

Why Global Muslim Scholars' Input in Islamizing Knowledge is Critical

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This report captures key points highlighted by Prof Mahmoud M Galander in a video conference on “Islam and the media” in Khartoum, Sudan on August 25, 2016. He was addressing the staff and communication science students in Hantoub, IMAM Institute, Gezira University. The students were mainly from Uganda .

An internationally established Muslim scholar, researcher and author, Galander currently heads the ‘Islam and Media Working Group’ of the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR (.

He is an Associate Professor at the Department of Mass Communication, Qatar University.

Response to the Globally Dented Image of Islam

Stressing the significance of global Muslim scholars’ input in the current process of Islamizing knowledge, Prof Galander noted, it’s the ideal response to the globally dented image of Islam. He depicted the importance of Muslim scholars as critical in developing a literature that would explain Islam in its true perspective as opposed to that perceived and explained by others .

Acknowledging the prevalent political divisions in the Muslim world as a challenge to this process, Galander observed that Muslim academicians can potentially override this log jam through published literature and global outreach events .

Last year, he said, the ‘Islam and Media’ conference in Berlin, Germany, for example, attracted a fair audience from people of various faiths in Europe and Japan. He anticipated an even better representation at this year’s conference due in Bogota, Colombia .

Training of Muslim Mass Communicators

Explaining a concern how best Muslim educationists could shape Muslim mass communication students to ably represent Islam at work stations, Galander said it all has to do with the concept of media-value-determinism (MVD (.

It’s the values of the learners’ society (Islam) which must dictate how they should practice rather than practicing values of other cultures, he said .

He elucidated this, recalling the tragedy of the-mysterious-plane-crash-that-explains-us-egypt-mistrust of 1999 where American investigators interpreted the pilot's appeal for Allah's help above the Atlantic Ocean as an act of 'terrorism'.

In their investigations U.S. government Arabic translators (non Muslims) discovered that Egyptian flight Captain el Batouty seemed to declare, "tawakilt al Allah," Arabic for, "I place my fate in the hands of God." To them, this statement was an act of terrorism, in which 216 died. All Western and South Asian media relayed that fault line of interpretation and representation of Islam .

But, said, Prof Galander, a consciously trained Muslim mass communicator, would have portrayed the situation in its true perspective .

Indeed the American approach was perceived in Cairo as an 'assault on Egypt's national pride.' The Egyptian Islamic press coupled with government officials sentiments, expressed dismay that the investigators had hardly begun their investigations than they settled on an explanation without considering alternative theories. They also emphasized that the phrase el Batouty allegedly uttered before the aircraft began its precipitous drop, tawakilt al Allah, is often used when, for example, Arabs start a car and is meant in a way that God should look after them. As a result, the Egyptians rejected the hasty conclusion that Gamil el Batouty, a former military pilot, flight instructor, and long-serving flight officer for Egypt's flag carrier was responsible for the crash. Experts informed viewers of Egyptian television that it was impossible for el Batouty to have taken his own life because he was a good Muslim and suicide is haram (forbidden) in Islam .

Call for Media Quality Standards

Prof Galander paid glowing tribute to Al-Jazeera TV's outstanding recognition both in the Muslim and non Muslim world audiences for its quality identification with the Islamic values .

He cited the aljazeera-coverage-of-the-arab-spring , which was clearly pro-revolutions as a case study of 'media-value-determinism.' He advised for more entities of the Al-Jazeera caliber—where the concept of objectivity does not cloud portrayal of right and wrong. Such well established Muslim-founded media outlets will bring into limelight appalling conditions under which minority Muslim communities like in Central African Republic and Rwanda in the African continent live so as to solicit adequate responses .

Beginning of the Process

Prof Galander believes that subscription of Islamic academic institutions, including colleges and universities to the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), will galvanize and complement efforts already undertaken by him and his peers.

With compatriots like Dr Moh'D Hasan Mahmoud Al-Azzam and Prof Basyouni Ibrahim Abdelhalim Hamada, they have relentlessly engaged in a number of works geared toward redeeming the lens through which Islam is viewed globally .

Starting as early as late 1990s, while working with the International Islamic University in Malaysia (IIUM), this group committed resources into developing the basic literature in the realm of Islamizing knowledge. They initially and still do subscribe to a number of Muslim associations in Europe and North America such as Arab European Association of Communication Researchers, International Public Relations Association (IPRA), GlobalCongress of Muslim Public Relations Practitioners in Kuala Lumpur, International Communication Association, (IAC) and Arab-US Association of Communication Educators.

However, the contextual framework of these groupings is mainly shaped according to the setting where they are founded. This, therefore, occasioned the necessity of forming a Muslim Media and Working Group at IAMCR that would bridge global Muslim scholars and researchers in the process of producing original Islamic positions adrift from borrowed literature sourced from other cultures .

Annual Themes not Research Agenda

Responding to a concern by Dr Mohammed Babiker, the Dean, IMAM Institute, about IAMCR's research agenda, Prof Galander under scored the importance of free thought, saying the Muslim working group at IAMCR deliberately avoided a specific agenda, for it would limit the diversity of information flow .

Instead, he said, it annually announces a theme that is approached from pronged directions by academicians. The works of these academicians and researchers are presented at IAMCR's annual conferences and other platforms. The wealth of information generated from this process is not limited to the benefit of the global Muslim community but extends to other world citizens seeking for a proper understanding of Islam. It also offers a critical leverage in advancing the academicians' careers in their respective fields .

To participate in IAMCR's global activities, browse at: <http://iamcr.org/> , to join as an institution and if Islamic, get in touch with Prof Galander, the Chair, "Islam and Media Working Group".

