



ISLAM & LIBERTY NETWORK

Exploring and Promoting a Muslim Case for Freedom

Funding Appeal Document

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www.islamandlibertynetwork.org

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Islam and Liberty Network¹

Funding Appeal Document

Executive Summary

At the risk of generalizing, Muslim majority countries have quite limited economic, political, and religious freedoms compared with other advanced or developing countries. Many Muslims, in both Muslim majority and Muslim minority countries question whether Islam is compatible with a free society; a challenge also raised by many non-Muslims who are hostile to Islam. We believe that serious intellectual efforts are needed to demonstrate how Islam is compatible with the institutions of a free society. Poor quality thinking can only be changed by better thinking. We intend to promote intellectual change via an annual programme which comprises an international conference, an open-access journal, opinion articles, webinars, and a regional residential workshop. The estimated funds needed are in the range of US\$ 100,000 each year initially for a period of three years. Achieving this needs your help.

Who are we?

Islam and Liberty Network is registered as a non-profit foundation under the name “Istanbul Network for Liberty (L) Foundation” in Malaysia and is governed by an international board of directors, all of whom except for the part-time CEO give their time freely.

Our mission is to “explore and promote a Muslim case for freedom”, in the religious, economic, and political spheres through developing and disseminating knowledge and human resources.

What is the problem?

Islam is both a religion and a comprehensive code of conduct. Its interpretation has significant implications for the attitudes of Muslims and for the attitudes of the governments which rule them. In Muslim majority countries, societies which endorse, and practice religious, economic, and political freedom are far and few between. Furthermore, in the West Islam is perceived as antagonistic to the institutions of a free society.

One key reason arises from the history of Islamic civilization, which originally arose in an era of Muslim political dominance. Thus, Muslims today largely live with the same dominant frame of mind, narrative and legal code, which may be valid for its followers as a matter of belief, but is not relevant to addressing the practical social, economic, and political challenges and on-the-ground realities of today. Islam, the way it is largely practiced and understood today, has been perceived by both Muslims and non-Muslims as alien to the most

¹ Formerly known as Istanbul Network for Liberty.

fundamental value of modern civilization, which is freedom, notwithstanding that the high standards of personal accountability and God-fearing attitude that Islam prescribes need individual freedom and choice as an essential pre-requisite.

Why this problem matters?

The problem of the perceived antagonism between Islam and freedom has dire consequences for both Muslim majority societies and for the world at large. Not only do we observe high levels of authoritarianism, poverty, and religious bigotry in Muslim majority societies, we also witness waves of radicalization and violence elsewhere in the world associated with Islam. While this problem is not unique to Islam, with followers of other religions also exhibiting similar extremist and violent tendencies, what makes the Islamic connection a unique phenomenon is its global scale, political appeal and geo-strategic implications.

What others are doing? And why is it not working?

There are scores of individuals, institutions, and publications working in this domain. However, no one is particularly focused on what we consider to be the most fundamental problem - the gap between Freedom and Islam- in a manner that is intellectually rigorous, fully thought through, and properly grounded in the Islamic sources. There are growing numbers of deradicalization projects, but we consider them to be narrowly concentrated at the tactical level without a coherent, rigorous, and tested theory. Lastly, while there are individual voices of reform scattered around the world, there is no network bringing these voices together on one platform.

What we have done already?

As think tank leaders from many Muslim majority countries, we got together in 2011 in Istanbul. We agreed that all of us believed that freedom is not an alien concept for Islam, and that open societies, (with a strong commitment to individual liberty, the rule of law, the protection of private property, free markets, equality before law, free speech and limited government) are possible in Muslim majority countries - and are consistent with Islam. We named our grouping the Istanbul Network for Liberty, which has recently been renamed as the Islam and Liberty Network to eliminate the understandable but mistaken presumption from the old name that we are based in Turkey.

Since its foundation, the Network has organised five international conferences, which have been held in Morocco, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Turkey. About 400 intellectuals, academics and think tank leaders from 25 countries have participated in these conferences. These conferences have created an intellectual basis to further deepen a critical dialogue on the institutions of free society in a Muslim context. In 2016, a book “Islamic Foundations of a Free Society” was published comprising of a selection of papers presented in these conferences. This has been very well received and has already been translated into several additional languages beyond the original English.

What we plan to do to address the core problem?

