## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam and Democracy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix One: Programme</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Two: Speakers’ Biographies</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Three: Participant List</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Royal Society of Edinburgh
wishes to acknowledge the support of

HRH Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal
Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Edinburgh Institute for the Study of
The Arab World and Islam
and thank the Organising Committee:

Professor John Richardson FRSE  
Emeritus Professor of Classics, University of Edinburgh

Professor Yasir Suleiman FRSE  
Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Director, 
Edinburgh Institute for the Study of the Arab World and Islam,  
University of Edinburgh

Richard Holloway FRSE  
Former Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Róisín Calvert-Elliott  
Events Manager, The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Lia Brennan  
Events Officer, The Royal Society of Edinburgh
SESSION ONE - SCENE-SETTING

Professor Yasir Suleiman opened the conference by explaining why the Society had decided to hold it. He noted that ‘Islam’ is often in the news, and usually for bad reasons. Common Western perceptions of Islam are that it is backward, violent, and not compatible with democracy. Muslims, meanwhile, argue that Islam is deliberately misinterpreted and slandered in the West.

Professor Suleiman stated that the conference was not intended to rebut such arguments but to bring together prominent, active speakers to debate this subject, addressing certain fundamental questions:

- What is democracy; what forms does it take?
- Does it mean a particular form of governance, set of values, system?
- Why does democracy matter?
- Can it be imported into the Muslim world?
- Is ‘Islam’ an invariant idea?
- Are there different interpretations and are some of them more compatible with democracy?
- Can Islam be separated from Muslims?
- Should we speak of democratisation rather than democracy?
- Is Islam compatible with democracy and does it have to be?
- What is the interest of the West in democracy in the Muslim world?
- Are those who call for democracy in the Muslim world willing to live with its consequences?
- Should Muslims reject democracy simply because Western governments want it? This would be shooting the message, not the messenger.

Khalid Abu al-Fadl has problematised the relationship of Islam and democracy: noting that, especially in the matter of law, popular authority is hard to reconcile with divine authority. Professor Suleiman observed that this was a difficult question to answer. But there are practical political (rather than philosophical) reasons for the lack of democracy in Muslim societies. These include the existence of authoritarian, powerful states; these societies’ experience of colonisation; and democracy’s specific historical background in post-Reformation Christian Europe. Despite all of these, it is quite possible for Muslims to see democracy as an ethical good that is worth pursuing regardless of its origins.

However, Professor Suleiman noted that many Muslims, despite their interest in democracy, are cynical about attempts by non-Muslim powers to propagate it. He cited as an example of this suspicion a newspaper cartoon depicting Condoleezza Rice as a shifty-looking ‘saleswoman’ of democracy.

SESSION TWO - EXISTING FORMS OF DEMOCRACY IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES AS SEEN FROM A SEAT OF WORLD POWER

Frances Guy, head of the FCO’s Engaging with the Islamic world group, began her talk by saying that she would not answer, or even attempt to answer, Professor Suleiman’s questions. But she offered another example of a cartoon to illustrate the legitimate suspicions of many Muslims regarding democracy (this one, about two years old, from al-Hayat newspaper). It shows a set of (Iraqi) scales, on one side of which is ‘democracy’ and on the other ‘totalitarianism’, each with an equal pile of skulls and bones.

Nevertheless, the speaker held that it is right for Western governments to promote democracy as a form of political governance, and said that she would discuss what this meant in practice, including the different dilemmas posed by recent events in Egypt and Palestine. She noted that most Muslims do not live in the Middle East and that many in fact live in broadly democratic countries (e.g. Indonesia, India, Bangladesh). But her own experience, and recent British attempts at democracy-promotion in Muslim countries, have been concentrated in this region, which according to the UN Human Development Report has extremely poor indices in areas such as governance, education, and gender empowerment. (She acknowledged that some see these as suspect figures.)

Ms Guy noted that democracy is not simply the peaceful transfer of power via a free and fair electoral process, but a range of contributing elements including the guarantors of that peaceful transfer of power, such as: an independent judiciary; freedom of association and of expression; a functioning, neutral and uncorrupt bureaucracy and security forces answerable to an elected government. The lack of democracy is not restricted to the Muslim world and it is patronising to assume a problem between Islam and democracy. Islam is not the only world religion to suggest that ultimate authority rests with God. However, in the Arab world the specific problems outlined earlier coincide with the concentration of resources there and with political problems in the region’s relationship to the West. Western governments’ interest in promoting reform is not essentially a question of principle: it is because of a belief that democracy—as the European experience has shown—makes for more stable and effective government (notwithstanding the legitimate questions posed to democracy even in democracies—for example, how legitimate is a democracy where only 50% bother to vote?). Western governments should
not seek to impose specific systems and immediate change, but they should still encourage reform on the basic principles of good governance, transparency, and accountability.

The speaker then admitted that many find such a position problematic, given the UK’s seeming interest in supporting undemocratic but friendly regimes (e.g. Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia)—and refusal to deal with the Hamas government in Palestine, elected in unusually fair elections. The ‘promotion of democracy’ has implications for relations between Western governments and political Islam.

While these are difficult questions, Ms Guy stated that the UK has an interest in peaceful change rather than revolution, and acknowledged that the transition to democracy has been difficult everywhere and will be in the Muslim world too. She outlined the ways in which the British government has encouraged democratic reform in countries such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, both through bilateral relations and in multilateral organisations.

Regarding the ‘problem’ of political Islam in democracy, Ms Guy noted that Islamist movements have grown up under the political circumstances of repressive and autocratic regimes—regimes often associated with the secular West, damaging the image of secular democracy; regimes where bureaucratic and judicial corruption seem to leave no alternative means of challenging the system but a moral (i.e. religious) one. It is therefore important for democracy promotion to focus not merely on elections but on the whole process of building democracy as outlined above, which will open space for other political forces to emerge. At the same time, Western governments must not ignore Islamist movements (which can push them towards extremism, as past Western errors have shown) but seek to include them in democratic reform—indeed, many Islamist parties operate in relatively democratic environments and represent a range of views within which it is in the West’s interest to encourage the moderate wing. Relations with Islamist movements are unlikely to be easy, and there are particular ‘grey zones’ (as identified by Amr Hamzawy in a recent Carnegie Foundation paper) which represent particularly problematic issues. These include:

- implementation of Islamic law
- violence
- pluralism
- civil and political rights, especially those of women and of religious minorities.

These dilemmas relate to the implementation in a Muslim context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—which acknowledges the rights of individuals. Ms Guy noted that most legal systems in majority Muslim countries are a mixture of colonial, independent, customary and shariah law (and hard to overhaul). Shariah law is rarely dominant overall, but it is particularly important as regards family law and therefore women’s rights—an issue on which there has been positive engagement with Muslim countries. Concerns in these areas should not hold the West back from engaging with Islamist movements, while still holding to the principles of the international legal system as it has developed since the 1950s.

Ms Guy did not wish to demonise political Islam, which has many shades of opinion; nor to criticize the West for lack of engagement. For example, the Islamist AK Party government in Turkey is committed to EU membership (and has implemented reforms demanded by the EU), while the EU—pushed by Britain—has opened membership talks with Turkey.

