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Poverty and Injustice

Alarming Signs of the Present Crisis
in Human Society Worldwide

3rd Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table
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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Preface, <i>Andreas Bsteh – Tahir Mahmood</i> | 7 |
| Injustice and Poverty on the Level of World Politics, <i>Goga Abrarovic Khidoyatov</i> | 11 |
| Questions and Interventions | 19 |
| The Different Faces of Poverty, <i>Ingeborg Gabriel</i> | 25 |
| Questions and Interventions | 35 |
| Poverty and Injustice: From Justice to Injustice, <i>Seyed Abdolmajid Mirdamadi</i> | 39 |
| Questions and Interventions | 46 |
| Spiritual Aspects of a Global Political Dispute, <i>Heinrich Ott</i> | 49 |
| Questions and Interventions | 56 |
| Hopelessness and Despair as Consequences of Extreme Poverty and Injustice, <i>Nasira Iqbal</i> | 59 |
| Questions and Interventions | 68 |
| The Globalization of Socially Just Structures as a Challenge to Religions, <i>Richard Potz</i> | 73 |
| Questions and Interventions | 82 |
| Education and Global Learning as a Challenge to Poverty and Injustice, <i>Aïcha Belarbi</i> | 87 |
| Questions and Interventions | 103 |
| Poverty and Injustice: A Socio-Political Challenge in the Realm of Minority Affairs, <i>Georges Khodr</i> | 113 |
| Questions and Interventions | 117 |
| Poverty and Injustice – Alarming Signs of the Present Crisis in Human Society Worldwide, <i>Saleha S. Mahmood</i> | 121 |
| Questions and Interventions | 133 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Role of Non-Governmental Agents in the Struggle against Poverty and Injustice on the International Level, <i>Irmgard Marboe</i> | 141 |
| Questions and Interventions | 157 |
| Prejudices Breeding Injustices: Minorities' Predicament amid Global Modernism, <i>Tahir Mahmood</i> | 163 |
| Questions and Interventions | 174 |
| We are Unjust when We Owe a Debt to Ourselves and to the Others, <i>Adel Theodor Khoury</i> | 179 |
| Questions and Interventions | 189 |
| Participants to the Round Table | 196 |

Indices

| | |
|---|-----|
| Name Index | 198 |
| Source Index (Qur'ān, Bible, Documents of the Church) | 201 |
| Terms and dicta from the Islamic tradition | 202 |

Preface

How do we come upon a path that leads us to joint responsibility? The issue becomes increasingly urgent in the face of all the burning problems which challenge us today. Does it not become more and more evident, that the vital problems of our world can only be solved, if at all, in a concerted effort to ensure environmental sustainability – which means using natural resources wisely and protecting the complex eco-systems to provide for all people the vital water and the daily bread, to share the resources of our planet for the benefit of all and not only the few who are privileged, to give an adequate say to all nations when it comes to decisions on how to organize international relationships and structures, to implement effectively a worldwide independent judicial system in order to punish violations of valid principles and rules of international law, and many other things? Is this emerging world not in the need of a new world order to be evolved in the light of the seemingly irresistible process of its global socialization?

Aware of entering a new epoch in history that calls upon us and all our fellow human beings to thoroughly reconsider our way of life in a creative manner, and to be prepared to jointly design the new rules for the future house of humanity in which our later generations will be living, the participants of our Round Table dealt with the general topic of their 3rd Plenary Meeting – “Poverty and Injustice”.

The fact that an alarmingly wide segment of humanity lives in extreme poverty was already noted in the course of the 1st Plenary of this Round Table, where it was repeatedly characterized as particularly worrying when we tried to clarify what the most important problems humanity is facing on its way into the future would be.¹ Then, more attention was paid to the

¹ Proceedings of the 1st VICIRoTa Plenary were published in: A. Bsteh & T. Mahmood (ed), *Reading the Signs of the Time: Contemporary Challenges for Christians and Muslims* (Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table; 1). Mödling, 2003; and its translations into German (Mödling, 2003), Arabic (Jounieh, 2003), and Urdu (Delhi, 2004) .

problem of worldwide poverty in the context of our 2nd Plenary which dealt with “Manifestations and Reasons of Intolerance and Violence” in the present-day world.² So, it was not just by chance that our spiritual path, which we wanted to follow in our Round Table talks, directed us to focus in the framework of our 3rd Plenary on the subject of “Poverty and Injustice.”

Inter-disciplinary discussions between social ethics and political science, theology and sociology, jurisprudence and pedagogy, were likely to sharpen the awareness of the multi-dimensional problem area of “Poverty and Injustice” in general, and the different approaches which would be needed to structure and organize the world of tomorrow. Tangible was indeed the spirit of sincere openness that united all of us sitting around the table. Deeply encouraging was the joint experience that even difficult situations can be mastered in reaching out to one another in a spirit of sensitive togetherness.

Therefore, we may take our 3rd Plenary and the successful process of publication as a renewed sign of hope. Dialogue which can lead us to joint responsibility is possible. The fact that it calls for hard work should only be understood as a criterion for its seriousness, as a reference to the price we have to pay if looking at things realistically we wish to deal with the problems that are posed to us at this moment when a new epoch in human history is being born.

Our sincere thanks to all those who participated in this 3rd Plenary of the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table and also actively cooperated in the publication of its proceedings, for which purpose VICIRoTa participants suitably revised their respective presentations and contributions to the discussions. Furthermore, we owe heartfelt thanks to Mrs. Ingeborg Bogensberger and to Professor James S. Rooke for their substantial help in accomplishing the translation of the German texts into English. In recognition of their manifold services in connection with the organization of the 3rd VICIRoTa Plenary and its publication we would like to express our special thanks also to friends from the Institute for Theology of Religions –

² Proceedings of 2nd VICIRoTa Plenary were published in: A. Bsteh & T. Mahmood (ed), *Intolerance and Violence. Manifestations – Reasons – Approaches* (Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table; 2). Mödling, 2004; and its translations into German (Mödling, 2004), Arabic (Jounieh, 2004) and Urdu (Delhi, 2004).

Mrs. Petra Gerl and Mrs. Brigitte Sonnberger, MA., who with great sensitivity and utmost care transcribed the recorded discussions, compiled the indices, and assisted us with other preparatory steps for the publication of the German and English editions of the present documentation, which will be the basis for the Arabic and Urdu editions to be published in the near future in Jounieh / Lebanon and New Delhi respectively.

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