The knowledge we produce, the public education we promote, and the human resources we cultivate, are focused on three distinct but related areas which are firmly embedded in the Islamic sources. These three areas are: Religious Freedom (freedom of religion and faith, expression and practice); Economic Freedom (open markets, voluntary exchange, private property); and Political Freedom (liberal democracy, rule of law and limited government).

Our **objectives** are to:

- Publish high quality scholarly papers and articles on Islam and liberty which are widely disseminated.
- Develop a vibrant network of public intellectuals, scholars, and researchers
- Create a network of institutions around the world to support our research and events
- Educate and train young researchers, writers, teachers and journalists working on Islam

We have an **annual programme**, which comprises of the following **activities**:

Annual International Conference

Our featured event is an international Conference bringing together scholars from around the world to discuss liberty and Islam. The cross-cutting areas of interest remain religious, economic and political freedom. The conference takes place over two full days, when 12-18 high quality papers are presented and debated. We have organised five international conferences since 2012. Most recent conference *Democratic Transitions in the Muslim World* was organised in Kuala Lumpur on 27-28 November 2017. Proceedings and papers from these conferences are available here: <http://istanbulnetwork.org/annual-international-conferences/>.

Islam and Liberty Webinars

Our Network has started a series of monthly Webinars in 2018 which feature a lively discussion of the intellectual dimensions of the relationship between Islam and liberty with a focus on religious, civil, political, and economic liberty in an Islamic context. Our programme for 2018 webinars is available here: <http://istanbulnetwork.org/islam-and-liberty-webinars/>.

Opinion Articles

We publish opinion articles to comment on current issues of interest of global significance from a scholarly perspective exploring the relationship between Islam and liberty. These articles are typically of 800 words and are written for a general audience. The articles are available here: <http://istanbulnetwork.org/articles-2/>.

Open Access Journal

There is little scholarly literature available on the institutions of a free society from an Islamic perspective, particularly in Muslim majority countries. To fill this gap, we intend to create and publish a bi-annual English language on line journal: “Islam, Liberty and Enterprise”. It will enable the development of a classical liberal Muslim theory, which will improve understanding of the relationship between Islam and freedom. Renowned journalist and author Mustafa Akyol has agreed to be on its editorial board.

Islam and Liberty Summer University

Islam and Liberty Summer University (ILSU) is a proposed week-long regional residential event, which will feature our core faculty and guest speakers giving lectures, workshops, and seminars. This exercise will take up critical aspects of the debate on intellectual foundations of freedom in Islam in religious, economic and political domains. The main participants will be young scholars affiliated with universities and research institutes working on relevant topics. The ILSU graduates will be expected to participate in our future projects involving research and public education by becoming fellows and alumni.

Target Audience

The primary target audience includes, but is not limited to, academics, researchers, think tank leaders, journalists, jurists, legislators, and media commentators engaged in discussion on the public interface of Islam. We reach out to our audience directly and indirectly using events, our website and newsletter, social media, and other publications.

What do we need?

We estimate that approximately US\$ 100,000 is needed each year to run our core programme. Within the budget, 30% of the funds are allocated for the International Conference, 25% for the Summer University/Regional Workshop, 25% for the journal, 10% for the Webinars and 10% for the Opinion Articles. All staff and overhead costs of the program will not exceed 30% of total costs.

We ask you to consider becoming either a recurring annual donor or a one-time donor. We are open to receiving funds, with priority to an annual commitment, both from individuals and organizations who broadly agree with our mission.

Your support will greatly help in directly addressing what we believe to be the most important issue facing Muslims worldwide. Please contact our CEO Ali Salman for more information at [ali at islamandlibertynetwork.org](mailto:ali@islamandlibertynetwork.org).

Annex-I: Examples of impact

Formation of New Think Tanks in Mali

At the second meeting in Istanbul in 2014 Joel Hirst, who was nation-building for the United Nations in Mali, met Nouh el Harmouzi, who as a result took a group from the Arab Center to undertake outreach work in Mali. After several visits the very active think tank Think Peace was founded and is now promoting freedom in Mali. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKdpFzZXoxA>

Another member of that first group that went from Morocco to Mali was Zineb ben Alla who subsequently formed another group in Mali, TICVE (The Transnational Initiative for Countering Violent Extremism). <http://www.ticve.org/> It has been active in Mali and also in the US and Morocco making the case for an end to violent extremism. They were subsequently invited to, to the UN in New York where they were able to make that case.

