



Salam Institute
For Peace and Justice

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

Advancing Forgiveness, Reconciliation,
and Peacebuilding Across the Arab Region





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Message from The Team

The year 2024 marked a significant period of growth and impact for Salam Institute for Peace and Justice. Through research, education, capacity building, and regional networking, Salam continued advancing its mission of promoting forgiveness, reconciliation, peacebuilding, and social cohesion across the Arab region and beyond.

Amid ongoing conflicts, humanitarian crises, and social polarization, our work focused on creating practical tools, generating knowledge, empowering local actors, and strengthening networks committed to peaceful transformation. We are proud of the achievements realized through our regional partnerships, educational initiatives, research programs, and advocacy efforts.

Our Mission

Salam Institute was founded nearly a decade ago by Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer with the support of a team of academics and practitioners well-regarded in the field of conflict resolution, peace studies, education, Islamic cultural studies, and international development. Dr. Abu-Nimer brought his expertise in working and publishing extensively on dialogue and peacebuilding efforts, the application of conflict resolution models in Muslim communities, inter-religious dialogue, and conflict resolution training, and evaluation of conflict resolution programs to establish an organization that can promote the values of pluralism, non-violence, and human rights with an authentic Islamic and interfaith voice around the world. In this spirit, the Salam Institute has worked in places as diverse as Palestine, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Mindanao Philippines, Egypt, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, the Balkans, and the United States to:

- Further inter-religious dialogue among Muslims and non-Muslims in Western and non-Western societies, as well as promote an action orientation towards peace and justice among different communities.
- Explore, develop, and utilize resources in Muslim communities to contribute to peacebuilding and development efforts in various conflict areas in the world.
- Provide scholarly and professional knowledge and expertise to governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals on dimensions of political, socio-cultural, religious, and economic conflicts in Islamic context.
- Enhance the knowledge base of Islamic models for conflict resolution and peace among practitioners, academics, and policymakers.
- Advance the integration of local traditions and values in areas of peace, conflict resolution, and development.



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2024 Highlights

The Regional Network for Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Arab World

In May 2023, Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, in collaboration with Hayat Center-RASED, Jordan, [launched the first regional network for reconciliation and forgiveness in the Arab Region](#). The network aims to capitalize on existing efforts, and provide a hub to exchange knowledge, lessons learned, build capacities, and foster cooperation in promoting reconciliation in the Arab region.

The network now has: 35 members, from 11 Arab countries: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen. The network includes 26 organization and 8 independent members, 23 of them are men and 11 of them are women.

Network Objectives

The network seeks to:

- Strengthen capacities in reconciliation and forgiveness.
- Facilitate regional knowledge exchange.
- Promote cooperation among organizations and experts.
- Support policy and advocacy initiatives.
- Raise public awareness about reconciliation, forgiveness and peace building.
- Create spaces for dialogue among practitioners, researchers, and local communities.

Activities in 2024

Network Meetings

Five regional meetings were held by the network and addressed:

- Humanitarian responses following the Morocco earthquake and Libya floods.
- The war on Gaza and its implications for peacebuilding.
- Expansion of network membership.
- Strategic planning and committee development.
- Reflection on the first anniversary of the network.

Lectures and Learning Sessions

Eight specialized lectures covered:

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- Reconciliation efforts in Iraq.
- Women's participation in peacebuilding.
- Religious diversity and reconciliation.
- Conflict dynamics in Yemen.
- Reintegration challenges in Syria and Palestine.
- Emergency planning and gender-sensitive responses in Libya.

Collaborative Initiatives

Network members jointly contributed to:

- Women's peacebuilding initiatives in Yemen.
- Public affairs and women's leadership dialogues in Libya and Jordan.
- Discussions on the Human Fraternity Document.
- Mediterranean cooperation initiatives.
- Peacebuilding film screenings and regional conferences.

