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A Welcome Message: The World Organization for Al-Azhar Graduates

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Allah's name I begin with, the utmost Kind, the ever Merciful. All praise to Allah alone, and His peace and blessings upon His messenger, our Prophet Muhammad, his family and his Companions.

With the name of Allah, we have inaugurated this scholarly and intellectual project and the related website (www.waag-azhar.org and www.azharalumni.uk) for the Organization of graduates of Al-Azhar University and its scholars across the world, from South Africa to Europe and Russia in the North, and from the United States of America in the West to China and Japan in the East.

On behalf of the thousands of al-Azharis, who have been registered forming the alumni numbering approximately forty thousand, I welcome the visitors to the website and the Organization who are searching for the reality of Islam and are keen to gain acquaintance with its sciences, culture, civilisation and morals and values by virtue of the authoritative specialist works of the al-Azhari scholars. This significant seat of knowledge, Al-Azhar, which has passed through more than one thousand and fifty years of history, carries the responsibility of presenting Islam as a heavenly message that concludes the previous heavenly messages. In fact, it is the last segment in the series of the one divine religion that began with Adam and ended with the holy Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and grant him peace), passing through Nuh (Noah), Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and 'Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary), peace and blessings be upon them all.

This project firstly aims to make people aware of Islam, as it is in the holy Qur'an and as it was conveyed by the holy Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and grant him peace) to the people. Moreover, as a way of life that landed as a reality for the people bringing great benefit for a long

period all over the world, its East and its West. This reality contributed towards the building of human civilisation with which it has interacted over the centuries and its cultures have been affected by the contribution of knowledge, sciences, arts, literature, philosophy, legislation, ethics, sports, medicine, astrology and music as well as other treasures from the ancient and modern heritage and legacy of the scholars of Islam and its intellectual thinkers.

This project does not aim towards any other objective other than rightly defining Islam. It has no other goal except this. Hence, there is no political nor missionary agenda, rather our supreme objective is the presentation of Islam as a religion, civilisation and culture in a pure and honest manner distant from misunderstandings and intellectual and historical misinterpretations that have distorted the true image of Islam and have misrepresented the essence of this great religion in the eyes of the seekers of truth.

Indeed Al-Azhar, which has carried the burden and responsibility of protecting and preserving the purity of Islam, its moderation and balance over the centuries, is still powerfully dedicated to continuing this mission of clarifying Islam, maintaining its balance and stability and highlighting its creative contributions in all fields of knowledge as well as the cultural and moral development of humankind.

While we inaugurate this project, we put in front of our eyes the renewed tensions of the late twentieth century and early twenty first century that have negatively affected the relations between Islam and the West. These tensions have created a gap between the East and the West, or a thick wall of mutual suspicion between the Westerners and the Muslims able to regenerate the conflicts of the Middle Ages and the crises of the Colonial Era, which both the people of the East and the people of the West had almost forgotten about.

Being the most significant reference for Muslims in the past and in the present, Al-Azhar is the able and qualified institution to carry the mission of its new message of bringing civilisations together, to bridge this gap between Islam and the West and to build mutual respect between fellow human beings wherever they are based, whatever their creed and religion be irrespective of their colour, ethnicity or language. As the Prophet of Islam (Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, "Human beings are equal like the teeth of a comb", they are the offspring of one father and one mother, they are brothers and sisters equal, they are created from the same soul and no matter how many colours and races they be, they all return to the same origin of this one father.

In view of this equality, the project is inspired by the Qur'anic reality that emphasises that there is no place in Islam for any discrimination or prejudice between people on the basis of race or colour and, in fact, the standard of distinction within Islam is only one and that is righteous deeds disciplined with the sense of responsibility before Allah, the Almighty. For Allah says, "O people! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from them scattered many men and women, and fear Allah, through whom you demand your rights, and kinship. Indeed Allah is ever Watchful over you." [Qur'an 4:1]

Allah also says, "O people! We have indeed created you from a male and a female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may come to know one another. Certainly, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed Allah is all-Knowing, all-Aware." [Qur'an 49:13]

The Prophet of Islam, the Messenger Muhammad (Allah bless him and grant him peace), spent twenty-three years instilling into the depths of the hearts of the Muslims the reality of equality

between people and the manner of dealing with others. In his farewell sermon, which was delivered during the Final Pilgrimage, the holy Prophet (Allah bless him and grant him peace) stressed the concept of equality among people, as he said, "O People! Listen to me attentively, for I know not whether after this year, I shall be amongst you again ... O people! Your Lord is one, your father is one. All of you are from Adam and Adam is from clay. The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, and a non-Arab has no superiority over an Arab, nor a black over a white, except through righteousness. Have I delivered? O Allah! Bear witness. The one who is present convey the message to the one who is not."

Dear visitor, we would like to welcome you once more to this project, which comes from Al-Azhar and radiates from its minarets and domes that are deeply rooted in the depth of times and ages. We welcome you as a brother in humanity, a colleague in the thirst for knowledge and understanding, a friend in mutual dialogue and a partner in realising an interaction between the East and the West.

May Allah grant us all the ability in which He is pleased and peace be upon you all, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings.

- *Ahmad al-Tayyeb, Shaykh al-Azhar*



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