religious freedoms. Interfaith dialogue remains a powerful and effective tool for fostering cooperation and understanding between different faith communities. Ultimately, Islamophobia is more than a matter of personal prejudice—it is a global human rights issue. Confronting it demands the combined efforts of governments, civil society, educators, and the media to build a world grounded in respect, understanding, and peace.

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# Artificial Intelligence And The Future Of Creative Thinking: A Reflection From Islamic Perspective

OSMAN BAKAR, PHD<sup>1</sup>

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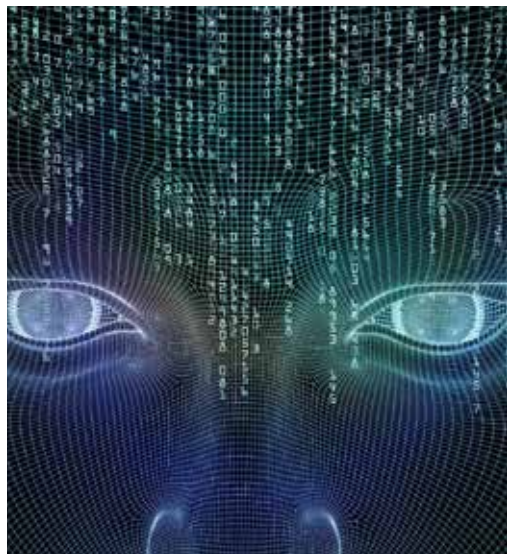
## Introduction

During the last fifty years we often hear of concerns in academia about the decline in creative thinking among college and university students. Critical voices on the issue are becoming more numerous and louder, suggesting the decline is a progressive one. In fact, the decline is observed to have cut across generations, implying that its causes and effects are cumulative. The general trend observed by these critics, including this author, is away from deep and critical to shallow and superficial thinking. The brunt of the criticism is now directed at the education system, which is widely seen as the perpetuator of the pedagogical “vicious circle”. Each decade of teachers and students appears to have less critical-thinking outlook than the previous decade!

When progressive decline in quality thinking is entrenched in an education system with no clear counterproposals in sight to arrest it, then there is a cause for great concern. The genuine fear is that the system in question would degenerate to produce either more of the same kind of mediocre graduates that lack critical thinking or, worse, graduates of lower thinking ability what more if this group is produced in great numbers. Wisdom tells us that the progressive decline in deep and critical thinking worldwide needs to be arrested if true human civilisation is to be restored. The eclipse let alone absence of such quality thinking, especially over a considerable period, could spell a civilisational doom for a society. It would cause any society to degenerate to lower levels of civilisational achievement if we can still indeed speak of such a downgraded achievement as civilisational. The societal degeneration occurs because without critical thinking that is given a meaningful and well-defined epistemological and pedagogical role in the educational curricula many existing problems of the world would not be solved, and new problems would pile

up awaiting solutions.

Critical thinking is a necessary condition for the advancement of knowledge, societal salvation, and the Earth’s planetary health. But this condition alone is not sufficient for the realisation of these noble objectives. A sustained critical thinking tradition needs to be put in place that is complemented with spiritual and moral character building. I argue in this article that critical thinking needs to be wedded to spirituality—the essence of which is faith in God. It is only within the framework of this epistemological marriage between rational and spiritual intelligence that humanity can hope to sustain their civilisation and the planetary ecology that supports it. This viewpoint may be dismissed by sceptics as baseless. But consider the lesson that we learn from history about the rise and fall of civilisations. Critical thinking and spirituality understood in the sense of attachment to rational and ethical values are usually identified with the creative and ascending phase of a civilisation,



while its declining phase coincides with the disappearance of creative thinking and detachment from universal moral and ethical values. Both phases are known to span long periods of time making the decline gradual and hardly noticeable from within the civilisation in question.

Indeed, most members of a great civilisation who live during the phase of its decline are not aware that they have lost their rational excellence that is based on critical thinking, and their moral pride to the language of brute and irrational power and collective arrogance. This is because the feeling of greatness and superiority survives in their collective consciousness. In truth, however, such a feeling is no longer based on sound reasoning and exemplary moral leadership as it used to be during the creative and ascending phase of a civilisation. Rather, it is based on sentiments, ideological or nationalist fervour, and false pride. Devoid of rationality and moral sensitivity, the centres of power in a declining empire or civilisation are only known to be good at demonstrating its might through its display of force, military or otherwise. It is the pursuit of political and military power that overrides everything else in a declining empire. At the same time, hypocrisy in moral and political behaviour is rampant in such an empire, both in its dealings with foreign nations and within its own community.

Jeffrey Sach, the well-known but controversial contemporary American economist, has been speaking more than once about the decline of the American Empire and its European allies. More recently, he is talking about the end of 500 years of Western dominance over other world systems. In short, he is talking about the decline of Western civilisation. His discussion on the subject is framed in the light of the rise of such Asian powers as China and India. In Sach's view then, we who are living today are living witnesses of the decline of the American Empire and, more generally, of Western civilisation. It would be an interesting study if we were to investigate into the origin and characteristic features of the American civilizational decline, particularly a study of the state of its creative thinking and moral sensitivity during the last fifty years, which we have identified as part of the period of its decline. This study may be pursued along the lines of argumentation that I have presented in my foregoing introduction.

### **Contributory Factors to the Decline of Critical Thinking**

Taken collectively, many factors have been cited by critics for the decline of creative thinking. Several

of these factors pertain to the educational trends in modern times that de-emphasize the teaching of thinking skills. First, there is decreasing attention being paid to the teaching of courses on sources of thinking skills such as logic and creative thinking. In traditional Islamic educational curricula, the teaching of logic (*mantiq*), which is essentially the art of thinking, is accorded great importance. But at the present time this subject is no longer taught, including in many universities and colleges that carry the name Islamic or Muslim. This deprivation of students' access to conceptual tools for thinking advancement is in sharp contrast to what the Muslim philosopher, al-Farabi (870 CE – 950 CE), would like to see, and rightly so, in a higher education institution, especially that is dedicated to the rigorous and advanced training of philosopher-scientists, both natural and social. Al-Farabi wrote the first comprehensive education curriculum for such a purpose in Islamic history in which he included the teaching of logic and language.

Second, the art of problem solving is no longer as important a part of learning in schools and universities as it once was. This art helps sharpen thinking skills and keeps cognitive functions healthy. When I was in school, mathematics taught me the art of solving problems. I solved numerous mathematical problems. Mathematics at the more advanced university level continued to teach me how to solve problems but these are now more of the complex types. The precious lesson that I learnt from my mathematics education is that, in truth, I was not just acquiring the art of solving mathematical problems but, rather, the art of solving all kinds of problems in general. There is a universal lesson that may be learnt from traditional mathematics education. Unfortunately, this lesson is now lost. Examinations in the subject of mathematics are now less about testing a student's ability to solve problems than about him answering correctly his objective tests.

Third, the deprivation of quality time for reflection and contemplation for both students and teachers is obvious to all. Both are overburdened with academic works that only add mental stress, not to speak of their uncomfortable feeling of intellectual insufficiency. There is truth in the claim that the existing academic and learning system is such that it does not provide a favourable condition for deep and creative thinking.

Fourth, over-dependence on educational tools like Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is increasingly recognised as harmful to an individuals' cognitive health and development, notwithstanding some benefits it

confers on its users. AI is also cited as a significant contributor to digital distraction, which critics say can lead to a decline in reading comprehension and learning concentration. A MIT study released in June this year suggests a link between ChatGPT use and cognitive decline<sup>2</sup>. According to the team of eight researchers at MIT's Media Lab, ChatGPT can harm an individual's cognitive function, including critical thinking, over time, especially in younger users. Separating the subjects they studied into three groups – users of OpenAI's ChatGPT, users of Google's search engine, and users of the natural brain only – they discovered that those who use ChatGPT over a few months had the lowest brain engagement and “consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioural levels”. This study comes at a time when there is growing concern among educators that AI is increasingly accessible to cheating.

This is not the first study that supports claims about the negative impact of AI-assisted learning on the quality of students' education. In Sweden, there has been for years a fierce national debate on the merits and demerits of digital education and the extensive use of AI-assisted learning tools. Several studies conducted in the country reveal a connection between extensive digital education and decline of student learning. According to Sweden's Karolinska Institute<sup>3</sup>, a highly respected medical school focused on research, in their response to the country's national digitalisation strategy in education, “there is clear scientific evidence that digital tools impair rather enhance student learning.”<sup>4</sup> If we accept the logic of this research discovery, then we could add that given the generative nature of AI its rapid use in digital education would only accelerate the impairment of student learning.

It is interesting to observe that in Sweden, the second-highest use of the internet in the European Union, after Denmark, it was only eight years ago (2017) that the government introduced a five-year digitalisation strategy for schools that was meant to “create further opportunities for digitalisation, achieve a higher level of digital competence (especially in the context of children, students, and younger people), and promote the development of knowledge and equal opportunities and access to technology.”

<sup>5</sup>But last year (2024) the government declared its intention to reverse “the too many opportunities” for young people to stay digitally connected in the classroom. It is leading an effort to get students to rebalance real life and TikTok reels. In the words of Jacob Forssmed, the country's Minister of Social Affairs

and Public Health, “Swedish students are suffering widespread disorders and a decline in physical and intellectual capabilities due to the hours spent online.”<sup>6</sup> In my view, the main casualty in the widespread disorders resulting from over-digitalisation is healthy development of critical thinking in young people. If left unchecked, the consequences for society could be devastating.

Sweden's national debate on the issue of what ought to be a balanced digital education and the place and role of AI in the changing landscape of educational technology offers useful lessons to the rest of the world. The country first embarked on a comprehensive digital education policy around 2009 with the goal of replacing textbooks with digital tools to advance the cause of digital literacy. In 2017 it became more ambitious when it unveiled its dream of becoming a world leader in digital education through the implementation of a five-year digitalisation policy (2017-2022) in schools that could only be described as revolutionary in scope and intensity. Critics call the policy “over-digitalisation.” Post-policy research shows widespread negative impact of the implemented policy on student and youth life. The Swedish digitalisation experience in education raises the fundamental issue of how to strike a balance between real life and the needs for virtual space. In years to come this issue is expected to be more engaging to educationists, scientists, and scholars than any other educational technology issue in the past.

Central to this issue is the ethical question of how to use digital tools and AI technology that would best guarantee a holistic and balanced health for the individual users and the health of the community. Practical experience clearly shows that their usefulness in many areas of societal life cannot be denied. But equally true is the cumulative negative effects of their (mis)use on the wellbeing of individual users, especially students, as amply documented by Sweden's Karolinska Institute. This “double-edge sword” nature of digital tools and AI reminds us of the similar nature of all technologies in general. At a more fundamental level we are reminded of the double-edge sword nature of applied knowledge in general, which sums up the ethics of knowledge that is so much emphasised in the teachings of Islam.

The Qur'an teaches man to pray: “My Lord, increase me in knowledge.”<sup>7</sup> And the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) unveils the spirit of this Qur'anic prayer through his two complementary prayers: “O God! Grant me knowledge that is beneficial,” and, “O God! I seek refuge in Thee from unbeneficial

knowledge.” This prophetic prayer conveys the precious message that while all knowledge is epistemologically true, it is only beneficial to the extent that its use and application will have a self-transformative effect on its possessor so that he becomes a better human being, as well as a community-transformative effect for the better that we call progress. But it is important to note that true knowledge can become unbeneficial if its use and application were to produce opposite effects that are detrimental to the wellbeing of the individual users and their community.

Islamic ethics of knowledge is known for its comprehensiveness and its detailed prescriptions. As such, it may serve as a useful source of ethical guidelines for teachers in digital education and creators and developers of AI-assisted educational technology tools. However, beyond ethics, in the Islamic perspective, digital education and the pursuit of AI progress are to serve higher purposes of human existence. The primary twin higher purposes of education are the cultivation of healthy critical thinking, which itself admits of various levels of attainment, and the formation of spiritual-moral character in individuals. The former attainment is intellectual in nature, and the latter spiritual. The two together – intellectuality and spirituality – define the essence of humanity. The pursuit of digital education and AI, which in truth are mere means to an end and not an end for their own sake, should not distract us from this real purpose of education. I argue that in education it is this wedding of intellectuality and spirituality approach that would help us both attain and preserve a healthy creative thinking culture. Accordingly, in this last part of the article, I would like to briefly discuss a few

aspects of creative thinking in its relations to intellectuality and spirituality.

### **The Future of Creative Thinking: The Wedding of Intellectuality with Spirituality**

According to a prophetic hadith, the present world will not come to an end until not a single human soul is left on earth who invokes the Name of God. The day of the future that is imagined in this hadith coincides with the day when the world will lose its foundational pillars to stand by itself. The creator of the world would remove its supporting pillars that day for the simple reason that all the humans who then fill the earth think that these pillars are no longer of any use to their life. In truth, they entertain the false view that the spiritual metaphysical pillars supporting the cosmic edifice do not exist or are meaningless and redundant to their adopted worldview. But such a falsehood when embraced by the whole of humanity could not sustain the world for even a moment since it goes against the inner logic of the world’s existence or cosmic truth to which many pages of the Qur’an refer as *bi’l-haqq*.

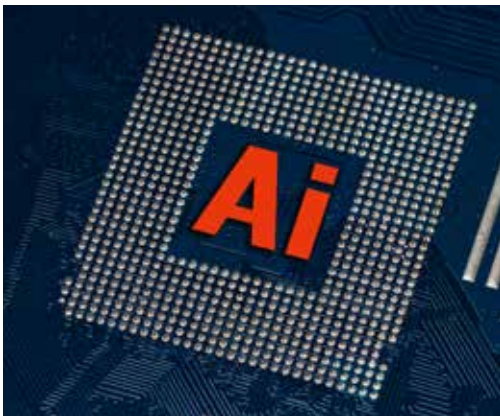
It may be inferred from the quoted hadith that the *raison d’être* of the world is man’s remembrance of God. In other words, the remembrance of God or faith in Him is what preserves the metaphysical link between Earth and Heaven and between man as a terrestrial being and his Creator and Lord (*Rabb*), and hence the continuation of the world. Without such a preservation, there is no longer any valid reason, metaphysically speaking, for the planet Earth, home of the human species, to exist. It is argued here that there is a “mysterious” causal relationship between



the end of the world and the disappearance of faith in God from humanity. Of course, the ultimate meta-physical cause of the end of the world is God's Will to end it. But He chooses a particular moment in cosmic and human history to end it, which He alone knows. To be sure, man does not know the precise cosmic moment in question in future human history, but He shares with him through His last Prophet part of the secret to the question as to why He will choose that moment. The hadith tells us that there is something about the human condition in their future history that contributes to the answer to the question. The human condition referred to is when the heart of every human being is completely empty of faith in God.

In accordance with the Islamic theory of causality, an event happens due to four causes: namely; the material, formal, efficient, and final causes. With respect to the end of the world, we may interpret the four causes as follows: the material cause is the total breakdown or collapse of the physical order; the formal cause is the complete absence of remembrance of God, which we interpret as absence of faith in Him in every human soul; the efficient cause is the angelic withdrawal from their cosmic functions as invisible supporting pillars of the cosmos; and the final cause is the Divine Will to end the world. The formal cause so-described implies that the human condition in the last days of the world contributes to the divine choice of the time to end the world. It is as if God is saying to humanity at the end of time: "since every one of you human beings no longer believes in Me, why should the world continue to exist?" After all, God created the earth to be the place in the cosmos where human beings will play their role as His vicegerents (sing: *khalifah*).<sup>8</sup>

The hadith implies that the global human condition that is favourable to the continuity of the world is one



that may be characterised as sustained spirituality. But then Qur'anic spirituality is essentially intellectual in nature. In the Qur'an spirituality and intellectuality are inextricably linked to each other. Each is viewed as enhancing the other. A core element of intellectuality is critical thinking. The Qur'an speaks of critical thinking (the Arabic *ta'aqqul* and *tafakkur*) as a pre-condition for the flourishing of spiritual and rational truths. It is especially interested in an education that will produce individuals with critical thinking ability and spiritual-moral character. It is in reference to such individuals that we speak of the wedding of intellectuality and spirituality the heart of which is the remembrance of God (*dhikr'Allah*). This wedding is reflected at various levels of human-divine interconnectivity. The civilizational offspring of such a sanctified wedding is what religion calls the true human norm.

### Conclusion

Insofar as thinking ability is a definition of the human species, and in the light of the idea of the true human norm just explained, it is not just any kind of thinking ability that would sustain the species. The quoted hadith supports this argument, since humans at the end of time will still be thinking creatures and yet unable with this thinking characteristic alone to sustain the world. Rather, the kind of thinking needed is precisely the one that would lead to man's consciousness of himself as a theomorphic being who reflects God's Qualities and Names in a total and integral manner and as God's representative (*khalifah*) with a civilizational mission on earth.

This civilizational need poses a formidable challenge to Islamic universities and other institutions of higher learning, especially in this chaotic contemporary world. Malaysia's International Islamic University is currently pursuing Tawhidic Epistemology as its institutional vision and Ummatic Excellence (*khayrun ummah*) as its educational mission, which are positioned as strategic responses to this challenge. A key element in these strategic responses is the revitalisation of creative thinking in its educational curricula and the pursuit of AI that is informed by the Qur'anic philosophy of intelligence. *Wa bi'Llah al-tawfik wa'l-hidayah wa bibi nasta'in.*

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# Unlocking Potential: A Community Blueprint for Muslim Educational Success

MUFTI HAMID PATEL

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“Read in the name of your Lord who created.”  
(Qur’an 96:1)

A quiet transformation is gradually emerging in our communities across England. It isn’t televised or trending. It isn’t led by politicians or pundits. But it is visible in rising parental engagement, the growth of community-led educational initiatives, and the increasing strategic focus of Muslim philanthropy. It has its roots in living rooms, mosques, and community halls—where parents are asking better questions, where mentors are offering stronger guidance, and where donors are choosing to invest not in buildings, but in minds. It is a slow but steady metamorphosis, and one which we must nurture.

Muslim communities in England—and quite possibly beyond—are navigating a paradox. We are aspirational yet underrepresented. We value education deeply yet face persistent barriers to academic success. The data is clear. The stories are familiar. What is needed now is not another diagnosis—but a blueprint for change.

## The Landscape of Uneven Progress

According to the 2021 census (which surveyed the population of England and Wales), among major religious groups, including the substantial group identified as “having no religion”, Muslims had the highest percentage of adults with no qualifications. A startling 25% of the over-16 Muslim population had not stepped onto the first rung of the qualifications ladder. That figure has not shifted much over recent years.

32% of those who identified as Muslims reported having a degree or equivalent, similar to the overall population, but much lower than the impressive 59% of Hindus who had reached this level. Encouragingly, Muslim achievement at this threshold has risen by 8%

since the 2011 census<sup>9</sup>; however, in higher education, just 64.9% of Muslim students received a First or 2:1 degree, compared to 76.3% of the overall population achieving at this standard.<sup>10</sup>

These statistics are not just numbers. They are reflections of structural inequality, social exclusion, and squandered opportunity. They speak to the steady erosion of potential—when talent is overlooked, when ambition is unsupported, and when faith is treated as an obstacle rather than a source of strength.

## The Problem Beneath the Surface

The barriers facing Muslim students are not solely institutional—they are cultural, psychological, and narrative. The framing of Muslim identity through a deficit lens is not restricted to England, nor to current times. It is a longstanding subliminal perception that shapes expectations in classrooms, access to opportunity, and the confidence of young people navigating systems that were not built with them in mind.

Within our own communities, the challenge is compounded by fragmentation. Parents often lack the tools to support their children’s learning. Community organisations operate in silos. Philanthropic giving is generous but rarely strategic. The result is a landscape rich in goodwill but poor in coordination.

There is also a silence around success. Too often, the achievements of Muslim students are underreported, their stories untold. This absence of public narrative matters. It shapes how young Muslims see themselves—and how others see them. We must not only close the attainment gap; we must also rewrite the story.

## The Change We Must Lead

The transformation we seek will not come from outside. It must be led from within. It requires a shift in mindset—from reactive to proactive, from

fragmented to focused, from charitable to strategic.

This is not about abandoning the state or retreating into parallel systems. It is about building the capacity, confidence, and coherence to act as equal partners in shaping the future of education.

1. **Parents:** Cultivating a Culture of Learning and Connection

Parents are their children's first educators. Their influence shapes not just academic outcomes, but identity, aspiration, and resilience. In many Muslim households, education is valued—but not always understood in its intricate modern complexity. Supporting a child through GCSEs, university applications, or navigating special educational needs requires more than aspiration. It requires knowledge, networks, and confidence.

We must:

- equip parents with the tools to support learning at home—from literacy strategies to digital skills
- encourage active engagement in school life—governance, volunteering, advocacy
- promote a faith-driven narrative of excellence: that seeking knowledge is not optional, but sacred

This is not about turning every parent into a teacher. It is about making every home a place where learning is loved, effort is praised, and ambition is normalised.

But, today, a new challenge has emerged—one that is reshaping childhood itself. In many of our homes, children as young as two spend hours each day on iPads, immersed in YouTube content. Teenagers navigate social media platforms that shape their self-worth, attention spans, and worldview. Families sit together in one room, each glued to a separate device, yet disconnected from one another.

This is not just a lifestyle issue—it is an educational one. Excessive screen time erodes attention, limits conversation, and displaces play. It undermines the very foundations of learning: curiosity, communication, and human connection.

Jonathan Haidt's research shows that adolescent depression rates more than doubled between 2010 and 2021, correlating with the rise of "phone-based childhoods."<sup>11</sup> A meta-analysis of 34 studies found that disordered screen use is linked to significantly poorer cognitive performance, especially in attention and impulse control. For children aged 0–3, screen time negatively affects language, motor skills, sleep, and social-emotional development.<sup>12</sup>

We must:

- regulate device usage: Limit YouTube and social media, especially for younger children. Delay social media access until at least age sixteen

- prioritise conversation: Create screen-free zones and times where families talk, reflect, and connect
- encourage play and relationships: Children need to play outdoors, build friendships, and experience the world beyond the screen
- use technology wisely: Online learning platforms can be powerful tools—but they must be used intentionally, not passively

This drive is emphatically not about rejecting technology. It is about reclaiming childhood. It is about ensuring that our homes are places of dialogue, imagination, and growth—not silent rooms lit by soulless screens.

But how do we empower the average parent to enact these changes? Who leads this transformation?