Advancing Forgiveness Education in the Arab World

Templeton Religion Trust (TRT) Project

Salam Institute announced the launch of a groundbreaking project supported by the Templeton Religion Trust (TRT). This initiative aimed to advance the integration of forgiveness *and reconciliation* within Arab education systems—helping reduce violence, foster peaceful living, and promote educational and social recovery from political, sectarian, and interpersonal conflicts.

Project Overview

Two major objectives:

1. Updating the Teacher's Guide for Middle and High School: Building on a manual originally developed over a decade ago and previously implemented in Jordan and Lebanon, the Salam Institute revised and enhanced the curriculum with fresh content, especially addressing digital and gender-based conflict, online bullying, and youth engagement through social media.
2. Developing a New Teacher's Guide for Early Grades: For the first time in the Arab region, an age-appropriate forgiveness curriculum was introduced for children in kindergarten to third grade—supporting emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and social interaction through peace education.

Despite years of turmoil and ongoing societal recovery, formal education systems in the Arab world often lack the tools to teach forgiveness and reconciliation. Teachers are unequipped to respond to violence—whether in classrooms, communities, or online spaces—leaving

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students without structured guidance on how to navigate conflict peacefully. This initiative addresses this critical gap.

Beneficiaries and target Audience

The primary users of the new guides were teachers, counselors, and professional development trainers in Arab schools—empowered with culturally rooted, practical tools. Educators from Lebanon, Jordan, and Libya played a vital role in designing and localizing the materials, ensuring relevance and resonance within their national contexts.

Institutionalizing Forgiveness Education

The project aimed to:

- Revise the youth manual, used by over 200 educators and praised by Jordan's Ministry of Education.
- Complete the early grades manual, initiated through earlier Salam-led workshops but left unfinished due to funding constraints.

Both manuals will undergo expert peer review and will draw on real stories—modernized to reflect today's social and media environments. Core topics include emotional awareness, forgiveness and justice in Arab cultures, dialogue principles, and peaceful conflict resolution.

REACH Forgiveness Research Project

Everett Worthington's REACH model of forgiveness has been key to scientifically establishing forgiveness as beneficial to physical, mental, relational, and spiritual health. The do-it-yourself REACH Forgiveness Workbook had already [been tested in five different regions around the world](#), but not yet the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

A project led by [Ilham Nasser](#) at [Salam Peace and Justice Institute](#) aimed to translate the workbook into Arabic and then replicated REACH in three Arabic speaking countries in the MENA region: Egypt, Tunisia, and Iraq. The three countries chosen were all in post conflict and/or went through political changes while witnessing increased levels of community violence in recent years.

A validation panel from the MENA region was engaged to ensure that translations are sensitive to the local social, political, and cultural conditions. Once the translation and validation processes were completed, the recruitment of 600 participants in each of the three locations started. The target groups for the intervention were schoolteachers, professionals such as social workers, and university students. The study included intervention and control groups to assess the program's impact.

An international conference in the MENA region was planned in 2027, inviting experts from the United States, Europe, and other regions, (especially those three countries where REACH was implemented) to the Middle East to share their knowledge with stakeholders as well as to learn of the new insights and findings generated from the research and application in the MENA region. The conference also aims to engage researchers from Arab Universities in the



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three countries to raise awareness and enhance the levels of interest in the science of forgiveness.

WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION – Witnessing Their Efforts and Struggles in Peacebuilding



We all may agree on women's critical role in bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding and the need to further engage women in top-down peace processes.

This Salam Institute Newsletter highlights several examples of women in the Arab region who devoted their work and committed their lives to advancing peace in their communities and their interpersonal lives. We share these stories in an attempt to shed light on life-generating experiences to counter the current sense of hopelessness

and helplessness that dominates the private and to some extent the public spaces. The work of these women inspires hope and a message of empowerment, especially to young generation who are seeking ways to cope with the harsh reality of structural violence and militarization. The extent of the ongoing contributions of Arab women to various social cohesion and peacebuilding demonstrates the need for further initiatives.

