

### A Call to Conscience and a Reminder to the Muslims

...those who seek to destroy “cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques wherein God’s names are frequently invoked” Qur’an [22:40].

#### **The Islamic Imperative:**

This week marked a day of outrage as the world saw a new low in the spiraling bloodshed and brutality that continues to pervade the daily lives of Iraqis. In the aftermath of latest violence, we join with the countless voices, Muslim and non-Muslim, Shia’ and Sunni, in condemning this heinous act and the revenge killing it has provoked.

In this time of strong passions, legitimately aroused by hurt feelings, we must be guided by the Islamic ethical imperative, which commands us to show compassion toward our fellow human beings. We urge all Muslims to be mindful that the destruction of a mosque—even one with powerful symbolic meaning—must not let our communities descend into further tumult.

This is not the first time in Islamic history that the sanctity of Muslim and non-Muslim sacred sites has been violated. The Ka`ba in Mecca, the most sacred site of all in Islam, was destroyed in 683—barely fifty years after the Prophet Muhammad’s death— as a result of Muslim in-fighting. Muslims have also been guilty of destroying the holy sites of others, in violation of the Quranic command to be respectful of others’ religious sensibilities, and to not mock those who worship other than the One God, unless they curse God out of their ignorance [6:108]. Yet in spite of this event now forgotten by most Muslims, Islam— meaning submission to God and compassion toward our fellow human beings— has survived and grown.

#### **Today this precious meaning of Islam is challenged.**

More odious than the destruction of property, which is a desecration of one of the five fundamental protected rights of the Sharia and a major sin in Islam, is the willful creation of human strife, sectarian hatred, social turmoil and mayhem. The Qur’an condemns this mortal sin, calling it *fasaad fi’l-ard*. It equates those who commit this major crime with having killed all of humankind [5:32-34] and promises them a grievous punishment in the hereafter and deserving the worst penalty if caught in this life.

The perpetrators of this act had no other intention than to stir sectarian hatred and to provoke civil war in Iraq. The Qur’an warns us not to succumb to such provocation, counseling us that *if an incitement to discord is made to you by the force of evil, seek refuge in Allah. This verse teaches us that “good and evil are not alike;” and urges us to respond to evil by doing what is more beautiful in behavior, so that the person with whom one bears enmity transforms into a close friend [41:34-36]*. This is the Islamic ethical imperative, to transform hatred into compassion, and we call upon all our fellow Muslims to meet this Quranic directive.

To respond with violence is to fall victim to the forces of evil, and to become manipulated by such forces, is to fail a test [*bala’*]. Ayatollah Sistani has urged Muslims from slipping down this slippery slope and committing acts of retaliation.

We pray that we be guided by God’s promise and “help His cause so that we be helped.” God and His Prophet Muhammad urge us to join our hands, our voices, and our prayers, with the millions who are committed to pushing back against those who seek to destroy “cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques wherein God’s names are frequently invoked” [22:40]. In the words of this verse, this is our opportunity to join with all who share our compassion to rebuild, as an inter-faith and intra-faith effort, this Mosque which is so dear to our Shia brethren and other holy sites and places of worship held dear by religious people of all faiths.

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