But if the Islamist, democratically-elected AK government is acceptable, what is the problem with the Islamist, democratically-elected Hamas government in Palestine? Ms Guy highlighted the following issues:

- Hamas’s use of violence for political ends.
- At the time of the elections Hamas was a banned organisation in the EU, creating technical and legal problems for funding and political contact.
- The AKP came to power in a secular state where the peaceful transfer of power has been tested, the army defends the state and not the party in power, and the judiciary and bureaucracy are regarded as independent. Islamism is thus a political agenda within a democracy, an agenda which has endured—and accepted—democratic setbacks. In a democracy the winner does not take all, and governments act in the name of all the people, including those who voted against them.
- As regards Hamas, Palestinians are by the standards of the Middle East both well-educated and secular; their reasons for supporting Hamas are complex, and do not necessarily imply support for the party’s religious agenda. But the Palestinian state is fragile: there are concerns about the independence of the security forces and the judiciary, and corruption in the bureaucracy. These concerns justify caution on the part of European governments. Aid has been frozen, not cut, and donors are seeking ways to help the Palestinian population. Space has been left for dialogue, and Hamas ought to (but has not so far) take advantage of it.

In conclusion, Ms Guy reiterated that Western governments should promote democratic values in the broad sense but not impose any particular models.
They should engage with Islamist movements but not shy away from issues of e.g. human rights.

**DISCUSSION**

In the course of the discussion on Sessions 1 and 2 between panellists and the floor, a number of points emerged:

- Understanding the relationship between Islam and democracy requires a deconstruction of both concepts: democracy is no more a single thing than Islam is, and it could be that some forms of Islam can accept some forms of democracy. But in addressing these questions it is important to to extract them from a western-centric context.
- This debate often lacks historical perspective: in the West democracy is also a new system and some cultural features of the West (e.g. Judaism, Christianity) have incorporated antidemocratic elements—but have also been dynamic, able to support or counter democracy. Islam, like Judaism or Christianity, is not static—though even critical scholars have sometimes assumed that it is, for example by taking classical law as current norm.
- Iraq aside, promoting democracy is not the same as imposing it, and it is in the interests of Western governments to create space for more voices to be heard—while accepting the consequences of democratisation even if this creates space for voices critical of the West, for example.
- There is a proper debate about the legitimate and illegitimate use of force—whether by states or by non-state actors.
- There is a profound hypocrisy in the West’s attitudes to democracy in Muslim world. For example, Britain views Hamas negatively owing to its use of violence, but engaged in a peace process with the provisional IRA despite its failure to decommission its weapons.
- In the Occupied Territories, corruption may be a big problem but occupation is a bigger problem. If Western governments wish to be taken seriously when they protest against corruption, they must also protest the occupation.
- There may be questions over Turkey’s human rights record—but the Turkish government is actively engaged in discussion on these issues, which will be taken very seriously in the EU admissions process.
- Western governments are frequently uncertain and uneven in their encouragement of democracy, and in weighing that encouragement up against their economic and strategic interests. But in the long term supporting autocratic regimes only stores up problems and exacerbates them. There is a recognition that this has happened in the past, and it is to be hoped that current events in Iraq and Palestine will not discourage Western governments from promoting democracy. This is an important subject for political debate in Western countries; while in Middle Eastern/Muslim countries there are those who want external pressure for democratisation—up to a point, and provided the Western powers are willing to live with consequences.
- The relative absence of large public expressions of dissent in the Arab world regarding the war in Iraq, by comparison with the major demonstrations in Western countries, reflected the autocratic regimes’ refusal to permit manifestations of public dissent for fear that it might get out of hand. But permitting dissent is an essential test of democracy; and the fact that some large demonstrations did take place in the Arab world shows the courage of people willing to demonstrate in the face of severely repressive security forces. People do come out on to the streets to demand their rights. But they are also aware of possible consequences and this does limit popular demonstrations.
- The media plays a very important role in giving popular access to political debate and must be encouraged. In this respect, Al-Jazeera has changed face of political discourse in Arab world; one result is that the FCO has created a unit to express British views in Arab media. It was felt that al-Jazeera is a very good, high-quality broadcaster—its excellent children’s channel being one often overlooked example.
- Across the Middle East, there is much discussion of politics (and religion) at a popular level despite people’s awareness of the security services.
- The Middle East is not the only region of the world with a democracy deficit, and the West’s markedly different attitude towards promoting democracy in China is revealing. But democracy is still worth promoting.

**SESSION THREE - THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Professor John Esposito began by relating an anecdote: as he passed through immigration on his way to the conference, the officer on duty had asked him the purpose of his visit. On being told that it was to give a conference speech about Islam and democracy, the officer smiled, stamped the passport, and said “I guess it’ll be a very brief speech!”
This anecdote reflects the situation in which we, in non-Islamic societies, find ourselves in trying to understand Islamic societies—after 30 years Professor Esposito said that he was still being asked precisely the same questions (“is Islam compatible with democracy?”). He noted that as a rule Islam is considered guilty until proven innocent; things can be said about Islam that would not be acceptable if they were said about any other religion or group. Foreign policy is not the only problem in Western governments’ relations with Islam: social policy concerning Islam and Muslims is also deeply problematic.

For the West, the speaker noted, democratisation in Muslim countries has posed problems: examples are the electoral victory of Hamas, or (democratic) constitutional demands in Iraq and Afghanistan for an Islamic system. Recent poll research in Muslim-majority countries creates interesting dilemmas for Western powers that claim to promote democracy but are hostile to the notion of any ‘Islamic’ involvement in politics. In Egypt, meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood has enjoyed a degree of electoral success despite rigged elections—while the regime has clamped down on Islamic and/or democratic activists, as well as the increasingly independent-minded judiciary. This raises the question of what Western policy towards an ally should be. While Western governments may have reasons to encourage democracy (e.g. stability), the question may be asked in the region, “Who are you to encourage democracy?” It is well-known that, traditionally, US governments have openly supported non-democratic governments (and entrenched secular elites) which since 9/11 have said that they are becoming democratic but are not. Likewise, Abu Ghraib, US unilateralism and pre-emptive strikes do not fit well with US calls for Muslim respect for human rights or ‘international norms’. There is an increasingly well-informed, well-educated, globally-aware—and, in some cases Islamist—Muslim audience that will ask these critical questions.

On the other hand, Professor Esposito pointed out, the history of Islamist regimes in power is troubling. Yet new Gallup polling evidence shows strong support among Muslim populations for democracy or democratic-style reform; their problem with the West is western denigration of Islam, and western observers have not adequately understood this. Western governments say they want to listen to alternative voices, but hold conferences at which believing Muslims are not present—let alone Hamas and Hizbullah.

Next, Professor Esposito raised the issue of secularisation, noting that there has been a resurgence of religion globally—not just in Islam—that poses problems for secularisation. It is no longer, perhaps, a question of the separation of religion and politics, but of church and state—these are different things. And many critics of the mixture of religion and politics in Islamic countries willfully mix religion and politics in their own countries (e.g. John Ashcroft). This is not just a problem for Islamic countries.

Turning to the question of Islam and democracy, the speaker identified a number of problems for democracy in the Middle East. Many of them, he maintained, are structural political realities, rooted in colonial oppression and continuing into (often Western-influenced) undemocratic systems of (secular) government. In many Middle Eastern societies there is a culture of authoritarianism, and in some a culture of violence—both secular and religious. But this is not just a question of ‘Islam’.