Despite this contribution, women in the [MENA region](#) continue to face gender-based violence (GBV) at the second highest rate in the world, affecting 35% of women.

In addition to the GBV and socioeconomic instability they face, it is empirically proven that women in the Arab region are also often perceived as victims of patriarchal society and living in an unending crisis. Nevertheless, these women are the driving force behind preserving their communities and advocating for their rights. Today, war, lack of security, limited political opportunities, and restricted access to funds have limited their capacity to enhance their role in effectively responding to conflicts in their communities.

Based on Stone's (2014) quantitative study of 156 peace agreements over time the likelihood of an agreement lasting at least two years rose by 20% when women made decisions and acted as mediators and negotiators.

The probability of the deal lasting for 15 years [rose](#) by 35%. This shows the need for women to be involved in conflict resolution processes. This also illustrates the need for women to be involved in conflict resolution processes. In 2021, UN Women established the "[Young Women in Peacebuilding programme in the Arab States Region](#)" network of 50 young women from the Arab states. This encompasses advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adhering to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and upholding UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, as well as 1325 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security. Notably, The Programme was [renewed](#) last year as it was a success in addressing those features outlined by



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the UN Women. The [Women of Middle East for Peacebuilding](#) strive to foster peace in the Middle East and North Africa by promoting women's participation in peacebuilding discussions, facilitating dialogue among women with ties to the region, and increasing the visibility of women experts internationally. These examples showcase the significant and potential efforts in advancing peacebuilding and highlight the crucial role women play in fostering stability and reconciliation in the region.

Women's peacebuilding efforts are not without significant struggles, Arab women face different obstacles, including GBV, SGBV, lack of access to education and healthcare, and [societal restrictions](#). The limited opportunities for political positions, whereby there are only a few women at the negotiation tables or political leadership have hindered consolidating the role. The prolonged conflict in the MENA region creates an environment of constant uncertainty and danger which makes their work even more challenging.

As in other conflicts, women and children are the most vulnerable and marginalized sectors in society, which are often most affected by the war. The ongoing war on Gaza provides a clear example of such a reality.

Despite these harsh conditions on the ground women in the Arab region have promoted values and practices of forgiveness and reconciliation in many forms and shapes. They also have shown incredible strength and resilience in advocating for a community without violence. Women's work often involves personal sacrifices, making an effort to mend relationships to create a space for forgiveness and reconciliation.

To contribute to initiating peace in the region, women have a critical role in advancing more inclusionary practices in politics and peacebuilding initiatives. It is undeniable that women's inclusion in peacebuilding in the region is low and needs to be improved as they have a much bigger presence in informal processes. Their unique resilience coupled with their deep understanding of their communities make them invaluable in achieving sustainable peace. Therefore, it is paramount to not only support but empower women in the Arab region, and make sure they have the resources to contribute effectively to peacebuilding processes.

VOICES OF PEACE: Liza Nissan Hido, Founder of Baghdad Women Association



Liza Hido, Founder of Baghdad Women Association & Member of the Regional Network for Forgiveness & Reconciliation in the Arab Region.

In the "Voices of Peace" series, we are pleased to present an inspiring interview with **Mrs. Liza Nissan Hido**, the founder of the Baghdad Women's Association and a member of the Reconciliation and Forgiveness Network in the Arab world.

The conflict in Iraq has involved sectarian, ethnic, and political disputes since the 2003 US invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein's



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government. Tensions have risen between Sunnis and Shiites, and the Kurds' quest for independence has added to the complexity. The rise of ISIS in 2014, which led to the group's control over large areas of Iraq, caused widespread violence and displacement. Although most territories were liberated from ISIS by 2017, the security situation remains unstable due to sporadic attacks and local conflicts. Reconstruction efforts are hindered by corruption and weak infrastructure, while national reconciliation remains difficult due to deep divisions and external pressures.

