



International Conference

Toward Integration of Knowledge: Reforming Education in the Muslim World

Date: March 18-20, 2016 Venue: Istanbul, Turkey

Organized by the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), in partnership with: the Faculty of Theology, Istanbul University

Dear Respected Colleague,

The Muslim world is experiencing a crisis of education at all levels. A plethora of recent studies has highlighted just how ruinous the situation has become. The 2003 Arab Human Development Report pointed out that the 'knowledge deficit' in Arab societies was 'grave' and 'deeply rooted'; a similar inference could be made about other Muslim nations. More recently, a number of research papers and other publications have made similar points.

Early in the 1980s, the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) stated in its Work Plan that 'the centuries of decline have caused illiteracy, ignorance and superstition to spread among Muslims' and 'these evils have caused the average Muslim to withdraw into the bliss of blind faith, to lean toward literalism and dogmatism'. The Institute identified 'the intellectual and methodological decline' as the core cause of this malaise.

Over the last few years, the IIIT has held a number of meetings to discuss the state of education in the Muslim world and to chart a viable way forward. A number of discussion papers were presented at these meetings, held in London, Istanbul and at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC. The papers and deliberations of these meetings have now been summarized in a synthesized paper, 'Education Reform: From Islamization of Knowledge to Integration of Knowledge'.

The deliberations at the IIIT meetings led to a number of initial conclusions. It was realized that the crisis of education, including higher education, is not limited to Muslim societies. Higher education in the West is also facing a predicament – although the crisis here is of a different nature. The former Dean of Harvard College, Harry Lewis, has described it as "excellence without a soul". Social sciences have come under severe criticism both for their Eurocentrism and for fragmenting reality as though the political, social, economic and psychological human being were different species.

Another conclusion was that the overall problems of higher education are epistemological and ethical in nature. The way forward requires us to meet the epistemological and ethical challenges through integration of knowledge – which necessitates rethinking disciplinary identities and a new mode of thought that would integrate revealed knowledge with human efforts at knowledge production. In other words, we need a new paradigm rooted in the Qur'anic worldview and a *tawhidic* epistemology – based on the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid* (monotheism), and on responsibility to God and humanity. This paradigm accords importance to revealed and human knowledge, and recognizes the diversity and plurality of our societies, as well as the needs of the environment and the planet and the accelerating pace of new technologies and innovations that are transforming the world.

The IIIT is organizing a two-day conference to explore a roadmap leading towards a new notion of knowledge and education, where knowledge, creation, life and humanity are perceived as integrated within a *tawhidic* framework and serve the whole of humanity.

The conference has two key objectives: to deconstruct the definitional power of the modern knowledge system – complete with its disciplines, institutions and processes – and its dominant western-based worldview; and to explore the Qur’anic worldview and *tawhidic* paradigms of knowledge formation, that are based in the histories, legacies and traditions of Islam and offer a more humane and values-based appreciation of what constitutes learning and its advancement.

The conference will address a number of questions, including:

- How do we position *tawhid* as the Qur’an-based worldview and basis for integrated approaches to knowledge?
- What is the role of the legacy of Islam in the development of a new paradigm of learning at all levels of education?
- How can we ensure that the process of integration of knowledge is based on convincing epistemology and methods and leads to objectively valid results?
- What is required to make education, at all levels, appropriate to the diversity, complexity and chaotic nature of the contemporary world, an educational system that can deal with intricate and mutual interdependence of all forms of life?
- How do we create new knowledge based on ethical concerns such as social justice and public interest, environment and ecology, as well as reverence and humility?

With the above objectives in mind, the conference will be structured around four major themes:

- The Nature and Characteristics of Islamic Legacy and Ethics of Islam in Education
- The Issues in Integration of Knowledge and Legacy of IIIT
- The Issues and Currents in the Dominant Paradigms of Education
- The Future of Education in a Globalized World

We are inviting proposals for scholarly papers that explore these themes within the overall framework of developing a new discourse of knowledge and education that is inclusive and has meaning for us all, and through which we can deconstruct power and ideologies, engage and change the world for the common good, along with shaping pluralistic and viable futures. Each potential author is asked to send an abstract of their paper (ca.500 words) and an academic CV to: Dr. Iqbal Unus (iqbalunus@iiit.org) and cc:

Saulat Pervez (saulat@iiit.org). Selected papers will be published in an edited volume after the conference.

We would like to register our warm thanks and appreciation to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for his participation in the project from its initial stages to its current development, and for taking part in all the meetings held in different countries to date. We also thank him for his invaluable intellectual input evolving ideas relating to the conference. For their critical work in providing initial papers and for helping develop the project, framework and ideas which have now been synthesized into a paper, we deeply thank our colleagues, Dr. Abdelwahab el-Affendi, Dr. Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, and Dr. Anas al-Shaikh-Ali. Finally, we express our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Professor Ziauddin Sardar for his intellectual input and his outstanding work in expertly producing the attached synthesized paper.

CONFERENCE TIMELINE

Abstract Deadline:	September 30, 2015
Abstract Acceptance Notification:	October 15, 2015
First Draft of the Paper Due:	December 15, 2015
Comments on the Paper Sent By:	January 15, 2016
Revised Conference Paper Due:	February 15, 2016
Conference:	March 18-20, 2016
Final Paper for Publication Due:	May 1, 2016

The organizers retain the right to cancel participation in case these deadlines are not honored.

HONORARIUM, TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

The authors will be compensated \$2,000 per paper: \$1,000 upon submission and acceptance, and \$1,000 after finalization for publication. Travel and accommodation will be provided by the organizers, within a reasonable limit.

DOCUMENTS AND MATERIALS

The papers, documents, and list of books referred to in this invitation letter are available at: <http://www.iiit.org/Research/ReformofHigherEducation/tabid/376/Default.aspx>


Dr. Jamal Barzinji


Dr. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman