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Recently, there have been several meetings and dialogues amongst Muslim and Jewish religious leaders in both France and Britain to coordinate a peaceful coexistence imposed by the conditions of staying in the West. How do scholars in the Islamic East view these dialogues? Will they be reflected on our reality in light of the political crisis we live in, with the Jewish occupation and arrogance in Israel against our brothers in Palestine? How far do we accept such dialogues? Will Muslims ultimately gain anything of such dialogues?

Al-Risalah newspaper asked His Eminence Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah, the Vice-President of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, the President of the Global Centre for Renewal and Guidance, member of the Islamic Fiqh Academy, and the Mauritanian former Minister of Justice, about his opinion on this subject. His response was as follows: “A single ruling on the dialogue with Jews cannot be generalized. The dialogue conducted between the Muslim and Jewish communities across Europe and USA is natural, especially if they are citizens of the same state. For the sake of coexistence, citizenship and a common interest in stabilizing their country through peace, they resort to dialogue amongst themselves. Moreover, if the Muslim communities avoid such a dialogue, this may cause them trouble.”

Bin Bayyah added: “It is natural for Muslims to respond to dialogue if they are invited to do so. This is something positive and is required. Additionally, we should not impose any tutelage on Muslim minorities in the West. They are responsible for their own actions, they understand the importance of dialogues that are in their best interests and can distinguish those dialogues held for false and malicious propaganda. This approach is for the dialogue between Muslim minorities and the Jews of the West.

“As for the dialogue between Muslims and Jews in the Arab world, this is a more controversial matter. It depends upon the discretion of countries and how the Jews in question deal with the Palestinian cause. These countries must take into account the policy of opening dialogue channels with the Jewish community. For instance, there are Arab countries that have opened channels of dialogue and established diplomatic relations with Israel, while other countries still refuse to open any such dialogue with Jews. There are many attempts by Jewish organizations to open bridges of dialogue with the Islamic countries. I was invited to one of these dialogues held by a French Jewish organization calling itself ‘Hommes de Parole’ (“Men of Words”) in Morocco. It appeared to me, however, that I had nothing to discuss with them, so I apologized and did not attend.”

Bin Bayyah went on to say: “The issue of dialogue in my opinion is dependent on the discretion of the higher authorities of scholars and rulers in the Arab and Muslim countries. It should be noted that dialogue in itself is not a problem; but dialogue with Jews needs to be considered carefully so that Muslims may not fall in the trap of cheap propaganda. Such dialogue neither helps nor has any benefit to Muslims, whether the parties that call for dialogue are private international or governmental Jewish organizations.”

Sheikh Bin Bayyah concluded by saying: *“The Muslims have to distinguish between dialogue with the Jews transgressing on our land and holy places, and the Jews opposing this occupation. That is, there is a small group of Jews in the world who have a humanistic approach. This group stands strongly against the Israeli occupation and the Zionist project in the region. Hence, there is no harm in opening a channel of constructive dialogue with them to the interest of the Muslims.*

“The same applies to the dialogue between Muslim minorities in the West and the Jews of their countries. However, opening a direct channel of dialogue with the transgressing Jews on our land is dependent on a number of factors. Namely, the discretion of the rulers and scholars in Muslim countries, and the aspects of interest for Islam, Muslims and the Palestinian cause, away from all personal interests.”



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