We must now move from awareness to action. This requires:

- Community-led parenting programmes: Evidence-based models—such as peer-led parenting groups—have shown success in improving child behaviour, parent confidence, and family resilience. These programmes are often delivered in schools, community centres, and faith spaces, and are especially effective when led by trained parent facilitators from within the community.
- Faith-sensitive adaptations: Parenting programmes should reflect the values and lived realities of Muslim families. This includes integrating Islamic perspectives on child development, discipline, and emotional wellbeing.
- Local leadership: Mosques, schools, and community hubs should take the lead in convening parenting networks. This includes offering workshops, support groups, and digital resources tailored to different age groups and challenges.
- Learning from others: Other communities have successfully scaled parenting support through national networks, local hubs, and partnerships with schools. These models offer valuable lessons in structure, sustainability, and impact.

Ultimately, we must build a Muslim parenting movement—one that is confident, collaborative, and rooted in both faith and evidence. This movement must be led by a coalition of educators, faith leaders and scholars, community workers, and parents themselves. It must be supported by philanthropic investment and embedded into the wider educational strategy.

While the Muslim third sector and philanthropic efforts often intersect, they play distinct roles in educational transformation. The third sector delivers programmes, builds institutions, and engages



communities directly. Philanthropy, meanwhile, fuels these efforts—shaping their scale, sustainability, and strategic direction.

## 2. **Muslim Third Sector:** Evolving Supplementary Education, Independent Schools, and Community Programmes

The Muslim third sector has shown remarkable growth over the past two decades—particularly in areas such as food banks, refugee support, and humanitarian relief. But in education, its potential remains underdeveloped.

Supplementary education—manifested in weekend and evening schools and *maktabs*—has long been a cornerstone of Muslim community life. It has helped preserve faith, language, and identity. But the time has come to ask: what does the next phase of supplementary education look like?

We are beginning to see promising answers. In cities across the UK, supplementary schools are collaborating—sharing teacher training, curriculum design, and safeguarding practices. Some are embracing technology, offering hybrid models and online access for children who cannot attend in person. Others are investing in outdoor learning, enrichment projects, and creative pedagogy that go beyond rote memorisation.

This evolution is not just anecdotal—it reflects a broader surge in demand.

Participation in supplementary education, youth programmes, and faith-based enrichment has grown significantly in recent years. Waiting lists are expanding, volunteer numbers are rising, and demand for quality provision is outpacing supply. This signals not only a need—but a readiness—for coordinated

growth.

The next phase should include:

- networks of supplementary schools that collaborate locally and nationally
- shared platforms for curriculum, training, and quality assurance
- digital access for children in remote or under-served areas
- a strengthened safeguarding culture: Many supplementary schools have made significant progress in safeguarding policies and practices. This must now be formalised through a community-led self-regulation framework—a process that allows schools to demonstrate their quality, safety, and impact
- character education embedded into every programme, as a matter of urgency

There is a rising tide of concern about a minority of Muslim boys living morally turbulent lives—disengaged from school, vulnerable to gangs, drugs, and online radicalisation. Supplementary schools must become safe spaces for moral development, identity formation, and mentorship. They must offer not only Islamic studies, but also nurture resilience, empathy, and civic responsibility—values that are not separate from the Qur'an and Sunnah, but expressions of it in action.

Beyond supplementary schools, we must also focus on independent Muslim schools. These institutions have made significant strides in academic achievement and faith-based character development. But continued investment is needed—in leadership, governance, curriculum innovation, and accountability

at all levels. The third sector must support these schools to raise standards, share best practice, and build capacity.

Many of these schools are located in disadvantaged areas and charge extremely low fees to remain accessible. There is a difficult balancing act. If fees are raised, pupil numbers drop. If fees remain low, the offer stagnates and quality suffers. This cycle must be broken. No independent school should charge less than the per-pupil funding provided to state schools—and should aim to offer more. To achieve this, we must encourage families to invest their charity, including zakat, into the education of the community's children. This requires a cultural shift: to see education not just as a private good, but as a communal obligation and a sacred trust.

At the same time, we must not overlook the reality that the vast majority of Muslim children are educated in mainstream schools. Here, the third sector has a vital role to play: supporting school improvement, offering targeted interventions, and advocating for inclusive policies.

This includes:

- providing mentoring and tutoring programmes in partnership with schools
- supporting teacher training on faith literacy and cultural competence
- engaging parents and communities to strengthen home-school relationships

Across the UK and Europe, we have built a vast network of Muslim relief charities delivering aid to millions globally. Their reach is extraordinary. Their impact is undeniable. Yet many of these organisations operate in communities where Muslim children face educational disadvantage and rising vulnerability—but rarely engage in local educational provision.

What if each of these charities dedicated part of their operational focus to local educational and enrichment programmes? What if they directly ran mentoring schemes, tuition support, and youth social action projects for Muslim children in their own countries—while extending access to non-Muslim pupils as well?

This would not dilute their mission. It would deepen it. It would affirm that charity begins not only at home, but with a vision for the future. It would connect global compassion with local transformation.

### 3. **Philanthropy:** Investing in Minds, Not Just Projects

Muslim philanthropy is generous and growing. But it is often reactive—focused on immediate relief rather than long-term transformation. Giving tends to

be driven by personal relationships or urgent needs, rather than aligned with a shared vision for educational renewal. This limits impact, sustainability, and the ability to scale up.

In recent years, several Muslim-led foundations have launched multi-million-pound education funds, supporting hundreds of grassroots organisations with grants for mentoring, tutoring, and enrichment. This signals a growing maturity in Muslim philanthropy—a move away from reactive giving toward long-term strategic investment.

To build on this momentum, we must cultivate a culture of collaborative giving—where philanthropists, foundations, and community organisations align around common goals, share data, and invest in scalable solutions. This is especially urgent in education, where long-term transformation requires sustained funding, not just short-term interventions.

Strategic philanthropy should prioritise:

- research initiatives that generate data on Muslim educational outcomes, barriers, and enablers
- scholarship funds that open doors to elite institutions and underrepresented fields
- innovation grants that support edtech, leadership development, and school improvement

There is a powerful opportunity to partner with universities. Muslim charities and foundations can:

- co-fund research centres focused on Muslim education, identity, and civic engagement
- sponsor academic chairs and fellowships in Islamic studies, education policy, and social justice
- collaborate on widening participation programmes to support Muslim students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- develop leadership pipelines by connecting university students with mentoring, internships, and community service opportunities

These partnerships not only elevate the academic profile of Muslim communities, but also embed their contributions within the intellectual and civic fabric of society.

To ensure long-term impact, we must also build community-owned endowments—professionally managed, transparent, and aligned with educational priorities. While interest in Islamic endowments (*waqf*) is growing, few models are structured as true perpetual funds focused on education. Most giving remains project-based. What's needed is a strategic fund that supports scholarships, school improvement, leadership development, and educational research—year after year, generation after generation.

This fund should invite contributions from

philanthropists, businesses, and ordinary families—creating a shared legacy. It must be governed with integrity and designed to grow over time, reinvesting returns to expand its reach.

And we must tell our donors a new story: that the most powerful *sadaqah* is not a meal or a blanket, but a mind awakened, a life transformed, a legacy built.

### **Conclusion: A Legacy Worth Building**

We are not short of talent nor deficient in faith. What we lack is coordination, investment, and vision.

Our faith teaches us that the pursuit of knowledge is a sacred duty. Excellence—*ihsan*—is not elitism, but the standard we are called to uphold in all things. As we build systems and strategies, we must also nurture a moral vision: one that sees education not just as a tool for success, but as a path to service, dignity, and divine reward.

This growing engagement in societal structures, the opening of our own spaces, and the long-term investment in minds over monuments reflect a maturing community—one increasingly confident in its place, purpose, and potential.

The next chapter of our educational story must be written by us—parents who believe, organisations that build, and donors who invest in futures. It must be shaped by a theology of excellence, a politics of inclusion, and a strategy of scale.

This is not just about grades or university places. It is about dignity, opportunity, and influence. It is about building a generation that is confident in its faith, competent in its field, and committed to the common good.

If we act together—with purpose and resolve—we can unlock the potential of a generation. Not just for personal success, but for communal renewal and global impact.

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# Holistic Education: Reclaiming The Soul Of Learning In A Fragmented World

MUSTAFA CERIC, PH.D.  
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In an age where education is increasingly reduced to metrics, marketability, and mechanization, the concept of holistic education emerges not merely as an alternative pedagogy, but as a profound reassertion of the sacred purpose of learning. It is a philosophy that transcends test scores and job readiness; it reclaims education as a path to human wholeness, ethical consciousness, and harmonious coexistence — ideals deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and urgently relevant to our global future.

## Beyond Information: The Crisis of Modern Education

Mainstream education today is caught in a paradigm of fragmentation. Students are often treated as containers to be filled with information, measured primarily by their capacity to memorize and replicate. Knowledge, in this context, is commodified — stripped of its ethical, spiritual, and communal dimensions. While the world has witnessed exponential advancement in science and technology, we are also witnessing parallel crises in mental health, ecological degradation, social disintegration, and spiritual emptiness.

This dissonance reflects a fundamental flaw in how we educate. When learning is detached from meaning, when reason is severed from reflection, and when intellect is divorced from empathy, education fails not only the individual but society as a whole. The crises we face today are not technological — they are human. Thus, they require a human-centered response.

## What is Holistic Education?

Holistic education is not a method; it is a worldview. It recognizes that the purpose of education is not merely to produce workers or consumers, but to cultivate whole human beings — intellectually curious,

emotionally balanced, ethically grounded, and spiritually aware.

Rooted in wisdom traditions across civilizations, including Islam, holistic education honors the interconnectedness of knowledge, self, society, and the cosmos. It values multiple forms of intelligence — cognitive, emotional, social, ecological, and spiritual. It encourages inquiry that is as much inward as outward. And, above all, it emphasizes purpose: not simply what we know, but who we become through what we learn.

## The Islamic Ethos of Holistic Learning

The Islamic intellectual tradition offers a luminous precedent for holistic education. From the Qur'anic invocation: — “*Read in the name of your Lord who created...*” (96:1), to the legacy of polymaths like Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Khaldun, education in Islam has historically been understood as an integrative endeavor — uniting the physical and metaphysical, the empirical and the ethical, the rational and the spiritual.

The early madrasa system combined religious sciences (*‘ulum al-din*) with rational and natural sciences (*‘ulum al-‘aqliyah*), nurturing not only scholars but sages. Students were taught *adab* — the cultivation of inner discipline, humility, and service — as a foundation for intellectual pursuit. Knowledge (*‘ilm*) was not valued for its own sake, but for its capacity to illuminate, elevate, and liberate the soul.

In this tradition, the true purpose of education was *tazkiyah*: the purification of the self, the awakening of the heart, and the alignment of one’s actions with higher moral purpose. In this light, holistic education is not a modern invention, but a recovery of an ancient trust.

## Core Pillars of Holistic Education

A meaningful vision of holistic education for the 21st-century Muslim world — and the world at large — must be built upon several foundational pillars:

1. **Integrated Knowledge**  
Holistic education resists the artificial silos of modern academia. It encourages the integration of disciplines, fostering the capacity to see connections across fields, cultures, and contexts. It views the natural and social sciences not as isolated domains, but as lenses to understand God's signs (*āyāt*) in the universe and within the self.
2. **Ethical and Spiritual Development**  
In a world increasingly shaped by moral relativism, holistic education centres values. It nurtures compassion, justice, patience, and humility — not through dogma, but through embodied practice. Spiritual literacy is not confined to theology but becomes a living inquiry into meaning, service, and the sacredness of life.
3. **Emotional and Social Intelligence**  
Mental health and emotional well-being are integral to the human journey. Holistic education prioritizes self-awareness, empathy, communication, and community engagement. It trains learners not only to think critically, but to feel responsibly and act constructively in society.
4. **Environmental Consciousness**  
In the face of climate collapse, holistic education affirms the ecological interdependence of all life. It instills a sense of *khalifah* — stewardship — as a sacred responsibility, encouraging sustainable living and reverence for the earth.
5. **Creativity and Wonder**  
True education does not stifle imagination; it nourishes it. Holistic learning cultivates the arts, storytelling, design, and innovation — recognizing creativity as a reflection of the Divine creative impulse in the human being.

## Challenges and Imperatives

Implementing holistic education is not without challenges. It requires rethinking curriculum design, teacher training, assessment models, and institutional goals. It necessitates courage to question inherited models and creativity to pioneer new ones. In many parts of the Muslim world, this means transforming outdated colonial education systems into frameworks that are rooted in our own values, history, and aspirations.

But the urgency of our global condition demands such transformation. As young Muslims navigate

identity crises, cultural alienation, and ideological extremism, a holistic educational model can serve as a sanctuary — reconnecting them with purpose, belonging, and the prophetic example of mercy, knowledge, and balance.

## Towards a New Educational Renaissance

A new renaissance in Muslim education must reclaim the spirit of *ta'lim* (learning), *tarbiyah* (nurturing), and *tazkiyah* (purification) as an inseparable triad. It must merge the best of traditional wisdom with the best of modern research — not in opposition, but in harmony. It must restore teachers as moral mentors and schools as gardens of human flourishing.

Initiatives across the Muslim world — from faith-integrated schools in Malaysia, character-based education in Indonesia, spiritual pedagogy movements in Turkey, to community-led madrasas in Africa and North America — are already embodying elements of this paradigm. What remains is to link them, scale them, and embed them in our educational policy and imagination.

## Conclusion: From Knowing to Becoming

Holistic education reminds us that the highest goal of learning is not accumulation, but transformation. In a time when we are drowning in information but thirsty for wisdom, this approach calls us back to balance. It invites us to educate not just minds, but hearts; not just for livelihood, but for life; not just to know, but to become.

As we celebrate the visionaries shaping the Muslim world, let us also honor those cultivating its soul: the educators, mentors, and institutions daring to illuminate a new path forward — one where the whole person, and the whole society, may rise together.

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# The Rebirth of Islamic Environmentalism: The Emergence of Al Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth

FAZLUN KHALID

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This narrative encompasses the historical period that began in the 1960s when we began to discover that our global village, in its attempts to “progress”, has caused grievous bodily harm to planet Earth, our only home. Since then geologists and environmentalists have been arguing whether to call this period the Anthropocene<sup>13</sup> to replace the current Holocene<sup>14</sup>, to give weight to the fact that the human race has become a force of nature. I have been part of this journey of discovery, asking questions particularly about the Muslim contribution to this process, and seeking Islamic answers in mitigation of what we have wrought. What I discovered was that Islamic teachings affirm the embedded essence of the human community in the natural world and, as such, we have a profound responsibility to maintain the balance (*al-mizan*) that holds our world together.

## A Wake-Up Call

Environmentalism emerged as a major issue in the modern world in the early 1960s, stimulated by the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*<sup>15</sup>. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF, later renamed the Worldwide Fund for Nature) was created in 1961, Friends of the Earth in 1969, Greenpeace in 1971, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in 1972. The only exception to this was the creation of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1948 under the auspicious of UNESCO—perhaps a reaction to the severe damage inflicted on the natural world in the destructive Second World War which ended in 1945. There were significant contributions by Muslims such as Mustapha Tolba of Egypt who headed the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) from 1975 to 1992, and S. M. Idris of Malaysia who was a recipient of the

Alternative Nobel Prize called the Right Livelihood Award in 1988.

To match up to the initiatives of the secular world, the late Prince Philip initiated multi-faith environmental activism in the 1980s while he was President of the WWF. His motivation was to give a voice to three quarters of the world’s population who adhered to one faith tradition or another. He brought together world religious leaders in 1986 in Assisi, Italy, out of which emerged the Assisi Declarations on Nature<sup>16</sup>. There were contributions from leaders of the five major religions of the world, and the Muslim Declaration on Nature was delivered by Abdullah Omar Nasseef who was at that time Secretary-General of the Muslim World League (Rabitat al-‘Alam al-Islami). This was the beginning of the faith-based environmental movement which under Prince Philip’s patronage was developed by the International Consultancy for Religion Education and Culture (ICOREC). I contributed to this movement as an associate of ICOREC until the year 2000.

One of the first fruits of this collaboration was an invitation to co-edit *Islam and Ecology*<sup>17</sup> in 1992 which was part of a major series on Faith and Ecology sponsored by the WWF. I was subsequently invited to chair an international workshop of faith-based environmental activists and organisations in Japan in 1995, which had as its objective the discovering of common ground between nine different faith traditions. The outcome of this was the Ohito Declaration for Religion Land and Conservation (ODLRC)<sup>18</sup> named after the town where this gathering took place. This workshop produced ten environmental principles and ten areas of action in which the faiths found common ground. In the same year ICOREC morphed into the Alliance of Religions



and Conservation (ARC) and continued its work as the hub of faith-based environmental activism and promote ODRLC. Having chaired the workshop that produced this declaration, I was invited to promote it internationally. I thus slipped into the role of a roving ambassador for ARC and conducted this work for five years.

### **Discovering the Islamic Heritage**

A common question, particularly from young Muslims, levelled at me when I started this work was, “Has Islam really something to say about the environment?” This in a sense underscores a vital gap in the way Islam is being taught today and reflects a secularisation of the Islamic ethic under the hegemonic European colonial period since the 15th century. By and large, the curricula of the madrasas in the Islamic world today confine their teachings to the basics such as learning to read the Quran, a rudimentary insight into hadith literature, knowledge of the five pillars, and not a great deal beyond that. This subject does not appear to figure with the urgency that it deserves even at the seminaries that turn out imams and Friday preachers. Nevertheless, signs of positive change are now emerging, led by the rapid growth of the teaching of ecological ethics through the lens of Islam in the Indonesian madrasa movement.

It is also, it would seem, a matter of language at another level. An encounter with an *‘alim* of my acquaintance in the early days of my work described the increase in environmental awareness as nature worship. And another, at a political level, described the growing interest in environmental issues as, “Their problem; they created it; so let them solve it”, meaning the west created the problem thus absolving Muslims of any responsibility for the current state of planet Earth.

A Muslim awakening to the burgeoning environmental crisis has had something of a longish period of maturation. The field was led by Seyyed Hossein Nasr who has a reputation in the academic world as a pioneering Muslim thinker and who wrote about the natural world from an Islamic perspective. One of his early works, *Man and Nature*<sup>19</sup>, was first published in 1968. Another source, *Environmental Protection in Islam*<sup>20</sup>, was jointly published in 1983 by the Meteorology and Environmental Protection Administration (MEPA) of Saudi Arabia and IUCN.

The poetry of the Sufis had much to convey about the natural world. The compositions of Jalal ud-Din Rumi<sup>21</sup>, which are popular amongst western audiences, are perhaps the best-known amongst them. There are others like Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Al Habib<sup>22</sup> of Morocco, who eulogise nature in his poems. The

following is a section from 'Reflections,' one of the *qasidas* (poems) from his *Diwan*<sup>23</sup> (a collection of poems):

Reflect upon the beauty of the way in  
which both the land and sea are made,  
and contemplate the attributes of  
Allah outwardly and secretly.

The greatest evidence to the limitless  
perfection of Allah can be found  
Both deep within the self and the distant horizon.<sup>24</sup>

If you were to reflect on physical bodies  
and their marvellous forms  
And how they are arranged with great  
precision, like a string of pearls;

And if you were to reflect on the earth  
and the diversity of its plants  
and the great varieties of smooth  
and rugged land in it;

And if you were to reflect on the secrets  
of the oceans and their fish,  
and their endless waves held back  
by an unconquerable barrier;

And if you were to reflect on the  
secrets of many winds  
and how they bring the mist, fog and  
clouds which release the rain;

And if you were to reflect on all  
the secrets the heavens –  
the Throne and the Foot-stool and the  
spirit sent by the command -

Then you would accept the reality of  
tawhid<sup>25</sup> with all your being,  
and you would turn from illusions,  
uncertainty and otherness;

Whilst one can take comfort to the existence of deep ecology in Islamic teachings, how does one express them in the global village we now live in?

There were two individuals from whom came much of the inspiration since the earliest days of my activism. They were the late Al-Hafiz B. A. Masri whose book *Animals in Islam*<sup>26</sup> was published in 1989. Although frail of health when I met him in 1990, he was full of enthusiasm for his chosen subject and campaigned

tirelessly for animal welfare from an Islamic perspective. The second was Othman Llewellyn<sup>27</sup> who has been pioneering Islamic environmentalism in Saudi Arabia since the early 1990s.

Encouraged by these initiatives, I founded the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences<sup>28</sup> (IFEES/EcoIslam) in 1994. Its objectives were to raise awareness in the Muslim world and beyond of the existence of a deep ecological ethic prevalent in the foundations of Islam by developing teaching resources based on the Quran and the sharia, and giving practical expression to them in real time. The first of these resources, *Quran, Creation and Conservation*<sup>29</sup> was published in 1999. Its efficacy was demonstrated a year later when it was used to persuade Zanzibari fishermen to stop using dynamite in their fishing activities as it had the effect of destroying the coral reefs where the fish spawned. This initiative, known as the Misali Island Marine Conservation project, represented two firsts. The first was the establishment of a marine hema<sup>30</sup> in modern times and the second was the appointment of Ali Khamis Thani to the post of Islamic environmental officer to manage the project<sup>31</sup>. This project was subsequently accepted as a "Sacred gift to the Earth" from Islam at a major gathering in Nepal in 2000 organised by the WWF and ARC. Since then, *Quran, Creation and Conservation* was the key resource that featured in the workshops we set up for the *ulama* and madrasa teachers from the West Coast of Africa to Indonesia.

The summation of what I had gathered thus far is consolidated in my book *Signs on the Earth – Islam Modernity and the Climate Crisis*<sup>32</sup>.

## The Covenant

The global village was in something of a quandary when we began to realise that we were devouring nature on a massive scale by the heedless exploitation of life-giving sources into resources for profit. Belatedly, the Earth Charter movement was born in the late 1990s, recognising the absence of a secular ethic that protected the natural world. I was part of this movement and contributed to the development of the Earth Charter<sup>33</sup> which was launched in Amsterdam in 2000.

Although faith-based activism demonstrating environmental concerns was on the rise, a comprehensive faith-based response to the emerging crises was yet to emerge from this movement. IFEES/EcoIslam attempted to mobilise support for an Islamic Environmental Charter in 2013 but this received no support from Islamic countries and institutions. Operating

on a shoestring budget, this was way beyond the scope of our activities to go it alone. In 2015 the late Pope Francis launched *Laudato Si*<sup>34</sup>, articulating the Christian position on the environment. In the same year we launched the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change<sup>35</sup> with the support of Islamic Relief.

It was a frustrating position to be in. Islamic teachings on human relationships with the natural world had much to offer, but how to bring this to the fore? A rare opportunity arose when I was invited to speak at the Eighth Islamic conference of the Ministry of Environment in Rabat, Morocco in October 2019. What is often said about conferences is that the important decisions are made during informal meetings between delegates, and so it happened that a discussion over dinner between Abdul Majid Tribak, who was part of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) Directorate and Iyad Abu Moghli, who was the Director of the Faith for Earth division at UNEP, and myself agreed to work on launching an Islamic resource for the protection of the environment. What was vital about this arrangement was that we had the backing of the resources of UNEP thanks to Iyad Moghli, in the absence of which this initiative would have floundered.

Thus, 27 February 2024 was the historic occasion when dormant Islamic teachings concerning the in-eradicateable connection between man nature emerged as the *Al Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth*<sup>36</sup> (the Covenant) which was officially launched at the 6th United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA-6) in Nairobi. It had taken five years to put together by an eminent group of twelve Islamic scholars and environmental activists spread from Indonesia to the States. Much to my own relief, Othman Llewelyn took on the role of lead author in the production of the Covenant.

What was also notable in this endeavour was the comprehensive consultation process that went into consolidating the draft of the Covenant. The first draft was circulated to more than three hundred Islamic institutions worldwide for comment, and a further review was carried out with the assistance of twenty-eight eminent experts and academics from various countries, including Cairo-based Al-Azhar scholars.

The Covenant is spread over 40,000 words, consisting of five chapters and an annex, as follows -

- Chapter 1: An Appraisal of the Earth
- Chapter 2: Signs of God in the Heavens and the Earth

- Chapter 3: The Ecological Ethos and the Ethics of Islam
- Chapter 4: Equity, Fairness and Justice in Sharing the Sources of Life
- Chapter 5: Principles and Practices for Tending the Earth
- Annex: A Way Forward

Whilst the first chapter encapsulates the current state of planet Earth, the other four chapters are drawn exclusively from teachings in the Qur'an and the consequent evolution of Islamic jurisprudence (Shariah) in relation to human relationships with the natural world. The Covenant provides ample evidence of the existence of an integrated ecological ethic from the beginnings of Islam and its evolution as Islam spread into numerous ecological systems from West Africa all the way to China. This realisation issues a challenge to the Muslim world to join in the leadership that is attempting to save the planet from further destruction.

The annex to the covenant lays down the way forward. The most important of these recommendations is education. In reiterating my earlier observations, this needs to start at the very bottom, the madrasa system, as increasing urbanisation and consumerism is distancing children from the natural world. Those who deliver the Friday sermons and the scholarly community also have a profound responsibility to normalise the understanding and application of Islamic creation theology. There has been an encouraging increase in the volume of dissertations and research studies appearing in academia concerning the Islamic environmental ethic since the 1990s. It is hoped that those who are armed with this knowledge will form the vanguard of teachers and activists reaffirming the human role as Khalifa, leaving a livable Earth for future generations.

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Reaching out - I extend an invitation to those who wish to support the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences in promoting *Al Mizan A Covenant for the Earth* to contact me for further information.

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# Shared Human Values from an Islamic Perspective

PROFESSOR FAID MOHAMMED SAID

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In a world marked by globalisation, conflict, and moral relativism, the search for a set of universally shared human values has never been more urgent. There exists, the world over, an invisible thread that connects us all, no matter where we come from or what we believe. This article aims to highlight the global moral discourse by presenting an Islamic perspective on common human values. Drawing from the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the classical Islamic tradition, the study explores concepts such as justice, equality, forgiveness, tolerance, love, moderation, and solidarity. It highlights Islam's profound moral foundation, which aligns with global ethical frameworks, while also offering unique insights rooted in divine revelation. Special attention is given to the Islamic view of conflict resolution, the role of global religious leadership, and ethical responses to contemporary crises, with a concluding reflection on justice and the moral duty towards Palestine and Gaza.

## The Global Quest for Moral Anchors

In recent decades, humanity has grappled with questions of ethics, identity, and survival in an increasingly interconnected world. Amid the challenges posed by war, inequality, technological disruption, and ecological collapse, the question remains: Are there values we can all agree upon? The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Earth Charter, and interfaith declarations such as the Declaration of Human Fraternity (Abu Dhabi, 2019) suggest that a shared moral language is possible. Islam, as a world religion with over 1.8 billion adherents, has a significant contribution to make to this discourse, not merely as a religion, but as a civilizational force with a rich ethical tradition.

### 1. The Foundations of Human Values in Islam

Islamic ethics are grounded in a triad of sources: the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and *al-'aql al-salim* (sound reasoning). The Qur'an states:

“We have certainly honoured the children of

Adam” (Qur'an 17:70),

thereby affirming human dignity as a foundational value. The purpose of Shariah, as outlined by classical scholars such as al-Ghazali and al-Shatibi, is the preservation of five essentials: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property—universal concerns that are also echoed in secular ethics. Islamic moral philosophy, particularly as developed in the works of Ibn Miskawayh, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, shows that Islam does not see virtue as a monopoly of revelation alone, but also as accessible through reason and experience.

### 2. Common Principles and Religious Values: The Overlap of Faith and Ethics

Across faiths, we observe shared injunctions: “Do not kill,” “Honour your parents,” “Be just,” and “Do unto others.” These are not coincidental but reflect a divine universality. The Qur'an declares:

“Indeed, those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does righteousness—shall have their reward with their Lord...” (Qur'an 2:62).

Islam recognises previous scriptures and prophets, thus building a theological framework for religious pluralism. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

“The prophets are brothers from one father; their mothers are different, but their religion is one.”

This example conveys the unity of the ethical message despite the diversity of religious practice.

### 3. Conflict Resolution in Islam: From Tribal Warfare to Ethical Diplomacy

The Islamic tradition on conflict resolution is rooted in *sulh* (reconciliation), *'adl* (justice), and *ihسان* (benevolence). The Prophet ﷺ mediated between warring tribes even before prophethood (e.g., the rebuilding of the Ka'ba) and, after prophethood, he continued this legacy, most notably in the Treaty of

Hudaybiyyah, praised in the Qur'an as a "clear victory" (48:1) despite being a compromise. Islamic jurisprudence developed principles for the ethics of war (*fiqh al-jihad*), insisting on the protection of civilians, prohibition of mutilation, and respect for treaties. These principles are not just legal but are moral commitments that promote peace over revenge.

#### 4. Forgiveness and Mercy: A Prophetic Standard

Forgiveness in Islam is not weakness—it is nobility. Allah is described as *al-Ghaffar* (the Forgiving) and *al-Rahman* (the Merciful), and believers are encouraged to embody these attributes. The Qur'an states:

"Repel evil with what is better; then the one who was your enemy may become your close friend" (Qur'an 41:34).

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ forgave the people of Mecca at the height of his power. His mercy was not reactive but principled. This has inspired Muslim rulers, scholars, and mystics throughout history—from Saladin's chivalry in Jerusalem to Imam al-Ghazali's spiritual counsel.

#### 5. Justice and Equality: The Ethical Backbone of Islam

Justice (*adl*) is the foundation of Islamic governance and social order:

"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and to judge with justice..." (Qur'an 4:58).

The Prophet ﷺ declared:

"Even if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad, stole, I would punish her," thus rejecting

nepotism.

Equality in Islam is spiritual and ethical. Bilal al-Habashi, Salman al-Farisi, and Suhayb al-Rumi—figures from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds—became central companions of the Prophet. The Farewell Sermon made it clear:

"No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor a white to a black, except in piety."

#### 6. Love, Compassion, and Solidarity: Beyond Sentiment

The Qur'an uses the term *mawaddah* (loving kindness), notably in family life:

"He placed between you affection and mercy" (30:21).

But love in Islam extends beyond family to all humanity and creation. The Prophet ﷺ said:

"You will not believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself."

Solidarity is manifest in *zakah* (almsgiving), *sadaqah* (charity), and *waqf* (endowments). These are structural expressions of love and ethics made into law and practice.

#### 7. Moderation and Balance: Wasatiyyah as a Way of Life

The Qur'an defines the Muslim community as:

"A middle nation" (*ummatan wasatan*) (2:143).

Moderation (*wasatiyyah*) applies to belief, consumption, emotions, and behaviour. Excess is condemned; so is negligence. The Prophet ﷺ warned:

"Beware of extremism in religion, for it



destroyed those before you.”

Islam thus avoids the extremes of monasticism and hedonism, legalism and libertinism. The ideal is a balanced life that nourishes the soul and serves society.

## 8. Religion as Moral Guidance: Not Dogma but Direction

Religion in Islam is not a set of isolated rituals but a comprehensive moral compass. The Qur’an consistently ties *‘ibadah* (worship) to ethical conduct:

“Establish prayer... indeed, prayer prevents immorality and wrongdoing.” (29:45)

In Islamic theology, faith (*iman*) must lead to action (*‘amal salih*), and action is judged by intention (*niyyah*) and impact. Religion thus becomes a force for societal betterment.

## 9. Understanding, Tolerance, and Interfaith Engagement

The Qur’an encourages dialogue:

“O People of the Book, come to a word that is equitable between us...” (3:64)

and warns against compulsion:

“There is no compulsion in religion...” (2:256)

Islamic history records rich examples of coexistence: the Covenant of Najran, Ayyubid Jerusalem, Ottoman millet system, and al-Andalus. Scholars such as Imam al-Qarafi wrote legal treatises protecting the rights of non-Muslims under Islamic governance.

## 10. The Ethical Response to Materialism and Arrogance

Modernity’s challenges—materialism, consumerism, and egoism—are not new. The Qur’an warned against *taghut* (false idols), *istikbar* (arrogance), and *tughyan* (transgression).

“Indeed, man transgresses when he sees himself self-sufficient” (96:6-7)

Islam promotes humility (*tawadu’*), detachment from excess (*zuhd*), and accountability (*muhasabah*). Wealth is not condemned, but its use is a moral test.

## 11. Global Religious Leadership: Shared Moral Responsibility

Islam recognises moral leadership among the righteous of all faiths. The Qur’an praises those who:

“Enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong” (3:104) and describes upright members of other religions as “standing in prayer, fearing the Hereafter” (5:82-84).

This sets the stage for a global alliance of spiritual

leaders—Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and so on—committed to justice, compassion, and peace. The Amman Message (2004) and Marrakesh Declaration (2016) reflect such aspirations.

## 12. Happiness, Harmony, and the Pursuit of Meaning

Islam views happiness (*sa’adah*) not as pleasure but as contentment and purpose. The Qur’an teaches:

“Indeed, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (13:28)

Inner harmony comes through faith, ethical living, and community. The Prophet ﷺ was described as always smiling, even in hardship, modelling a joy rooted in trust (*tawakkul*) and hope (*raja’*).

## 13. Palestine and Gaza: A Moral Litmus Test for Humanity

No discourse on justice and values can ignore Palestine and Gaza. The occupation, the blockade, the enforced famine, and the constant bombing violate every moral code, secular and religious.

Islam commands solidarity with the oppressed:

“And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children...” (Qur’an 4:75)

Support for Palestine is not political opportunism but a fulfilment of a divine mandate for justice. It is a test of our shared humanity.

## Conclusion: Towards a Global Moral Movement

Islam offers a vision of ethical universality rooted in divine guidance and human dignity. The shared values of justice, love, forgiveness, moderation, and understanding are not unique to Islam, but Islam offers a coherent theological and practical framework to embody them.

In a fragmented world, the Islamic ethical tradition can serve as a bridge between faiths, civilisations, and generations, toward a more just and compassionate world.

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# Working for the Common Good: A Muslim Obligation in the West

DR MUHAMMAD ABDUL BARI

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## Introduction

This paper explores how Muslims in the West, especially those in mosques and community institutions, can engage meaningfully with wider civil society, not just to protect their own rights, but to contribute to the common good.

God created humans as His “representatives” or stewards on Earth (Qur’an 2:30) and this is a key objective in Islam. Believers must strive to perform this role with integrity and excellence in all circumstances. Islam is both spiritual and communitarian, and its social aspect calls on individuals to strive (*jihad*) in order to create empathetic, respectful and equitable societies. Alongside core beliefs and ritual worship, good behaviour and service to others are essential aspects of piety and are seen as a form of ongoing charity (*sadaqa jariyah*) that will be rewarded immensely in the Hereafter.

Mosques and community leaders should thus prioritise two key goals:

- Build internal capacity by nurturing talent within

their congregations

- Encourage outward engagement to serve the wider society

These are vital for grassroots democracy and the survival of any faith community in pluralist, post-religious societies. Success depends on strong internal grounding and rootedness to faith as well as confident external engagement and alliance building, underpinned by better socio-religious understanding, thoughtful planning and effective action. Leaders must be equipped with contextual Islamic knowledge and be able to engage confidently and productively with society.

Muslim civic leaders require social and political literacy and the intellectual maturity to inspire service without any expectation. In a world dominated by materialism and a “me first” attitude, spirituality and humility are antidotes and should be their hallmark. If Muslims remain disconnected from civic and political life, they risk developing an insular mindset and false sense of achievement. The next generation



will drift further away from community involvement, widening the existing generational and cultural gaps. Talented and professional Muslim youth, including children of established community leaders, often hesitate to lead legacy institutions. A community cannot thrive if it fails to harness its youth.

### **Story of Muslim Migration to the Modern West**

The meteoric rise and expansion of Islam in its early centuries sent a shockwave across the wider world. The eruption of knowledge, academia and intellectual pursuit amongst Muslims initiated a civilisation that in turn energised the then intellectually stagnant Europe. Some European Christian powers responded with hostility, launching a series of Crusades to regain lost holy sites. Later, the Mongol Horde devastated the Muslim world, marking the start of its gradual decline.

By the 13th century, the already weakened Muslim world fell behind further due to internal disunity and intellectual stagnation. A Renaissance in Christian Europe, known to be influenced by Muslim scholarship, created an unparalleled vigour that launched a global expansion. With superior knowledge and drive but bereft of ethical or moral values and teachings, the European ruling class began an adventurous 'discovery' of the then unknown world. "Europe is ablaze with knowledge and skills. Truly its foundation of life is in the pitch darkness," lamented Asian philosopher poet Iqbal in early 20th century.

Europe's "conquest" led to ethnic cleansing and the genocide of weaker indigenous people. There was stiff resistance from victims, but they simply were not a

match, and the three 'new' continents soon turned into European settler colonies. At the same time, many countries fell victim to colonisation, largely from their own hands through decadence and deceit. European colonisers were relentless in their injustice, using divide and rule policies in Asia or enslaving millions of Africans by shipping them to America.

Muslims faced unprecedented humiliation under colonial rule. Even post-independence, most Muslim countries remain deviously fragmented and weakened by Western "divide and rule" policies and the ineptitude and corruption of newly installed rulers. Poor governance, failing economies and internal conflict have forced many Muslims to seek a better life and education in the West, where they now form significant minorities.

Despite some good progress in Western countries, Muslim communities generally lag behind their peers across the major socio-economic indicators. Post-9/11, the narrative has shifted further against them, with sections of politics, media and thinktanks framing Muslims through the prism of national security. Social and theological challenges further complicate integration and identity. Western Muslims now face the task of rebuilding themselves and contributing meaningfully to civil society.

### **The State of Muslims in Western Countries**

Muslims in the West form a "community of communities", each with unique histories. First-generation migrants worked hard to establish mosques, community organisations and businesses. However, they often started their journey from disadvantaged



backgrounds; internal differences on ethnic, linguistic, sectarian and political lines often held back collective progress.

In socio-economic indicators like health, housing and employment, Muslims often remain at the lower rungs. While they have excelled in areas such as charitable giving and small business enterprise, they remain underrepresented in politics, media and wider public discourse. They are often misrepresented or portrayed negatively in not only the right-wing media, but often in mainstream discourse. Anti-Muslim rhetoric, including attacks on Muslim women, often goes unchallenged.

Although educational outcomes have improved in recent times, social mobility remains limited, hindered by discrimination and internal limitations. Religious leaders, daunted by the evolving societal landscape and weak contextual knowledge, have struggled to guide their communities effectively.

### **Identity and Belonging**

Islam promotes a deep sense of belonging and responsibility toward the world we inhabit. Muslims historically travelled freely to faraway lands to seek knowledge, trade and serve humanity, exemplified by the travels of the famous Moroccan scholar and author, Ibn Battuta. Their sense of belonging to any place was as vital as their sense of responsibility. Islam celebrates diverse human identities and envisions globally minded citizens who balance self-interest with the common good.

When practiced with sincerity, Islam fosters integration, empathy and synergy. The idea of “us and them” based on one’s clan, tribe or race is not compatible with Islam’s teachings, which rejects racial or tribal divisions and promotes a universal brotherhood.

While some accuse Muslims of isolationism or separateness, this is often a political smear by right-wing factions in media and politics to win votes or gain power. Nevertheless, it is also a reality that Muslims have often failed to demonstrate visible social cohesion with mainstream society. Greater political literacy, communication skills and outreach are needed to forge alliances and counter marginalisation. Islam teaches believers to contribute unilaterally to the wellbeing of society, regardless of any suspicion or hostility.

### **Priorities for Western Muslims**

Muslim leaders, from mosque imams to academics and politicians, must adopt creative and pragmatic strategies for civic engagement. Lazy thinking or

copying others without understanding local nuances is unhelpful. The first generation, still a predominant demographic force in many countries, needs empathetic and practical support in adapting to Western societies. Younger generations need confidence to engage with the mainstream.

Western Muslims must work with broader civil society groups committed to justice and social equality. Democratic systems allow citizens to effect change through advocacy, professional bodies and legal channels, enabling civil society to take governments and public servants to task. Opting out of civic and socio-political life only entrenches disadvantage.

Muslim parents, community leaders and educators must collectively raise political awareness and instill a sense of civic duty, especially in the youth. Serving others should be engrained in every Muslim’s upbringing, for it not only benefits society materially but enriches their own spiritual and ethical life. Some may avoid engagement due to apathy or fear, but they should be supported. Disengaged Muslims indeed suit the agenda of Islamophobes, who benefit when minorities are silent and marginalised.

### **Complement, Coordinate and Join the Dots**

It is vital Muslims understand and act on their dual responsibility to both their own community (the Ummah or religious compatriots) and the wider society (the *qaum* or people amongst whom they live). As God’s stewards, they should embody service and lead with vision and professionalism.

Community-building requires integrity, healthy competition and effective leadership. Individuals should carve their own niche and collaborate to amplify impact. Support for umbrella organisations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, can bring collective progress through “joining the dots” and complementing separate efforts. Where such bodies exist, individuals and institutions should coordinate and offer practical backing as it will be seen as the entire community’s success.

Engagement with wider society also demands socio-political and cultural awareness. Alliance building and effective lobbying or advocacy, to support the vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of society, needs a mature approach to bridge-building and negotiation. With patience and determined efforts, Muslims and their institutions should set optimistic targets and find practical solutions to the following questions:

- How can they best serve their own community and become a valued part of society?

- How can they act as a catalyst for good?
- How can they stay true to Islam while doing so?

Adding value to any existing successful activity can be the starting catalyst to positive change. For example, many mosques teach school-age children basic Islam and Qur'an recitation in the week, often after school hours. Using some of this time to also teach values, civic participation, building character (*adab* and *akhlaq*) and imparting social skills could uplift these children and elevate mosques as respected community centres. Qualified teachers and other relevant professionals can be drawn from the congregation or local community to enhance this education.

With a rich volunteering ethos in the community, such programmes can be implemented affordably, using local professionals. Some mosques may already do this but if it were to become standard practice, it would not only enhance children's self-esteem, but also garner more respect and support for mosques as the hub of the community. Careful planning and execution of these ideas can yield profound benefits.

### Conclusion: Aiming High

Muslims must remember that worship is a private matter between them and God alone. It is their character, integrity and day-to-day behaviour that defines their public identity. A proper understanding of Islam leads one to better practice of worship which should translate into better human qualities and social competence.

People are drawn to those who are authentic, caring and principled. In the UK, Muslims are recognised as leading charity givers, a quality closely linked to the spiritual impact of Ramadan. This is known to be same in other countries. If Muslims everywhere can build on this trait to selflessly serve everyone beyond the holy month, they will be seen as establishing a moral force for good across societies. By opening mosque doors regularly and actively engaging with others in matters of socio-economic-political rights, they will demonstrate the ethic of service that Islam requires.

Character-building begins in the family. This trust (*amana*) must be embraced by parents through gentle, positive and purposeful parenting that helps children grow with human qualities such as reflection, discipline and a balanced approach to life. A culture of reflecting, reading, learning and practicing then becomes second nature for children as they grow. Effective mosques and community organisations can complement and build on this through mentoring and further education.

Historically, Muslims were known for their characteristic trait as a community of purpose. As proactive enforcers for good, they symbolised the best of humanity wherever they lived and whatever their profession was. They were assets to themselves, their religion and to the wider society. For a thousand years they were at the helm of a value-laden civilisation that helped reshape the old world and usher in a new era of human progress.

Sadly today, a lack of a higher purpose, unity and deficiency in leadership has weakened the Muslim global position. It is time the new generation, especially in the West, shoulder the task of recreating value-driven and service-oriented communities everywhere.

There is nothing for man except what he strives for (Qur'an 53:39)

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# Renewing Islam in the Modern World

DR MAMNUN KHAN

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The modern world, marked by rapid change, globalisation, and technology, has reshaped life in unprecedented ways. Yet, it is also an era scarred by aggressive secularisation, rampant consumerism, and the erosion of moral and spiritual foundations. God-centredness is increasingly treated as a private matter, with religious authority increasingly pushed to the margins. As a result, Muslims (like many other faith communities) are left grappling with how to stay relevant, maintain identity, and find their place in public life.

Ironically, despite its remarkable progress, the modern world may be more in need of spiritual and ethical grounding than ever before. The relentless pursuit of economic growth, technological mastery, and personal freedom has produced societies that are materially prosperous yet morally fragile and spiritually adrift. Rising anxiety, inequality, environmental degradation, loneliness, and the breakdown of family and community life, and so on, all point to a deeper crisis of meaning, one in which individuals struggle to find authentic connection and lasting purpose beyond material success and fleeting pleasures.

In such a climate, as sincere believers, we see Islam's enduring spiritual, ethical and moral traditions as more vital than ever. In the remembrance of God not only do hearts find contentment (Qur'an, 13:28) but also a moral compass for us as individuals and as a society wrestling with questions of progress, justice, equity, and human dignity.

This presents a unique opportunity to bring Islamic paradigms into focus and to demonstrate how Islam speaks meaningfully to contemporary challenges, whether spiritual, social, economic or political. The modern world, rather than being a threat to religious identity, can be seen as a testing ground for renewal (*tajdid*), a space where Islamic values and God-centredness can affirm its relevance in promoting human flourishing, for all people.

For such a reframing to take place, Muslims, in perhaps every part of the world, must cultivate a deeper

level of religious literacy. To know one's religion is an inviolable imperative. Yet, as I will outline in this short essay, there are recurring pitfalls that too often hinder such efforts, diminishing our ability to renew Islam in the modern world, both for ourselves as believers and for the wider society to which we belong.