In the late 1980s, an economic downturn led to calls for greater democracy, transparency, and accountability in many Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan and Turkey. This in turn led to an upsurge of elections (but not, in most cases, democracy). The regimes in power and Western governments were surprised by the relative success of Islamist movements despite electoral fraud. Behind this popular turn to Islamic candidates lay complex reasons: some votes were ‘for’ them, others were protest votes ‘against’ the government. But, Professor Esposito emphasized, this is normal in democratic elections: it happens frequently in Western politics, without Western observers then saying that those thereby elected are not credible democrats.

The speaker then discussed the US response to these electoral victories for Islamists. A State Department spokesperson said at the time that the US would support democracy, even if it involved Islamist politicians. But the American responds to Islamist election victories with suspicion; for example, when the FIS was elected in Algeria. Professor Esposito summed up this attitude as “We know what they say but we don’t know what they’ll do”—to which he offered the rejoinder that we know what current secular regimes (such as that of Ben ‘Ali in Tunisia) do as well as what they say. Why is secular authoritarianism in some way more acceptable than religious authoritarianism? The speaker noted that secular authoritarianism is certain to feed religious radicalisation and violence.

The late 1980s and 1990s demonstrated that as well as violent Islamists there were moderate Islamists who wanted to come to power through democratic means. However, the Western response tended to be that such peaceful Islamists were ‘wolves in sheep’s clothing’. But we need to look at track records. Can the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—which renounced violence decades ago—really be considered a terrorist movement, a wolf in sheep’s clothing? And by con-
trast, what about the track record of regimes in e.g. Egypt and Tunisia? In countries where regimes responded to Islamist pressure by accommodation rather than repression, Islamist politicians have now served in senior positions within existing systems. This is also a track record on which they can be judged.

In the region and beyond, Professor Esposito noted, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were used by Muslim and non-Muslim governments to demand American (and European) support with the argument that “Now you know what it’s like: support us as we combat extremists”. But regimes have targeted all opponents, not just extremists, under the pretext of eliminating Islamic radicalism. The West needs to understand this, and be aware that democracy promotion will be seen as a tool of western domination especially on the question of human rights. These are major issues, but when western governments are caught out (e.g. Abu Ghraib) they claim that such abuses are exceptional. (It’s a problem for western governments too: how far do we abrogate rights of individuals in order to combat terrorism?)

Nevertheless, in the post-9/11 Muslim world we do see increased democracy, for example, in Bahrain, Morocco, Turkey (among others). Some Islamist parties such as the Turkish AKP have broadened their appeal, adopted a wider secularism that is not anti-religious (unlike French or Turkish laïcité) but secular in the best sense of protecting the rights of believers and non-believers. In other countries there is reform, even if it is slow. But when observing this we must also understand the slow evolution of democracy everywhere, including Europe and the US. Western powers want ‘risk-free’ democracy in the Middle East but this is not possible. There are risks in democratisation, but these must be accepted. Things are changing in the Arab and Muslim world, the speaker maintained; the question is, to what extent will we in the West (as governments and individuals) recognise that change?

In this connection, Professor Esposito made the observation that democracy depends on such things as a strong civil society and active NGOs, and the attitude of Western governments and authoritarian regimes in the region, to these. If Western powers seeking incremental reform offer support to regime-controlled entities such as ‘royal NGOs’ which lack credibility in the eyes of the population, there is a risk of counter-productive hypocrisy.

The speaker stated that certain issues must be borne in mind in Western dealings with the Middle East. These include: the culture of authoritarianism; the question of whether existing governments stand for e.g. the rule of law; popular feeling in the region. He also emphasised the fact that religious authoritarianism is no more dangerous than secular authoritarianism. From the point of view of democratisation, the lack of a free press under either of these is equally dangerous torture in prisons is equally unacceptable whether it takes place under the Shah or Khomeini. This being so, when promoting democracy it is acceptable to insist that Islamist movements respect, in government, the things they demanded in opposition (taking heed of the worrying but extremist precedent of Islamist governments in Afghanistan, Iran, and Sudan). But we must be equally concerned to hold secular authoritarian regimes to account in these areas.

Western governments should encourage, not impose, movements towards broader participation, and seek to strengthen civil society and the rule of law. They should acknowledge that this presents risks, but risks that must be taken—and they should not blame ‘Arab’ or ‘Islamic’ culture for any lack of democracy without questioning our own contribution to it. And they should be prepared to live with the consequences of democratisation: for example, the election of Hamas. Western governments cannot claim to be promoting democracy while simultaneously trying to freeze out a democratically elected government. (The speaker also asked the question, who benefits from this freezing-out?)

In conclusion, Professor Esposito reiterated that Western observers must be aware that we are seeing a process which in other countries (including our own) was long, painful, and involved bloody civil wars, revolutions, intellectual and religious conflicts. It is a risky process but one that is inevitable if we do not accept it as such we contribute to an ever more unstable situation.

**DISCUSSION**

In the discussion following Session Three, the following points were raised:

- Encouragement of democratisation, whether in ‘friendly’ states like Egypt or ‘enemy’ states like Iran, might best be achieved through diplomacy. Public rhetoric denouncing the lack of democracy—as currently heard regarding Iran—is counterproductive. However, this must be counterbalanced by a willingness to voice criticism of regimes (including friendly ones), where this is useful, in a way that is heard by the region’s public.

- The framing of the debate—whether Western states should ‘permit’ democracy in the Middle East—is revealing of a very colonialist mindset. Whatever the risks of democratisation in the region may be for the West, self-determination only works when recognised as a universal good: not as
something that some peoples are ready for and others not. And we need to recognise that democracy, in any circumstances, is fragile.

- There are many ways to persuade regimes to enact democratic reforms, and these should be used. But persuasion is the word: threats and bluster are likely to be counterproductive, as in Iran at the moment where many citizens who are hardly enamoured of their government nevertheless support it in its confrontation with Europe and America over the nuclear programme. (There are other similar cases, e.g. Pakistan.) This creates problems for reformers, who have to look ‘nationalist’ and avoid being tainted by association with the West.

- It is not justifiable to delay democracy until societies are ‘ready’ for it. Societies become ‘ready’ for democracy through the practice of it, not through waiting for it. For example, in Iraq the tendency to vote along religious or ethnic lines is seen by some as an example of that societies ‘unreadiness’ for democracy—and yet in the USA (to name just one example) it was until recently, and in some cases still is, normal for voters to behave in a similar way. In a sense, democracy always means putting the cart before the horse.

- Democratisation need not be a threat to Islamic identity, and not all Muslims perceive it as such. Recent poll data suggest that large majorities in Muslim-majority countries want democratic reform but also want to maintain their Islamic identity: people are proud of this, and believe that it is crucial for their progress. And there are many ways in which democratic reform can be made compatible with maintaining an Islamic identity (and vice-versa)—just as many (religious) people in the West don’t see their (secular) state as going against their religious beliefs. A greater problem is that people in the Middle East, for example, are rightly suspicious of how democratic government will be brought about: will true self-determination be allowed, or are Western governments keen to impose limits? This is already creating anger against Western governments, e.g. because of response to election of Hamas. If they are serious about democratisation, Western governments must accept the idea that they may have to work with relatively hostile elected governments.

