
Report of Partners in Humanity Working Meeting

Amman, Jordan July 26-29, 2003

For three days in Amman, sixty leaders of NGOs, government agencies and international organizations – all catalysts and facilitators of Islamic-Western dialogue – convened to develop an action plan to improve understanding and cooperation between the U.S. and the Muslim world.

Participants from Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, India, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and the U.S. met to launch *Partners in Humanity*, a global effort to establish Islamic-American cooperative action based on mutual respect and guided by a desire to affirm and build on their shared humanity.

To achieve maximum impact, participants were drawn from the high-leverage fields of media, development and humanitarian assistance, higher education, and action-oriented cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue.

The meeting was held under the auspices of a unique partnership formed by His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal and Search for Common Ground and was funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

From the opening session, the meeting took on an urgent, action-oriented tone:

“Those who promote hatred are energetic and organized. We can be more energetic and more organized than that enemy. We must become more proactive, may I say aggressive, about moderation. We must enhance what is universal and cultivate respect for our differences.”

- HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal

From this point of departure, participants spent one day exploring the obstacles and opportunities for Islamic-American cooperation in each of the fields represented before breaking into working groups for the remainder of the meeting to generate cooperative action plans.

While issues of US policy toward the Muslim world, a perceived domination of media by those with political agendas, and other factors were acknowledged as playing key roles in exacerbating Islamic-American divisions, participants took these and other issues up only to the extent that they felt they were in a position to influence them. Informing all of their deliberations was the guiding question:

“What can the people in this room do to make a difference?”

MAIN THEMES

Discussions were organized according to four fields represented at the meeting:

1. Media Outlets
2. Humanitarian and Development Agencies
3. Education Institutions
4. Dialogue Centers

PROPOSED ACTION PLANS

- 1) **Launch a list-serve and web-based Partners in Humanity (PiH) News Service** to commission, select, and disseminate materials and articles that promote constructive perspectives and dialogue between the US and the Muslim world.
- 2) **Produce short (3-minute) animated or live action films which humanize “the other” and demonstrate diversity and commonality between Islamic and Western values.**
- 3) **Hold action-oriented trainings for media producers and journalists on how to mobilize journalism skills to build cross-cultural understanding** and to expand media involvement in activities such as the PiHNews Service.
- 4) **Provide a series of public communications coaching workshops in major cities in the Muslim world.**
- 5) **Convene Christian and Muslim faith-based development and aid professionals and religious leaders** to discuss issues arising from serving one another’s faith communities, using aid as a means to proselytize, and other areas of concern.
- 6) **Commission a report on good practices and lessons learned from interfaith cooperation in development and aid projects** in the 1990’s (i.e. in Iraq, Kosovo, Bosnia, etc.) as a means to re-popularize the notion and counter the post-9/11 trend toward segregation of development efforts.
- 7) **Convene Presidents of American colleges and universities that are developing or strengthening Islamic studies programs with their counterparts in predominantly Muslim countries who are developing American studies programs.**
- 8) **Develop citizen conferencing projects that link college students in the U.S. and those in Muslim countries.**

- 9) **Compile from dialogue centers and universities lists of effective speakers-on-demand for media outlets** on issues such as Islam & women, Islam & political violence, American-Islamic relations, etc.

- 10) **Link dialogue centers offering spiritual and cultural experiences and internships with universities and other organizations seeking to deepen the experience of those going through their exchange programs. Also, link dialogue centers that offer training in cross-cultural understanding and community relations with development, humanitarian aid, and private sector organizations seeking such training for their staff and partners.**

- 11) **Develop a web-based PiH clearing-house including a directory of interfaith, cross-cultural, and “civilizational” dialogue centers** around the world starting with those present at the PiH meeting.

- 12) **Strategize for the creation of a global citizen’s media-watch.**

NEXT STEPS

In an article published in *al-Hayat* three days after the PiH meeting, journalist and PiH participant Raghida Dergham wrote of the meeting,

The meeting not only offered recommendations, but suggested programs that can be executed.

- al-Hayat, 8/1/03

The challenge now is to translate the momentum generated at the Amman meeting into action along the lines proposed above. For each of the action plans generated at the meeting, one or more organizations represented there expressed a desire to engage and in several cases, have made specific commitments.

Majlis El Hassan and SFCG’s offices and partners in the U.S., Morocco, Indonesia, Belgium, and throughout the Middle East are committed to working together with these PiH participants and others to advance each of the proposed actions, beginning with identifying and approaching potential donors.

SFCG will establish a mechanism for updating PiH participants on the progress of these efforts, starting with a regular e-mail update and eventually a website dedicated to the Partners in Humanity initiative.

In cases where it appears action plans may duplicate work already being carried out by others, SFCG will link interested PiH participants to those initiatives.

The importance of the networking and cooperation that has already taken place through the PiH working meeting can not be underestimated. Early feedback from the meeting has been extraordinarily positive, with participants reacting particularly well to the action-oriented bias that dominated the entire meeting and to the wide spectrum of participants, particularly in terms of professional and geographical diversity.

It is the firm belief of those who convened and participated in the Partners in Humanity working meeting that the proposals generated there offer concrete, achievable steps. Taken together, they model the kind of Islamic-American cooperation based on mutual respect and guided by a sense of shared humanity which we seek to bring about more broadly.