Starting Discussions in Bosnia

Admir Cavalic first came to our attention when he asked if the Istanbul Network might pay for his flight from Bosnia to the Istanbul Network meeting in Istanbul in 2013. He covered his room costs by sharing with a Bosnian friend. He got to know many like-minded individuals at that meeting and made significant interventions in the discussions. As a result of seeing him in action at the meeting, Network for a Free Society then agreed to support his group Multi during the following year with all the beneficial outcomes that flowed from it.

Book Tour for the author of “Early Islam and the Birth of Capitalism”

In February 2016, Istanbul Network in collaboration with IDEAS (Malaysia) organised a lecture tour by the historian Benedikt Koehler, author of “Early Islam and the Birth of Capitalism”. These activities included a colloquium on Islam and the Market Economy, public lectures at various institutes and universities, and a lecture on Islam and Capitalism hosted by Sekolah Pemikir Jalanan.

Publication of “Islamic Foundations of a Free Society”

In October 2016, the Institute of Economic Affairs published the book “Islamic Foundations of a Free Society”, edited by Dr Nouh El Harmouzie and Linda Whetstone. It was written by 13 Islamic scholars from countries as diverse as Afghanistan and the USA and aimed to inform those in the West who view Islam with fear and suspicion while also encouraging Muslims to remember and learn from their history of rich and pluralistic Islamic civilisations. Most of the papers were developed from presentations made at the annual conferences of the Istanbul Network for Liberty. It has been translated into Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Indonesian and Dari with the possibility of French to follow and can be downloaded free from the Institute of Economic Affairs website <https://iea.org.uk/publications/islamic-foundations-of-a-free-society/> or bought in hard copy through Amazon.

Part of Asia Liberty Forum in India

In February 2017 there was a debate on this subject at the Asia Liberty Forum in Mumbai with an audience of around 100, in which an exclusive panel was organised attended by the Chairman of Istanbul Network Wan Saiful Wan Jan.

Virtual Discussion Group with Students for Liberty

Beginning February 2017, the book was the topic of a session Students for Liberty online book discussion with Ali Salman as Discussion Leader and with 15 participants drawn mostly from the USA but also including other countries.

Improving Understanding in Europe

In March 2017, the subject was also the theme for one of the sessions at a seminar at St. Mary's University, Twickenham hosted by the Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society titled "Understanding Islam, and its relationship with a free society and a free economy".

Laying the Foundation in Malaysia

In April 2017, the Institute of Economic Affairs shipped 100 donated copies of the book to Noor Amin Ahmad, Director of the Institute for Leadership and Development Studies in Malaysia for some outreach events they were about to run. The first event was organised on 21st June 2017, where Dr. Maszlee Malik, one of the authors in the book, and Ali Salman of Istanbul Network for Liberty also spoke. This was organised at Institut Darul Ehsan, Selangor.



Talk on democracy and rule of law in Turkey at Kuala Lumpur

On 30th October 2016, Istanbul Network for Liberty organised a talk in Kuala Lumpur by Dr. Bican Sahin, who is the Chairman of the Freedom Research Association in Turkey and is also an associate professor at Hacettepe University. The event was attended by a mixed group including students, journalists, activists and diplomats. During his talk, Dr. Sahin spoke on the future of freedom, the rule of law, and democracy in Turkey in the context of the increasing social friction between pro-secular and pro-Islamist movements in the aftermath of Turkey's failed coup d'état.

Participation in the Arab Liberty Festival in Morocco

Our Programme Officer, Hakan Sahin attended the Arab Liberty Festival and Mena Think-Tank Training in Rabat, Morocco. He gave small speeches at the festival about the problems of centralized higher education and the importance of a market economy in Early Islam.

Istanbul Network for Liberty in Sarajevo

Istanbul Network for Liberty held a Session titled "Perspectives on Ideas of Free Society and Islam" at Open Fest in Sarajevo on 29th October 2016. The festival was organised by the collaboration of Association Multi, Atlas Foundation and European Students for Liberty. The session was chaired by Dr. Edo Omercevic, while speakers included Dr. Admir Cavalic, Ozlem Caglar Yilmaz and Hakan Sahin. Linda Whetstone introduced the recently published book by the Institute of Economic Affairs titled Islamic Foundations of a Free Society which she has edited together with Dr. Nouh El-Harmouzi.

