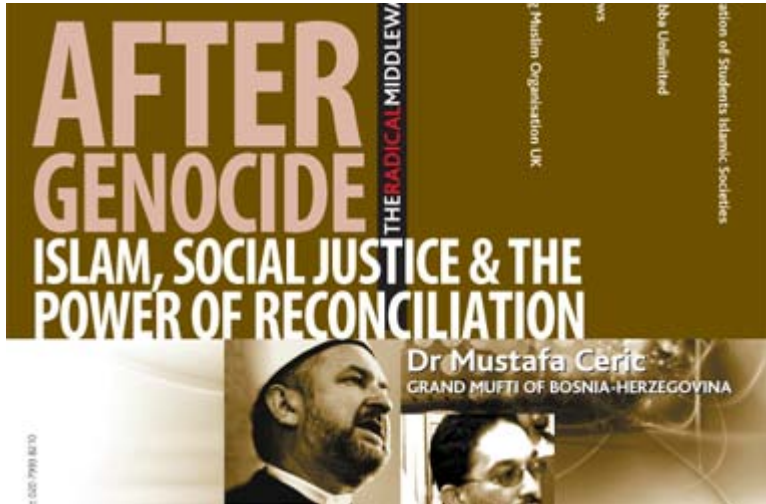


## Question and Answers



With Mufti Mustafa Ceric (Bosnia), Mufti Saleh Habimana (Rwanda) and Naeem Jinnah

(South Africa)

**Fareena Alam:** Naeem, you lost a brother. We can talk about compassion and mercy and all those things, but as a human being how do you reconcile with someone who has murdered someone in your family?

**Naeem Jinnah:** I think that human beings have an enormous capacity for compassion, for justice, but more for compassion, and I'm sure Mufti Ceric would be able to tell us about his experience in Bosnia as well where we had a genocide and Muslims could have been wiped out completely. In my case for example, through our truth and reconciliation process, we had old women for example, that would come to the TRC, who would have lost children to apartheid security forces. After days of testimony and many tears etc, they would be asked what they wanted as compensation, and their only request would be that the child's bones be buried properly and that they have a gravestone. I think this capacity for compassion is, as I say, enormous in human beings, but of course its there because we all have the ruh, the spirit of Allah within our hearts.

**Fareena Alam:** What about justice, justice for the people who have been wronged?

**Naeem Jinnah:** Well, of course justice is important and it is our choice, but Allah says in the Qur'an that forgiveness is better than justice. I'm not in any sense suggesting that struggles for justice are not important, you know, I've spent my whole life engaged in those struggles and continue to do so, but Allah does say in the Qur'an that forgiveness is better than justice. I think that that kind of forgiveness, compassion etc is something that we need to develop as

Muslims. As I say, it is part of the spirit of Allah within us, but it's something we need to allow to come out. My mother, I'll just end on this since you asked me a personal question, my mother for example, she and my brother lived alone, and when he died, she was living on her own. She has no desire to see anyone go to prison for the murder of my brother, she has no desire to see anyone being punished, her only request is she wants to know what happened and move on with her life, and I think we can be like that.

**Fareena Alam:** Dr Ceric, with the death of Milosevic, some people are saying that they are disappointed because he'll never see justice being done to him. Do you agree?

**Mufti Mustafa Cerić:** No, no, he will see justice of course, I don't think we should concentrate on Milosevic now, I mean Milosevic is over. What we have to do is concentrate on the victims and to try to help them. Milosevic will meet his hell, I think, I don't know. So let me come back to the compassion, the art of compassion. This is very personal. We are not the same. Some people have the ability to have more compassion and forgiveness than others. If I now tell you the stories of women in Srebrenica, I think monkeys would cry, how it is difficult. But what we have achieved at least, that these women are not talking about revenge and I think they have a healthier life than those who did commit genocide. There is something in us, God has created in us, that we cannot overcome, that we cannot ignore, and because we are part – you know in the Qur'an God says that He has put His Spirit in us (“*wa naghaha fi ruhihi*”), so there is something.