- Islamist movements when they participate in the political process are as pragmatic as they are ideological—for example, President Ahmedinejad’s stand regarding Iran’s nuclear programme gains him support among secularised youth who might otherwise be hostile to him. Islamism (like other radical movements) is also often, if not always, the expression of political and social grievances. Frequently activism done in the name of religion actually uses religion to legitimate acts of political or social protest.

- Tunisia is an example of a country which has successfully achieved economic (and social) development under an authoritarian political system. But this has come at a real cost which Tunisia’s Western allies have been too quick to gloss over. Islamists are not the only group to have felt the cane: any opposition to the regime is repressed, especially human rights organisations.

- The invasion of Iraq, where the US and Britain have sought to ‘impose’ democracy, has been extremely counterproductive and this deserves debate in the West. Have the politicians and the generals understood the consequences of their decisions in terms of loss of life (Western and Iraqi)? How can we know how many US lives have been lost while having no idea how many Iraqi lives US policy has cost? The cost-benefit analysis of lives lost (versus political and other benefits) is made by people who are very distant from the results of their decisions. This casts harsh light on the refusal to define state violence as ‘terrorist’—in another example, Palestinian ‘terrorism’ kills civilians, but Palestinian civilians are not killed by Israeli ‘terrorism’.

- It is not for Western governments (or observers) to decide whether others have the right to self-determination—they have that right. When regimes such as those in Central Asia claim that the opposition to them is Islamist, and use this as a pretext for denying democracy, we should not necessarily believe them. This is a claim made by the governments in order to clamp down on all opposition and gain carte blanche from the US for doing so. Even if the opposition is Islamist, it is hypocritical to proclaim our fears about what such movements might do if they came to power while ignoring the extremely repressive (and destabilising) behaviour of the secular regimes that are currently in power. So supporting democratisation in such regimes is not equivalent to supporting Islamism—and the existence of an Islamist opposition cannot justify the claim that certain people or societies are not yet ready for democracy. Where Islamism has emerged it has done so in the specific circumstances of autocratic political systems.
SESSION FOUR - THE DIVERSITY OF FORMS OF BOTH DEMOCRACY AND ISLAM AND THEIR COMPATIBILITIES AND INCOMPATIBILITIES

Professor Tariq Ramadan began by outlining his talk: a short introduction would be followed by three sections, the first a theoretical discussion about the Islamic tradition’s responses to democracy and the way democracy is perceived in Western countries; the second on the current political dynamics of Muslim countries, and within Muslim communities in the West; and the third a discussion of shared responsibility: the need for us in the West to understand these dynamics (without seeking to control them) and facilitate the process—in the name of shared principles, but with respect for the autonomy of Muslim populations.

In his introduction he made four main points:

- As earlier speakers had noted, Islam and democracy are often wrongly presented as two monolithic and separate realities. Within the Islamic tradition we can find many principles (such as the rule of law) that are also seen as part of democracy—the idea that such principles are unique to democracy, and thus Western traditions that are a foreign import into Islam, is simply wrong. A main purpose of his talk would be to differentiate between principles and morals.

- Today in Islamic-majority countries—a carefully-chosen term, more meaningful than ‘Islamic world’—there is something we have to acknowledge: now and in the future it would be very difficult for us to deal with these countries while dismissing the Islamic factor. Islam is present within the discourse and politics of these countries as a point of reference—if we want dialogue (rather than an ‘interactive monologue’ with people who share our points of reference) then we must recognise this. We respect someone when we understand that his or her universe of reference is as complex as ours—and we recognise that, for example, Christianity is very complex.

- Third, religious liberalism does not equate to political liberalism. As within Judaism or Christianity, it is possible to be religiously liberal, even non-practising, without being a democrat. In the Arab countries it is often the opposite that is the case, with secular but authoritarian political regimes. Such secular politicians use the false conflation of ‘secular’ with ‘democratic’ in order to gain support from democratic societies. (By the same token, there are devout believers who are political democrats.)

- Professor Ramadan’s last point was the centrality to this debate of the experience of European Muslims. Muslims are often included in debates about terrorism in Europe, but excluded from debates about democracy. The discussion is influenced by the perceptions we have—for example, of ‘Islam’ being foreign to ‘democracy’. The speaker emphasised that there are millions of Muslim democrats living in European societies, but they are rarely involved in this debate. It is also necessary to respect and understand evolution and change within the other—for example, the changes that are taking place among European Muslim communities. Change is accepted as such when we trust the other, but suspected as a strategy of dissimulation when we do not.

The speaker then asserted that there is only one parameter for consistent judgment between societies: what is the gap between the stated principles and actual practices of a society? This is, he felt, is more useful than comparing the practices or politics of one society with those of another; it is as useful a measure for assessing the actions of the British government as it is for Islamist movements. For example, Professor Ramadan once discussed Sudan with Hasan al-Turabi at a time when the latter was a senior figure in a repressive Sudanese government. Al-Turabi made a comparison with Egypt, to Sudan’s advantage—Egypt had more political prisoners, etc. But Professor Ramadan did not accept this comparison: more important was the gap between Sudan’s own principles and its practice. Likewise when the governments of Islamic-majority countries criticise abuses such as Abu Ghraib—this criticism is fine as far as it goes, but what about their own prisons?

Professor Ramadan did not accept the notion that there are many ‘Islams’, even though Islam is not monolithic: there are common values within the beliefs and practices of Muslims. However, there are many readings of Islam: talking about ‘Islams’ oversimplifies the complex situation of diverse readings of Islamic sources, and diverse Islamic cultures, within one overarching Islamic frame of reference.

Political Islam, the speaker maintained, must be seen within this frame of reference—but with an understanding of its diversity. Geographically and historically, Islamist movements are diverse and changing. Just as this is taken for granted when we look at political movements in the West, it must be understood when looking at Islamist movements—for example, the writings of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s and 1940s cannot be taken as representing the Brotherhood’s current views (though they are still relevant to an understanding of the Brotherhood’s historical development). Within Islamist movements there is evolution, change, and re-thinking of positions in response to new
circumstances.

Taking another example from an old discussion—the late 19th century exchanges between al-Afghani and ‘Abduh—Professor Ramadan noted the differences between these two influential thinkers in their response to Western domination. The first saw change in the power system as essential; the second saw it as more important to improve education and achieve cultural resistance throughout society. Both wanted to resist domination and colonisation through the development of autonomous alternatives within an Islamic frame of reference. We often lack an understanding of this historical tradition of diversity and evolution. Hasan al-Banna, citing ‘Abduh in the 1940s, stated that the (British-style) parliamentary system was not against Islam. He entered elections in 1941 and was criticised by ‘Salafis’ for participating in a system imposed by the colonisers, but believed that he had studied the constitution and believed that while it was not from within the Islamic tradition it was not against it—and could be used in the struggle against domination. He did not have a binary vision of Islamic/non-Islamic systems. But after al-Banna’s death, and Nasser’s repression of the Brotherhood, Egyptian Islamists—often imprisoned—developed such a binary vision, and rejected what they considered ‘un-Islamic’. A notable example, Professor Ramadan said, was Sayyid Qutb: a man who was very westernised, being familiar with English literature and having studied in the US. But he returned from the US convinced that it was necessary for Muslims to cut themselves out from their westernised past (for himself, his own westernised past) and create a new present based on a purely Islamic frame of reference. This was not the same position as Hassan al-Banna’s. But not all members of the Muslim Brotherhood, even imprisoned members, shared this violent rejection of Nasser, secularism, and the West. The debate is ongoing, but within the Islamic frame of reference it is necessary for those who disagree with this rejectionist binary vision to understand the circumstances (of repression) in which it arose.