## Removing problematic categories

As Muslims, we often place religion into unhelpful categories or draw false comparisons that hinder a fuller realisation of God's guidance. A common example is the way popular discourse sets *deen* (religion) against *dunya* (world), as if they are opposites. Yet such a dichotomy does not exist in Islam. *Deen* is for the *dunya*, the two are inseparable. It is within worldly life that we secure reward in the *Akhirah* (Hereafter) by living a God-centred, righteous life, striving sincerely so that our good deeds outweigh bad deeds on God's ultimate scales of judgment (*mizan*).

When we frame *deen* and *dunya* as rivals, we risk implying that religion is detached from the struggles, complexities, and dilemmas of modern life. But God commands us to seek goodness in this world as well as the next (Qur'an, 2:201). Our task is to make *deen* not only relevant but also empowering in the *dunya*, guiding us to navigate its challenges while orienting us towards success in the Hereafter (*Akhirah*).

Navigating the *dunya* with *deen* means recognising that religion and worldly life are intertwined, transforming daily living into spiritual and ethical growth and service to God (*'ubudiyah*) and humanity (*khidmah*).

Similarly, we often use the term "secular" to avoid godly reasoning and responsibility. Yet, whatever sphere of life we find ourselves in, God is ever watchful and Islamic values such as justice, human dignity, integrity, stewardship of resources etc. remain relevant.

## Embracing Islam's universal principles and outlook

Engaging with Islam's universal principles means recognising that its vision is not bound by culture, geography or external categories. At its core are values that speak to all people: justice, mercy, human dignity, care for the earth, and the oneness of humanity. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent as a mercy (*rahmah*) for all of creation. That is, what he brought, exemplified or stood for is beneficial not only to humanity but to all creation (Qur'an, 21:107).

Islam's outlook is expansive. It sees life as interconnected, where faith is expressed not only in rituals but in how we, for example, treat others, react to things, uphold fairness, protect what we have been entrusted with. Every act of kindness or effort to make others' lives easier (*birr / ihsan*) can become worship, and so on.

This expansive view recognises that Islam is not limited to personal spirituality but extends to social justice, environmental stewardship, and responsible leadership. It teaches that humanity is part of a larger system created by God, where every individual has a role as a caretaker (*khalifah*) on earth, responsible for promoting peace, equity, and care for all creation. True worship of God is visible through how we embody ethical values in everyday life, whether in family, community, business, or governance, and in making faith a practical force for good in the world.

This broad perspective encourages unity and respect for diversity, seeing individuals as part of a human family (*Banu Adam*), and souls on their own journeys back to God. It invites believers to connect their inner spiritual awareness with outward action, transforming society through mercy (*rahmah*), justice (*adl*), truthfulness (*sidq*), integrity/steadfastness (*istiqamah*), patience/grit (*sabr*), and love (*muhabbah*). These are just some of the core values that ought to determine the actions and outlook of a sincere believer.

To embrace this universality is to look beyond division, religious identitarianism, and narrow and sectarian viewpoints. Reducing God's guidance to mere group identity, for example, narrows the spiritual and ethical scope of Islam, and often it leads to exclusionary belonging or rigid ways of thinking. Yet, God calls us to see the stranger as a neighbour (Qur'an, 49:13), to value diversity as part of God's design (Qur'an, 30:22), and to measure our worth by the good we leave behind (Qur'an, 2:26). In this way, Islam offers a framework for living with purpose, compassion,

humility, and responsibility in a shared world.

Similarly, reducing "Muslimness" to a fixed mode of identity, either fully "on" or "off," or squeezed into labels like "moderate," "progressive," or "conservative," misses the complexity and spectrum of what it means to be Muslim. When "Muslimness" is framed as mere "religious conservatism," Islam itself is cast as a suspicious "Other" within liberal, secular settings. When it is conflated with "Islamism," the faith is collapsed into a purely political project.

Such oversimplifications distort reality. Muslim life and practice cannot be pinned down to a single mode of being, nor neatly mapped onto outside categories of "reform," "tradition," "progress," "change". As believers we need to transcend these labels and embody Islam's universal vision, one that unites rather than divides, and that calls us to live as witnesses of justice, compassion, and human dignity for all.

## Being realistic about the world today

The sociologist Phillip Lewis rightly writes that, "*All too often, journalistic and political commentary on Islam supposes that actual ethnic particularities are subordinate to the aspirational rhetoric of belonging to one, undivided, world-wide community – the umma. The reality is quite different*" (Lewis, 1994). Muslim communities whether in the West or across the world are far from monolithic; they are plural, internally diverse, and animated by the same human needs and interests as their fellow non-Muslim citizens. Yet media and even Muslims often collapse this diversity into simplistic categories.

Being realistic about the *ummah* means acknowledging both its power as an ethical and spiritual ideal, and its limits as a description of lived Muslim experience. Islam's universality does not erase difference; rather, it gives space for local cultures, languages, and practices to evolve while remaining rooted in shared principles of faith. To belong to the *ummah*, then, is not to dissolve into uniformity, but to carry a sense of solidarity that coexists with diversity. At the same time, we must recognise that for Muslims today, the *ummah* is experienced more as an emotional and spiritual concept than a political reality. Thus, while it inspires solidarity across borders, political, social, economic, and geographical conditions inevitably shape its practical expression, which is how it has always been.

This recognition matters, because many of the concerns Muslims grapple with, family, livelihood, dignity, justice, are not uniquely Muslim, but profoundly human. Islam has a framework where the universal



and the particular can meet. Where a sense of belonging to the wider *ummah* sits alongside an embrace of local contexts and the wider human fraternity and needs.

Being realistic about the world also extends to technological advances, especially emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI). While AI promises remarkable benefits, Muslims must approach these developments with thoughtful scepticism, assessing not only their practical utility but also their impact on spiritual, moral, and ethical foundations from an Islamic perspective.

Islamic ethics (based on justice (*ʿadl*), mercy (*rahmah*), human dignity (*karamah*), upright conduct (*ibsan*), and trustworthiness (*sidq*) and so on) offer a framework for evaluating AI's influence on human identity and relationships. These principles ensure that technology serves humanity rather than diminishing it. After all, as the Qur'an reminds us, God has "certainly honoured (*karramna*) the children of Adam" (Qur'an, 17:70), affirming that human dignity is sacred and must not be diminished by artificial intelligence.

The rise of AI raises important questions about privacy, accountability, bias, and the potential erosion of moral responsibility when decisions are delegated to machines. In the Qur'an God says: "And when he turns away, he strives throughout the land to spread mischief in it and destroy crops and cattle. And Allah does not like mischief" (Qur'an, 2:205). This verse highlights the destructive behaviour of someone who, after turning away from truth, causes corruption and harm on earth, which God disapproves. It is a reminder against spreading corruption, whether physical, social, or moral. In the context of technology (AI, media platforms, software applications, algorithms, automatic decisioning, chatbots etc.), Muslims are reminded to ensure technology aligns with values that uphold fairness, rights, compassion, and

accountability.

This stance does not reject technological innovation but insists on embedding these ethical values into the development and use of AI. It also calls for vigilance against uncritical application of new technologies that might undermine the spiritual meaning of being human, the sense of community, or the moral agency entrusted to individuals.

In this way, Muslims can contribute to global conversations on AI and technology, advocating for a balanced approach that safeguards ethical integrity, promotes social benefit, and respects the transcendent purpose of human life.

### **Becoming religiously literate**

In an age of information, where often everything seems to meet and interpenetrate everything else, understanding religion and how to draw guidance from revelation, requires more than surface knowledge, titbits of information or watching endless short form videos. Religious literacy is the ability to engage deeply and critically with beliefs, practices, histories, and ideas without reducing them to stereotypes or slogans. It allows us to see the richness, diversity, and nuance within faith traditions, and to recognise how they interact with culture, politics, and daily life.

Islamic theology has always been a living tradition, capable of grappling with the dilemmas of any age. The Qur'an itself invites reflection, reasoning, and ethical discernment, urging believers to think, question, and apply its guidance to changing circumstances (Qur'an, 3:190-191). Across history, Muslim scholars drew on this theological depth to address new challenges, whether in philosophy, science, law, international relations, government or economics, without losing sight of Islam's universal principles like justice, mercy, and human dignity.

In the modern world, this depth remains vital. The dilemmas we face (e.g. climate change, technological



disruption, meaninglessness, economic development, inequality, questions of identity and belonging etc.) cannot be resolved by shallow appeals to rigid formulas or by reducing Islam to cultural identity. They require the careful work of theological reasoning: returning to revelation, engaging with the intellectual heritage of Islamic scholarship, and applying insights to contemporary contexts with both faithfulness and creativity.

When engaged with seriously, Islamic theology equips believers not only to preserve their faith but also to enrich the broader human conversation. Its intellectual and ethical reasoning show that religion is not opposed to modern life; rather, it offers moral clarity, depth, and guidance in navigating its uncertainties and upheavals.

But Muslims today can often find themselves caught in what might be described as a form of “medievalism”: an attachment to interpreting Islam strictly through the lens of historical contexts, legal rulings, and cultural norms frozen in a past era. This medievalism, while rooted in respect for tradition, sometimes hinders the vital process of translating Islamic thought into meaningful and dynamic applications for modern life and the experiences of Muslims now.

Such an approach may lead to a narrow or literalist view that overlooks the broader ethical, spiritual, and rational principles that underpin Islamic teachings. It often leaves believers struggling to reconcile faith with issues like modern governance, scientific progress, human rights, gender equity, and economic systems. The rich legacy of Islamic theology, which historically fostered intellectual inquiry, adaptability, and renewal (*tajdid*), can be overshadowed by a fear-driven focus on rituals over broader contextual understanding. This can often, and indeed does, contribute to the perception that Islam is incompatible with the modern world, reinforcing cultural alienation among some Muslims and fuelling external

misconceptions.

To move beyond medievalism, sincere believers and Muslim communities must develop a deeper religious literacy, one that goes beyond rote adherence and shallow or sectarian understanding. This involves revisiting primary sources, the Qur’an and Sunnah, with a critical, reflective, and principled lens, drawing on the body of intellectual heritage, reasoning and tools (such as in *fiqh*, *usul*, *tafsir*, *maqasid*, *kalam*) developed by scholars who engaged thoughtfully with their own contexts. It means recognising Islam’s universal ethical values (e.g. justice, mercy, human dignity, stewardship of the earth, and so on) and applying them creatively, confidently and rationally to the realities today without compromising God-centeredness.

Moving beyond medievalism also requires fostering an ongoing critical dialogue between tradition and contemporary knowledge, while encouraging diverse voices within Muslim scholarship to engage with modern challenges. By doing so, Islam can continue its historic role as a living, vibrant tradition that speaks powerfully to today’s world, equipping believers to live authentically God-centred lives in the modern era. This dynamic interpretation underscores that true commitment to Islam includes renewal (*tajdid*) and contextualisation (*takeef*) rather than rigid repetition or mere cultural preservation.

### **Learning the art of engagement and disengagement**

Believers must learn to engage with the modern world without losing God-centredness. Islam does not call for withdrawal from life’s blessings, but for balance: embracing the *dunya* as a path to success in the *Akhirah*. The Qur’an instructs: “And seek, through that which God has given you, the home of the Hereafter; but do not forget your share of the world” (Qur’an, 28:77).

The sincere believer’s engagement with the world

starts from a foundation of spiritual awareness, keeping God at the centre of one's intentions and actions. Every effort to earn a lawful livelihood, care for family, contribute to society, and pursue personal development can become acts of worship when done with God-consciousness (*taqwa*).

Yet, believers must also cultivate the wisdom to disengage from excessive and wasteful materialism, and distractions that erode, faith, spiritual values and righteous character (*'amal al-salih*). God commands moderation, warning against extravagance and indulgence (Qur'an, 7:31). Through conscious reflection and self-discipline, Muslims can protect their hearts from becoming attached to fleeting pleasures and worldly obsession, maintaining a steadfast focus on life's moral and spiritual purpose.

Disengagement does not mean neglecting duties or ignoring the challenges of modern life, but setting boundaries that prioritise justice, dignity, and piety. It involves rejecting unethical practices, nurturing prayer and contemplation (*tadabbur*), and strengthening community ties. The Prophet embodied this balance, fulfilling worldly responsibilities while remaining rooted in worship. This balance requires continual awareness so the world remains a place of service to God (*'ubudiyah*) and humanity (*khidmah*).

## Conclusion

Renewing Islam in the modern world requires more than defending tradition or adopting whatever is in the modern world uncritically. It calls for recovering Islam's universal vision, rooted in remembrance of God, animated by justice, mercy, and human dignity, and expressed through balance in worldly engagement. By cultivating deeper religious literacy, rejecting narrow categories, and embracing Islam's expansive ethical outlook, believers can show that their faith is not a relic of the past but a living force for human flourishing. In an age marked by uncertainty, instability and moral fragmentation, Islam's enduring message offers clarity, grounding, and hope. True progress is not in material pursuits alone, but in aligning all aspects of life with God's guidance.

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# Loving the Prophet ﷺ 1500 Years After His Birth

AMJAD M. TARSIN

The Prophet ﷺ was born in the most sacred city of Mecca on Monday, the 12th of Rabi' al-Awwal in the Year of the Elephant, 1500 years ago. At his birth ﷺ the Prophet's mother saw a light emanate that illuminated the palaces of Greater Syria. His father 'Abd-Allah passed away before he was born and his mother Amina passed when he was at the tender age of six. He spent most of his life as an orphan. Instead of disadvantaging him, this only further proved that he was guided and nurtured by Allah ﷻ.

In adulthood, he became a merchant, interacting with different kinds of people. His integrity became evident, granting him renown as "The Trustworthy" (*al-Amin*).

When he ﷺ reached the age of forty, Allah ﷻ sent him as a Messenger to all people. As the Prophet ﷺ was devoting himself to Allah ﷻ in the Cave of Hirā, the Archangel Jibril e came to him and said, "Recite." He replied, "I am not a reciter." The Prophet said, "*He then took me and squeezed me until I could almost take it no more. Then he let me go. He then said, 'Recite.' I replied, 'I am not a reciter.' He then took me and squeezed me until I could almost take it no more.*" After the third time, he said, "**Read in the Name of your Lord Who created—created humans from a clinging clot. Read! And your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught by the Pen—taught humanity what they knew not.**" [Quran 96:1-5]

The Prophet ﷺ called people to the Oneness of Allah. In return, he and his Companions faced unspeakable persecution. Some were even tortured to death, and a group of them migrated to Abyssinia, which was ruled by a Christian king, known as al-Najāshī. In the 7th year of his mission, a ban was placed on the Prophet ﷺ and his tribe. They were confined to a specific area and almost starved to death. They survived by eating tree leaves, bark, and animal skin. After going through this for almost three years, Allah ﷻ brought them relief. Shortly thereafter, the Prophet's beloved wife and strongest supporter, Khadija j passed away, as did the Prophet's beloved uncle, Abu

Talib.

Allah ﷻ then took His beloved a on a night journey from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. On the way, he ﷺ visited Madina, Mount Sinai, and Bethlehem. In Jerusalem, all the Prophets and Messengers f were brought together and the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ led them all in Prayer. Allah ﷻ then had him ascend to the highest heavens. He brought him close, spoke to him intimately, and made the Prayer an obligation upon him.

In the 13th year, a group of believers from Madina traveled to Mecca to perform Hajj. They pledged their allegiance to the Prophet ﷺ on behalf of their people, agreeing that he and his Companions would migrate to them, and that they would protect him the way that they would protect their own selves and families. The Prophet ﷺ then migrated to Madina, and upon his arrival, he was greeted by its people with songs of celebration and joy. History has immortalized their song:

*The full moon has risen over us  
From the Valley of Wadā'  
We owe it to show thankfulness  
Whenever a caller invites to Allah*

In the second year after the Hijra, Allah ﷻ granted the Messenger ﷺ permission to fight in jihad to protect the call to Allah. The Prophet ﷺ took part in 29 battles, including the battles of Badr, Uhud, the Trench, and the Conquest of Mecca.

In the 6th year after the Hijra, the Treaty of Hudaibiya was established between the Muslims and the polytheists. Some of the Companions felt that the truce was a compromise, but in fact, it was a victory. Allah ﷻ said regarding it, "**Truly, We have given you [O Prophet] a clear triumph!**" [Quran 48:1]

As the fires of war were calmed by the peace, people became more willing to listen to the invitation of Islam. During this time, the Prophet ﷺ engaged with the leaders of surrounding lands by sending letters to the kings of Persia, Byzantine, Abyssinia, Egypt, and Syro-Palestine.

In the 8th year after the Hijra, the Conquest of Mecca took place. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, when conquering Mecca, entered with utmost humility, with his noble head bowed low, witnessing Allah's favor upon him. After experiencing 21 years of persecution, the Prophet ﷺ now had the upper hand. The people who used to harm him and his Companions surrounded him, and he addressed them, "O gathering of Quraysh, what do you think I am going to do with you?" They replied, "Treat us well. You are a noble brother, the son of a noble brother." He said, "You are all free to go." In an act of unparalleled mercy, he issued a general amnesty by which he pardoned them all. People then understood the exaltedness of this man and of his way, and that he did not desire domination or vengeance. Safwan ibn Umayya said, "Only a Prophet could be so gracious." After witnessing the beauty of the Prophet Muhammad's character ﷺ, people embraced Islam in great numbers.

Ten years after his migration, Islam spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. In that same year, the Prophet ﷺ led the people in the Farewell Hajj. He gave his famous sermon at 'Arafa, in which he reminded people of the foundation of Islam and counseled them to be morally upright. On that day, Allah ﷻ revealed to him ﷺ, "**Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and am pleased with Islam as your religion.**" [Quran 5:3]

After conveying the message, fulfilling the trust, establishing Islam and the worship of Allah alone, putting an end to falsehood, and forming a just and rightly-guided Muslim Ummah of believers over the course of 23 years, he ﷺ returned to Allah ﷻ in the 11th year after the Hijra. He was 63 years old.

Although the Ummah still yearns for him ﷺ, he left behind an undying source of guidance for us: "*The Book of Allah and the Sunna of His Prophet.*" Through embodying the message and guidance of both, we remain connected to him ﷺ.

When studying the Prophet's legacy ﷺ, it is summed up in the following narration: When 'Aisha j was asked what the most wondrous thing about the Prophet ﷺ was, she replied, "Everything about him was wondrous." [Ibn Hibban] When studying his accomplishments in his lifetime—and their continuous impact—they bewilder the mind.

In twenty-three years, the Prophet ﷺ was able to bring about unprecedented civilizational, educational, and moral transformation. This is especially miraculous, considering that he ﷺ was unlettered and he was sent to a people who had made no major

civilizational contributions to the world.

The word "Madina," which the Prophet's city is lovingly referred as, also means a place of civilization. A city previously known for fever and pollution was turned into a place of healing and hygiene. The Prophet ﷺ not only brought about spiritual healing through asking Allah ﷻ to remove the fever that plagued many of its residents, he also appointed one of his Companions to be responsible for sanitizing its wells to provide clean water to its residents.

The first word of the Quran to be revealed was, "**Read!**" [Quran 96:1] The Prophet ﷺ allowed captives to earn their freedom by teaching ten children to read. He ﷺ instilled within his community a deep love and appreciation for knowledge, inspiring some of the greatest discoveries in the fields of astronomy, medicine, and science. Despite being unlettered himself (since his knowledge was entirely divinely-inspired), it has been said that the greatest single promoter of literacy was the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

He established a moral code that refined a generation of people steeped in ignorance and created the greatest generation of human beings to ever walk the face of the earth. Allah ﷻ says of him, "**You are truly preeminent in magnificent character.**" [Quran 68:4] He cared for the weak, gave to the needy, and forgave those who wronged him. He taught us the importance of family harmony and showing kindness and mercy to our spouses and children. At the Battle of Uhud, when seventy of his Companions were martyred, he raised his hands in supplication, "*O Allah, forgive my people, for they do not know.*" Through showing amnesty when conquering Mecca, the Prophet ﷺ established a firm foundation of forgiveness and reconciliation. His example continues to be a source of guidance, inspiration, and spiritual purification for his Ummah today.

As Imam al-Busiri says in his poem praising the Prophet ﷺ, known as *al-Burda*,

*Finding such knowledge in one unlettered  
Living in the Age of Ignorance is enough of a miracle—  
And such refinement despite being an orphan!*

The miraculous contributions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ are summarized by Imam al-Ghazali in Book 20 of his magnum opus, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*,

Know that if one witnesses the Prophet's states and lends an attentive ear to the transmitted reports detailing his qualities of character and his actions, virtuous states, habits, disposition, his manner of ruling over various classes of people, his guiding them to uprightness, his bringing together the diverse strata of people and his leading them to his obedience,

together with what is related of his wondrous answers to perplexing questions, his astonishing manner of managing the wellbeing of the creation, his excellent indications about the details of the exoteric law... there shall remain for him no doubt or misgiving that these traits were *not* attained by human means. Nay, that is utterly inconceivable save by seeking help and heavenly support and divine power.

As we commemorate the 1500th year after the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ birth, the Ummah continues to express its undying love for the Best of Creation. At his birth ﷺ, the Prophet's mother saw a brilliant radiance that illuminated the palaces of Greater Syria. He ﷺ said of his birth, *"I will inform you of my beginning: I am the supplication of my father Abraham, the good news that Jesus shared, and the vision my mother had when she gave birth to me, when a light emanated for her that lit up the palaces of Greater Syria."* [Ahmad] Also highlighting the blessedness of his birth ﷺ, when asked by his Companions why he would fast on Mondays, he said, *"I was born on that day."* [Muslim]

Long before we came into the world, our beloved Prophet ﷺ expressed his love for us. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ loved us even before our own mothers and fathers loved us. He ﷺ once visited the Baqī Cemetery in Madina and addressed the believers buried there. He said, *"Peace be upon you, O home of believing people. We will, God willing, follow after you."* He was expressing his love for members of his Ummah who had already passed. When visiting the graves of his Companions, the memory of those who had left the world invoked a longing within the Prophet ﷺ for those who had not yet come. He said, *"I would have loved to have seen our brethren."* The Companions asked, *"Are we not your brethren?"* He replied ﷺ, *"Rather, you are my Companions. Our brethren are those who have not yet come...I will be awaiting them at the Basin [of Kawthar]."* [Muslim] It is as if, in that moment, he was looking across the vast expanse of time and expressing his love for us.