For example, Prophet Muhammad, *sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam*, (and it is easy to preach to others), was compassionate. You know when he came back to Mecca, he, *sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam*, heard about this wahsh who killed Hamza. You have seen the film *Risalah*? It is the thirtieth anniversary and it's a very graphic picture of this boy that came from Ethiopia that was hired by Hind to kill Hamza. He killed him on the battle of Uhud. When he (the Prophet, *sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam*) came back to Mecca what he did, he heard that he is somewhere there, and he sent somebody to tell him he should accept Islam and ask for forgiveness. Because Prophet Muhammad, *sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam*, was thinking Hamza was his relative he had the right to forgive or not to forgive him. So they came to him and he said, “No, I don't want to, I don't care”. So the Prophet, *sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam*, sent him another man and he said to him, “Alright, Prophet Muhammad has forgiven you for your killing but please renounce your shirk (polytheism); accept one God”. Then this wahsh said, “No, I can't”. On that occasion we have the verse of the Qur'an that says “*Qul ya ibadi Alladheena asrafu ala anfusihim la takhlahum min rahmatik lahi innallaha ya firidh thanubi a-jamee'ah. Innahu huwal ghafurur raheem*”. It was revealed on the occasion of wahsh saying that, “Those who did wrong against themselves to the extent that it is unimaginable almost, they should not lose hope in God's mercy because God is forgiving of all their sins”. But that was the Prophet Muhammad, *sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam*, and we are just human beings that have a different approach to that. What we can do, we can suggest to Muslims to try to learn how to be compassionate, and that is not easy when you are hurt in a deep way like genocide, and this is not an easy job.

**Questions:** In the process of reconciliation, have you faced problems with corruption and if you have, how have you dealt with this problem? Secondly, you're talking about politics, and



you're talking about the racism against black people; is the education being redeveloped to help against oppression of black people and others? Is this education happening in the Muslim world or is it accepting religious discrimination?

**Naeem Jinnah:** As for the first question, certainly we have our fair share of corruption in South Africa. We have a former Deputy President who is going to come up on corruption charges in the next few months. He is currently in court on rape charges, but that's a separate matter. So yes, we do. It needs to be rooted out but I think its not something that's unexpected in a transitional period, that's not to make any kind of excuse. As far as the second question is concerned, in terms of the South African context, certainly there are great efforts in terms of raising the standard of education, and raising the standards generally of black people within South Africa. Unfortunately in a society that is oriented in a capitalist direction, in a society that follows neoliberal policies like South Africa does, it means that those people that have been most disadvantaged are not necessarily able to rise up from that. So we see a situation, for example I mentioned the inequality in South Africa has actually increased between 1994 and now. What we use to have by the early 90s, was rich white people, poor black people. What we now have is rich white people and some rich black people, and all poor black people, with the inequality between the two increasing. So yes, there are policies in place to redress the inequalities of the past, but they're certainly not sufficient, they can never be sufficient in a capitalist society.

**Mufti Saleh Habimana:** Generally speaking, my country is crime and corruption free. But this is a wonderful question to think about. Corruption is just getting into our system when it comes to freeing people from the jail. Now the only thing the government is asking is for a person in jail to come and say I have killed so many people and they are somewhere here, and the family members of these people, they are only willing to offer a decent burial to those children of theirs. So the corruption is getting in somehow, but as I told you, our country is fighting right and left and when it comes to justice, it is no excuse to anybody who is corrupting the system, especially the police, so the government is fighting this issue of corruption in reconciliation. But corruption does exist when you talk about reconciliation anywhere, at least in my country.

Racism, really it will never go away, it is an issue which took almost 100 years, it will never go away all of a sudden. It will take some time, but at least the government is fighting it, there is a mechanism in place to stop this racism. You'll never see 'Hutu' or 'Tutsi' in their identity card. Before you would have 'Hutu' or 'Tutsi' on the identity cards, it's no longer there. In examinations also, you used to mention your tribe in order for you to access education and it's no longer there. So there is a policy on the ground trying to stop and curb racial discrimination.

**Questions:** Naeem, you talked about racism and Muslim communities. Can you elaborate please? Didn't Islam come to eliminate racism?

**Naeem Jinnah:** Islam also came to eliminate shirk (polytheism) and Islam also came to eliminate disadvantage against women, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. In the South African context, yes, within the Muslim community itself, there's a great deal of racism. I wrote an article about a year and a half / 2 Hajjs ago, when we had a khutbah in the masjid where I attended by a Maulana who was African. He spoke about how during his Hajj, in the South African camp, the racism that he experienced, and his wife was pregnant, as a result of that and the stress that that caused, miscarried, and on their return home she died

because of the complications as a result of that.

The racism within the Muslim community is at various levels. On the one level its very crude kind of basically 'they are inferior to us'. On another level its also around the question of resources, so for example there was an article written by a British person, (which was republished in a newspaper that I used to edit called 'Al Qalam'), Ibrahim Hooper. I'm sure many of you know him; he visited South Africa and brought with him an article called 'The Tale of Two Mosques'. He compared a masjid not far from where I lived, (which was at the time – this was about 15 years ago - built at the cost of about 6 million Rands, and at that time that would have been about \$6m), and about a masjid about 30km away in a squatter camp that served African Muslims, that was basically a shack that was probably about a fifth of the size of the wudu area in the other masjid. And so there's also the question of resources. Both financial resources as well as human resources that add to the issue of racism within the Muslim communities.