Liza has lived profound experiences in the field of peace and reconciliation in Iraq and is a graduate of the University of Technology in Baghdad, where she worked in the Iraqi Ministry of Finance for 25 years. However, her career extended to social and humanitarian work by establishing the Baghdad Women's Association, which focuses on combating violence against women and girls and promoting peace and reconciliation in Iraq. In addition to being an active member of the Reconciliation and Forgiveness Network in the Arab world, which was established in May 2023 by the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice and the Life Foundation – Rasid.

Liza Nissan Hido has been involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003. At the time, there was great hope for building a new Iraq characterized by peace and coexistence. However, the reality was laden with shocks and conflicts, making the path to reconciliation difficult and fraught with challenges.

As Iraqis, trust between us as one people has been shaken, which has affected the possibility of reconciliation and forgiveness. I don't want to forget the past, but I forgive and pardon because I believe in the Bible.

Under the umbrella of the Baghdad Women's Association, Liza and her team worked to overcome sectarian sensitivities, promoting the principle of coexistence among all sects and religions in Iraq. In Liza's view, the Baghdad Women Association is, as she puts it, "*a miniature example of Iraq*," as it includes staff from all sects and religions. Religious or national affiliation was not a criterion for treatment; instead, the focus was on collective work for the common good.

Liza addressed her colleagues, saying, "May God bless you, keep Iraq in your eyes," reflecting her deep belief in the need to maintain Iraq's unity and work for its safety.

With the emergence of ISIS, the challenge was greater than ever. In Mosul, where Christian communities were displaced, Liza feared that her previous experiences would not be sufficient to address this crisis. However, due to her deep faith and commitment to forgiveness, she responded to the call to work with displaced women in the city. She says: ***"An international organization asked us to open a listening and guidance center for women and girls who are survivors or displaced in Mosul, given our experience in this field. I initially refused because I couldn't help the women and girls whose families had been expelled from their homes."***

Liza shared one of the touching moments she faced when she decided to establish a listening and guidance center in the town of Qaraqosh after the displacement of women and girls. Here, Liza organized discussion sessions that brought together women from various religions and cultures, where they shared their stories and the painful experiences they had endured at the hands of ISIS fighters, who made no distinction between Christians and Muslims, thus helping to build trust and love among them. ***"This meeting was an example of how to sow trust and work towards reconciliation and forgiveness."***



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Through every experience, Liza has always sought to rebuild trust and humanity. She says: ***“I made it clear to them that one of my colleagues in the association is named Mohammed, who is one of the people I trust the most and whom I call the light of my eyes. I do not accept that anyone comes and says that all Muslims blew up the church.”*** This awareness of the need to avoid generalizations and work on building trust is what helped her face challenges.

Through her work with the Baghdad Women’s Association, she participated in many initiatives aimed at promoting reconciliation and forgiveness. She says: ***“As women, we act as an early warning system, trying to resolve conflicts before they escalate. Unfortunately, in peace negotiations, the voices of women are often missing, but our role remains vital in building peace and understanding.”***

Liza’s experience was not only in building peace but also in testing the strength of will and faith. She says: ***“What motivates me in my life is first my faith in the Lord and also my faith in us as humans.”*** When asked about the hope that drives her to continue despite all the difficulties, she replied: ***“My mother always taught us to love everyone without distinction. She was religious, prayed, and fasted a lot, but she never discriminated between people.”***

But the journey was not easy, as Liza faced significant challenges in trying to bridge the gap between a painful past and a difficult present. She spoke about her experience in Mosul and how changing her concepts and perceptions was a slow process, accompanied by much patience and faith in humanity beyond religious or cultural identities. It was a necessary journey to deepen the faith in the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. Liza worked in various areas such as Anbar, the south, Mosul, Baghdad, and Kurdistan. Each experience was significant to her both personally and professionally.

She also spoke about her experience with the Reconciliation and Forgiveness Network in the Arab world, which was a new and important experience for her.

