

Executive Summary

The Initiative for Justice, Knowledge, and Opportunity

I. OBJECTIVES

- To foster tolerance, dialogue and understanding by giving voice to the moderate Muslims in Islamic societies, through intra-regional exchanges and the creation of forums in key countries for debate, dialogue, and acquisition of knowledge.
- To address key development gaps of justice, knowledge, and economic growth identified by the UNDP Arab Human Development report which are germane elsewhere in the Muslim world, and develop in the process future leaders (agents of change).
- To enhance moderation and non-violence in key countries where extremism presents a significant strategic risk to U.S. national security interests.

II. PRINCIPLES

The Initiative must be “demand-driven,” responding to the perceived needs of people with sensitivity to local cultures. Respond to local values such as helping the poor, taking care of the family, fighting corruption, etc.

De-emphasize the role of the U.S. Use partners with local credibility and legitimacy; support intra-region and inter-Muslim exchanges; involve the private sector. Focus on empowering women, while being sensitive in general to country-specific cultural contexts.

III. THE ISLAMIC WORLD

A. Description

Religion and Culture:

Islam is a comprehensive system of thought which attempts to address all aspects of life, including politics and science, and is supportive of both scientific progress and the pursuit of knowledge. There is no inherent conflict between Islam and modernism, so the assumption should not be that Islam is incompatible with changes in the modern world.

"Others" know much more about us, than we know about them. We lack the knowledge of their society, culture, politics, etc., whereas they tend to have a much better understanding of ours. While the majority approve of, and indeed desire, what we have in the US (such as technological mastery, political liberty, and economic well-being), they also fear the moral influence that accompanies our secular life.

Politics and Economy:

The vast majority of the Muslim world is impoverished, and the poor are the foot soldiers of terrorism. Leaders of terrorist groups are not only highly educated but are drawn, more often than not, from Islamic countries with long records of repression and no democracy.

Islamic women are excluded from participating in society, despite being the ones who can influence their children, who are the most vulnerable to being swept into terrorist groups. Bangladesh was transformed as a society when women began to participate in the economy and became politically active.

B. Action

Overview:

- The problems to be addressed by this new initiative are not cultural or ideological, but *political*. In particular, the US must stop "double-talk" which claims to be committed to "democracy" while supporting non-democratic government leaders.
- New initiatives should focus on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Libya, and Egypt.
- This initiative should work *outside of regimes* and build parallel structures using a bottom-up approach.
- Focus on discovering what *incentives* cause governments to change.
- The US must commit to the reality that this is going to take a very long time. Moreover, reactions (both small and large) to a US attack on Iraq can be expected to occur all over the globe, and governments will come under great pressure from their citizens.

Program design considerations:

- New programs should be introduced within the context of the USAID social programs already established in the Muslim world. Do not label this an Islamic initiative but make it a world-wide focus.
- The building blocks of transforming societies are 1) **education** at every level, starting at the primary level; 2) **civil society** support – civic education, community management and health service; 3) **employment** – technical assistance for income-generation schemes and vocational training; 4) **small business** – assistance for self-employment opportunities, SME support, and microfinance development; 6) development of independent **media**.
- Most aid programs and government interactions with the Islamic countries tend to ignore or bypass the most important constituencies in a particular society, to deal only with secular-oriented western-educated upper and elite classes. Women, in particular, have been unheard and marginalized and need to be brought into the dialogue and into the societal mainstream. Also, use financial assistance as a way to require governments to support the NGO community.
- Aid that is channeled through governments allows for massive diversion of resources. A study in Bangladesh showed that only 25% of aid actually reached

the intended recipients. (On the positive side, this small amount did in fact succeed in transforming the country.)

Education, Religion, and Media:

- New ways must be found to provide alternative educational choices to compete with madrassahs. Madrassahs attract people by providing social services and can then be the means of drafting young people into radical groups. The biggest demand/desire in these countries is for education, and as soon as there are other options, people leave the madrassahs. However, if the US simply tries to change curriculum of madrassahs so that it is not religious-based, the response will be, "they just want to secularize us/impose their values on us." Suppression of religion only causes radical Islamic groups to go underground and re-emerge in another place at another time.
- The focus should be on improving the education system, at all levels including primary schools. Support secondary and university education programs that (a) increase academic and scientific knowledge of the West and (b) **enhance values of moderation and understanding within improved local curricula. Women's access to education is a focal concern.**
- Support libraries as a way to change the perception of the US abroad. AID used to be well respected for its libraries that were built and maintained around the world.
- Build into development programs a significant emphasis on university alliances, both international and intra-regional, including sponsorship of **local or national dialogues on issues of justice**. Include participants representing moderate Islamic states.
- Promote Islamic scholars from other countries so that they gain access to US media; support Area Studies programs in the U.S. to develop experts with an intense regional focus.
- Development of independent news media is critical. Support exchanges of journalists and "journalistic methods" so as to increase coverage of the Muslim world and deepen our own appreciation of this region.
- Develop programs to support innovative consultative mechanisms between citizens and government.

Economic Growth:

- Improve the enabling environment for economic growth through an emphasis on market liberalization, trade capacity building, and private-sector led employment generation.
- Highlight the potential uses of applied science and technology in creating development and employment opportunities.
- Strengthen business and professional associations and economic think tanks, and support exchanges with successful counterpart associations and institutions.
- Support "business knowledge exchanges" involving volunteers from the West (including Diaspora communities).
- Support vocational programs to narrow the digital divide.

IV. THE ARAB MIDDLE EAST

A. Description

- Religion is not the main issue. Politics is the issue, more specifically US politics towards the Middle East, and more specifically towards Israel.
- Arabs are angry about 1) US policy; 2) Israel's treatment of Palestinians; and 3) Arab leaders who stay in power for 40 years and bring no progress. Muslims live with a great feeling of hopelessness and humiliation, which has led to violent reactions. The most radical militants are found in countries with the most repressive regimes.
- An obstacle to US development projects is the perception by Arabs of US's double standards, promoting democracy while supporting authoritarian regimes. It is perceived that U.S. support is given selectively on the basis of US interests.

B. Action

- Improving the lives of those living in poverty, and in particular improving the lives of Palestinians, will help ease the violence. Programs addressing civil society should apply a broad definition *to include Islamist organizations and tribal groups*, who are typically involved in providing infrastructure and services and are more prominent than standard NGOs.
- Focus on adult education based on discussion of a set of texts of their own country, their own culture, in their own language. Such "great books programs" would generate a new form of discussion and critique of tradition which would begin to permeate the rest of society.
- Along the same lines, academic conferences and multi-national dialogues between Muslims have proved effective at altering perceptions and establishing connections between Muslims. Such events have also generated much discussion about the history of tolerance within Islam, and the "promotion of pluralism within Islamic values." **The Initiative should promote exchanges within and outside the region, to create opportunities for dialogue and debate on issues of pluralism, human rights, and democratic governance.**