So yes, the Qur'an speaks against it, the Prophet salallahu alayhi wa sallam has spoken against it and there's a famous story that I always quote of Abu Dharr and Bilal about racism, but it does exist. And there are some efforts now for example the organisation I belong to, the 'Muslim Youth Movement', has been instrumental in starting, particularly in Durban, what is called a Muslim Anti Racism Forum, which has brought together a number of Muslim organisations that participate in this Forum, that take up issues of racism within the Muslim community, or racism by Muslims and try to address them. They have an annual anti-racism khutbah (Friday speech) that is uniform across all the mosques in Durban, etc. So there are efforts to address it, but it exists and it's a very serious problem within the Muslim community.

**Mufti Saleh Habimana:** It's true, there is no corruption in my government because we're very serious when it comes to corruption because our system was corrupt. I would take some time, like our Mufti of Bosnia if I came to explain why my country, my system there was corrupt. I'm not sure but they say Belgians who came to colonise my country were suffering from their own problem; they've got the French and the Flemish. So these two groups or tribes don't meet (agree) except on Brussels as the capital city, on the national soccer team and a pot of tea. So the corruption was just in my country in that way; whatever comes from Brussels, just take it as it is - it is a corruption. They taught us to kill ourselves, it is a corruption so we hate corruption. Every person in the street, in the mosque, in the church, my president also, we talk about corruption, so it's corruption free. But when we talk about Muslims getting in the mainstream, we appreciate, we're talking about 100 years of being marginalised completely. There had been no right to get involved in any affairs in our land and today, getting involved - I guess we're wise enough to shape our future.

**Naeem Jinnah:** I wanted to respond because I think it's an important question in our context as well as South Africans and I think its an important question for Muslim minorities all over the world; the issue of what you call 'partisanship'. In the South African context under apartheid, for example, there was a huge debate among Muslims about, (Muslims were active in the 'end the apartheid' struggle anyway), should we be aligned to any particular liberation movement or should we remain non-aligned to any liberation movement and work with all of them? It was a big debate and various different organisations took different positions. Today in post-apartheid South Africa, in a sense it's still a debate; they are those who want to align with the ruling party, Muslims that want to align with ruling party, and other Muslims that want to align as organisations with other parties. I think it's important for Muslim minorities

to be politically active, but I think it's foolish for Muslim minorities to hitch their flags to a particular mast only. I think it's something Muslims in Britain need to consider seriously. The political involvement is extremely important, but how you do it and whether you attach the entire community to a particular group is a different matter.

**Fareena Alam:** In many cases, Dr Ceric, the perpetrators of injustice are Muslims and often there is a great deal of political blood capital attached, for example Bangladesh, Armenia, East Timor. What advice do you have in this situation? Also the questioner says: 'Colonisation causes me great grief. I don't see myself getting over it in the future, can you advise?'

**Mufti Mustafa Cerić:** I have advice for you, I don't know who you are and if you are a good student. The way to overcome this difficulty is to be a good student, study, work hard and don't be obsessed by the past because you cannot change it, but you can change what will happen in the future. So on the one hand, we have a right to complain why Muslims have been colonised, but I think the right question for us is how did we allow others to colonise us? Because if you allow somebody to colonise you and to do you injustice – unfortunately today, 70% of the whole population of refugees according to UNHCR reports are Muslims. 70% refugees of the world are Muslims. All wars that are being conducted today are in the lands of Muslims. Now unfortunately, Muslims are suffering from tsunami more than anybody else, from the earthquake in subcontinent more than anybody else and Muslims believe and have feeling that the world is doing injustice to them. Probably they are right, but on the other hand no-one from outside can help us, only we can help ourselves with God's help.

So we should stop complaining and we should work hard together and we should unite ourselves and no one is responsible for our disunity. We are the most united religious group on the planet, but if you look across, we have so many amirs, so many princes, and the more we have amirs, the less power we have. I think we have to organise ourselves and become more aware in the world in which we live. I am optimistic, I think the new generation, young generation will have a better future than your grandparents if you take seriously that God will help you if you help yourself.

**Question:** During the conflict, Serb, Croat and Muslim neighbours turned on each other. What led to this and, as neighbours, could they have done anything differently?