“This network remains an opportunity for communication, knowledge exchange, and strengthening efforts towards building peace.”

In the end, Mrs. Liza Nissan Hido’s story is a living testimony to the power of will and the ability to overcome hardships, embodying reconciliation and forgiveness in a country exhausted by conflicts and wars for decades.

VOICES OF PEACE: FATIMA AL BAHADLY



Voice of Peace: FATIMA aL-BAHADLY: The Network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab World

Our Voice of Peace column initiated in October reflects the learning and expertise that encompasses the above-mentioned network established earlier this year by the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice in collaboration with the Al-Hayat Center-RASED.

The establishment of [the Reconciliation and Forgiveness network in the Arab Region](#) was a concluding outcome of the reconciliation and forgiveness-related conference held in Jordan

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from May 27th -29th, 2023 that brought together 35 civil society representatives, media professionals, and academics, engaged in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in their communities from diverse locations in the Arab region. The Arab region which has its diverse conflict-based challenges is also rich in its cultural tapestry and traditions of peacebuilding. Representing the 11 Arab region countries that participated in the conference in Jordan and resulting in eight months of preparation, meetings, and coordination, the much-awaited network was finally launched.

In the darkest of circumstances, peacemakers emerge, yet their inner motivations remain a profound mystery to many. What drives them to undertake their perilous journey, at times even at the cost of their own lives or the lives of their loved ones? They celebrate the cause of peace, for which some are tragically sacrificed, while others persevere as champions. They embody qualities such as forgiveness, tolerance, resilience, and empathy, believing these virtues to be the cornerstones of a sustainable world.

Throughout the month of October, Our Voice of Peace, a member of the Network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab Region, proudly spotlights the remarkable Women peacemaker and human rights defender, Fatima Al Bahadly, hailing from the city of Basra in Southern Iraq. Fatima's unwavering commitment to peace takes on extraordinary significance, given the heartbreaking sacrifice she endured – the tragic assassinations of her two sons. These devastating losses, which occurred in 2019 and 2021, serve as a painful reminder of the immense personal toll exacted in the pursuit of a more peaceful world.

Fatima holds a Master's degree in Arabic studies. She is the founder of Al-Firdaws Society, an organization focused on protecting women and youth affected by war and strengthening their role in peacebuilding. Al-Firdaws provides literacy, education, and skills workshops and works to bring an end to violence against women in areas where women are most marginalized, including rural areas.

Grounded in the principles of peace and inspired by the values of tolerance and coexistence among individuals of diverse backgrounds and religions, Fatima Al Bahadly emerged as a socially conscious leader from her early teenage years. she harnessed her talents to benefit her local neighborhood by taking on the responsibility of teaching fellow students when she was just around 14 years old.

“My childhood was not easy as my father died in the Iraq-Iranian war when I was 10 years old. From this age onwards my mother taught me self-reliance, I loved teaching and with the difficult situations in Iraq, I devoted myself to educating marginalized groups that don't have access to adequate education such as women and youth in my area”.

Fatima played a pivotal role in empowering women in Iraq. She instilled confidence in women, recognizing and celebrating their existing roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers. She provided support for women in various aspects, including family-related and financial matters. Fatima also educated women about their human and health rights, offering insights into politics and political participation. Her efforts significantly reduced societal pressures on women in Iraq.

Fatima also played a vital role in tribal conflicts that affected women. her actions led to her being sought out by many neighboring families who looked towards her as a societal leader. Fatima notes that she was following a tradition of service and female leadership found in her religious heritage. Yet this was misconstrued as ‘Western’ by local militia groups who eventually started to threaten and intimidate her.



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Fatima introduced us to a concept known as “Fasliyah.” This term is used to describe a deeply rooted and archaic practice within tribal communities in Southern Iraq where, if a member of one tribe kills a member of another tribe, it triggers a cycle of retribution. In some cases, as an act of resolving the conflict and preventing further revenge between the tribes, women are offered compensation for the life that was taken. Astonishingly, in the instance Fatima witnessed in 2015, up to 40 women were exchanged to settle such disputes.