Despite a millennium and a half passing since his arrival, the Prophet's ﷺ indelible impact on the Ummah and the world remains strong. His life and teachings remain ever-present in the hearts and minds of over two billion Muslims today. Devotional poems of love and praise of the Messenger ﷺ are sung in countless languages across the world. No matter how much the world is enshrouded in darkness, his light continues to guide the way for us. To quote Imam al-Busiri again as he says in his poem, *al-Burda*,

*He truly is the Sun of virtue and*

*the Prophets are the constellations in his orbit,  
Their lights manifest for people in times of darkness*

This connection we must have, as part of our faith, comes as no surprise. Allah ﷻ informs us in the Qur'an of the intimate connection the Prophet ﷺ has with his Ummah, *"...The Prophet has a stronger affinity to the believers than their [own] souls. And his wives are their mothers..."* [Al-Ahzab, 33:6]

Sidi Ahmad ibn 'Ajība, in his *Babr al-Madīd*, says, *"... The Prophet has a stronger affinity to the believers ..."* means that the Prophet has more right to the believers in everything related to religious and worldly matters, and his ruling is more binding. *"... than their [own] souls ..."* because he only commands them to, and is pleased with, what benefits them and brings them success.

This verse contains many layers of meaning. It could also be translated as, *"... The Prophet is closer to the believers than they are to their [own] souls ..."* or, *"... The Prophet is more caring towards the believers than they are to their [own] souls ..."*

And in a hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī, the Prophet ﷺ said,

*"I am closer to every single believer than their own souls in this life and the next. Recite, if you so wish, "... The Prophet has a stronger affinity to the believers than their [own] souls ..."* Any believer who leaves behind wealth, then his relatives will inherit it; but if he leaves behind a debt or dependents, let them come to me and I will be his benefactor."

Reflect on the extent of the Prophet's love and concern for us. If he ﷺ cares so much about a believer's *financial debts*, what then is his level of concern for our wellbeing in the next life? Some of the Pious Predecessors, particularly those among the Prophetic household, said that the most hope-inspiring verse of the Qur'an is, *"And [surely] your Lord will give so much to you that you will be pleased."* [Al-Duha, 93:5] This is because the Prophet ﷺ will not be pleased until every member of his Ummah is in Paradise.

Celebrating the Prophet's birth ﷺ ignites love and reverence within the hearts of Muslims. This love, which is so central to our faith, gives us a more complete religious experience that goes beyond the shell of outward obedience. Love naturally brings about a willingness to obey, but obedience does not necessarily inspire love.

In recent times, there are some who oversimplify the understanding of the love a Muslim should have for the Prophet ﷺ by equating it to obedience. This simplistic approach has resulted in a type of dry, superficial commitment to outward acts of obedience,

often leaving people searching for something more meaningful. When people experience the realities of faith *through* love, they then taste its sweetness.

This is why the celebrations for the Messenger of Allah's birth ﷺ, that span from as far East as Indonesia to as far West as California, inspire hope that great openings are in store for the Ummah. It shows us that multitudes of Muslims are returning to their faith and revering the things made sacred and blessed by Allah ﷻ. In a time when selfish desires and materialism run rampant, Muslims celebrate the greatest manifestation of spiritual perfection and guidance. This choice speaks volumes about their love and loyalty for Allah and His Messenger. It is as if the mute eloquence of their states continues to affirm,

*Glad tidings for us, O assembly of Muslims,  
For truly we have a pillar of support  
That can never be destroyed!  
When God named the one who called us to Him  
"The noblest of Messengers,"  
We then became the noblest of communities*

This is why love of the Prophet ﷺ is a central element of faith and why it has always been the Ummah's guiding light. This love, when we leave this

world, sustains us into the next life. As mentioned, the Prophet ﷺ said, "I am closer to every single believer than their own souls in this life and the next." [Bukhārī] By reorienting ourselves to our Prophet, our greatest exemplar, and our guide, the Ummah finds direction, strength, and purpose.

*And you, when you were born,  
The earth and horizons filled with your light!  
And we—in that radiance and in that light—  
Traverse the paths of guidance*

1500 years later, the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ light still shines brightly for all those who seek guidance.

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- 1 Rector and Al-Ghazali Chair of Epistemology and Civilisational Studies and Renewal, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. Email: osmanbakar@iiu.edu.my
- 2 See Nataliya Kosmyna et al., “Your brain on chatgpt: Accumulation of cognitive debt when using an ai assistant for essay writing task,” arXiv preprint arXiv:2506.08872(2025). See also Rachel Scully, ‘ChatGPT use linked to cognitive decline: MIT research,’ The Hill, 06/19/25, thehill.com/policy/technology/5360220-chatgpt-use-linked-to-cognitive-decline-mit-research/?email=36733ad11b-f0291a2eb76f923...
- 3 Karolinska Institute, situated at Solna a few kilometres away from Stockholm and regarded as one of the world’s foremost medical universities, accounts for the single largest share of all academic medical research conducted in Sweden.
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- 5 Teri Schultz, “Back to basics: Sweden aims to de-digitalize youth,” 16 September 2024, dw.com/en/back-to-basics-sweden-aims-to-de-digitalize-youth/a-70228600#:
- 6 Teri Schultz, “Back to basics...”
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- 13 Viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.
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- 18 See <https://www.ifees.org.uk/resources/ohito-declaration/>
- 19 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature, The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*. George Allen and Unwin, London, 1968.
- 20 Abubakr Ahmad Bagader, Abdullatif Tawfik El Chirazi El Sabbagh, Mohammad As-Sayyid Al Gyaland, Mawil Yousuf Izzi-Dien Samarrai, and Othman Abd arRahman Llewellyn (eds.), ‘Environmental Protection in Islam’, IUCN Environmental Policy Law Paper No. 20 second revised edition, Gland Switzerland and Cambridge UK, 1994.
- 21 Rumi’s best-known work is *The Mathnawi*, a six-volume epic didactic poem considered to be a masterpiece on the teachings of Sufism.
- 22 Shaykh Ibn al-Habib, a distinguished scholar of Islamic jurisprudence was also the last great Sufi Master of the Darqawi-Qadiri Order in Morocco. He was 110 years old when he died on his way to Mecca to perform the Haj pilgrimage in 1972.
- 23 The *Diwan* of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn al-Habib

p. 69. Madinah Press, Cape Town, South Africa, 2001. This Diwan was written over a period of forty years in the last century.

24 This is a reference to verses 51: 20, 21 in the Qur'an.

25 The doctrine of divine unity otherwise described as Islamic monotheism.

26 Al-Hafiz B.A. Masri, Animals in Islam, Athene Trust, London, 1989.

27 Othman Llewellyn is an American-born environmentalist who has dedicated his life to reviving the historic conservation models used in Islamic societies of the past. He lives and works in Saudi Arabia and has been responsible for pioneering the establishment and maintenance of the Jabal Aja' Biodiversity Reserve in that country which serves as a benchmark for Muslim environmentalists in other parts of the world.

28 See [www.ifees.org.uk](http://www.ifees.org.uk)

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36 <https://www.almizan.earth>



# BOOK CORNER

# The Art of Cultivating Noble Character: A Translation of Rāghib al-Isfahānī's *Kitāb al-Dharī'a ilā Makārim al-Sharī'a* (The Path to the Noble Virtues of the Divine Law)

**Author:** Rāghib al-Isfahānī

**Translator:** Emeritus Professor Yasien Mohamed

**Reviewed by:** Abubakr Karolia

**Publisher:** White Thread Press, London, UK, 2024  
— 303 pages.

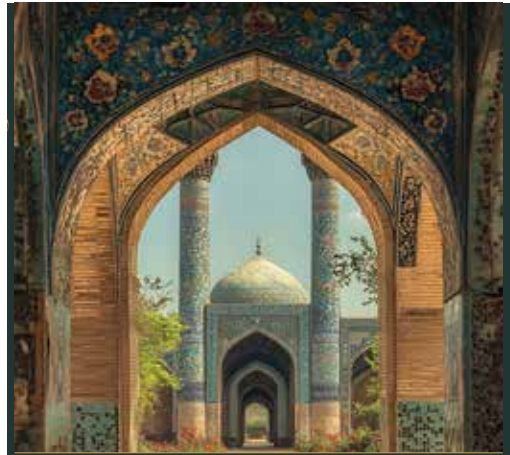
**ISBN-10:** 1933764236

**ISBN-13:** 978-1933764238

In an age starved of moral clarity, *The Art of Cultivating Noble Character*, an annotated translation by Yasien Mohamed, revives one of the most profound and methodical texts in Islamic virtue ethics: *Kitāb al-Dharī'a ilā Makārim al-Sharī'a* by Rāghib al-Isfahānī. This translation is not merely a scholarly contribution but a spiritual offering. It presents a Qur'anically grounded framework of human excellence that speaks directly to the contemporary ethical vacuum.

Isfahānī's work is a distinguished contribution to Islamic moral philosophy. While it draws inspiration from the classical Greek virtues of wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice, he reorients them toward a Qur'anic purpose. Isfahānī appreciates the civic ideals of Greek philosophy, but extends them toward a higher spiritual telos: cultivating noble character to know the self and, through that inner awakening, to know and serve God. In his ethical vision, the refinement of the soul is not simply a social virtue but a sacred obligation. The end of ethics is not civic harmony, but divine nearness.

Structured across seven chapters, the treatise begins by establishing the theological and psychological foundations of character development. Human beings, as vicegerents (*khulafā'*) of God, are called to this station not by birthright but through *tazkiyat al-nafs*, the purification of the lower self. Isfahānī's ethical framework draws on a model of the human psyche developed by earlier scholars such as Miskawayh (d. 1030 CE), author of the seminal Islamic ethical work



## The Art of Cultivating Noble Character

AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION OF

Rāghib al-Isfahānī's  
*Kitāb al-Dharī'a ilā Makārim al-Sharī'a*  
by YASIEN MOHAMED

*Tabdhīb al-Akblāq* (Refinement of Character). This model divides the soul into three faculties: rational (*'aql*), concupiscent (*shahwa*), and irascible (*ghadab*). Moral excellence arises from the disciplined harmonisation of these faculties through intellectual rigour and submission to divine guidance.

Chapters two through five provide a deep examination of the cardinal virtues. Isfahānī presents these virtues not as isolated traits but as dimensions of an integrated spiritual psychology. The intellect gives rise to faculties such as contemplation, discretion, eloquence, and inspiration. Wisdom (*hikma*) is not speculative knowledge but practical insight that results in righteous action and reflects divine attributes. Temperance governs desire and moderates the

senses. Courage is the disciplined resistance to fear and impulse.

Justice (*adl*) stands at the centre of Isfahānī's ethical system. It harmonises the internal faculties of the soul and brings balance to society. It mirrors the order God has established in the cosmos and, when sincerely embodied, becomes the highest expression of moral integrity. Justice integrates and perfects the other virtues, ensuring equilibrium within the self and the world.

Throughout these chapters, Isfahānī insists that noble character is not merely a set of ideals. It is the pathway to God. These virtues already exist within the human soul in potential form. Revelation is the light that awakens them. Isfahānī anchors each ethical trait in verses of the Qur'an and deepens the discussion with Hadith, demonstrating how the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him) exemplified these virtues. Revelation, in his view, is not only the source of ethical knowledge but the very catalyst of moral and spiritual transformation.

Man, Isfahānī explains, has been created to resemble all that exists in the world; he is a small world - a microcosm of the greater cosmos. His ethical purpose, therefore, is not only to refine his soul but to reflect the divine order woven into creation. The primary aim of *al-Dharī'a* is to cultivate these noble characteristics, guiding the human being toward knowledge of the world, the self, and ultimately the Creator. This process is not theoretical but lived and embodied. It demands the full alignment of reason, intellect, and revelation through righteous action, conscious ethical conduct, and inner discipline.

Chapters six and seven shift from inner cultivation to outward conduct and practice. Chapter six focuses on the ethics of livelihood and social interaction, showing that virtue must extend into professional and public life. Chapter seven considers the metaphysical relationship between human striving and divine decree, affirming that moral responsibility is embedded within the oneness of God (*tawhīd*).

For Isfahānī, what distinguishes the human being is the divine gift of intellect. This capacity to reflect, discern, and choose the good qualifies humanity to carry the sacred trust of vicegerency (*khilāfa*) on earth. Noble traits such as humility, forbearance, generosity, courage, wisdom, and justice are not standalone attributes but deeply interwoven qualities that bring the soul into harmony with divine intent. A person who cultivates these virtues lives in moral awareness, spiritual dignity, and social responsibility, fulfilling the purpose of creation as a steward of God.

This vision of virtue resonates with Alasdair MacIntyre's (d. 2025) critique of modern moral philosophy in his influential book *After Virtue* (1981). MacIntyre argues that contemporary moral discourse, shaped by utilitarianism and Kantian ethics, has become fragmented, and detached from meaningful moral traditions. He calls for a return to Aristotelian ethics, rooted in community, tradition, and the pursuit of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Isfahānī's treatise, though authored centuries earlier, anticipates this ethical renewal. His vision is rooted in lived tradition and spiritual discipline, where virtue is rationally understood but realised through revelation.

Yet there is a critical distinction. MacIntyre's project is philosophical and secular, emphasising moral traditions that evolve within human communities without appealing to divine revelation. Isfahānī's ethics, on the other hand, are thoroughly theological. They place divine revelation and the oneness of God at the centre. The telos of Isfahānī's ethical project is not simply human flourishing but nearness to God, which is achieved through obedience, worship, and purification of the *nafs*, a dimension that is absent in MacIntyre's secular framework.

Mohamed's translation is a major scholarly accomplishment. It is the first complete English edition of *Kitāb al-Dharī'a*, the product of over two decades of sustained engagement. Mohamed provides not just a translation but extensive commentary and philosophical insight, making the work accessible to students, scholars, and spiritual seekers alike. His command of Arabic and Islamic philosophy, paired with a sensitivity to contemporary ethical concerns, makes this edition an indispensable resource.

Throughout this work, we see how Isfahānī elevates ethics from theoretical speculation to spiritual formation. His moral framework is grounded in revelation and tradition. True virtue, in his view, is not merely known through reason but realised through divine instruction and embodied righteous action. Human success is not measured by status or intellect alone, but by one's proximity to God through devotion, service, and the cultivation of noble character.

Isfahānī's personal life gives moral weight to his teachings. Known for his asceticism and humility, he refused public office and worldly recognition. His ethical teachings were matched by his character. That Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), the renowned Shāfi'ī scholar and polymath, memorised *al-Dharī'a* is testimony to the work's lasting scholarly and spiritual significance.

The book is situated within the Sunni tradition,

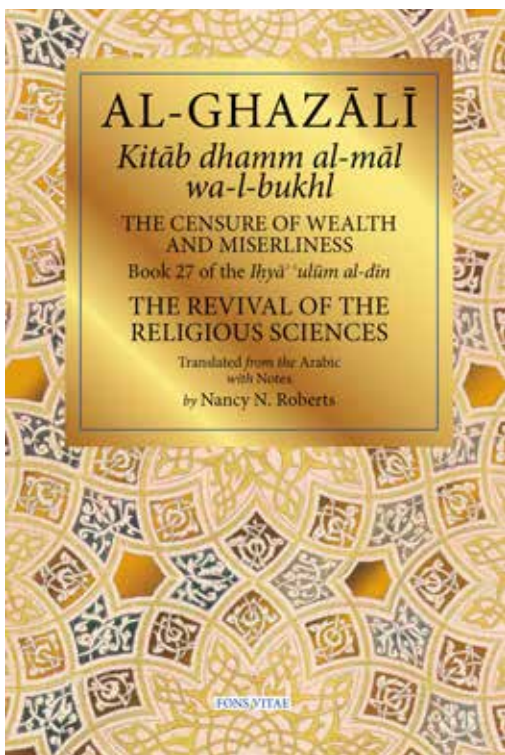
especially the Shāfiʿī school of law and Ashʿarī theology. A significant contribution of Isfahānī is his distinction between *ahkām al-sharʿiyya* (legal rulings) and *makārim al-akhlāq* (noble character). The former governs external behaviour; the latter refines the soul. This makes the work both legally relevant and spiritually indispensable.

This is not just a philosophical treatise. It is a manual for ethical living. It offers profound insight for scholars of theology and philosophy, students of ethics, educators, and anyone seeking moral clarity in an age of confusion. Mohamed has reintroduced a classical treasure to the modern world, offering a luminous guide to those who seek to walk the path of virtue.

*Al-Dhārīʿa* is far more than a scholarly text; it is a manual for human flourishing. It calls for the active use of the intellect to cultivate noble character, to connect to the soul, and to purify the heart on its journey toward its highest purpose: to live in remembrance, in devoted service, and to attain nearness and love of God. Mohamed's masterful translation restores this classical work to its rightful place as a timeless source of moral clarity and spiritual guidance for our time.

**Reviewer Bio:** AbuBakr Karolia, M.A. (with distinction) in Semitic Culture and Language, University of Johannesburg. Founder of the Movement for a United South Africa (MUSA) — [musa.org.za](http://musa.org.za).

## Al-Ghazali: The Censure of Wealth and Miserliness (Book 27 of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*)



**Author:** Abu Hamid al-Ghazali

**Translator:** Nancy Roberts

**Publisher:** Fons Vitae

**ISBN-10:** 1941610722

**ISBN-13:** 978-1941610725

“The Censure of Wealth and Miserliness” is Book 27 of the “Revival of the Religious Sciences”, which is al-Ghazali’s magisterial compendium consisting of 40 volumes on 40 different aspects of Islamic belief, practice, ethics, and worldview.

Al-Ghazali writes that wealth is the principal pillar of this world, and the more wealth we have, the more engaged we become with the world.

In this volume, al-Ghazali explains the subtle connection between one’s inner relationship with wealth and one’s outward actions and lifestyle. He roots his treatment of the subject in the Quranic passages, hadith, and traditional accounts which relate to wealth and the love of it. He covers such topics as the proper uses of wealth according to the obligations of both the law and social graces as well as the vices of miserliness, greed, covetousness, and avarice.

Ghazali also discusses the virtues of generosity, open-handedness and their highest expression, altruism, in which there is no thought of self. “For

whosoever is greedy for thanks and commendation is a merchant...essentially purchasing praise with their wealth." When there is trust in God, one shouldn't worry about some hypothetical future hardship which may never come to pass. Ghazali quotes Abu Hazim who said, "That which belongs to someone else could never be mine, just as that which belongs to me could never belong to someone else. So why should I fritter my life away in pursuit of either of them?"

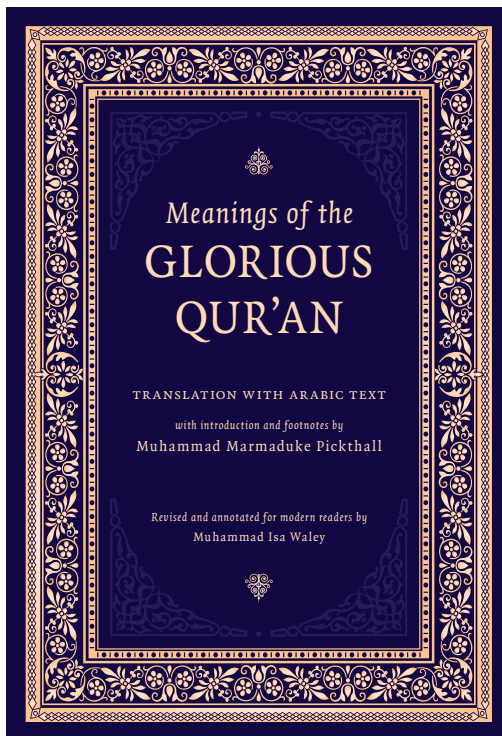
Ghazali comments, "There is no end to the paths our minds can go down when we fret over our worldly affairs; those who have enough for the day are safe." Earthly harms endured by the wealthy include fear, grief, the hardship of retaining wealth and acquiring it. "What do you possess of your wealth other than what you have consumed and is therefore gone? Or

what have you dressed yourselves in which is now worn out? Or is it, in fact, only what you have given away in charity that is lasting?" Wealth is its own enemy; it consumes itself until it is gone.

Besides making us aware of subtle details regarding wealth and greed, al-Ghazali offers advice on: acquiring a disposition of satisfaction, ways to uproot miserliness, responding to the initial higher impulse to help and not hesitate, and consistently forcing ourselves to be open-handed.

This book serves as a humbling mirror for any readers on a personal spiritual journey by presenting the many subtle ways in which the inner life is being greatly harmed by lack of awareness of the fundamental dangers of wealth and greed, which has been viewed in all the great religious traditions as an enormous detriment to the soul and to spiritual aspiration.

## Meanings of the Glorious Qur'an



**Author:** Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall

**Revised and Annotated by:** Muhammad Isa Waley

**Publisher:** Turath Publishing

**ISBN:** 978-1-915265-24-1

Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's classic *The Meanings of the Glorious Koran* was the first English interpretation by a British Muslim. First published in 1930, it has never since been out of print. But Pickthall's 'Biblical English' is archaic and sometimes hard for today's readers to understand. This revised version uses clearer, more modern language. Without altering the basic character of the original translation, it seeks to convey more of the rhythm and rhetorical force of the Arabic. Also included are a new general introduction; additional introductions to each Sūrah; and footnotes explaining references, divergences from Pickthall's rendering, and other points. These enhancements make *Meanings of The Glorious Qur'an* a valuable addition to the available literature on the Book of Allah.

# Soulful Sexual Health for Muslims: A Developmental Guide for Individuals and Clinicians

**Author:** Sameera Qureshi, MS OTR

**Publisher:** Routledge

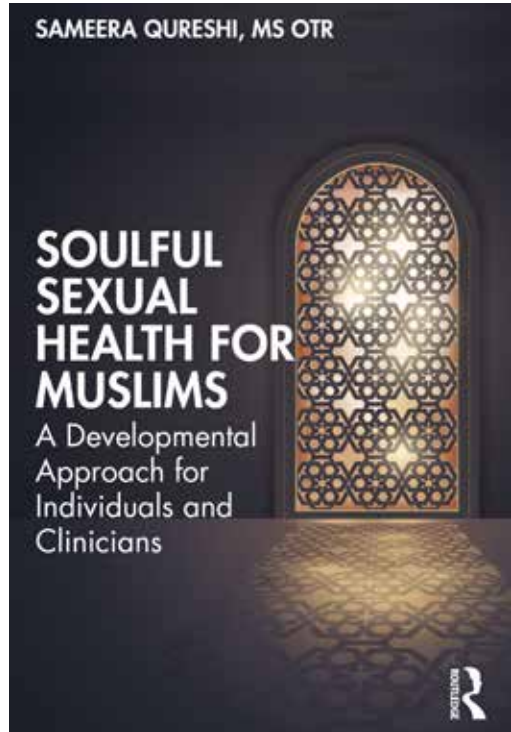
**Purchase Link:** Buy from Routledge

**ISBN** 9781032663470

Across Muslim communities, sexual health is frequently spoken of only in terms of marriage, reduced to rules about sex and silence about desire. Yet sexual health is far more expansive than this — it is part of the soul's journey, unfolding alongside the body, the emotions, and the spirit, and offering a pathway through which intimacy and longing can become means of nearness to God. When viewed in this light, sexual health is no longer a topic to be hidden or diminished, but a sacred dimension of life that can be lived with compassion, accountability, and spiritual depth.