**Mufti Mustafa Cerić:** I don't have a clear answer to this question. I can give you just my 'puzzles' [clues in the puzzle as to how] something could happen. If you know in Bosnia Herzegovina we have the cult of neighbourhood which we call 'kumshirook'. We have also the idea that the neighbour, according to the Prophet's hadith, *sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam*, is the one who can inherit your property because he's your neighbour. What happened in Bosnia-Herzegovina - this is a short time and we cannot explain to you but if you can accept this one; I think that historically speaking, we got wrong people at the wrong time to be our neighbours, like Milosevic and Touchman from Croatia.

Bosnia Herzegovina is one of the most beautiful countries in Europe. Bosnia Herzegovina has the resources of all that you could need. Bosnia Herzegovina has the borders of four rivers; it has waters, it has mines, it has woods; it has everything. So there was the greed to conquer this land and then in order to achieve that you use greed, you use hatred, you use all kinds of propaganda. So I think that this machine that was operating against each other...and then you have to remember one thing; we lived forty-five years in so-called communist time. When you have morality very low, I believe, and when the sacredness of religious beliefs were not regarded highly and people had lost their moral sense and therefore Bosnia Herzegovina suffered because of these things, I believe. Even if you come today in Bosnia Herzegovina in the streets of Sarajevo, probably you will be surprised how people of all different races are working together. There are no enemies in Bosnia Herzegovina based on race or nationalities or ethnic group. I think we have problems with a political craziness that unfortunately brought us to a very difficult time.

**Fareena Alam:** Dr Ceric, you spoke about how it's more than a physical hurt - it's hurtful when people deny that genocide has taken place. We have a question from a Jewish girl who became Muslim: "Being Muslim, how do you understand genocide from an Islamic world-view; why does God allow genocide?" Also she has asked, "What do you think about Muslims that deny the Holocaust ever took place?"

**Mufti Mustafa Ceric:** The same thing I feel about it that I feel about the Serbs who are denying the genocide in Srebrenica. You know that the denial of genocide, your Holocaust is a crime. You have that here in England; the Professor who denied the Holocaust is in prison for three years. Now we did not yet hear in Bosnia Herzegovina that those who deny in Belgrade will be put into prison because we did not yet catch all the criminals who should have been, including Radavan Karakdic and Miladic. So I think no one has the right to deny the crime or Holocaust or genocide and I think this is very counter-productive. I think these people are not worthwhile of my comment.

Why God allows genocide? I think we cannot ask questions; we can put questions to God – He is God. We have in the Qur'an, you don't ask what God is doing – we are poor judges to judge God. Unfortunately many theologians spent time to explain what is theodicy and how God is just or not just. I think we should spend time about why people are not just. Where does evil come from? This is a great temptation on all of us. I think in the case of Bosnia Herzegovina and genocide, you learn a lot and unfortunately sometimes we have to see things that seem very bad for us but they are very much educational. You see, even though I had hard time, I lived in Sarajevo, but this experience that I have from this time – I wouldn't give for anything in the world because you learn something that you cannot learn from the books. You learn from life and you learn how people are good or bad. Unfortunately we have in this world good people and bad people but I believe we have more good people than bad people because the world cannot live on evil, cannot live on haram. I think there is more halal and we have to be optimistic after all.

**Questions:** What can the Muslims in the West do to help Muslims in your countries? (Two inaudible questions). Lastly, some people believe that these occurrences such as genocide and natural disasters are due to the curse of Allah as a result of His displeasure with a people. In light of this belief, what is happening now in Bosnia to revive the Commandments of Allah, subhaanahu wa ta'ala?



**Mufti Mustafa Cerić:** I do not agree with you that some people get the curse. I do not believe we can judge who is receiving the curse and who is receiving the blessing. You never know where is the curse and where is the blessing so the evil cannot be explained. When you explain something that means you understand and once you understand, you justify. So if you say that we deserved the curse in Bosnia Herzegovina, then you justify that and say that what happened is ok. I don't think so. Certain things, they just happen as they happen and there is no explanation. I think that evil has no explanation and don't try to explain it; it is there, sometimes. If you want to apply this rule, you can go all over the world and expect a curse that will happen. No.

On the other hand we have the notion that those who have deep faith are put through more testing and temptation than those who are weak. So I can tell you the other way around that we were so nice, so close to God and God had tested us to see how we were going to behave. There is a hadith of the Prophet, sal Allah-u alayhi wasalam; when somebody asked the Prophet, "Who are those who ithtila? Al-Umbiyyah summal amsu al summal amsu al rajul a la qadri a la qadrihi (he is tested)". So don't jump too fast into saying there is a curse or a blessing. I think even if you have a reason to say to somebody that he is receiving a curse I would tell him that he is receiving a blessing because we are not here to judge about this.

So let me tell you this, my Brother, regarding the Prophet and the Europe. I would not suggest to you that you should make busy yourself about that and not myself. I want just to bring as my argument that we as Europe receive these blessings from the East. We all in Europe are equal (Jews, Muslims, Christians, others) because Islam has been treated as and is still a stranger. It is not naturalised still in Europe. I, as a European Muslim want to tell the other Europeans that I am equal with you in my right to receive Islam and the relation of Qur'an in the same way as you are receiving the revelation and honouring Jesus and Moses, peace be upon them, and so on. There is no priority as to whose religion is more European and less European. We all have received religions in Europe. We did not, as far as I know, probably you know that there was a prophet in Europe but as far as I know there was no Prophet Nuh recognised by people who was from Europe. All the Prophets were from the Middle East and they are from Bani Isra'el and God decided at what time that Prophet Muhammad be from the Arabs. Why He decided to change the direction of revelation from Bani Isra'el to the Arabs, that's something maybe next time when we come we can talk about.

**Naeem Jinnah:** firstly, I want to thank Mufti Ceric for actually being so nice and diplomatic in his response to Brother Hassan's question. My own opinion is that I don't think people who make such statements should be called Ulema. It's the same people who are saying now that the Earthquake in Kashmir or the Tsunami is for the same kind of reason or that Bosnian Muslim women were raped because they did not wear scarves – this is the kind of ridiculous thing that I am not making up. This is what I've heard being said and I don't think we should call such people Ulema. People who think they can decide for Allah why Allah has done what He has done; that's more shirk to me than a sign of ilm (knowledge). It's the same kind of people who have similar statements about black people under Apartheid; that they suffer because they're stupid so they deserve it. Insha Allah whatever they get from Allah they will deserve it too.

Referring to the question from the sister as to what can be done to help was, I think, particularly directed those of us in Africa. I think Muslims have a responsibility to be knowledgeable about the world in which we live and today that includes the global community. Africa in particular, for many people in Europe, I think, including Muslims, is still very much an unknown entity so I think the first thing is to be knowledgeable about the world in which we live.

Secondly I think it's important for Muslims here in the UK to also begin building links with Muslims in Rwanda or South Africa. Links in which we can exchange information and exchange visits etc. between ourselves. I think that the development of Africa has still a long way to go and that Muslims in this country can assist greatly in that regard but I just want to add one note of caution.

Muslims in many parts of the world, like in Europe or South Africa, (many of us sometimes regard South Africa as being part of the West as well when its convenient for us), have a tendency to talk about the Islamic responsibility in terms of, "What can we be doing in other parts of the world?" I think we should also be asking about, "What can we as British Muslims (for example) be doing in terms of developing our country, in terms of alleviating the suffering of people in this country (and there are suffering people whether you are talking about Britain or South Africa)? How can we participate as citizens of this country; in the upliftment of this country; in the development of this country; in ensuring justice within our country?" I think that's as important as looking at other countries and I say this myself as a solidarity activist in South Africa – Palestinian Solidarity, anti-war activists etc.

**Mufti Saleh Habimana:** Bismillah-irrahman-irahim. I would like to add to what Naeem and Mufti Ceric said; what about Aceh? Aceh is more Islamic than any other part of the world that was hit by the tsunami. Aceh is very Islamic and yet there were a lot of people who died there because the Tsunami was so big.

Now let me come to the point of my sister over there. The only thing we need from the young people in the UK is we need to see people united, united as one force. We know very well that you are religious; we need to see Islam as a driving force towards unity and towards reaching out to other communities. We need to see you engaged in dialogue. We believe you have scientific discoveries and financial distributions in your surroundings. It will never reach us unless you are united. So the contribution we need from you first of all is to see you united as one voice, as one power trying to take us from the poverty and ignorance. You reach us only in that way.

Number two, to my sister here, as I've said we lost one million people in one hundred days – it was a very big killing and again Muslims live only in towns because it is the way we can survive; we depend on small trading; flea markets; small types of businesses (so we don't live in remote areas). Then we were only one per cent of the population; our population then was seven million. Today we are eight million. It is always amazing – we lost one million, we were seven million and today we are eight million because of the refugees who were in camps in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania – that is why we are now eight million and according to a census today we are three per cent of the whole population of Rwanda so we were able to save those who were near by, those who were living near the mosques, those who were living in towns only.

**Fareena Alam:** We have some questions here: there is immense pressure for Muslims to be 'moderate' and some say palatable to the West - how do you feel about that? In relation to this, we have some Muslims who are so frustrated that they are willing to die (referring to 7/7 and the like). Should we learn to be patient for paradise? Thirdly, we have a question: how far is this talk of patience and compassion and so on going to work in place like Palestine where the situation is very great? You mentioned that we should concentrate on being students and concentrate on building our sights here but we have a very strong Palestinian solidarity movement here – how do we merge the two?