She used the resources of her organization and collaborated with influential religious leaders within these tribal communities. Together, they recognized that this practice had no basis in their religious values. These religious leaders began incorporating messages against “Fasliyah” into their Friday sermons, using their influence to bring about change.

Thanks to this concerted effort, women who were held captive were eventually liberated and reunited with their families. Fatima, in particular, played a pivotal role in securing the freedom of 40 women.

Fatima was also passionate about promoting coexistence and social cohesion between different communities in Iraq. As the Sunni-Shia conflict intensified during the later years of Saddam Hussein’s rule, Fatima took proactive steps to promote tolerance amid the escalating violence. She played a crucial role in mitigating the intense Sunni-Shia sectarian tensions in Iraq, even during the most violent periods, while also advocating for the protection and safety of the Christian minority group.

“I opened my house to Christians fleeing conflict situations and also to Sunni families who rejected the atrocities committed by ISIS in their areas and they escaped to the south, my area. I wanted to send a message to my community, who are all Shia that not all of Sunnis are affiliated with ISIS and are our enemies, we share common values and we should spread peace and coexistence among all the Iraqis.”

To be a peacemaker in a bloody vicious conflict, demands navigation through dangerous power dynamics within that context, especially as a women peacemaker. Fatima had nurtured resilience within her heart as a God-given bounty but yet, she breaks down as she talks about the successive killing of her two sons.

In 2019, Fatima’s son, Ahmad, fell victim to militant groups and lost his life hanging at the hands of extremist groups. Despite her devastating loss, Fatima continued her work, emphasizing that Ahmad had always supported her peacebuilding efforts, unwavering in his belief in their importance, no matter how challenging the circumstances.

In 2020, Fatima received three international human rights awards for her transformative work, impacting numerous lives and showcasing her remarkable resilience. However, militant groups in Iraq falsely attributed these accolades to her collaboration with foreign sides.

In 2021, they targeted her eldest son, Ali Karim, kidnapping and subsequently killing him with gunshot wounds to the head and chest.

“After these tragic incidents of killing my two sons, I lost all hope for humanity reigning this world. I could not continue in the mission I had taken upon. For months I struggled with the irony that my values of promoting peace and reconciliation resulted in the assassination of my two sons the most precious people in my life, it set my heart and soul on fire.” she states. Nevertheless, earlier this year she resolved to return to be of service to her people. One of the pivotal factors that rekindled her passion for re-engaging in peacebuilding was the invitation



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extended by the Salam Institute to participate in the establishment of the Network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab Region

"In fact, it is this network creation that motivated me to once again act on my passion for prompting peace in my country. Such a network is a very powerful mechanism of keeping the solidarity of peacemakers of the region and helps to strengthen their resolve to overcome even the most unimaginably painful situations that arise as part of their commitment to usher in peace in the world".

Fatima's voice toward forgiveness and reconciliation demonstrates the real values of the network for forgiveness and reconciliation through her painful story. Last year she was widely quoted in social media citing the statements she gave in a media interview where she was asked what she would do if the killers of her son were identified and her answer was that she would forgive them.

"All my life I worked towards encouraging peace, forgiveness, and coexistence amongst diverse communities. As such these aspects I will preserve for even those who murdered my sons. If they are found, I will forgive them," she states and emphasizes that justice and forgiveness are two entwined as well as independent needs for societies to thrive. Fatima also stated "It's certain the killers have mothers and sisters, women and people who loved them. I wouldn't want them to suffer the way I suffered the loss of my sons."

Her vision for the Network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab region is to empower more women as agents of change and to see women's leadership become synonymous with global peace leadership.

"Women are those who keep the peace within the household, thereby the peace of the world. This makes them the most needed resource in these challenging times the world is going through".