*Soulful Sexual Health for Muslims* uses a transformative approach to sexual health for Muslims - one that does not fragment the human being into body versus spirit but instead embraces sexual health as an integral part of well-being and faith. Drawing deeply from Islamic traditions, it reframes the often-stigmatized conversations around sexuality into a soulful dialogue about compassion, responsibility, and spiritual connection. By weaving together the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, it opens up a way of seeing sexual health not merely as a private matter or an uncomfortable topic, but as an essential part of one's relationship with God.

At its heart lies the Soulful Sexual Health Model, a framework through which Muslims are guided to navigate challenges across the lifespan and across the unfolding stages of the soul. This model rests on four values: compassion, which softens harshness toward oneself and others and invites the possibility of beginning again; self-accountability, which grounds us in honest reflection without collapsing into shame; the journey of the soul, which reminds us that we are constantly in motion, always in the process of becoming; and inseparability from Allah, which anchors us in the truth that God is present in every moment of struggle, longing, and healing. Through this model,



sexual health is restored to its rightful place as a sacred trust and an opportunity for nearness to the Divine.

The book unfolds across a wide spectrum of topics, beginning with the foundations of anatomy, physiology, and puberty. Here, puberty is not simply described as a biological stage, but as a moment of profound spiritual accountability when young Muslims are called to embrace new responsibilities of prayer, fasting, and self-awareness. Compassion is emphasized as central during this tender transition, allowing young people to integrate their changing bodies into their spiritual lives without fear or shame. From this foundation, the narrative moves into empowered abstinence before marriage, where the familiar religious guidelines are revisited not as rigid rules, but as a lived journey of intention, struggle, and renewal. Abstinence is explored as an ongoing practice that may involve difficulty and repeated effort, reminding readers that God's compassion is vast and that striving itself is part of worship.

Marital intimacy is treated with equal depth, re-framing it as far more than physical obligation or expectation. Instead, intimacy is described as a soulful meeting, a tender act of vulnerability and connection through which couples can experience joy, comfort, and spiritual growth. Intimacy within marriage is presented as one of God's signs, a sacred trust that points toward His mercy and companionship. The book also turns toward parenting, offering parents practical and spiritual guidance to speak openly with their children about bodies, boundaries, and sexual development. In doing so, it challenges patterns of silence and secrecy that have long left Muslim children unprepared, and instead offers a vision where families can nurture both faith and honesty side by side.

The realities of sexual trauma, pornography use, infertility, and sexual dysfunction are addressed with sensitivity and care, recognizing the deep wounds that these experiences leave on both body and heart. Rather than bypassing these struggles, the book offers pathways for healing that draw on therapeutic wisdom as well as Islamic traditions of patience, prayer, and resilience. These chapters remind readers that even in pain and uncertainty, there is space for growth, hope, and reconnection with God. Reflective questions, personal narratives, and practical activities are interwoven throughout, inviting readers not only to learn but also to engage with their own experiences and integrate the material into their daily lives.

This work is designed for a wide audience: Muslims seeking a holistic understanding of sexual health, parents who want to raise their children with honesty and faith, couples yearning for deeper intimacy, and professionals — from educators and therapists to imams and community leaders — who support Muslims in their journeys. It bridges contemporary knowledge with Islamic frameworks, creating a resource that is at once practical, spiritual, and deeply human.

Ultimately, this book is an invitation to see sexual health as inseparable from the journey of the soul. It is a call to move beyond silence and shame, to engage with compassion and accountability, and to embrace intimacy and desire as part of one's relationship with God. By grounding sexual health in the Soulful Sexual Health Model, readers are reminded that every aspect of their being — body, heart, and spirit — can be lived in alignment with the Divine. This book offers not only information and guidance, but also a vision of healing and growth that honors the whole person and situates sexual health as a sacred part of life's unfolding journey.



# MAJOR EVENTS

# Major Events

## SEPTEMBER 2024

- 1 UK government announces suspension of 30 out of 350 arms export licenses to Israel.
- 2 Türkiye signs decades-long liquid gas deal with British Shell.  
Artist Macklemore cancels show in Dubai over the UAE's ties to the war in Sudan.
- 3 Israeli settlers, backed by the military, close the historic Ibrahimi Mosque to Palestinians in Hebron in the Occupied West Bank.  
Reports of Sudan facing "a starvation crisis of historic proportions" amid civil war. The Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council and Mercy Corps state that the international community is failing to address the issue.
- 4 Israeli-American Zionist woman is arrested for attempting to drown a 3 year old Palestinian-American girl in Texas.  
Columbia University arrests Gaza protestors outside its gates.  
Netanyahu unveils a plan for Israel's total occupation of Palestine, without West Bank on the map, and violates the 40 year old peace treaty with Egypt showing the Philadelphia Corridor as a military zone.  
1 civilian is murdered and 5 others are wounded in Southern Lebanon after Israeli strikes.  
Sisi visits Türkiye for the first time in 12 years.  
Spain's Prime Minister announces the first Spain-Palestine summit, adding that they will continue to put pressure on Netanyahu at the ICC.
- 10 The UK, US, France and Germany impose fresh sanctions on Iran after Iran supplies Russia with ballistic missiles for use in Ukraine
- 11 The United Nations Security Council adopts a draft resolution to extend the sanctions on Sudan until September 2025. Targeted sanctions include asset freezes, travel bans and an arms embargo. The Sudanese representative says that there is "irrefutable evidence" that the war is due to the UAE's support for military groups that are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, which the UAE denies and says are "baseless allegations"
- 13 Israeli special forces raid a "Hezbollah missile production facility" in Syria. Air strikes are used to neutralise Syria's defences and prevent reinforcements from reaching the site. 18 people are killed and more injured in the raid near Masyaf.
- 14 Fighting breaks out in Sudan's el-Fasher, North Darfur following an attack by the Rapid Support Forces.
- 15 A missile fired at central Israel from Yemen hits an unpopulated area, causing no injuries. The Houthis issue a statement saying that the attack caused "2 million Zionists to run to shelters for the first time in the enemy's history".
- 17 In one of the largest terrorist attacks in recent history, Israel had planted explosives inside pagers and walkie-talkies in Lebanon and detonated at the same time killing scores of people, including children, and injuring nearly 3,000, with many of the injured suffering life-altering injuries (losing eyes, fingers etc)
- 27 Israel assassinates Hezbollah's leader, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, by dropping 85 tonnes of Bunker-Buster bombs on the Southern Dahiyeh area of Beirut where Nasrallah was meeting with Hizbollah members.
- 29 Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon leave over a thousand dead and displace a million people.
- 30 Israel invades Lebanon.

## OCTOBER 2024

- 1 Shigeru Ishiba is elected as Japan's new Prime Minister and calls for a snap election.
- 1 Iran attacks Israel with ballistic missiles as a response to Israel's assassinations of Hassan Nasrallah and Ismail Haniyeh.
- 1 Israel closes its airspace; Jordan and Iraq also shut airspace amid the attack.
- 1 IDF invade southern Lebanon and warns residents of border communities to evacuate north of the Awali River; Hezbollah denies that an Israeli ground incursion has begun.
- 2 Regional flight disruption: Airspace closures trigger dozens of diversions/reroutings across the Middle East.
- 3 The 2024 ICC Women's T20 World Cup is held in the United Arab Emirates, and is won by New Zealand.
- 6 The 2024 Kazakh nuclear power referendum is held and approved.
- 6 Kais Saied reelected as Tunisian president.
- 7 Hurricane Milton becomes the fourth most intense hurricane in the Atlantic Basin, and the most intense storm in the Gulf of Mexico tying with Hurricane Rita in 2005.
- 12 The long-period comet C/2023 A3 (Tsuchinshan–ATLAS), described as the "comet of the century", makes its closest approach to Earth.
- 13 SpaceX achieves the first successful return and capture of a Super Heavy booster from Starship, the biggest and most powerful rocket ever to fly.
- 14 The Europa Clipper spacecraft is launched to investigate Europa, an icy moon of Jupiter.
- 16 Leader of Hamas Yahya Sinwar killed in a gunfight with Israeli forces in Rafah.
- 20 Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka are inaugurated as the President and Vice President of Indonesia.
- 21 The National Assembly of Vietnam elects Lương Cường as the new president of Vietnam. He replaced Tô Lâm, who was formally promoted to the general secretary of the Communist Party.
- 26 Israel launches airstrikes against Iran in retaliation to Iran's attacks earlier that month.
- 29 Spain suffers from its worst floods in 50 years, over 200 dead and many missing.
- 30 58 years of uninterrupted governance is ended as the BDP party is voted out of Botswana.

## NOVEMBER 2024

- 1 Israeli strikes intensified across Gaza and into Lebanon's Baalbek; Hezbollah launched 30 rockets into northern Israel; reports of casualties on both sides and a brief closure near the Lebanon–Syria border crossing.
- 2 Fighting continued: Israeli forces struck targets linked to Hezbollah (including in/around Beirut, per multiple outlets), while UAVs launched from Iraq toward Israel were intercepted; clashes and civilian harm reported in Gaza.
- 5 U.S. President Donald Trump defeats incumbent Vice President Kamala Harris to win a second non-consecutive term. Trump became the second person in American history to win a second nonconsecutive term, after Grover Cleveland in 1892.
- 9 Suicide bombing in Balochistan, Pakistan at Quetta railway station kills 26; attack organised by Balochistan Liberation Army.
- 13 Qatar paused its Gaza ceasefire mediation, saying both Israel and Hamas needed to show "seriousness"; U.S. officials also pressed Doha about Hamas' presence.
- 10 The electoral alliance Lepak of incumbent Prime Minister Pravinth Jugnauth is defeated by that of opposition leader and former Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, with the latter taking all but two seats.
- 11 Houthis expanded attacks toward U.S. naval vessels; the U.S. Navy repelled the assault, per the Pentagon. Cross-border fire also killed civilians in northern Israel on Nov 12.

- 12 Justin Welby announces his resignation as Archbishop of Canterbury following the publication of a report critical of his handling of the abuse of children within the Church of England by John Smyth.
- 15 Spotted hyena is rediscovered in Elba protected area of southeast Egypt, 5000 years after they were believed to have been extirpated.
- 16 Iraqi Air Force strike near Kirkuk killed four suspected ISIS members, part of ongoing counter-IS operations.
- 16 French-Algerian dissident writer Boualem Sansal is put in custody by Algerian authorities after his landing in Algiers.
- 17 An Israeli strike in Beirut killed Hezbollah's media chief, as exchanges escalated across the Lebanon front.
- 21 ICC issues arrest warrants against Netanyahu, Yoav Gallant and Mohammad Deif for war crimes committed.
- 21 Researchers using the Very Large Telescope announce the first-ever "close-up" image of a star outside the Milky Way Galaxy, WOH G64.
- 21 Terrorists in Peshawar, Pakistan, ambush a group of vehicles carrying Shiite Muslims, killing 46 and injuring 20.
- 26 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announces that a ceasefire deal has been agreed to end fighting with Hezbollah in Lebanon.
- 27 Ceasefire agreement took effect along the Lebanon border after near-daily exchanges since September; analysts outlined verification and de-escalation challenges still ahead.
- 30 Syrian civil war: Opposition forces seize control of most of Aleppo, Syria, prompting the first Russian airstrikes on the city since 2016.

## DECEMBER 2024

- 2 Biden gives his son Hunter an unconditional pardon.
- 4 CEO of UnitedHealthcare, Brian Thompson is shot and killed by a lone gunman in Manhattan, creating criticism of the health insurance industry in the USA.
- 7 The Notre-Dame Cathedral reopens to the public after previously being damaged by a structural fire in 2019.
- 8 Syrian President Bashar al-Assad flees from Damascus to Moscow after being overthrown, ending his presidency and the Ba'athist Syria regime after a total of 61 years. The Syrian opposition forms the Syrian transitional government as a provisional government.
- 9 Google unveils a new quantum computer, capable of performing a mathematical calculation in 5 minutes, that the most powerful supercomputers could not complete in 10 septillion years
- 9 Luigi Mangione (26) is arrested at an Altoona, Pennsylvania fast food restaurant after a five-day manhunt, and charged with murder of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson in NYC
- 11 FIFA announces that Morocco, Portugal and Spain will jointly host the 2030 World Cup, with anniversary matches to be held in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, while Saudi Arabia is confirmed as the host for 2034.
- 12 Indian chess prodigy Gukesh Dommaraju defeats former world champion Ding Liren in the 2024 World Chess Championship, breaking the previous age record of 22 set by Garry Kasparov by becoming champion at 18 years, 195 days old.
- 12 Suspected Chinese spy with links to Prince Andrew is banned from the UK by a government tribunal.
- 15 More than 50 killed in Gaza in Israeli airstrikes, death toll surpasses 45,000.
- 17 Port Vila, Vanatu suffers a 7.3 magnitude earthquake where at least 16 people are killed.
- 20 Six people are killed, while another 235 are injured, after a car is driven into a crowd at a Christmas market in Magdeburg, Germany.

- 24 The Parker Solar Probe breaks the previous record set in 2018 for the closest artificial object to the Sun by 6.1 million kilometers (3.8 million miles), becoming the closest and first man-made object to approach and "touch" the Sun.
- 25 Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 8243, crashes in Kazakhstan. Twenty-nine out of the 67 on board survive the crash.
- 31 Houthis claimed a retaliatory attack on USS Harry S. Truman after U.S. strikes on Yemen; U.S. side did not confirm damage.

## JANUARY 2025

- 1 Poland takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, after the Hungarian presidency.
- 2 Israeli warplanes carry out airstrikes on defense factories and a research centre in Syria
- 5 OCHA's weekly snapshot logged fatalities across Kunar, Laghman, Nuristan, Faryab, and Baghlan after snow/rain beginning Jan 2–5; multiple road crashes and exposure deaths were recorded.
- 6 Indonesia becomes the tenth member to join BRICS.
- 6 Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau stepped down after several political controversies, with growing discontent in his own party
- 7 A 7.1 magnitude earthquake strikes Tibet, China, killing at least 126 people, with another 338 are injured.
- 7 Los Angeles experienced the most devastating wildfires in its history, driven by fierce winds and an extended drought. More than 13,000 buildings were destroyed. At least 29 people lost their lives, while 180,000 residents were forced to evacuate.
- 8 Israeli airstrikes across the Gaza Strip kill at least 27 people
- 9 Joseph Aoun, Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, was elected Lebanon's 14th president, ending a two-year power vacuum.
- 10 The European Copernicus Climate Change Service reported that 2024 was the hottest year on record.
- 11 A gas station explosion in Al Bayda, Yemen, results in 40 deaths and dozens of others injured.
- 11 South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was arrested after a second police attempt, following his impeachment and last December's martial law declaration.
- 13 A non-periodic comet, reaches perihelion, and is dubbed The Great Comet of 2025.
- 15 The President of South Korea, Yoon Suk Yeol, is successfully arrested after a second attempt by police following a martial law declaration and successful impeachment motion last December.
- 15 Israel and Hamas approved a ceasefire deal to end the Gaza war, exchange hostages and prisoners, and permit international aid.
- 16 A Navy three-star said U.S. forces have fired 200+ missiles and intercepted ~400 Houthi drones/missiles since late-2023 to protect shipping.
- 18 Two Sharia judges were assassinated in their chambers at Iran's Supreme Court in Tehran; the gunman injured two others before killing himself.
- 19 A truce between Israel and Hamas began at 11:15 a.m.; within 24–48 hours media and official tallies tracked ongoing incidents, prisoner/hostage moves, and sporadic fire.
- 20 Heavy rain triggered deadly slides and flash floods in Pekalongan Regency, with at least 25 people killed; regional disaster bulletins the same week flagged widespread January flooding on Java and the Lesser Sundas.
- 20 Donald Trump inaugurated; JD Vance Vice President.
- 22 The White House and Reuters confirmed President Trump signed E.O. 14175, initiating and then re-imposing the Foreign Terrorist Organization label on Ansar Allah (Houthis); Iran denounced the move.

- 24 Ahmed al-Sharaa is appointed as the president of Syria, after a one-month vacancy following the fall of the Assad regime.
- 27 A large slide near El Jebha–Al Hoceima cut a strategic road, underscoring winter geomorphic risks in the Rif.
- 28 Mosques, community centres, and a primary school across London targeted with anti-Muslim graffiti.
- 31 Israel attacks Lebanon.

## FEBRUARY 2025

- 1 Hamas releases 3 Israelis, while Israel releases 183 Palestinian prisoners.
- 3 Belgium appoints new Prime Minister, Bart de Wever
- Mass deportations of illegal immigrants by Donald Trump
- 4 China announced export controls and higher tariffs on select U.S. imports in retaliation for Donald Trump's tariffs on Chinese goods.
- 4 A gunman opened fire at an adult education center in Örebro, Sweden, killing at least 11 people including himself and injuring 15 others, in the country's deadliest mass shooting.
- 4 Donald Trump announced that the United States would take control of the Gaza Strip under an agreement with Israel, with U.S. forces overseeing its reconstruction.
- 14 Sudan is marked as the biggest humanitarian catastrophe, marking its 2nd year of conflict, remaining underreported
- 15 Mahamoud Ali Youssouf is elected as the chairperson of the African Union Commission.
- 17 Nationwide protests erupted in Indonesia after legislation expanded military involvement in civilian government roles.
- 18 Vladimir Putin announces that Russia and the United States have officially agreed to restore diplomatic relations. A four-hour summit between the US and Russia is held in Saudi Arabia.
- 28 U.S. President Donald Trump met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House, where Trump and Vice President JD Vance sharply criticized him, questioning support for Ukraine, a proposed war settlement, and the nation's future.
- 28 Colombian president, Malaysian prime minister, and South African president release a joint statement announcing they will close their ports to any ship carrying weapons supplied to Israel

## MARCH 2025

- 3 The Trump administration pauses military aid to Ukraine, following the Oval Office meeting with Zelensky the previous week.
- 5 Sudan filed a case against the United Arab Emirates at the International Court of Justice, accusing it of violating the Genocide Convention by supporting the RSF responsible for the Darfur genocide.
- 8 Over 1,000 people, including civilians, were reported killed in a crackdown by Syrian transitional government forces in the Alawite region, the country's worst violence in years.
- 18 Israel launches widespread aerial bombardments and attacks on the Gaza Strip, killing at least 591 people, including children, ending the ceasefire agreement reached in January.
- 18 The President of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, survives an attack on his convoy by al-Shabaab, killing at least 10 people.
- 19 Nationwide protests erupt across Turkey following the arrest of the mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, on charges of corruption and terrorism.
- 21 South Korea suffered one of its worst wildfires in modern history, with over 87,000 hectares burned in South Gyeongsang Province and at least 28 people killed.
- 25 Hossam Shabat and Mohammad Mansour murdered by Israel in targeted attack.

28 A 7.7 magnitude earthquake occurs in Myanmar, resulting in 5413 killed and 11402 injured

## APRIL 2025

- 1 Fram2 launches aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, becoming the first crewed spaceflight to enter a polar retrograde orbit.
- 2 US President Donald Trump issues sweeping trade tariffs on many countries, including a 10% baseline tariff for all imports.
- 3 Hungary withdraws from the International Criminal Court after Israeli Prime Minister and accused war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu lands in Budapest for a state visit, in defiance of the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant against him.
- 13 A Russian missile strike on the city center killed ~35 and injured 100+ on Palm Sunday; officials said ballistic missiles with cluster munitions were used.
- 15 A blaze on a Congo River boat near Mbandaka killed at least ~50 people; dozens were missing.
- 15 NOAA confirmed the fourth global mass coral-bleaching event, with major heat stress across multiple ocean basins.
- 21 Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church since 2013, dies at the age of 88. World leaders pay tribute. Many countries have declared national mourning.
- 22 Militants affiliated with The Resistance Front open fire on a group of tourists at the Baisaran Valley in Jammu and Kashmir, India, killing 26 and injuring at least 20.
- 26 The funeral of Pope Francis is attended by delegations from 164 countries, including 82 leaders, and 250,000 members of the public.
- 26 An explosion in the Port of Shahid Rajaei, Bandar Abbas, Iran, kills at least 70 people and injures more than 1,000.
- 28 Iberian Peninsula blackout. A cascading grid failure cut power across Spain and Portugal from 12:33 CEST, disrupting transport, telecoms, and hospitals; restoration progressed overnight as investigators probed causes.

## MAY 2025

- 3 2025 Australian federal election: The incumbent Labor Party led by Anthony Albanese wins reelection, increasing their majority.[
- 3 2025 Singaporean general election: The incumbent People's Action Party led by Lawrence Wong wins reelection in a landslide, retaining a supermajority government.
- 5 Oman brokered a truce halting U.S. strikes in Yemen and Houthi attacks on U.S. vessels (Houthis said it doesn't apply to Israel).
- 6 2025 German federal election: Friedrich Merz is elected Chancellor of Germany in the second round of parliamentary voting, hours after being defeated in the first round, a first in post-WWII German history.
- 6 India launches several missiles into Pakistani territory in response to the 2025 Pahalgam attack two weeks prior.
- 7 On the fourth ballot, 133 cardinal electors chose Robert Francis Prevost as Pope Francis's successor. Taking the name Pope Leo XIV, he became the first North American pope, the first with Peruvian or U.S. citizenship, and the first from the Order of Saint Augustine.
- 8 The OIC-IPHRC issued a forceful statement condemning Israeli operations and highlighting mass child malnutrition risks in Gaza.
- 11 2025 Albanian parliamentary election: The incumbent Socialist Party led by Edi Rama wins reelection, retaining a majority government.
- 12 The Kurdistan Workers' Party announces its dissolution after previously declaring a ceasefire with Turkey.
- 15 Israel expanded ground operations; by May 26 IDF said Rafah phase completed and a push into Khan Younis began.

- 16-17 After cabinet approval earlier in May, the IDF began a large-scale operation across multiple axes (Rafah/Khan Younis/Gaza City); heavy air and ground strikes followed and casualty counts climbed sharply.
- 17 As the offensive expanded, outlets reported new truce contacts (Arab League focus, shuttle talks), keeping a negotiation channel alive even as fighting intensified.
- 18 Israel claimed to have struck over 670 " Hamas targets " in a wave of preliminary airstrikes on the Gaza Strip, killing over 400 people and injuring another 1,000.
- 18 The incumbent Social Democratic Party led by Luís Montenegro wins an increased plurality, but fails to achieve a majority.
- 19 Israeli forces killed at least 136 people and shuttered the last functioning hospital in north Gaza. Israel also struck the medical supplies warehouse of Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, damaging the medical supplies provided by Medical Aid for Palestinians. Israel ordered all residents of Khan Yunis to leave to al-Mawasi, with IDF spokesperson Avichay Adraee declaring the entire area " a dangerous combat zone. "
- 19 Targeted operations against Hezbollah continued inside Lebanon (incl. south of the Litani and Baalbek area), underscoring the porous nature of the ceasefire line.
- 25 Health officials reported 3,972 cases / 23 deaths YTD (ahead of 2024's pace by cases), foreshadowing the severe monsoon-season wave to come.
- 25
- 30 May 2025 was the second-warmest May on record globally.
- 31 Josep-Lluís Serrano Pentinat is sworn in as the new Episcopal Co-Prince of Andorra and Bishop of Urgell after the Vatican accepts the resignation of Joan Enric Vives i Sicília for age limitation reasons.

