



The Nation's Mosque Statement

Leaders of the world's largest Islamic and Evangelical organizations establish alliance with African American Muslims to promote human dignity and equality worldwide

**“God Needs No Defense:
Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations in the 21st Century”**

Imam Talib Shareef: “We are against weaponizing identity”

WASHINGTON, DC, July 13, 2021: Major faith leaders from around the world gathered at Masjid Muhammad, known as “The Nation’s Mosque,” to announce the establishment of a global alliance that aims to promote human dignity and equality.

In a signed statement, Muslim, Christian and Jewish leaders said their alliance “seeks to prevent the political weaponization of identity; curtail the spread of communal hatred; promote solidarity and respect among the diverse people, cultures and nations of the world; and foster the emergence of a truly just and harmonious world order, founded upon respect for the equal rights and dignity of every human being.”

Participants in the unlikely religious summit included Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of the Supreme Council of Indonesia’s Nahdlatul Ulama, the world’s largest Muslim organization with 90 million followers; Bishop Thomas Schirmacher, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), which represents 600 million Protestants in 140 countries; Imam Talib Shareef of The Nation’s Mosque; Rabbi David Saperstein, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom; prominent U.S. evangelical figure, Reverend Johnnie Moore; and HRH Prince Gharios El Chemor of Ghassan Al-Nu’man VIII.

Inaugurating the alliance, the event at The Nation’s Mosque — a community of the late Imam W. Deen Mohammed and the first mosque in the United States built by descendants of enslaved African Americans — included the launch of a book celebrating Muslim–Christian shared values.

The book, *[God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations in the 21st Century](#)* — an anthology of essays written by preeminent Muslim and Christian scholars affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama’s Humanitarian Islam movement and the World Evangelical Alliance — was dedicated to Bishop Thomas Schirmacher in honor of his recent appointment as Secretary General & CEO of the WEA. In April of 2020, NU and WEA leaders, including Schirmacher, established a Humanitarian Islam/WEA Joint Working Group to demonstrate the theological legitimacy and efficacy of Christians and Muslims actively cooperating for the benefit of all humanity.

The book was jointly published by the [Institute for Humanitarian Islam](#), the [Center for Shared Civilizational Values](#) and the [World Evangelical Alliance](#) Theological Commission.

Imam Talib Shareef, of The Nation’s Mosque, opened the event with a speech in which he said:

Bayt ar-Rahmah li ad-Da’wa al-Islamiyah Rahmatan li al-‘Alamin
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Humanity is one and we share a common identity that dates back to Adam. When he was created, Adam did not have a racial identity. How could he? He didn't have an ethnic identity. How could he? He didn't have a national identity. How could he? And right now, part of what's happening is that identities are being weaponized. Identities are being weaponized, but we see from Almighty God that when he created us we didn't have any of these identities. We had just one identity... the first identity, given by the One who created human beings [and] from that identity came the many beautiful, wonderful, diverse expressions of human life.

All of these identities are from Adam, and all have contributed to the beauty and strength of our nations and of our world.... Humanitarian Islam is focusing on that human identity first. God has said that if you focus on that identity first, that identity will become strong enough to support all of the other identities that are [in conflict with] each other... across the globe right now. And again, we are against weaponizing identity....

We know that in our sister faith, Christianity — more so than any other faith — there is a picture of a mother and a child. Often you will see that child [held] right by the heart, right by the heart. That picture takes us to where this alliance has its foundation. That is a picture of compassion. That is a picture of love. And we know that this is where the WEA has its root. We know that Jesus said, “I leave one commandment: that you love one another.”

The womb of the woman is called *rahim* in Arabic. In the book and the documents that you are going to see today you will see the word *rahmah* [universal love and compassion]. Now you heard us open up with the words *al-rahman al-rahim* [the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful]. The same thing associated with God's compassion and mercy is associated with the mother.

This community from Indonesia — the largest group of Muslims in the world right now — is at the foundation of human life. They have connected with this [Imam W. Deen Mohammed] Community here in America, a community that has struggled to see its identity free. We have found our brothers. We used to have a newspaper in the movement [whose logo] had [an image of] hands reaching out across the globe. That's now become a reality. I am not only speaking of Muslims. We also are connecting with our Christian brothers and sisters, the WEA, who have a presence in over 140 countries. They have a heavy presence in Africa. So [Masjid Muhammad] is a very appropriate place for this alliance to be launched, with *The Nation's Mosque Statement...* and it's taking place here, at this location, in America's capital city of Washington, DC.

“Let's not allow the past to determine our future,” urged NU General Secretary Yahya Cholil Staquf. “We of Nahdlatul Ulama, The Nation's Mosque and the World Evangelical Alliance are working hand-in-hand to establish a firm and lasting foundation for mutual respect, cooperation and peaceful co-existence between our respective faith communities worldwide.”

Addressing possible concerns among evangelical Christians — who are often reluctant to engage in dialogue with Muslims — Bishop Schirmacher stated:

When we work hand-in-hand against extremists in both our faith traditions and in favor of the common good of our societies, we do not minimize our truth claims. Rather, we

are each following our truth claims, which include the belief that God wants peace and justice for all. God’s truth will prevail in the end, and we should not act as if discussing what we believe — in depth and in the public square — might endanger His truth.