Moving from the debates of the 1950s to the present, Professor Ramadan noted that in the Islamic-majority countries and in the West, there are now Muslims coming to their own reading of Islam which does not adopt this binary view. It goes beyond concepts (such as ‘democracy’) to look at the principles on which both systems, ‘Western’ and ‘Muslim’, rest. For example, the principle of the rule of law is important in both Islamic tradition and ‘democracy’. Likewise, in some senses the Prophet’s injunctions regarding the rights and duties of Jews in Medina can be taken as establishing a sense of citizenship that is not based purely on Islamic identity. Other parallels can be found within the Islamic tradition for universal suffrage, accountability, and the importance of civil society.

At the same time, there are groups in Islamic-majority and Western countries who on the basis of their (literalist) reading of Islam utterly reject all such attempts to show that concepts that seem to belong to the West actually have principles in common with Islamic tradition. Such groups, which claim that there is no democracy in Islam ("Where are ‘elections’ in the Qur’an?")”, idealize the Medinan community, and seek to import the model without thinking about its principles. Similarly, they seek to implement the shariah exactly according to the model of the 7th century (notably the penal codes)—but the definition of shariah is hazy, and such groups—for example, Islamists in Nigeria who have successfully fought for the adoption of the ‘shariah’ in some regions—typically start with penal codes because they are most visible. Such people, a vocal minority, will reject ‘democracy’ and nurture fear of the West among the majority—which is otherwise inclined towards democracy.

This subject leads on to a debate, Professor Ramadan said, whose theoretical background must be understood. The debate is on two different levels:

- The first is the concept of *ijtihad*, critical reading of the scriptural sources when the sources are not definitive or are silent. Literalist interpretations seek to place strict limits on this—which can otherwise be used to promote the principles and model of democracy.
- The second is the definition of *shariah*, a central concept. Professor Ramadan does not agree with those who claim that anyone who makes reference to the shariah is an ‘Islamist’, and cannot be a democrat. Many Muslims are now promoting the principles of democracy, e.g. rule of law, elections, accountability—their approach is also evolving, and they too must be questioned regarding problematic issues, e.g. the role of women or the position of religious minorities. (In Malaysia, considered a democracy, Professor Ramadan had observed that the status of religious minorities is problematic.) Muslim democrats are still struggling with some of these issues. Likewise the penal code, which is often not properly opened to debate. Professor Ramadan has been criticised for not condemning outright some punishments that are enshrined in the shariah, but he felt that condemnation from outside the Islamic-majority countries is the wrong approach. It is better to promote a transparent and self-critical debate within the Islamic tradition.

Professor Ramadan then moved on to his second area
of discussion. He reiterated that a ‘monolithic’ understanding of Islam or democracy is mistaken. The implication of this is that just as democracies, whether western or otherwise, have different models drawn from their own histories, Islamic-majority countries will create their own models of democracy: the principles may be universal but the models are historical. The models of democracy that arise in Islamic-majority countries will share basic principles with other models, but they will be Islamically-orientated and this must be accepted by Western governments. The speaker noted that it is quite normal for people in different democracies (Britain, France, America) to have a low opinion of other democratic models—but a diversity of models is an accepted reality. The speaker noted that outside the Arab world there are already Muslim-majority democracies, such as Senegal. He felt that the experiences of African countries should not be excluded from discussions of democracy or of Islam, as they too often are: the Islamist movement in Senegal, for example, has changed over the last fifteen years and has become committed to secular democracy as the guarantor of religious rights. (Professor Ramadan also noted, though, that democracy in Senegal may be perceived as less threatening to Western interests than democracy in Saudi Arabia—and that geostrategic interests trump principles.)

Professor Ramadan also offered examples of political developments in Middle Eastern countries. In the case of Egypt, we may agree or disagree with the Muslim Brotherhood, but we most honestly accept that the movement is constantly evolving, is engaged in internal debate, and is developing new thoughts. It is not fair to taint the entire movement by referring to Ayman al-Zawahiri. It is not true to say that the Brotherhood supports al-Zawahiri, and indeed he himself has condemned the Brotherhood as ‘betrayers’, supporting the Egyptian regime against al-Qaida and dealing with the CIA.

The first person to describe ‘democracy’ as a concept central to the Islamic tradition, was the Tunisian Islamist Ghannouchi. In Turkey, Islamism has evolved and changed: Erdogan is not the same as Erbakan, there is an internal debate and a better understanding of democracy. Likewise, current events in Morocco must be considered when understanding the changing dynamics of political Islam. Other examples abound of groups promoting democratic values from within an Islamic tradition while remaining faithful to Islamic values. These, the speaker felt, are the deep dynamics. Our experience within the democratic societies of the West must inform us in our attempts to promote democracy elsewhere, while we acknowledge the presence of an extremist minority opposed entirely to the West.

There is a great deal of mistrust in the West, and superficial (mis-)understandings of Muslim political attitudes—but for the mainstream of Muslim societies, including Islamist groups, there is no contradiction between promoting democratic values being a Muslim. There are already millions of Muslims living this experience, stated Professor Ramadan, both in the West and in Islamic-majority democracies. In the West’s relationship to the Islamic world we need to understand this and approach democratisation consistently: maintaining a short-termist support for stability will fail in the long run. It is impossible for Western democratic governments to justify sidelining democrats coming from within a Muslim tradition in order to preserve their own interests—this undermines democracy for all of us. The ideology of fear spread by the war on terrorism exacerbates this situation. Here, as academics and citizens, we have a role in questioning our own governments—regarding their own behaviour and their chosen interlocutors in Islamic-majority countries (and those who they choose not to speak to). If we do not do this we will sustain a binary world at the cost of our own democratic values.

**DISCUSSION**

In the discussion following this session, the following points emerged:

- There is a common human tendency, when dealing with people from other communities or traditions, to compare the ‘best in my tradition’ with the ‘worst in yours’. At the political level, this is often deliberate—it may be destructive but it is politically useful. At a popular level it often derives from a lack of knowledge, an over-simplification of the other. We tend to try to live with the least effort possible, and it requires lots of effort to step out of our own intellectual ghetto. As well as its disturbing actual effects, this has dangerous implications for our ideals. To take the example of current events in Iraq, the assumption of different relative values of Western and Iraqi lives not only has the effect of permitting an unacceptably high loss of Iraqi lives: the devaluation of human life in general erodes democratic principles everywhere.

- The elections of early Islamic leaders such as Abu Bakr can provide a useful model in that they offer an example of principles compatible with democracy in the Islamic tradition. However, there is a question of interpretation: a literalist interpretation ignores the principles at work and seeks only to reproduce precisely the model—so whereas a democratically-minded interpretation would take from these examples the principle of consultation, shura, and apply it to the whole population, a literalist interpretation would apply it only to
Muslims, and within the Muslim community only to men, and within the male Muslim community only to the qualified (i.e. clerics).