**Mufti Mustafa Ceric:** In regards to the first question, we should not make a myth of the West; the West is not God. I think we are expecting too much from the West and what the West thinks about us. I think we should do things that we believe are right and the West is doing its job and is moving the way it is moving. We are in this West and we should learn how to take the most that is good for us and for others and we should learn how to share things with others and develop the ethics of sharing.

The second comment I liked very much and thank you for this question. I recently was with a great Alim , ( I don't want to mention his name), and he was referring to what is happening now in the Muslim world. We Muslims have difficulty today; we have to recognise that, we have to acknowledge it. The Muslims are impatient to earn paradise. Some of them want

instant paradise and they are ready to die and they are dying. But the difficulty is that Muslims now have difficulty living for Islam.

If you want to listen to my advice; don't hurry in being shahid – that's God's will. Why don't you be victorious? Victorious you will be when you go to Somalia and live with those who are hungry and be with them, for example. Some Ulema were able to teach Muslims to die for Islam but they don't know how to teach them now how to live for Islam and live with Islam, and to live with others. I believe that we Muslims, with all due respect to all that we are learning and all that we have, I think that we have difficulty now to prove to others that we want to live with others and share with them. It is, of course, not true that we cannot be integrated or that we cannot live with others, but unfortunately some of us are doing such things that others of us are lazy to get in to the details and to learn more of what we know and to say that this is not true. We have to work on our image in the world and to learn how to live for Islam since we have proven that we are prepared to die. So therefore I invite you to think and to learn to live as long as you can and as long as God is giving you the power to live; may God bless you insha Allah.

**Naeem Jinnah:** In the 1980s we cringed when we heard the second last Apartheid president in a policy statement speak about how there was a small group of Muslim 'radicals' but the majority of Muslims in south Africa were 'moderates'. I don't like the term 'moderate'; I think it's a very problematic term. I think that Muslims have a responsibility to be radicals and Muslims need to be radicals because we desire a change in society to a society that is better. We live in a global society that is not ideal, every one of us lives in a national context which is not ideal and we want to change society and transform society and that makes us radical, but what does that mean? The verse that I quoted when I started speaking, I think, relates to the banner under which this meeting is being held [The Radical Middle Way]; Allah says in that verse, "We have made you a community that is in the middle" ('Ummatan wassatan'), that means being in the middle is a radical position, it is an uncomfortable position but it is a position that Muslims have to take, it is a position that is between extremes; it is between the extreme of fundamentalism, (of refusing to believe that other people can think or that other people have truth as much as we do and so perhaps we are wrong), on the one hand, and the other extreme of acquiescing with whatever the status quo is, which is unfortunately, after 2001, the position which many Muslims find themselves in. The position that Muslims need to be in is the middle and the word 'wassata' also means 'in the centre' which means that you can't be complacent and 'moderate' (in the middle as in moderate) – it means in the centre of the action. We are in the centre of struggles to transform society into a better society; we are in the centre of struggles to eradicate poverty; we are in the centre of struggles to liberate the Palestinian people or any other people living under oppression, so we are the radical middle way that is always active.

The second question was about Palestine and I think certainly compassion has a role to play in every struggle. The struggle of the Palestinian people is a struggle for justice and, as a South African, we South Africans of course feel very strongly about the Palestinian struggle. Our analysis is that while we have overcome Apartheid in South Africa, Apartheid still exists

and it exists in Palestine and that as South Africans we will not be free until Palestine and Palestinians are free. We could have another session to talk about why Palestine is an apartheid state but I think that the Palestinian question of today is the moral question of the day. No person who claims to love justice and love peace can claim to have nothing to say about Palestine, and no person who claims to love justice and peace can have the wrong thing to say about Palestine. I say that quite deliberately, 'the wrong thing' because like with the South African struggle we hated it when we heard people outside of South Africa saying they heard two sides of the story. So the people heard the anti-Apartheid and the pro-Apartheid – there aren't two sides of the story; there's one side of the story and that is that are people that are oppressed, people that are dispossessed, people that are exploited, people that are being killed on a daily basis and it's their story to be heard. It's the only story. Anyone that claims to be on the side of justice and peace has to be on the side of that story; has to be supporting the struggle of the Palestinian people for justice.

**Fareena Alam:** We are going to take just one more question and we are going to wrap up. The speakers will be around for you to chat with them at the end.

**Question:** My question is for Dr. Ceric; you had said that about 70 per cent of the world's refugees were Muslim. I was just wondering to what extent do you feel, at least in the Middle East and Asia, that Muslims permit themselves to be governed by monarchs and dictators instead of being governed by elected leaders?