Fatima firmly believes that the network has the potential to be a powerful voice for the millions of people in the Arab region who are facing the challenging journey to find peace. Her vision is one of optimism and determination, and she envisions this network as a catalyst for fostering meaningful dialogue among communities that have long been estranged from one another. She sees it as a driving force that can bring about transformative change within societies, helping to bridge divides, heal wounds, and usher in a more harmonious and equitable future for all. Fatima's unwavering commitment to this cause and her dedication to promoting peace and unity in the region serves as a beacon of hope for a brighter tomorrow.

We disseminating this newsletter in October, which marks the 23rd anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution **1325** on Women, Peace, and Security, the first UN resolution that recognized women's leadership role in achieving peace and security as well as their indispensable contribution to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, Fatima's story and unwavering dedication serve as a poignant reminder of the essential role that Arab women must assume within the Arab region to ensure the enduring sustainability of peace.



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VOICES OF PEACE: ALMABROUK AL-GHADHYWI



Voice of Peace; Al Mabrouk Al-Ghadhywi: The Network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab World

The establishment of the Reconciliation and Forgiveness network in the Arab World in joint collaboration with Rased Jordan was a concluding outcome of the reconciliation and forgiveness conference held in Jordan from May 27th-29th, 2023 that brought together 35 practitioners of conflict resolution from diverse locations of the larger Arab region. The Arab region which has its diverse conflict-based challenges is also rich in its cultural tapestry and traditions of peacebuilding. Representing the 11 Arab region countries that participated in the conference and resulting in eight months of research, meetings, coordination, and general

agreements, the much-awaited network was launched.

Al Mabrouk Al-Ghadhywi from Libya, a member, and Secretary General of the Libyan local Mediators Network, Chairman of the board of directors for the Maa'man organization for Peacebuilding, and Chairman of the Shura Council of the Municipality of Bani Walid.

Reputed as a rare neutral voice of objectivity in the volatile past of Libya, Al Mabrouk's professional career has been in Libyan Airlines. Functioning as an accountant at Libyan Airlines, he gained much popularity for his honesty and integrity.

At the height of the social and political conflicts in Libya, Mr. Al Mabrouk was appointed to the National Network of Mediators established by the UNDP. His referral to the mediation network was by the village community of his area in 2020 when the network of about 100 community representatives started functioning.

Being from Bani Walid city in Libya, he was known for staying neutral when many took strong partisan views. Following the 2011 Libyan Civil War, after the anti-Gaddafi forces captured vital territory of the country, Bani Walid, was among one of two final strongholds held by forces loyal to the ousted Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

"Although tensions were running high, I was known to be politically neutral and encouraged dialogue and coexistence even at this time. This stance enabled me to personally diffuse tensions between local community members that could have led to bloodshed"

Libya is home to many different tribes and clans. Tensions could rise unexpectedly, he points out. Playing a crucial role in Libya as a peacemaker, Al Mabrouk finds being in the Network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab region a major asset.

"I was active at the grass-roots at a time when calm was needed. Being instrumental in preventing hate-based discourse I became known for this mediation type of role which is how I was nominated by the community members to the National Network for mediators."

"There is much that I have gained in the past few months in learning how diverse the Arab region's peacebuilding heritage is, through my interactions with the network created by the



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Salam Institute of Peace and Justice. I am also able to share practices linked to peace connected to Islam that are unique to Libya. For example, in Libya, when somebody pledges their word as an oath of integrity, it is taken as given that it will not be violated. There is much scope to replicate positive traditions such as these that are linked with faith,” he explains.

“Trust is a key component of peacebuilding. If we can learn methodologies different societies have used over time within their own cultures, to trust each other and honor their differences despite political conflicts, the Arab region could be a great place of abundance and stability”.

He also highlights that in countries such as Iraq, although known for conflicts, stories of peace abound.