## JUNE 2025

- 1 2025 Polish presidential election: Karol Nawrocki is narrowly elected President of Poland in the second round of voting, beating Rafał Trzaskowski.
- 1 Ukraine launched a major drone strike on Russian military bases, targeting over 40 Air Force aircraft.
- 3 After being pushed forward as a result of the impeachment of Yoon Suk Yeol, Lee Jae Myung wins the election, beating Kim Moon-soo.
- 4 Saudi authorities tightened permit checks and heat measures; coverage highlighted large-scale enforcement and efforts to reduce heat illness.
- 6 The IDF said it would move forward with a Rafah operation; humanitarian updates described severe access constraints across Gaza in early June.
- 6 Protests erupt in Los Angeles in response to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrests and deportations of illegal immigrants.
- 9 Following its June committee meeting, WHO said the mpox upsurge still met PHEIC criteria.
- 10 10 people are killed and another >30 injured after a gunman opens fire at a school in Graz, Austria.
- 10 Apple's developer conference week (June 9–13) unveiled major software updates, including expanded "Apple Intelligence" features.
- 12 Air India Flight 171, a Boeing 787 bound for London, crashed into a building shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad, killing 229 passengers, 12 crew members, and 19 people on the ground. One passenger survived. It was the first fatal accident and total loss involving a Boeing 787 Dreamliner.
- 13 Israel conducts air strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, killing military commanders including Hossein Salami; Iran retaliates.
- 15 Amid operations around Rafah, reports cited civilians killed while waiting for aid; heavy fighting and displacement continued.
- 16 The 51st G7 summit is held in Kananaskis, Canada.
- 18 The Bhumjaithai Party quit the ruling coalition after a leaked PM-Hun Sen call; thousands rallied on June 28 in Bangkok, setting up July's court-ordered suspension of PM Paetongtarn.

- 22 The United States carries out B-2 bomber airstrikes on three Iranian nuclear sites in Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan.
- 23 Iran launches missiles at US bases in Qatar and Iraq in response to the previous day's strikes.
- 24 A U.S.-brokered ceasefire took effect, halting the exchange of strikes.
- 24 A NATO summit is held at the World Forum in The Hague, Netherlands.
- 25 Axiom Mission 4 was launched with four astronauts on board, including Poland's Sławosz Uznański-Wiśniewski and India's Shubhanshu Shukla, marking the first astronauts from both countries since the Cold War.
- 27 The U.S., with Qatari support, brokers a preliminary peace treaty between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, ending their armed conflict that started in 2022.
- 29 Heatwaves pushed parts of Spain, France, Italy, Balkans toward record June temperatures.
- 29 Türkiye: Dozens of wildfires burned across western/southern provinces.

## JULY 2025

- 1 During the 2025 Thai political crisis, Thailand's Constitutional Court suspended Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra from office while it considers a case calling for her removal.
- 3 Moscow formally recognized the Taliban government, the first country to do so since 2021; analysts called the move mostly symbolic but consequential for regional diplomacy.
- 3 An early-July wildfire wave intensified around Ödemiş/İzmir; Reuters reported the first fatality and widespread evacuations, while satellite imagery captured the burn scars.
- 5 Palestine Action labelled 'terrorist group' by UK government
- 5 Gaza/Qatar: Indirect Israel–Hamis ceasefire talks ran in Doha; mediators shuttled proposals amid continuing strikes and expanding humanitarian need.
- 6 The Houthis attacked two commercial vessels in the Red Sea, with Human Rights Watch calling the strikes apparent war crimes.
- 13 Several clashes erupt in southern Syria between armed Druze and Bedouin groups.
- 15 Monsoon flooding surged across low-lying Bangladesh and the Himalayan foothills of Pakistan, prompting humanitarian alerts and landslide deaths in the north.
- 16 Israeli airstrikes hit the Syrian Presidential Palace and the Syrian General Staff headquarters in Damascus.
- 21 An F-7 BGI training aircraft of the Bangladesh Air Force crashes into Milestone College in Uttara, Dhaka, killing 31 people including the pilot.
- 21 Twenty-eight countries issue a joint statement calling for an immediate end to the Gaza war, saying it has "reached new depths" in terms of the suffering of civilians.
- 21 Government and media warnings flagged extreme heat and wildfire risk across Tunisia and northern Morocco (alerts into the 19–22 July window).
- 25 Under the Online Safety Act, websites such as Facebook and Instagram enact safety measures.
- 27 Weeks-long fires surrounded parts of Bursa, forced thousands to evacuate, and closed highways; officials warned of a "very risky week."
- 28 Airstrikes and shelling continued (e.g., at least 36 killed on Jul 28, per AP), while aid and malnutrition indicators worsened in OCHA's mid-month update.
- 30 An Mw 8.8 earthquake strikes off the coast of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, triggering tsunami warnings in Japan and Hawaii.
- 30 Gaza humanitarian images AP documented acute child malnutrition conditions.

## AUGUST 2025

- 3 OPEC and core members met and reaffirmed their stepwise output-adjustment strategy amid market-stability messaging.

- 7 The 2025 World Games start in Chengdu, China.
- 7 Israeli strikes in eastern Lebanon killed at least six and wounded 10 amid an often-violated Nov 2024 ceasefire.
- 8 Wildfires erupted around Çanakkale; evacuations and transport disruptions followed as the blaze burned into a second day (Aug 11–12).
- 8 Armenia and Azerbaijan sign a peace deal mediated by the United States to end 37-year-old hostilities regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- 11 Health officials warned dengue deaths and cases were surging, with August poised to be worse than July.
- 14 Insider reporting said Khamenei signaled openness to resume talks.
- 15 Taliban marked the 4th anniversary of their return to power.
- 15 US president Donald Trump meets with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Anchorage, Alaska, to discuss a plan for resolving the conflict in Ukraine.
- 19 Torrential monsoon rains triggered deadly flooding, widespread outages and damage.
- 20 Tehran's FM said the "moment" for effective US talks hadn't yet arrived, while stressing continued IAEA engagement.
- 22 Famine has now been officially declared in Gaza City after the UN-backed body that monitors global food security upgraded its assessment to Phase 5 — the most severe level. According to the IPC, over half a million people are currently experiencing "starvation, extreme deprivation, and life-threatening conditions."
- 28 Israel struck targets around Sanaa amid escalating regional spillover.
- 28 UN Security Council extended UNIFIL's mandate to Aug 2026 (Resolution 2790).
- 31 Red Sea escalation: A merchant vessel reported an explosion in the water off Yanbu, Saudi Arabia; UKMTO's August summary later logged an attempted attack on the Scarlet Ray that day.
- 31 An earthquake in eastern Afghanistan killed over 2,200 people and injures 3,500.

## SEPTEMBER 2025

- 1 Global Freedom Flotilla set sail to deliver aid to Gaza.
- 1 Indonesia's protests escalate. Students and unions rally nationwide over lawmakers' perks and policing; troops deploy around Parliament in Jakarta. The U.N. human-rights office urges restraint and dialogue.
- 2 Afghanistan quake response begins. OCHA issues its first flash update after the M6.0 quake late Aug 31; emergency plans ramp up through September.
- 2 Houthis widen maritime threat. The group claims a drone-and-missile strike on a ship in the northern Red Sea amid stepped-up fire toward Israel.
- 8 - 11 Nepali students protest corrupt government, overthrow them and elect new Prime Minister.
- 9 Israeli strike in Doha sparks diplomatic crisis. An attack targeting Hamas figures in Qatar triggers an urgent U.N. Human Rights Council debate set for Sept 16.
- 15-16 Arab-Islamic emergency summit in Doha. Nearly 60 states convene; the final communiqué condemns the Doha strike and pledges solidarity with Qatar.
- 16 Gaza City offensive intensifies as Israel launches a new ground push into Gaza City; mass displacement follows.
- 18 - 19 Gaza health system 'on the brink'. WHO warnings accompany heaviest strikes of the month; OCHA's mid-month snapshot tracks casualties and displacement.
- 22 Lebanon front simmers below peak. Israel continues limited operations against Hezbollah; intensity drops compared with earlier weeks, but strikes persist into Sept 29 with new casualties reported. By month-end, the U.N. tallies 100+ Lebanese civilian deaths since the November ceasefire.

- 23 Sahel states vs. the ICC. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger announce withdrawal from the International Criminal Court, deepening tensions with Western partners.
- 26 Pakistan: Monsoon flooding prompts OCHA Flash Update, while authorities warn of dengue.
- 26 A bombing in Quetta (Pakistan) kills at least 10.
- 27 The 2025 Seychellois general election is held.
- 29 Houthis hit Dutch ship; EU action urged. A cruise-missile strike ignites the *Minervagracht* in the Gulf of Aden (two crew injured); the Netherlands presses the EU to sanction the group.
- 30 Bangladesh dengue crisis. Health officials report September as the deadliest month of the 2025 outbreak, with hospitals stretched.
- 30 El-Fasher siege worsens. U.N. agencies and media detail new civilian killings, famine conditions, and disease outbreaks under RSF siege through the end of the month.

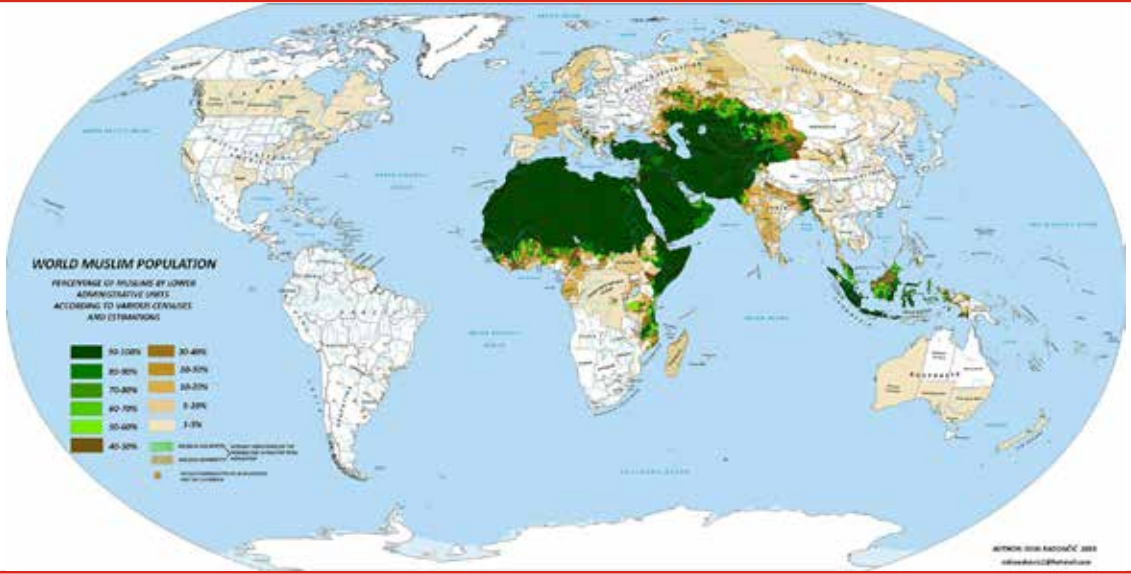
## OCTOBER 2025

- 1 Iran's Expediency Council conditionally approved joining the CFT (terror-financing treaty), a move aimed at easing isolation from the global financial system.
- 1-6 After the worst monsoon in decades, provinces—especially Punjab—braced for more rain through Oct 7; authorities cited >1,000 deaths nationwide since June and millions affected. NASA/UN imagery and OCHA reporting illustrate the scale.
- 2 Yemen's Houthis fired a cruise missile at the *M/V Minervagracht*; a fire broke out and two crew were injured.
- 5 Pope Leo XIV publicly urged swift progress on the emerging Gaza peace framework, calling for a lasting ceasefire and hostage releases.
- 6 Mediated negotiations in Cairo—described by Germany's foreign minister as the “most promising” yet—moved beyond a truce to longer-term governance questions; U.S. officials signaled cautious optimism.
- 6 Health authorities in Bangladesh reported the highest single-day hospitalizations (1,042) and nine deaths; officials warned October could be the worst month of the year. (DGHS dashboard & press.)
- 6 Indonesia: anti-corruption & resource crackdown. President Prabowo presided over the handover of seized tin-mining assets and ordered tougher action on illegal mining/smuggling—significant for a Muslim-majority G20 state central to critical-minerals supply.
- 6 Fresh reporting underscored continued migrant deaths off Libya's coast, days after late-September tragedies; NGOs blamed dangerous interceptions and chase tactics.
- 7 The Syrian government announces an immediate ceasefire with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces following clashes last night that killed at least four people and injured at least eight others.
- 7 Houthi rebels detain nine United Nations workers in Yemen as part of a long-term crackdown on UN presence in the country, bringing the total number of detained UN personnel to 53.
- 7 The value of gold futures rise above \$4,000 per troy ounce for the first time in trading history.
- 7 On 7 October, events marked the two-year anniversary of Hamas's 2023 attack on Israel and pro-Palestinian demonstrations were held in cities around the world (Sydney, Istanbul, London, New York, etc) in solidarity with Gaza.
- 8 Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson, and Omar Yaghi are jointly awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Chemistry for their work on metal–organic frameworks.
- 8 The governments of Israel and Hamas agreed to the first phase of a cease-fire plan proposed by US President Donald Trump.
- 13 On 13 October, international leaders met at the Gaza Peace Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, to discuss next steps following the cease-fire.
- 20 Reports indicate the cease-fire was under strain: “deadly Gaza truce breaches” with about 97–100 Palestinians killed after 10 Oct.



APPENDIX I  
Population Statistics

# World Muslim Population



Country/Region	Population 2025	Percent Muslim	Muslim Population
Afghanistan	43,844,111	99.7	43,712,579
Albania	2,771,508	50.7	1,405,155
Algeria	47,435,312	99	46,960,959
American Samoa	46,029	0.1	46
Andorra	82,904	2.6	2,156
Angola	39,040,039	0.3	117,120
Anguilla	14,728	0.6	88
Antigua and Barbuda	94,209	0.3	283
Argentina	45,851,378	0.9	412,662
Armenia	2,952,365	0.03	886
Aruba	108,147	0.4	433
Australia	26,974,026	3.2	863,169
Austria	9,113,574	8.3	756,427
Azerbaijan	10,397,713	97.3	10,116,975
Bahamas	403,033	0.1	403
Bahrain	1,643,332	73.7	1,211,136
Bangladesh	175,686,899	91	159,875,078

Country/Region	Population 2025	Percent Muslim	Muslim Population
Barbados	282,623	1.5	4,239
Belarus	8,997,603	0.5	44,988
Belgium	11,758,603	7.6	893,654
Belize	422,924	0.2	846
Benin	14,814,460	27.7	4,103,605
Bermuda	64,555	1	646
Bhutan	796,682	0.2	1,593
Bolivia	12,581,843	0.1	12,582
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3,140,095	50.7	1,592,028
Botswana	2,562,122	0.4	10,248
Brazil	212,812,405	0.05	106,406
British Virgin Islands	39,732	1.2	477
Brunei	466,330	82.1	382,857
Bulgaria	6,714,560	13.4	899,751
Burkina Faso	24,074,580	63.8	15,359,582
Burundi	14,390,003	10	1,439,000
Cambodia	17,847,982	2	356,960
Cameroon	29,879,337	30	8,963,801
Canada	40,126,723	4.9	1,966,209
Cape Verde	527,326	2	10,547
Cayman Islands	75,844	0.2	152
Central African Republic	5,513,282	15	826,992
Chad	21,003,705	58	12,182,149
Chile	19,859,921	0.1	19,860
China	1,416,096,094	0.5	7,080,480
Colombia	53,425,635	0.2	106,851
Comoros	882,847	98.3	867,839
Congo	6,484,437	2	129,689
Cook Islands	13,263	0.1	13
Costa Rica	5,152,950	0.1	5,153
Croatia	3,848,160	1.5	57,722
Cuba	10,937,203	0.1	10,937
Cyprus	1,370,754	25.3	346,801
Czech Republic	10,609,239	0.2	21,218
Denmark	6,002,507	5.4	324,135
Djibouti	1,184,076	97	1,148,554
Dominica	65,871	0.2	132
Dominican Republic	11,520,487	0.1	11,520
DR Congo	112,832,473	10	11,283,247
Ecuador	18,289,896	0.1	18,290

Country/Region	Population 2025	Percent Muslim	Muslim Population
Egypt	118,365,995	90	106,529,396
El Salvador	6,365,503	0.28	17,823
Equatorial Guinea	1,938,431	10	193,843
Eritrea	3,607,003	44	1,587,081
Estonia	1,344,232	0.1	1,344
Eswatini	1,256,174	2	25,123
Ethiopia	135,472,051	31.3	42,402,752
Falkland Islands	56,002	0.1	56
Faroe Islands	3,469	0.1	3
Fiji	933,154	6.3	58,789
Finland	5,623,329	1.8	101,220
France	66,650,804	10	6,665,080
French Guiana	313,666	0.9	2,823
French Polynesia	282,465	0.1	282
Gabon	2,593,130	10	259,313
Gambia	2,822,093	96.4	2,720,498
Georgia	3,806,671	10.7	407,314
Germany	84,075,075	5.5	4,624,129
Ghana	35,064,272	19.9	6,977,790
Gibraltar	40,126	4	1,605
Greece	9,938,844	2.5	248,471
Greenland	55,745	0.1	56
Grenada	117,303	0.3	352
Guadeloupe	373,791	0.4	1,495
Guam	168,999	0.1	169
Guatemala	18,687,881	0.1	18,688
Guinea	15,099,727	89.1	13,453,857
Guinea-Bissau	2,249,515	46.1	1,037,026
Guyana	835,986	7.3	61,027
Haiti	11,906,095	0.1	11,906
Honduras	11,005,850	0.3	33,018
Hong Kong	7,396,076	4.1	303,239
Hungary	9,632,287	0.6	57,794
Iceland	398,266	0.2	797
India	1,463,865,525	14.6	213,724,367
Indonesia	285,721,236	87	248,577,475
Iran	92,417,681	99.4	91,863,175
Iraq	47,020,774	98	46,080,359
Ireland	5,308,039	1.4	74,313
Isle of Man	84,118	0.2	168

Country/Region	Population 2025	Percent Muslim	Muslim Population
Israel	9,517,181	18	1,713,093
Italy	59,146,260	4.8	2,839,020
Ivory Coast	32,711,547	42.9	14,033,254
Jamaica	2,837,077	0.2	5,674
Japan	123,103,479	0.1	123,103
Jordan	11,520,684	97.2	11,198,105
Kazakhstan	20,843,754	70.2	14,632,315
Kenya	57,532,493	11.2	6,443,639
Kiribati	136,488	0.1	136
Kosovo	1,770,000	93	1,646,100
Kuwait	5,026,078	74.6	3,749,454
Kyrgyzstan	7,295,034	90	6,565,531
Laos	7,873,046	0.1	7,873
Latvia	1,853,559	0.2	3,707
Lebanon	5,849,421	67.8	3,965,907
Lesotho	2,363,325	0.1	2,363
Liberia	5,731,206	20	1,146,241
Libya	7,458,555	97	7,234,798
Liechtenstein	40,128	5.4	2,167
Lithuania	2,830,144	0.1	2,830
Luxembourg	680,453	2.3	15,650
Macau	722,007	0.1	722
Madagascar	32,740,678	10	3,274,068
Malawi	22,216,120	20	4,443,224
Malaysia	35,977,838	63.5	22,845,927
Maldives	529,676	100	529,676
Mali	25,198,821	95	23,938,880
Malta	545,405	2.6	14,181
Marshall Islands	36,282	0.1	36
Martinique	340,439	0.2	681
Mauritania	5,315,065	99.9	5,309,750
Mauritius	1,268,280	17.3	219,412
Mayotte	337,011	97	326,901
Mexico	131,946,900	0.01	13,195
Micronesia	113,683	0.1	114
Moldova	2,996,106	0.4	11,984
Monaco	38,341	0.8	307
Mongolia	3,517,100	5	175,855
Montenegro	632,729	19.1	120,851
Montserrat	4,359	0.1	4

Country/Region	Population 2025	Percent Muslim	Muslim Population
Morocco	38,430,770	99	38,046,462
Mozambique	35,631,653	18.9	6,734,382
Myanmar	54,850,648	4.3	2,358,578
Namibia	3,092,816	0.4	12,371
Nauru	12,025	0.1	12
Nepal	29,618,118	4.2	1,243,961
Netherlands	18,346,819	5	917,341
New Caledonia	295,333	2.8	8,269
New Zealand	5,251,899	0.9	47,267
Nicaragua	7,007,502	0.1	7,008
Niger	27,917,831	98.3	27,443,228
Nigeria	237,527,782	49	116,388,613
Niue	1,821	0.1	2
North Korea	26,571,036	0.1	26,571
North Macedonia	1,813,791	33.3	603,992
Northern Mariana Islands	43,541	0.7	305
Norway	5,623,071	3.2	179,938
Oman	5,494,691	86	4,725,434
Pakistan	255,219,554	96.5	246,286,870
Palau	17,663	3.8	671
Palestine	5,589,623	97.5	5,449,882
Panama	4,571,189	0.7	31,998
Papua New Guinea	10,762,817	0.1	10,763
Paraguay	7,013,078	0.1	7,013
Peru	34,576,665	0.1	34,577
Philippines	116,786,962	11	12,846,566
Poland	38,140,910	0.02	7,628
Portugal	10,411,834	0.4	41,647
Puerto Rico	3,235,289	0.1	3,235
Qatar	3,115,889	77.5	2,414,814
Réunion	882,405	4.2	37,061
Romania	18,908,650	1	189,087
Russia	143,997,393	12	17,279,687
Rwanda	14,569,341	4.8	699,328
Saint Helena	5,197	0.1	5
Saint Kitts & Nevis	46,922	0.3	141
Saint Lucia	180,149	0.1	180
Saint Pierre & Miquelon	5,574	0.2	11
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines	99,924	1.7	1,699
Samoa	219,306	0.1	219

Country/Region	Population 2025	Percent Muslim	Muslim Population
San Marino	33,572	0.1	34
São Tomé and Príncipe	240,254	3	7,208
Saudi Arabia	34,566,328	96.2	33,252,808
Senegal	18,931,966	97.2	18,401,871
Serbia	6,689,039	2.1	140,470
Seychelles	132,779	2.1	2,788
Sierra Leone	8,819,794	78.6	6,932,358
Singapore	5,870,750	15.6	915,837
Slovakia	5,474,881	0.2	10,950
Slovenia	2,117,072	3.6	76,215
Solomon Islands	838,645	0.1	839
Somalia	19,654,739	99.8	19,615,430
South Africa	64,747,319	1.9	1,230,199
South Korea	51,667,029	0.1	51,667
South Sudan	12,188,788	20	2,437,758
Spain	47,889,958	2.6	1,245,139
Sri Lanka	23,229,470	9.7	2,253,259
Sudan	51,662,147	96	49,595,661
Suriname	639,850	14.3	91,499
Sweden	10,656,633	7.1	756,621
Switzerland	8,967,407	5.2	466,305
Syria	25,620,427	87	22,289,771
Taiwan	23,112,793	0.3	69,338
Tajikistan	10,786,734	97.9	10,560,213
Tanzania	70,545,865	35.2	24,832,144
Thailand	71,619,863	5.4	3,867,473
Timor-Leste	1,418,517	0.2	2,837
Togo	9,721,608	20	1,944,322
Tokelau	2,608	< 0.1	< 3
Tonga	103,742	< 0.1	< 104
Trinidad and Tobago	1,511,155	5.8	87,647
Tunisia	12,348,573	97.8	12,076,904
Türkiye	87,685,426	98	85,931,717
Turkmenistan	7,618,847	93.7	7,138,860
Turks and Caicos Islands	46,855	< 0.1	< 47
Tuvalu	9,492	0.1	9
U.S. Virgin Islands	84,138	0.1	84
Uganda	51,384,894	14	7,193,885
Ukraine	38,980,376	1.2	467,765
United Arab Emirates	11,346,000	72.2	8,191,812

Country/Region	Population 2025	Percent Muslim	Muslim Population
United Kingdom	69,551,332	5.8	4,033,977
United States	347,275,807	1.1	3,820,034
Uruguay	3,384,688	0.1	3,385
Uzbekistan	37,053,428	88.7	32,866,391
Vanuatu	335,169	0.1	335
Vatican City	501	0	0
Venezuela	28,516,896	0.4	114,068
Vietnam	101,598,527	0.1	101,599
Wallis & Futuna	11,194	0.1	11
Western Sahara	600,904	99.4	597,299
Yemen	41,773,878	97.2	40,604,209
Zambia	21,913,874	1	219,139
Zimbabwe	16,950,795	0.7	118,656
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,231,243,381</b>	<b>26.11%</b>	<b>2,149,413,668</b>

Muslim population statistics taken from Wikipedia. org. World populations taken from www. worldometers. info.