- There are many ways for academics to encourage people to step out of their intellectual ghettos, and arrest the slide into fear, ignorance, and prejudice. These include academic research, and the engagement of academics in their national and local communities. In a plural society more generally, this is a necessity, whether we like it or not. Humility and a willingness to be de-centred are necessary; and what we are experiencing the Europe now—the evolution of plural societies with Muslim populations—will have a great influence everywhere. In this respect it is important to acknowledge and promote shared universal values. At the level of education, we must seek to eliminate prejudice, superficiality, ignorance—and within academia we need more people able to express the ‘Other’s’ point of view. (Travel is a simple but important factor too.) While this may be difficult, it represents an attempt to find practical responses to contemporary society’s challenges. It should be seen as a personal responsibility of all individuals, not just states or ‘the West’, to understand complexity: an idealistic but necessary objective, and one that is perhaps even harder to promote in Islamic-majority countries than in the West.

- It is important to recognise both the political manipulation of popular fears, and the legitimacy of those fears in many cases. The perceived threat of Islamist violence creates popular fear of Islam; in Europe, the far right will play on such fears and claim that current immigration policies are making inevitable a Muslim majority (presumed to be fanatical and violent) in European countries. We must respond to such legitimate popular fears while opposing the far right’s instrumentalisation of them. Likewise, the fears of Muslims that their identity is threatened must be taken seriously. But in both cases we must also be ready to condemn those who step beyond legal frameworks, and also recognise that there are limits to freedom of expression.

**PANEL DISCUSSION**

After the speaker presentations there was a general discussion. The following points arose:

- Regarding women’s rights, it is important to note that women’s status in contemporary Muslim-majority countries is influenced not only by religion but by location, region, tribe, patriarchy (amongst other things). Islam, like other religions, is often used to legitimate cultural practices that are not in fact rooted in religion; and the impact of culture on psychology, over generations, cannot be changed overnight. In the specific case of Afghanistan since the invasion, many women continue to adhere to strict ‘Islamic’ dress codes despite the fall of the Taliban; but the fact that Afghan women can now go to school is a more important development. In the Arab world, low rates of female education are common, and worrying. But in this respect economic development will also have an effect. It is dangerous, though, for Western states to use the women’s issue as a pretext for intervention.

- Regarding Iraq, there was a suggestion that from the point of view of Western strategic interests, the chaotic results of the attempt to impose democracy in Iraq have removed a counterweight to Iran—harming those strategic interests. Iraq may not break down into smaller parts, at least not in the short term; and if it does break apart it will (at least at first) be into two entities, Kurdish and Arab—not into religious entities. External pressure from neighbouring countries will have an effect here. One panellist noted the danger to the US of its building a huge and costly embassy in Baghdad, which gives the impression that America’s main purpose is to demonstrate its achievement of dominance in the region.

- Turkey’s place in the debate was considered central. From the European point of view it is a test case, with its long history of engagement with the West and a democratically-elected Islamist government that—despite hiccoughs—is committed to EU membership. (The use of the ‘politics of fear’ by Europeans opposed to Turkish accession was also mentioned.) From the American point of view Turkey is also important, though the European obsession with the country seems strange—and worries about the country’s Islamic identity hard to understand, since poll data show that Turkey is the only Muslim-majority country where a majority opposed implementation of the sharieha. But it was noted that Turkey often does not present itself as a vanguard of democratisation in the Middle East or Muslim world: it sees itself in relation to Europe and the West, not in relation to other Muslim countries. The question was raised of why some Turks find it possible to imagine themselves as Turkish and European, but much harder to imagine themselves as Turkish, Muslim, and European. (Nevertheless,
some people in other Muslim countries do see Turkey as an example to be followed.)

- The relationship between Islamic theology and democracy was discussed, with reference to Christianity—a religion which institutionally resisted democracy everywhere, but whose theology of the Fall of Man theologically justified democracy as a profound response to the human condition. While there is no precise theological parallel, Islam’s legal tradition provides room for interpretation within a framework of basic principles. It was noted that a major reason for the development of the shariah was to protect the people from the tyranny of rulers and governments: in this light, it can be seen that many Muslims want implementation of the shariah in order to create freedom against autocratic and repressive governments. Different groups, however, do mean different things when they call for the implementation of the shariah. This is not necessarily a bad thing: one panellist noted that there is a role for ‘constructive ambiguity’ in this area.

- On the subject of religious fundamentalism in Muslim diasporas and its relationship to Islamist movements in Muslim-majority countries, one speaker from the floor noted the trade-off between human rights and security, and felt that there was a possibility that freedom of speech in the West could create space for extremism. The example was given of students travelling to Western countries from Muslim-majority countries, becoming radicalised in the West, and then returning to their countries of origin with a radicalised political agenda. However, members of the panel noted that individual, personal Islamisation is far more common than political radicalisation. Radical groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir are very small, and the idea that large numbers of students (wherever they come from) are being radicalised towards violence is not true; there are also those who come to Europe or America as students and move away from Islam. For many Muslims in Europe (for example), Islamic principles can create the space for the creation of a Muslim European identity: a literalist and exclusive reading of Islam is not the only possibility for the creation of a sense of Muslim identity. One panellist noted that it is easy to overestimate the importance of one shared aspect of identity and ignore others, especially when the exaggerated aspect is religion—but religion is not necessarily the most important thing. For example, a Muslim Palestinian is likely to feel closer to a Christian Palestinian than to a Muslim Indian. We would do as well to recognise these complexities.

**SUMMATION**

The conference’s closing remarks were made by Baroness Williams of Crosby, who regretted that a vibrant conference on an under-explored subject was coming to an end, and expressed the hope that the report on the conference would be distributed to other learned bodies elsewhere in UK.

Baroness Williams noted that the conference began by examining the religious basis on which we discuss Muslim-Christian dialogue. This had conveyed a useful point: that there is a tendency in the West to see Islam as a homogeneous force, and a failure to understand fine distinctions. This failure comes from being poorly-informed. The speaker suspected that most British citizens know little about Islamic civilization and its contribution to world culture, and hoped that school curricula such as the English National Curriculum would begin to take more account of Islam and other religions.

Having identified the recurrent theme of the day’s discussions that Islam is not homogeneous and unnuanced, Baroness Williams raised the question of how much the issues discussed by Professor Ramadan turned on specific periods of interpretation of Holy Qur’an. She had been told by Malaysian (female) Islamic scholars that in past the Qur’an was interpreted in a way much more favourable to women, and noted that such flexibility may well be useful to us. The speaker also emphasised that for Western societies to understand Islam there must also be a dialogue among clerics, not just politicians and social scientists.

In the context of such a dialogue, Baroness Williams offered a comment on the issue of the Danish cartoons. In Britain, she said, we almost forget that freedom of expression must be balanced by human respect. If we understood this we would understand why the cartoons trampled on other humans’ sense of what is sacred. She drew a comparison with her own experience as a Roman Catholic, who often hears comments about Christ that are hard to take: while Christians may become inured to this, we should understand that others may find similar comments hard to accept.

Baroness Williams then compared simplistic understandings of Islam, which ignore its complexities, with the equally simplistic understanding of democracy that we have in the West. One common model for democracy is that of Attic Greece; but we rarely stop to think that this was the democracy of a relatively small minority. It excluded women (say, 50% of population) and slaves (25%). The remaining, ‘democratic’ 25% has become for us a model of
democracy, but by excluding women, slaves, and foreigners it bypassed problems that we in plural societies must face—and created a very distorted ‘democracy’. Another frequently cited model for democracy is that of the French Revolution—whose leaders, having asserted the *droits de l’homme*, ridiculed the idea of the *droits de la femme*. These powerful but exclusive models for democracy must be regarded critically.