**Mufti Mustafa Ceric:** It seems to me that your question is partly my answer and that you know the issues which is why you have a good question. I don't think that all Muslim rulers are dictators or that they are all wrong. We in Bosnia Herzegovina did not have a Muslim ruler; we were under the ruling of Christians, if you like, but we suffered genocide. So I don't think that we can explain or just say that because you don't have democracy in Muslim countries, that all Muslims deserve to be refugees.

I believe that Muslims in the last two centuries have had difficulty to come back to the mainstream of history and you have two possible ways for them to come back; through secularisation or Islamicisation. Some Muslims did go through the secularisation and some believe that the only way for Muslims to gain regain their dignity in the world is through Islamicisation. Unfortunately what I see is that some Islamicisation is a kind of idolisation, which I do not like. So yes, the Muslims now – (I would describe them almost like Bani Isra'el) - have great tests before them, including all these difficulties you have. I believe that all Muslims are going now through all these things and protesting against something that they don't even understand exactly what [they are].

I hope that the rest of the world will understand that the biggest resources of the energy of modern civilisations are in the places where Muslims live so I expect that the Muslims will realise the advantage of this and the rest of the world will respect that fact. So at the moment, as I can see it, the relationship and the trust that is between the Muslim and the Western world is at the lowest level. We have to work together in order to regain lost trust that was always there in the Mediterranean, in the Middle East etc. because there cannot be peace in the West until we have peace in the East. At the moment we don't have peace in the East so we have to work together. The world that we have does not belong to one nation, to one religion; it belongs to all of us. I believe in the ethics of sharing and that is my message here from Bosnia Herzegovina because without sharing, without the ethics of sharing, we cannot succeed – not one of us.

**Fareena Alam:** One last question and then we'll run.

**Questions:** (First is inaudible). Secondly, you mentioned that the Jewish community in Bosnia is very small and yet they acted as brokers between Christians and Muslims and based on that I wanted to know what is your advice, from all three of you, on for British Muslims in general and how can we be brokers?

**Mufti Mustafa Ceric:** I don't know you don't have a conflict over here with a need to be brokers so you should be glad for that. The idea of bringing us together from Rwanda, South Africa and Bosnia probably has some meaning but we are, I think, totally different. In the case of Rwanda you have Muslims who played a role in bringing together Christians who were against each other. In South Africa also, the Muslims played a very great role in being a voice of moderation in the extremes of Apartheid and so on. In our case we were the victims or the subject of the genocide and aggression and, I think, betrayal. We were betrayed by Europe, by 'the West' if you like, or whatever. So when we come to discuss about reconciliation and dialogue, yes, the Jewish community was very instrumental in that. I think there were almost one thousand Jews in Bosnia Herzegovina altogether, but they played a very good role as they were somehow neutral in that. But, on the other hand, the Jews in Bosnia Herzegovina have a different experience and the Jewish people are very grateful to Bosnia because Bosnia saved or played a very positive role towards the Jewish people.

In 1492 the Jews were received from Spain; seventy thousand of them, so-called settlers. They brought with them the book which is called "Haderga" / 'The Interpretation of the Torah' and it is decorated; the Jews are very proud of that. This book was saved by a Muslim family Korkud during the Second World War and it was also at a time when the museum was attacked. The library in Cordoba was burned in 1492 and the National Library of Sarajevo was burned on 25th August 1992. It was burned on exactly the five hundred year anniversary of the burning of the Library in Cordoba. I think there is some symbolism in that.

But let me say, I am not very happy talking all the time about ‘the Muslims’, ‘the Jews’, ‘the Christians’, ‘the...’. After all, we are all human beings, I think. We should develop some kind of ...you know, even in the Qur’an you start with verses with “Ya ayuhal Naas” (“O Mankind”). God himself does not call us “O Muslims”; I do not know how we developed this idea to emphasise all the time. If you read all the old classical works such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Khaldun (may peace be upon them), you will never find any book with the title [containing the words] ‘Islamic’ or ‘Muslim’. They are all speaking about the Arts etc. but when we became weak and insecure, then we needed Islam as a security blanket and therefore when we are weak then we seek refuge in Islam.

What I’m trying to say is this; we should work hard and be human beings, help others because they are human beings as well. Of course, develop our solidarity (we are right to have this brotherhood as Muslims), but we have in the end a brotherhood as mankind. After all I would like to say a very famous statement: “Neither the weak nor the aggressive will inherit the earth but be co-operative”. We should cooperate to make the world better than it is today. Thank you.