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَفُورُ  
ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ لَوْ يُؤَاخِذُهُمْ بِمَا كَسَبُوا الْعَجَلُ  
لَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ بَلْ لَهُمْ مَوْعِدٌ لَّنْ يَجِدُوا  
مِنْ دُونِهِ مَوْيلًا

Al-Kahf 18, 58

And your Lord is the Forgiver, Full of Mercy. Were He to take them to task for what they have earned, He would have hastened for them the chastisement; but they have a tryst from which they will not find any escape.

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APPENDIX II  
Social Media Statistics

## 🌸 Top Social Media Statistics of *The Muslim 500* 🌸

This is a list showing the most popular social media sites (Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube) run by Muslims.  
(Rounded values in millions)

# RANK	NAME	AGE	COUNTRY	OCCUPATIONS
1	Khaby Lame	25	Italy	Media
2	Salman Khan	60	India	Actor
3	Shahrukh Khan	60	India	Actor
4	Mohamed Salah	33	Egypt	Footballer
5	Paul Pogba	32	France	Sports
6	Mustafa Hosny	47	Egypt	Preacher
7	Mesut Özil	36	Germany	Footballer
8	AKON	51	USA	Musician
9	Tamer Hosny	48	Egypt	Musician
10	DJ Khaled	49	USA	Musician
11	Gigi Hadid	30	USA	Model
12	Huda Kattan	42	USA	Beauty blogger
13	Shaquille O' Neal	53	USA	Sports
14	Bella Hadid	29	United States	Model
15	Aboflah	26	Kuwait	Youtuber
16	Abir El Saghir	27	Lebanon	Cook and Influencer
17	Sheikh Mishary bin Rashid Alafasy	50	Kuwait	Qur'an Reciter
18	A.R. Rahman	57	India	Musician
19	Imran Khan	73	Pakistan	Politician
20	Ice Cube	55	USA	Rapper
21	Ahmad Al Shugairi	52	Saudi Arabia	Show Host
22	Amr Khaled	58	Egypt	Preacher
23	Ahmed Helmy	56	Egypt	Actor
24	Amr Diab	63	Egypt	Musician
25	Khabib Nurmagomedov	37	Russia	Sports
26	Zinedine Zidane	53	France	Sports
27	Maher Zain	44	Sweden	Musician
28	Ahmed Abou Hashima	50	Egypt	Businessman
29	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	71	Türkiye	Politician
30	Hannah Elzahed	31	Egypt	Actress
31	Aidh Al-Qarni	66	Saudi Arabia	Scholar
32	Muhammad Alarefe	55	Saudi Arabia	Scholar
33	HM Queen Rania Al-Abdullah	55	Jordan	Royalty
34	Atif Aslam	42	Pakistan	Musician
35	Haifa Wehbe	53	Lebanon	Musician
36	Mufti Menk	50	Zimbabwe	Preacher

Facebook	X	Instagram	TikTok	YouTube	Total
3m	0m	79m	162m	13m	257m
51m	46m	71m	0m	3m	171m
42m	44m	48m	0m	0m	135m
17m	20m	66m	0m	0m	103m
24m	10m	65m	2m	0m	101m
38m	14m	25m	8m	7m	92m
37m	26m	28m	0m	0m	91m
52m	6m	11m	3m	16m	88m
25m	4m	41m	6m	9m	86m
21m	5m	39m	5m	14m	84m
5m	0m	76m	1m	0m	83m
8m	0m	57m	12m	4m	81m
9m	15m	35m	14m	1m	75m
0m	0m	61m	10m	0m	71m
0m	2m	11m	8m	47m	68m
9m	0m	17m	30m	8m	65m
24m	15m	10m	3m	12m	63m
24m	24m	8m	0m	4m	61m
15m	21m	10m	12m	2m	61m
17m	6m	31m	1m	4m	59m
20m	18m	18m	0m	3m	59m
33m	11m	8m	3m	3m	58m
18m	10m	20m	8m	1m	57m
2m	12m	31m	0m	7m	52m
6m	2m	40m	0m	1m	50m
3m	0m	45m	0m	0m	48m
29m	2m	8m	2m	6m	48m
7m	0m	33m	5m	0m	45m
10m	22m	12m	1m	1m	44m
9m	2m	22m	9m	0m	42m
16m	20m	4m	0m	0m	40m
21m	18m	0m	0m	0m	39m
18m	10m	11m	0m	0m	39m
22m	1m	11m	0m	4m	38m
13m	7m	14m	1m	2m	37m
7m	11m	11m	2m	6m	37m

# Top Social Media Statistics of the General Public

This is a list showing the most popular social media sites (Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube).  
(Rounded values in millions)

	NAME		COUNTRY	OCCUPATIONS
1	Cristiano Ronaldo	41	Portugal	Footballer
2	MrBeast	27	USA	Media
3	Selena Gomez	33	USA	Musician
4	Lionel Messi (Leo Messi)	38	Argentina	Footballer
5	Justin Bieber	31	Canada	Musician
6	Dwayne Johnson (The Rock)	53	USA	Wrestler
7	Taylor Swift	36	USA	Musician
8	Kylie Jenner	29	USA	Media
9	Ariana Grande	32	USA	Actress
10	Kim Kardashian	44	USA	Reality Star
11	Katy Perry	42	USA	Musician
12	Neymar	33	Brazil	Footballer
13	Rihanna	36	Barbados	Musician
14	Beyonce	44	USA	Musician
15	Virat Kohli	37	India	Cricketer
16	Jennifer Lopez	56	USA	Musician
17	Khloé Kardashian	41	USA	Media
18	Shakira	48	Colombia	Musician
19	Kendall Jenner	30	USA	Model and Media
20	Miley Cyrus	33	USA	Musician
21	Nicki Minaj	43	USA	Musician
22	Billie Eilish	23	USA	Musician
23	Narendra Modi	75	India	Politician
24	Cardi B	32	USA	Musician
25	Kevin Hart	46	USA	Comedian
26	Will Smith	57	USA	Actor
27	Demi Lovato	33	USA	Actress - Musician
28	Drake	38	Canada	Musician
29	Chris Brown	36	USA	Musician
30	Lady Gaga	39	USA	Musician
31	LeBron James	40	USA	Sports
32	Barack Obama	64	USA	Politician
33	Charli D'Amelio	21	USA	Media
34	Vin Diesel	57	USA	Actor
35	Bruno Mars	40	USA	Musician
36	Snoop Dogg	53	USA	Musician

facebook	X	Instagram	TikTo	YouTube	TOTAL
171m	116m	665m	0m	63m	1019m
0m	33m	78m	119m	4m	671m
86m	65m	417m	60m	35m	663m
116m	0m	507m	0m	4m	627m
89m	109m	294m	29m	74m	597m
64m	17m	392m	80m	7m	561m
79m	93m	282m	33m	60m	549m
31m	39m	392m	59m	12m	533m
41m	0m	374m	39m	55m	510m
34m	74m	355m	10m	2m	476m
70m	104m	203m	9m	45m	432m
91m	64m	232m	35m	5m	426m
103m	107m	149m	16m	44m	421m
56m	15m	310m	8m	27m	413m
51m	68m	273m	0m	0m	392m
60m	43m	248m	18m	17m	386m
23m	30m	301m	6m	1m	361m
122m	52m	94m	41m	47m	358m
20m	31m	286m	7m	0m	344m
47m	45m	212m	19m	19m	343m
47m	28m	224m	2m	27m	329m
31m	8m	125m	74m	53m	294m
51m	109m	97m	0m	26m	286m
32m	36m	164m	30m	20m	282m
35m	36m	176m	34m	0m	282m
115m	0m	70m	80m	10m	275m
32m	51m	153m	8m	18m	263m
50m	39m	142m	0m	30m	262m
49m	31m	144m	0m	27m	253m
56m	81m	61m	17m	25m	246m
27m	53m	159m	0m	0m	238m
55m	130m	39m	0m	1m	225m
3m	5m	42m	156m	0m	215m
103m	0m	104m	3m	0m	210m
58m	42m	42m	15m	0m	199m
45m	20m	89m	30m	10m	194m

وَاكْتُبْنَا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ اِنَّا

هُدًى نَا إِلَيْكَ قَالَ عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ وَرَحْمَتِي  
وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَفَسَاكُتُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يَتَّقُونَ وَيُؤْتُونَ  
الزَّكَاةَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾

Al-A'raf 7, 156

And prescribe for us in this world good and in the Hereafter. We have turned to You'. He says: 'My chastisement - I smite with it whom I will, and My mercy embraces all things, and so I shall prescribe it for those who are God-fearing and pay the alms, and those who believe in Our signs;

# GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS

**Ahl Al-Bayt (or Aal Al-Bayt):** Literally, “The People of the House”; refers to the family of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

**Ahl Al-Sunnah wa Al-Jama’ah:** Literally, “The People of the Prophetic Practice and Community”; refers to Sunni Muslims as a community.

**Al-Fatihah:** Literally, “The Opening” or “The Beginning”. This is the title of the first chapter of the Qur’an that is recited as a fundamental part of Muslims’ daily prayers.

**Aqidah:** Creed. This refers to theological and doctrinal beliefs of Muslims.

**Ash’ari:** Theological school of Sunni orthodoxy named after the followers of the 9th-century scholar Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash’ari (874–936 CE).

**Awqaf:** Plural of *waqf* (see below).

**Adhan/Azaan:** The call to prayer.

**Bid’ah:** Literally, “innovation”; this refers to the act of introducing superfluous, or non-prescribed traditions into Islamic practice. It is used in common speech as a denunciation toward those not acting in accordance with the prescriptions of Islam.

**Caliph:** From the Arabic word *khalifah* (“successor”), the head of the entire community of Muslims, either current or in the past. Is also used by certain sects and Sufi *tariqahs* to refer to their own leader or his successor.

**Chador:** A loose cloth traditionally worn by Muslim women usually covering the body from head to foot.

**Da’i/Da’ee:** Islamic missionary.

**Dawah:** Islamic missionary work; literally “inviting” to Islam” or to acts of Islamic virtue.

**Emir (or Amir):** A title accorded to a leader, prince, or commander-in-chief.

**Fatwah:** A religious ruling issued by a mufti (a top legal scholar) regarding particulars of an issue in Islamic law based on circumstances surrounding the question, such as its time, place, people, and

other details. Unlike the ruling of a judge (*qadi*), it is not normally binding.

**Fiqh:** Islamic jurisprudence. A branch of the shariah that deals with rulings related to human actions, as opposed to faith or spirituality.

**Fiqh Al-Aqaliyyat:** Islamic rulings for Muslims living as minorities in predominantly non-Muslim lands.

**Ghazal:** Love poetry used for describing the beauty of the loved one as well as the emotions the poet has towards the beloved.

**Hadith:** Literally, “saying”. These are a collection of sayings—or direct observations—of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. There are numerous *ahadeeth* (plural of “hadith”), and the practice of verifying them is a particular Islamic scholarly practice that has been carried out since the life of the Prophet ﷺ.

**Hafiz (or Hafizah) Al-Qur’an:** A person who has committed the entire Qur’an to memory and can recite the Qur’an at will. This is important in Islam because the Qur’an was originally revealed as an oral text and, until today, the authenticity of Qur’anic transmission is based primarily on oral, then written, transmission.

**Hajj:** The pilgrimage to Makkah, one of the five pillars of Islam. It is a once-in-a-lifetime obligation upon every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it. The pilgrimage occurs from the 8th-12th days of Dhu Al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar.

**Halal:** Permissible. A term referring to actions or objects that are permissible according to Islamic law. Commonly refers to food items that are permissible for Muslims to eat.

**Haram:** In the context of a sacred precinct, like Makkah, Medinah, or Al-Aqsa, this term means “inviolable”. In most contexts, this term means “forbidden”, and relates to actions that are impermissible according to Islamic law.

**Hijab:** Normally refers to the headscarf worn by Muslim women but refers to both the head cover and attire worn by Muslim women to preserve their

modesty. It is obligatory by the consensus of all classical Islamic schools of thought. In some contexts, it can mean segregation, as in between genders.

**Hijaz:** The region along the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula that separates Najd in the east from Tuhamah in the west.

**Ibadi:** The Ibadi school has origins in and is linked to the Kharijites, but the modern-day community is distinct from the 7th-century Islamic sect. It was founded after the death of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and is currently practiced by the majority of Oman's Muslim population. It is also found across parts of Africa.

**Ihsan:** Virtue through constant regard to, and awareness of, God.

**Ijaza:** Certification given to a student for acquiring knowledge of a particular discipline under the authorization of a higher authority, usually by face-to-face interactions, thereby enabling the student to transmit the knowledge gained from the teacher. This is performed under the supervision of a certified sheikh whose chain of narrations often leads to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

**Ijtihad:** Independent reasoning, or individual interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

**Imam:** (1) In both Sunni and Shia Islam an imam is the leader of congregational prayers who may also deliver the sermon of the Friday (Jumu'ah) prayers; more generally, a person of authority within the community. (2) In Shia Islam this exclusively refers to a series of people, descended from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who by lineage are considered divinely guided spiritual leaders.

**Imamate:** The position or institution, in Shia Islam, that comprises a series of divinely guided imams.

**Iman:** Faith in God.

**Islam:** Submission to God's will.

**Isnad:** The chain of narrators of the Hadith; it is the list of authorities who have transmitted the sayings, actions or approbations of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ via one of his Companions or a later authority (*tabi'i*). The reliability of the *isnad* is the

main criteria in the validity of Hadith. Modern practices of scientific citation and historical method owe a great deal to the rigour of the *isnad* tradition of early Muslims.

**Jihad:** Literally, "struggle". An exertion of effort in any field (not just in war) in order to achieve good or prevent evil, done so for the sake of God's pleasure. The highest level of jihad is to overcome one's ego and lower self. It is considered a religious duty upon every Muslim.

**Kaaba:** The large cubic structure in the Grand Mosque in Makkah, adorned in gold-embroidered black fabric, referred to by Muslims as the "House of God". This structure marks the direction in which Muslims pray and is central to the Hajj pilgrimage.

**Khat:** Script. Refers to Arabic calligraphy, which is the artistic practice of handwriting Arabic phrases, often in the form of verses of the Qur'an or Islamic supplications..

**Khateeb:** Refers to the person who delivers the sermon (khutbah) during certain occasions such as the Friday or Eid prayers. He is usually the imam or leader of the prayer.

**Khalifah:** See "caliph".

**Khanqah:** A building designed specifically for gatherings of a Sufi brotherhood, or *tariqah*, and is a place for spiritual retreat and character reformation. It is also synonymous with the regional terms *ribat*, *tekke*, and *zawiyah*.

**Khawarij:** A group of Muslims in early Islamic history who went against the larger community and became outsiders. A term used to describe political deviants.

**Khums:** Literally, "one-fifth" in Arabic; a religious tax of one-fifth of one's income owed by followers of *Usuli* Twelver Shia to a very senior cleric and poor Muslims.

**Madhhab:** A traditional school of Islamic legal methodology (e. g. Hanbali, Maliki, Shafii, Hanafi, Ja'fari).

**Madrasah:** The Arabic word for "school". Can refer

to a religious school.

**Majlis al-Shurah:** Consultative religio-legislative body.

**Marja’/Marja’iyyah:** The highest position of authority in the *Usuli* school of Twelver Shia *fiqh* whose authority lies after the Qur’an, prophets, and imams. Also referred to as *marja’ taqlid* (literally, “one who is worthy of being imitated”); they have the authority to make legal decisions within the confines of Islamic law for laymen and less-qualified clerics.

**Masjid:** Arabic for “mosque”.

**Maturidi:** Theological school of Sunni orthodoxy named after the followers of the 9th-century scholar Muhammad Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi (853-944 CE).

**Melayu Islam Beraja:** The concept of Malay Islamic monarchy.

**Morchidar:** Literally, “(female) guides”. Refers to the Moroccan cadre of trained female preachers.

**Mufti:** A Muslim legal expert who is empowered to give rulings on religious matters.

**Mujahid:** Someone engaged in acts of jihad.

**Muqri:** Someone qualified to teach others correct recitation of the Qur’an.

**Murid:** Disciple of a Sufi guide or order.

**Mursyidul Am:** Malaysian term for religious guide.

**Mushaf:** A printing of the Qur’an, referring to the physical bound volume of the Holy Book.

**Mutabarrik:** Supporter or affiliate of a Sufi guide or order, someone less serious in treading the spiritual path than a *murid*.

**Mu’tazili:** An almost obsolete school of Sunni Islam, popular in the 8th century, that advocates the belief that the Qur’an is created—as opposed to the Orthodox Sunni view that it is eternal and uncreated.

**Nasheed:** Islamic song. Islamic vocal music, sung individually or by a group and sometimes accompanied by the *daf*, a shallow drum similar to the tambourine. The words sung may refer to religion, history, current issues, or anything related to Islam.

**Pancasila:** Indonesian concept of five basic, national principles: belief in the Oneness of God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy, and social justice.

**PBUH:** An acronym for “peace be upon him”.

**Pesantren:** The term for Islamic schools in Indonesia.

**Qiblah:** The direction in which Muslims offer their five daily prayers; the direction of the Kaaba in Makkah.

**Ramadan:** Holy month of fasting, 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

**Salafi:** A movement of Sunni Muslims that places great emphasis on the literal interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadith, with scepticism towards the role of the human intellect.

**Salawat:** Prayers of peace upon the Prophet ﷺ which have many distinct formulas, often consisting of the basic *Allahumma salli ala sayyidina Muhammad wa ala Aalibi wa sallim* (O God, send your prayers and blessings upon Muhammad and his family).

**Shahadatayn:** The two testimonies of faith: “There is no deity but God. Muhammad is the Messenger of God.” Stating these two sentences is sufficient to become a Muslim.

**Shariah:** Literally, “the way to the source”, this refers to Islamic law. Islamic law is not, as is widely perceived, a standard set of written rules, but is rather an unwritten text that is interpreted by legal scholars in specific instances, drawing on the Qur’an and other reliable religious sources relevant to the tradition followed.

**Sheikh:** (1) A position of authority granted to people who are respected in society. (2) A religious or tribal official.

**Shia:** The second largest denomination of Muslims

referred to as *shiatu 'Ali* or “party of Ali”, the fourth caliph of Islam and first imam in Shia Islam.

Ramadan.

**Zawiya:** See khanqah, above.

**Sunnah:** Literally “the trodden path”, this refers to the ways and practices of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Reference to these practices can be found in the Qur’an and in the Hadith.

**Sunni:** The largest denomination of Muslims referred to as Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama’ah or “The People of the Prophetic Tradition and Community”—with emphasis on emulating the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

**Tafsir:** Interpretation of the Qur’an, either by commentary or exegesis.

**Taqlid:** The practice of following rulings without questioning religious authority. This is a core tenet of the Shia *Usuli* school of Islamic law.

**Tariqah:** any particular brotherhood of Sufism (spiritual travel) that leads to a path to the Divine. It consists of a group of seekers following their guide (spiritual leader), and through spiritual deeds and guidance one reaches the ultimate truth of knowing God.

**Ummah:** The collective Muslim community.

**Umrah:** The “lesser pilgrimage” to Makkah. It can be performed any time of the year and has fewer rites than the Hajj.

**Usul Al-Din:** The basic foundations of the Islamic religion, represent creed, behaviour, and intellectual conduct and all are based on the rudiments of the Islamic faith.

**Velayat-e-Faqih:** A position of both spiritual and temporal powers in the Republic of Iran. Literally, “Guardianship of the Jurist”, referring to the fact that while the Mahdi (awaited one) is in occultation, the jurists should have guardianship over the earth.

**Waqf:** A religious endowment or charitable trust.

**Zakat:** Mandatory distribution of excess wealth to the poor, and one of the five pillars of Islam. It typically consists of distributing 2.5% (one fortieth) of one’s excess wealth every year, as well as mandatory charity during Eid Al-Fitr, following

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ

سَيَجْعَلُ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَحَبَّةً

Maryam 19, 96

Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds - for them the Compassionate One shall appoint love.

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وَأَنْتَ

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