“It is a matter of interacting with people who are at the grass-roots who are aware that amidst conflict there is the oasis of peacemaking. We just have to create more individuals who are genuine peacemakers,” he points out, stating that one of the key macro issues is the lack of strong and authentic political leaders who genuinely care about the wellbeing of their nations. He highlights the importance of learning from global examples such as Rwanda where violent conflict was reversed and the country developed into sustainable peace and prosperity in a relatively short time.

“My vision for the network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab region is that we would collectively be able to transform our region as Rwanda did in a total and dedicated manner. I thank the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice and the Al-Hayat Center- RASED for all the hard work that led to the launching of the Arab network. I thank the Salam Communications team for interviewing me and initiating this series on the Voice of Peace from the Network for Reconciliation and Forgiveness in the Arab World.

Forgiveness Research



At Salam Institute, our journey began in 2008 with a crucial objective in mind: to generate knowledge on forgiveness in the Arab region. Back then, the field lacked systematic research and empirical data on this topic. However, we were determined to change that. Our research project took us on a path of exploration and discovery. We conducted 690 surveys among Arab teachers in six societies, seeking to understand their perceptions of forgiveness. Additionally,

we conducted 93 qualitative interviews, delving into the reasoning behind forgiveness. Through our efforts, we collected 83 real-life stories and cases of forgiveness from various regions in the Arab world. Moreover, we developed the first Arabic instrument to measure willingness to forgive, adapting existing measures for this purpose. Our commitment went beyond research; we implemented a forgiveness training program to evaluate its impact and effectiveness on teachers and students. In schools for Palestinians in Jordan, we conducted



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pre and post-tests to assess the outcomes. Along this journey, we achieved remarkable outcomes and produced valuable products. We published 13 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on forgiveness and reconciliation in the Arab region. We also created two teacher training manuals specifically tailored for Arab educators in primary and secondary schools. Additionally, we conducted numerous training workshops for teachers in Arab schools across Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, and Palestinians in Israel, training over 300 educators on how to introduce forgiveness within their educational environments. Furthermore, we organized several regional conferences, bringing together experts and sharing forgiveness cases from around the world, including the USA and South Africa. Our efforts culminated in two noteworthy conferences, a Regional Conference on Forgiveness in the Education System in December 2011, and an International Conference on Forgiveness in February 2015. Through these events, we were able to create a platform for meaningful discussions and the exchange of inspiring forgiveness stories. Our journey continues, and we are proud of the strides we have made in advancing the understanding and practice of forgiveness and reconciliation in the Arab region. We believe that by fostering dialogue, promoting research, and raising public awareness, we can build a more harmonious and compassionate society.

Religious Peacebuilding Action Guides

The Action Guides on Religion and Peacebuilding is joint project Salam Institute for Peace & Justice together with the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) carried forward. Religion and Peacebuilding action guides are comprehensive resources for integrating religious and gender perspectives into peace efforts. The “Religion and Gender” guide emphasizes gender-inclusive approaches with principles of inclusivity, intersectionality, and collaboration. The “Religion and Mediation” guide offers practical tools for incorporating religious contexts into mediation, highlighting principles like “Do No Harm,” self-awareness, and embracing complexity. “Religion and Reconciliation” focuses on the roles of religious leaders and spiritual practices in reconciliation efforts. “Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding” explores religion’s dual role in conflicts and peacebuilding, advocating for engaging religious leaders in peace processes. Available in three languages (English, French, and Arabic).

Looking Ahead to 2025

In the coming year, Salam Institute will continue to:

- Expand forgiveness education initiatives.
- Strengthen regional reconciliation networks.
- Complete and disseminate educational curricula.
- Advance forgiveness research across the Arab region.
- Promote women's leadership in peacebuilding.
- Deepen partnerships with local and international stakeholders.
- Produce innovative knowledge resources for practitioners and policymakers.

Together, we remain committed to building more peaceful, inclusive, and resilient societies.