**Naeem Jinnah:** I think people as I said have the capacity to be patient and compassionate etc. but for many people I think that also has limits. In South Africa certainly I think those limits have been breached when black people were oppressed as they have been, treated like non-human beings and being exploited etc. and then having fought for and achieved a democratic government and twelve years later when the masses of black people have found that that democratic government has not meant that they have achieved economic liberation, then certainly you could see on the horizon another revolution. So I don’t think that people’s patience is unlimited and goes as far as to say, “I’ve been kicked into the dirt, I forgive you and you are welcome to continue to keep kicking me into the dirt”. I think it’s an important lesson we need to learn. All of us.

In terms of being a modern Muslim, I don’t know. I think Muslims have a responsibility to be modern and a responsibility to live in the here and now, as much as some of us feel we would like to live for the hereafter. We live in the here and now and that means being modern and using what is modern. I don’t think that Islam is not modern because modern means it is something that is applicable to the contemporary context and I think that’s what Muslims should be and that’s what Islam is. Certainly many Muslims are not modern and many Muslims think they live in an age gone by, and as Mufti Ceric said we should be living for the future, we should be living beyond modern in a sense.

Finally, in regards to advice to British Muslims my advice would be in future, if you want to leave early after a meeting, don’t invite people that are used to giving khutbahs because they talk for a very long time and they like to tell stories – not good things if you want to leave early (laughter from speakers and audience).

**Mufti Mustafa Ceric:** But people came here to listen to wisdom so we have to tell them...

**Naeem Jinnah:** People that give khutbahs are not always wise (ha ha).

But I think I'm going to be pre-empting Saleh in what he might want to say; the notion that people should be good citizens is an important lesson but one that we should take also with some degree of caution. You can see that whatever I'm saying is from my own experience. It is the kind of thing that, for example, in the 1980s we South African Muslims activists would be very unhappy about being told because we were often told that being a good Muslim means being a good citizen of the Apartheid state. We couldn't be good citizens of the Apartheid state; we had to be bad citizens, we had to oppose the Apartheid state.

Being a good Muslim means being loyal to your people – I think that is important, and your people, as a Muslim, are not just Muslims, your people are also people where you live. So being a Muslim in South Africa means being a good South African. Being a good South African in the 1980s meant opposing Apartheid, being shot by the police and being put into jail. Being a good Muslim in South Africa today means being a person that works towards the eradication of poverty and works for the reconstruction and development of our society as a whole – not the reconstruction and development of Muslim society but of society as a whole. I think that is particularly important.

If you are living as a Muslim in a particular context, your role in that context is to ensure that that context is the best that it can be, the most just that it can be. Our contexts of course are multiple; our context are local, for example the mosque that we go to and the area in which we live; our contexts are national regarding the country that we live in; and our contexts can be global, so we have global struggles as well. So my advice to British Muslims then is to be a good British Muslim citizen and also to be a good citizen of the world, to work towards the eradication of all kinds of injustices that occur in all parts of the world including your own country.

**Mufti Saleh Habimana:** Bismillah-irahman-irahim. I guess you don't have to be controlled by anger because the Qur'an tells you: "and those who are controlled by their anger..." Number two, once you are controlled by anger you lose direction obviously and the suicidal action comes up time and again as people want a shortcut to paradise. If you want to get into paradise you just need to come to the jungle of Africa where they teach Islam and teach people how to do things so its another shortcut to paradise – you don't have to blow yourself up. For us in Rwanda, just losing one million people in one hundred days is just too big and something you can never forget completely but as I told you, a president in Africa is

everything. He is teaching us time and again in his speeches, “Forgive the unforgivable”, so we try to overcome the anger. From our community as a religious community, as you said I am vice-president of the ‘Inter-faith Commission for Integration’ in Rwanda where we bring together genocide survivors, released prisoners and families of prisoners. As you know, in Africa there is poverty. What we do with these three groups of people, we engage in providing shelter to whoever doesn’t have a shelter. In the genocide, they were killing people but at the same time they were destroying homes and houses. So we provide shelters and we work together. Again, when it comes to providing educational activities we work together in the same process and when it comes to visiting people in the jail, our group including released prisoner and families of prisoners visit people in the jails. So genocide survivors, released prisoners and families of prisoners are today together; before you could never believe it. You see, in Africa it is too easy to overcome the anger and problems. Once you provide a –for your own son, everything is over. The issue of anger is about poverty and ignorance, so once you overcome these type of problems. In my experience we are overcoming the problem of anger thanks to our President and his government, and also we are overcoming the problem of anger by the way of Inter-faith. The dialogue between the faiths is helping us a lot because we are bringing together these three groups of people.