Moving on to another recurrent theme of the day’s discussions, that of the West’s hypocrisy and double standards regarding democratisation in the Middle East, Baroness Williams cited a number of particular cases. The first was Iraq, where the Western public should be concerned not only about the war but about the mishandling of the occupation. The occupation has been deeply corrupt: $18.8 billion of Iraqi money has disappeared, a sum dwarfing the oil-for-food scandal, with no systematic accounting done. This gives the lie to claims that democracy will bring good governance, transparency, and an end to corruption. In this light, what is surprising is that the occupation has not bred more trouble. Meanwhile, a religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani—who asserts the right of clerics to exert moral influence on politics while denying that they should themselves hold political power—has played a key role in promoting democracy: for example by ensuring that the new constitution would be written not by foreign experts but by an elected constituent assembly of Iraqis, and then ratified by a referendum.

Another example of Western double standards is in relation to Iran. Regardless of our attitudes to Iran’s current government and its proclamations on Israel, Western governments should acknowledge that Iran is surrounded by hostile nuclear powers—not all of which have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran has legitimate nuclear security concerns, yet the issue of whether substantial security guarantees should be offered in order to persuade Iran not to pursue nuclear weapons has never been properly addressed.

Baroness Williams concluded with remarks on three important areas of policy. The first was education. She noted that in some Islamic countries, of which Pakistan is an important example, the government funds available for education had in the past been cut under pressure from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. This had surely increased the role and influence of madrasas, some of which offer a good education while others are deeply fundamentalist. Western governments now have to deal with the problems that this has created—and accept their own responsibility in contributing towards those problems.

Next, the speaker discussed the EU’s relations with Turkey, stating that for all its mistakes the EU method of building democracy—encouraging voluntary reform with the ‘carrot’ of EU membership—has been wildly successful in extending democracy across Europe. It can also strengthen democracy in Turkey, a Muslim country, and will do so in another, albeit smaller, Muslim country when Bosnia achieves membership—which it will do long before Turkey.

Baroness Williams’s final comments were on the ‘war on terror’. After weeks of debate on the terrorism bill in parliament, she fully agreed that the war on terror is gradually eroding civil liberties. Mercifully, many problematic laws have been blocked by the independent judiciary which is at the moment upholding the fundamental rules of law—unlike the executive. The situation in the US is even worse, with the administration using intimidation, wire-tapping and home searches without warrant. The President’s ‘war powers’ give the President unprecedented power—but the ‘war on terror’, which Donald Rumsfeld tells us could last 50 years or more, is a war against an unidentified enemy in unnamed territories. In order to prevent the excessive accumulation of executive power, and the erosion of democracy in the ‘democratic’ West, the war on ‘terror’ should be renamed a war on organised terrorism wherever it may exist.
APPENDIX ONE
PROGRAMME

09.30 Registration and Coffee

10.00 RSE Welcome
Sir Michael Atiyah OM FRS PRSE HonFREng HonFMedSci
President, the Royal Society of Edinburgh

10.05 Session 1: Scene setting
Professor Yasir Suleiman FRSE
Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Director, Edinburgh Institute for the Study of the
Arab World and Islam, University of Edinburgh

10.15 Session 2: Existing forms of democracy in Muslim countries as seen from a
seat of world power
Frances Guy
Head of Engaging with the Islamic World Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

10.40 Question and answer session

11.15 Tea and coffee

11.45 Session 3: The challenge of democracy in the Middle East
Professor John Esposito
Professor of Religion and International Affairs, the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-
Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA

12.45 Question and answer session

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Session 4: The diversity of forms of both democracy and Islam and their
compatibilities and incompatibilities
Professor Tariq Ramadan
Visiting Fellow at St Anthony’s College, Oxford and Senior Research Fellow, Lokahi Foundation,
London

15.00 Question and answer session

15.15 Discussion panel
Involving all speakers

15.45 Summation
Baroness Shirley Williams of Crosby

16.15 Drinks reception
APPENDIX TWO

SPEAKERS’ BIOGRAPHIES

Professor John Esposito
University Professor of Religion and International Affairs, The Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University

John L. Esposito is University Professor as well as Professor of Religion and International Affairs and of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University. Previously, he was Loyola Professor of Middle East Studies and Director of the Center for International Studies at the College of the Holy Cross.

Founding Director of Georgetown’s Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding: History and International Affairs in the Walsh School of Foreign Service, he has served as President of the Middle East Studies Association of North America and of the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies as well as a consultant to governments, multinational corporations, and the media worldwide.


Frances Guy
Head of Engaging with the Islamic World Group, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Frances Guy is currently Head of the Engaging with the Islamic World Group at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. One of the key objectives of the group is to increase understanding of and engagement with Muslim countries and communities and to work with them to promote peaceful, political, economic and social reform.

Guy served as HM Ambassador to Yemen from 2001 to 2004 and has also had diplomatic postings in Ethiopia, Sudan, Thailand and France. She studied Arabic in Jordan and Syria, and International Relations at Aberdeen University, Johns Hopkins University and Carleton University, Ottawa.

Professor Tariq Ramadan
Visiting Fellow at Oxford St Anthony’s College and Senior Research Fellow, Lokahi Foundation

Professor Tariq Ramadan holds an MA in Philosophy and French literature and a PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Geneva. In Cairo, Egypt he received one-on-one intensive training in classic Islamic scholarship from Al-Azhar University scholars.

Tariq Ramadan has resigned from the post of Professor of Islamic Studies at Notre Dame University (Classic Department) and Luce Professor at the Kroc Institute (Religion Conflict and Peacebuilding). He is currently Senior Research Fellow at Lokahi Foundation and visiting Professor at Oxford St Anthony’s College. Through his writings and lectures he has contributed substantially to the debate on the issues of Muslims in the West and Islamic revival in the Muslim world. He is active at both the academic and grassroots levels, lecturing extensively throughout the world on social justice and dialogue between civilizations.

Professor Yasir Suleiman FRSE
Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Director, Edinburgh Institute for the Study of the Arab World and Islam, University of Edinburgh

Professor Yasir Suleiman FRSE is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Edinburgh University and Director of the Edinburgh Institute for the Study of the Arab World and Islam.

Previous positions held by Yasir include Head of the Planning Unit of Asian and Modern European Languages and Member of the University Court at the University of Edinburgh, as well as that of Vice-President and Chair of Council at The British Society of Middle Eastern Studies.

Yasir’s main areas of research interest include Arabic sociolinguistics, Arabic grammatical theory and linguistics, translation studies, Arab intellectual history, nationalism and cultural politics, teaching Arabic as a foreign language, and Arabic literature.

Baroness Shirley Williams of Crosby

Baroness Williams of Crosby was born in 1930, and for 35 years was a member of the Labour Party. As Shirley Williams she entered journalism in the 1950s, became
General Secretary of the Fabian Society in 1960, and in 1964 was elected MP for Hitchin. She was a member of the Wilson and Callaghan Governments in the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in her period as Secretary of State for Education and Science, and Paymaster General, from 1976 to 1979. She lost her seat in the 1979 election.

