

Chairman of icom-Europe

Chairman of icom-Arab

Director of Dialog-Department in Auswärtiges Amt der BRD

Honored heads of delegations

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear guests

It gives me a great pleasure to speak in this important workshop for which icom-Europe and icom-Arab have called, to discuss during several days ways and measure how to enhance cooperation in the realm of museums between European and Arab countries, as this Cooperation is a concrete approach to deepen understanding of each other, since museums are not only places where civilizations and cultures are displayed to visitors Museums are in fact molding area for different cultures and civilizations.

When I talk in this meeting my memory goes back to my previous occupation as director for the culture department in the ALECSO (Arab League organization for Education culture and science in Tunisia). We had a fruitful Cooperation with icom-Europe and icom-Arab. This Cooperation should go on and should give us all living examples of the reality, that we are not only neighbors but we have same human cultural heritage and roots to which all countries each in different epochs have paid their contributions.

Toby E. Huff writes in his book, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, Cambridge University: "From the eighth Century to the end of the fourteenth Arab Science was the most advanced Science in the world. In virtually every field of endeavor in Astronomy, Alchemy, Mathematics, Medicine, Optics and so forth.

Arabic Scientists (That is, Middle Eastern individuals primarily using the Arab Language but including Arabs, Iranians, Christians, Jews and others) were in the fore front of scientific advance.

From my Country, Syria, Saint Paul set out to spread the light of Christianity throughout the world, we are not only proud of our Arabic and Islam cultures but also proud for being a permanent incubator for treasuring the legacy of interaction among Civilizations, caring for the "other" and up holding the sublime values of justice and peace.

We considered the Arabic participation in Frankfurt International Book Fair as well as the days of Arabic World at the Bundestag and many important cultural events as real opportunities for obliterating the many misconceptions related to our image and the image of our Culture, religion and Civilization and finally for re-establishing, enhancing and strengthening the links between the Arabic-Islamic world and European Countries on the solid Ground of truly humanist Values of Justice, Freedom, Democracy and Peace.

I had the honor to be present by the opening Ceremony of “Saladin and the Crusaders” exhibition at Oldenburg. This sort of activities is very essential especially in these days to give an example how people and individuals should live together conflictless and peacefully, and to consider all three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) equal as in their spiritual message, calling for equality peace and better life for all peoples and to remove racism animosity and wars,

The Arabic and Islamic Countries are facing serious Challenges to catch up the ever fast moving development Process taking place at all levels of life in our globalized world. We stand now at a crossroad, and have to choose the most challenging alternative which is the general development of our societies. We think that one of the most important component in this process is to enhance our learning Systems in order to develop the social Potential and to secure a better life for our peoples.

We can't achieve our goals without the support of the international community. We hope to revive our strong ties with European countries and form a well functioning partnership that works towards prosperity for all the Nations of the Middle East, Europe and the whole World.

It is therefore very important to clarify the picture objectively and in a balanced manner, as the picture of the Arabs and the Islamic Culture has suffered a great deal after the horrifying and bloody events of September 11th which we strictly condemned, and we are categorically against any kind of terrorist Attacks that target civilian life's. We consider terrorism is a devil that should be fought against to get rid of this phenomenal that jeopardises the human life.

It is on the other hand unfair to accuse the Arabs and the Moslems and even Islam of being aggressive and having tendencies towards terrorism and violence.

Some Western media have persisted in quoting several Verses of the Holy Koran to prove the deep inclination in the hearts and minds of Moslems towards severity and terrorism, after taking those verses out of their general context to give tendentious explanations and biased accusations against the Arab Islamic Culture.

Religion is still in Arab and Islamic Countries a substantial element in the formation of Culture and one of the main supports on which the human behavior lies to some extent it governs the relations inside the society. Misunderstanding of this fact can lead to Contradictious and that exactly what happened in terms of the caricatures matter that took place some weeks ago.

The objective reading of the Islamic teachings can reveal the peace and tolerance that Islam calls for.

The Declaration of the principles of Tolerance issued by the member states of the UNESCO Nov. 16th 1995, the first paragraph of article number one points that tolerance means to respect and appreciate the rich diversity of the World Cultures and accept the different Patterns and Ways of expression of the Humankind.

The central point in tolerance is the principle of respecting and appreciating the cultural diversity of the world, in which we live. It is a principle that had practical examples in the Arab Culture throughout its History they had been a result of the geographic situation occupied by the Arab World being it a connecting link between the Cultures of surrounding Countries which necessarily affect Arab Culture and are affected by it in varying degrees. This fact enables the Arabic Islamic world to be open on the whole external world and to exercise cultural exchange based on Comprehension respect and a knowledge.

In this regard a koranic verse cites: “We have made you peoples and tribes become acquainted with one another”. Acquaintde re-acquieres accepting the other which in its turn imposes the necessity is respect the believes and faiths of the others and hence acknowledge their prophets, and apostles and praise them, so not differentiate between them. This is climax of tolerance which leads to peace among different religions.

We have to exchange thoughts and imply acceptance of others thought. The saying of Ibn Arabi, the Sheikh of Sufism, which became a part of the cultural

rhetoric, at least in some sectors of the Arab Societies, shows respect to all religions, Hence, this is the harmony and the accordance in diversity for which the UNESCO Declaration called for.

My heart came to accept every picture.

A prairie for Islam and a monastery for Christians.

A home for pagans and a Kaiba for the circumambulate.

And Bible sheets and Koran.

I take love as my religion where so ever it goes.

For love is my religion an faith.

This is the climax of tolerance vis`a`vis other beliefs so that love would prevail among its followers, and love would be the strong linking factor among peoples, despite differences and variations of their cultures, believes, and ways of lives.

These two values, tolerance and peace should be encouraged in our relation with each other, and this can only occur through improving an effective dialogue.

Both Christians and Jews plaid an important role in education and bringing and transcribing the Greek, Persian, Latin, and Sanskrit Cultures. This would not have been possible without the tolerant relations, without the mutual respect and the feeling off security and peace.

The story of the Khaliph Omer Ben El-Khattab who abstained from praying in a church in Jerusalem when called to pray there fearing that this act would be taken a pretext to transfer the church into a mosque one day, is a well-known story. The Khaliph, who respected Christianity as a religion, prayed on the outside stairs of the church because churches are a home of prayer and worship exactly like mosques.

Finally, let me finish my speech by saying that there is nothing more Common in the Arab daily rhetoric across the Arab world than the expression saying: he who is tolerant is generous or accept the apology of he who comes to the door of your house, which is a simple expression of the Koranic principle which says: if they incline towards peace incline for it.

Let us work together towards a peaceful future, where dialogue, tolerance, progress and fruitful Cooperation dominate. This Workshop is surely a important milestone of this Cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen I thank you for your kind attention wishing your workshop every success!