Shortly after the launch, global affairs expert Dr. James Dorsey published an [article](#) titled “Muslim-Evangelical alliance strives to create religious and political middle ground.” Dr. Dorsey observed that “this unprecedented alliance between Muslims and Evangelicals takes on added significance in a world in which human rights are on the defensive,” and

potentially could create a platform for voices in the Muslim world, particularly the Middle East, in which significant segments of the youth who constitute a majority of the population, increasingly reject state-controlled, ritualistic forms of religion and distrust clerics subservient to the government. It could also offer a middle ground on which elements of the secular centre-right and centre-left could meet based on shared values in deeply polarized parts of the world, particularly in the West...

Nahdlatul Ulama’s opportunity to turn its alliance with the WEA into a vehicle of change in both the Muslim world and the West is enhanced by the fact that religious reform in rival contenders for religious soft power like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Egypt is top-down by decree or changes in [statutory law] rather than, more sustainably, bottom-up and anchored in religious law and jurisprudence.

In an [article](#) titled “The World’s Largest Muslim Organization Just Honored Evangelicals,” religious freedom expert Dr. Paul Marshall described the wider significance and impact of the Humanitarian Islam/WEA alliance:

Many inter-religious partnerships can be akin to public relations exercises, and many religious declarations express fine words and sentiments that in the end come to little. But this remarkable partnership has produced fruit in joint projects in Africa and elsewhere.

The event was [livestreamed](#) to members of the African American Muslim community gathered in mosques, Islamic centers and homes throughout North America and abroad. C. Holland Taylor — who co-founded the Humanitarian Islam movement and Center for Shared Civilizational Values — moderated a panel discussion during which he observed:

From our perspective, the W. Deen Mohammed Community and The Nation’s Mosque are a concrete manifestation of *rahmah* — of God’s universal love, grace and compassion. Of course we know the history. Imam Talib is from Wilmington, North Carolina. I am from North Carolina. We know the history.

There’s not an African American in this room who does not know from their own genetic and family experience the legacy of slavery in America. But what we have encountered within this community is a spirit of kindness and forgiveness which shows greatness of soul, which shows the greatness of the Islam that you have embraced, and which offers a model to humanity as to how the world can move forward in reconciliation and forgiveness for the transgressions of the past and inspire others to rise to the highest common denominator of our religions, and of our respective civilizations. I want to give a special thanks to Imam Talib, to Sister Fitrah, and to all our brothers and sisters from The Nation’s Mosque.

When requested by the panel's moderator to share his view of the Imam W. Deen Mohammed Community, NU General Secretary KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf replied:

In 2015 we created an expression that encapsulates the nature of our religious and cultural identity in Indonesia: "*Islam Nusantara*." *Nusantara* is a Javanese term for the East Indies Archipelago, so *Islam Nusantara* refers to the Islamic civilization that developed in *Nusantara* over the past 500 years. The former Chairman of our Supreme Council, Kyai Haji Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, has provided a simple explanation of this complex socio-cultural reality: *Islam Nusantara* means that we are Indonesians who happen to embrace Islam, rather than Muslims who happen to live in Indonesia [while rejecting the Republic of Indonesia's constitutional foundation as a multi-religious and pluralistic nation state].

When we of Nahdlatul Ulama first met our brothers and sisters from the Imam W. Deen Mohammed Community, it was like gazing into a mirror. We realized that members of the W. Deen Mohammed Community are patriotic Americans who embrace Islam. Islam has not changed their nature as Americans. Rather, Islam has inspired them to become better Americans. This is what we regard as the true function of Islam.

Asked for his perspective on the alliance between Nahdlatul Ulama and The Nation's Mosque, Imam Talib replied:

We were very well received in Indonesia [in 2018 and] saw something in this organization [Nahdlatul Ulama] that we haven't seen in other Muslim countries...

A lot of declarations [have emerged in recent years from the Middle East], but these declarations are not consistent to what we were seeing in those other societies... But in Indonesia the *Nusantara Statement* is consistent with what we see in the society and is certainly at the center of Nahdlatul Ulama... It's not just a declaration, they don't just make statements and sign statements. They live the statements.

Our scriptures say "and the word became flesh." You can see the words have become flesh in this movement called Nahdlatul Ulama. They are living the excellence. And the Qur'an says "take the best thereof," and that's what we see happening with this organization... We want more of the world to look at this model, to look at this relationship. Because these are the things that Almighty God wants us to do.... Almighty God is showing us through these relationships how we should be behaving and interacting with each other as we move on towards Him in our destiny. Thank you.

Muslim Journal, which is published by the Imam W. Deen Mohammed (IWDM) Community, covered the event in its July 30, 2021 edition, with an extensive, one-and-a-half-page [article](#).

As noted by the *Muslim Journal*, "The Nation's Mosque was surprised and pleased to receive an unexpected visit from His Royal Highness Prince Gharios El Chemor of Ghassan Al-Nu'man VIII, the international sovereign head of the [Christian] Royal House of Ghassan... Ghassanid kings, emperors and princes ruled several Middle East regions from 220 CE until the mid-eighteenth century, a duration of over 1,500 years."

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*Spiritual leaders of Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama,
the world's largest Muslim organization;
the World Evangelical Alliance,
which represents 600 million Protestants in 140 countries;
and Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque, a community of
the late Imam W. Deen Mohammed, in Washington, DC,
the first mosque in the United States built
by descendants of enslaved African Americans,
call upon people of goodwill
of every faith and nation
to join in building a global alliance
founded upon shared civilizational values.*

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prevent the political weaponization of identity;
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