By 1980 it was clear that the Labour Party was veering into left-wing extremism, and in 1981 Baroness Williams co-founded the Social Democratic Party as one of the “Gang of Four”, becoming the first MP elected for the SDP in 1981 when she became member for Crosby. From 1982 and 1988 she was President of the new party. When, after the 1987 election, it became clear that the two parties should merge she strongly supported the creation of what was to become the Liberal Democrats.

Shirley Williams lost her seat in the 1983 General Election following boundary changes. Outside Parliament she increased her academic commitments, as Public Service Professor of Elective Politics at the John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University from 1988 to 2000. She has held lecturing posts at Cambridge, and in Princeton, Berkeley and Chicago in the US, and continues to lecture. Shirley Williams was married to the late Professor Richard Neustadt, a leading US political scientist. Previously she was married to the philosopher Bernard Williams.

She re-entered Parliament in 1993 as a peer, and chose to use her old constituency of Crosby in her title: Baroness Williams of Crosby. She served as the Party’s spokesperson on Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the Lords from 1998 to 2001. She was elected Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords in 2001 and served in this position until September 2004.
APPENDIX THREE
PARTICIPANT LIST

Mr Aniss Abazid
Student/ MSc by research in Politics, University of Edinburgh

Mr Hazzaa Al-Hasher
Head of Islamic Dept & Head of Media, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia

Ms Mina Al-Oraibi
Newspaper Correspondent

Mr Kenneth Arthur
Principal Teacher, Menzieshill High School

†Sir Michael Atiyah OM FRS HonFREng HonFMedSci HonFRSE PRSE

Mr Dadodjan Azimov
Student, Institute of Middle East, Central Asia and Caucasus Studies, University of St Andrews

Mr Fraser Brown
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Stephen Burge
Student

Mr Simon Burton
Chevening Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr Andrew Campbell
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mrs Caroline E S Carr- Locke
Historian

Mr Adam Cook
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Dr T Dalyell FRSE
Rector of Edinburgh University

Ms Elspeth Davey
Church Relations Officer, General Synod Office

Dr Alhagi Manta Drammeh
Lecturer, AI-Maktoum Institute

Mr Robert Dunn
International Division, Scottish Executive

Mr John Edward
Head of Office, European Parliament Office in Scotland

Sir Gerald Elliot FRSE

*Professor John Esposito
University Professor of Religion & International Affairs, The Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University

Mr Edward French
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Ronald Guild

Dr Shirley Guthrie
Lecturer, Islamic Art

*Ms Frances Guy
Head of Engaging with the Islamic World Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr Alastair Hall
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Ms Kifah Hanna
Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh

Professor R Hillenbrand FRSE
Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Department of Fine Art, University of Edinburgh

Professor C Hillenbrand FRSE
Professor of Islamic History, Department of Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh

Right Reverend R F Holloway FRSE

Mr Mohd Rahdi Ibrahim
Student

Ms Lesley Irving
Team Leader, Race, Religion, and Refugee Intergration Team, Scottish Executive

Miss Aksana Ismailkekova
Student, Edinburgh University

Mr Noorhuda Ismal
Student, St Andrews University

Mr Nassim Itani
Aljazeera Television

Mr Mazhar Khan

* Denotes Speaker / ** Denotes Chairman
Miss Souhad Khriesat  
Postgraduate Student, University of Edinburgh

Mr Matthew Kirkwood  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Fahad Kordi  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Ahmed Kordi  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Timothy Krysiek  
Marshall Scholar, Director St Andrews Energy Security Unit, School of International Relations, University of St Andrews

Dr M D Linklater FRSE  
Columnist, *The Times & Scotland on Sunday*

Mrs Helen Maclean  
Dental Surgeon

Mr Robin Macpherson  
Teacher, Merchiston Castle School

Dr Gabriele Marranci  
Lecturer in the Anthropology of Islam, School of Divinity, Religious Studies, & Philosophy, College of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Aberdeen

Mr Barry Marston  
Head of Department, Islamic Media Team, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Ms Shirvani Matharu  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr Sergei Mikhailenko  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Christian Milton  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Andrew Piner  
Political Analyst, Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies

Mr Ian Powell  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Miss Parvina Raichimova  
Scholar, International Relations, St Andrews University

*Professor Tariq Ramadan*  
Senior Research Fellow, Visiting Fellow at Oxford St Anthony’s College, Lokahi Foundation

Dr Kamran Rastegar  
Lecturer in Arabic and Persian, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh

Rev Donald Reid  
Convener, Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, Scottish Episcopal Church

Professor J S Richardson FRSE  
Emeritus Professor of Classics, Department of Classics, University of Edinburgh

Mr Colin Rogerson  
Principal Teacher (Religious Studies), Balerno High School

Mr Calum Russell  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr George Russell  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Tony Salvatori  
Media, British Satellite News

Mr Kamuran Samar  
Media Correspondent, Cihan News Agency

Mr Andrew Sarle  
Education Officer, CAIRS (Church Agency for Interfaith Relations Scotland, University of Edinburgh

Ms Jennifer Scarce

Mr Andreas Sculze  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Robin Silk  
Teacher, Merchiston Castle School

*Professor Y Suleiman FRSE*  
Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Director, Edinburgh Institute for the Study of the Arab World and Islam, University of Edinburgh

Ms Mokhira Suyarkulova  
Postgraduate Student, International Relations, University of St Andrews

Miss Tala Sweiss  
Student (OSI/Chevening/University of Edinburgh Scholar), University of Edinburgh/ British Council Scotland

Mr Michael Swinburn  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

* Denotes Speaker / ** Denotes Chairman
Mr Graeme Thomas  
Head of UK Outreach Public Diplomacy Group, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mrs Aziza Umarova  
Postgraduate student, University of St Andrews

Rev Dr James Walker  
Chaplain, University of St Andrews

Mr Philip Werner  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

Mr Benjamin White  
Teaching Fellow (Modern Middle Eastern History), Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Edinburgh

Mr Bruce Whitehead  
Media, British Satellite News

*Baroness Shirley Williams of Crosby

Mr Ian Yeoman  
Scenario Planning Research Manager, VisitScotland

Mr Andrew Young  
Student, Merchiston Castle School

* Denotes Speaker / ** Denotes Chairman
The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is an educational charity, registered in Scotland. Independent and non-party-political, we are working to provide public benefit throughout Scotland and by means of a growing international programme. The RSE has a peer-elected, multidisciplinary Fellowship of 1400 men and women who are experts within their fields.

The RSE was created in 1783 by Royal Charter for “the advancement of learning and useful knowledge”. We seek to provide public benefit in today’s Scotland by:

- Organising lectures, debates and conferences on topical issues of lasting importance, many of which are free and open to all
- Conducting independent inquiries on matters of national and international importance
- Providing educational activities for primary and secondary school students throughout Scotland
- Distributing over £1.7 million to top researchers and entrepreneurs working in Scotland
- Showcasing the best of Scotland’s research and development capabilities to the rest of the World
- Facilitating two-way international exchange to enhance Scotland’s international collaboration in research and enterprise
- Emphasising the value of educational effort and achievement by encouraging, recognising and rewarding it with scholarships, financial and other support, prizes and medals
- Providing expert information on Scientific issues to MSPs & Researchers through the Scottish Parliament Science Information Service

This report reflects opinions expressed by participants in a specific event. It does not, however, necessarily represent the views of the RSE Council, nor the Society’s Fellowship.