Istanbul Network 5th International Conference in Media

Istanbul Network 5th International Conference "Democratic Transitions in the Muslim World" held on 27-28 November 2017 in Kuala Lumpur received media attention thus spreading the word further. Selective media links are mentioned here.

<https://www.atlasnetwork.org/news/article/malaysian-conference-debunks-pre-conceived-notions-on-compatibility-of-islam>

<http://www.freemalysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2017/12/16/debating-islam-and-democracy/>

<https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/27982/>

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-s-largest-muslim-organisation-warns-against-9460576>

Annex-II: Islam and Liberty Council

Mohammed Amin (Chairman)

Mohammed Amin was born in Pakistan but has lived in the UK since the age of 2. He is a Cambridge mathematics graduate, a chartered accountant, a chartered tax advisor and an associate member of the Association of Corporate Treasurers. Before retirement, he was a tax partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, their UK Head of Islamic Finance and a member of PwC's UK Supervisory Board. In retirement, Amin divides his time between several political and interfaith organisations, mentoring individuals, and writing and speaking in the media. His website www.mohammedamin.com contains most of his past writings and some of his media appearances.

Ali Salman (CEO)

Ali is an economist by training and author of "Discord between Social Justice and Economic Freedom in Islam". He is a founding member of Istanbul Network for Liberty and is currently based in Malaysia, where is Acting CEO of IDEAS. He is also the founder of Policy Research Institute of Market Economy (PRIME) - Pakistan's leading free market think tank. Earlier, he has worked as a consultant and trainer for major international development organisations, public sector organisations and non-profits; worked in the government, academia and private sector. He has held a Fulbright scholarship, Royal Netherlands Fellowship and Charles Wallace Fellowship and has masters degrees in Economics, Public Policy and Business Administration. He writes regularly for Express Tribune, a partner publication of International Herald Tribune/New York Times.

Souad Adnane

Souad Adnane is a founding member of the Arab Center for Scientific Research & Humane Studies (a classical liberal think tank in Morocco) and a Consultant at the World Bank in Washington DC. She conducts research on laws and regulations related to legal restrictions on women's economic participation, with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa. Prior to joining the World Bank Group, she worked with several international and local NGOs. Souad is a Fulbright Alumna and holds an MA in Public Policy and Women's Studies, from George Washington University. She is currently pursuing her PhD at the same university and focusing her research on women's property rights.

Nouh Elharmouzi

Elharmouzi is Editor of the Arabic-language news and analysis site [MinbarAlHurriyya.org](http://minbaralhurriyya.org) (<http://minbaralhurriyya.org/>) of the Atlas Economic Research Foundation/Cato Institute (USA) and university professor at Ibn Toufail University in Kenitra, Morocco. He is also Director of the Arab Center for Scientific Research and Humane Studies, an Arab think tank based in Morocco. He served as a university professor for five years at Paul Cézanne University in France, teaching Economic Development Theories and Economic Philosophy & Thought. His main research focus is on institutional dynamics, ideological beliefs, and their

relationship with the process of development. He has published many articles and research papers in various periodicals and wrote “Underdevelopment in the Arab-Muslim world: what is the role of non-formal institutions?” [Le sous-développement dans le monde arabo-musulman: Quel est le rôle des institutions informelles?]

Edo Omerčević

Edo Omerčević has gone through more than a decade of training in economics and finance. He started his tertiary education at the International Islamic University Malaysia where he obtained his Bachelor in Economics (Hons) as well as his Master of Economics degree. He is currently a Ph.D. in Economics candidate at the International University of Sarajevo. His interest and specialization is in the field of money and banking, with special reference to complementary and alternative currencies and monetary systems. Mr Omerčević is a freelance economist and a co-founder of the Center for Advancement of Free Enterprise (Centar za poslovnu afirmaciju) that is promoting free market ideas in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Linda Whetstone

Linda Whetstone is Chairman of Network for a Free Society and a member of the boards of the Institute of Economic Affairs, Atlas Economic Research Foundation, Mont Pelerin Society, Istanbul Network for Liberty and British Dressage. She runs a small business in Sussex with her husband and writes on agricultural, trade, and development issues. She is the daughter of IEA founder Sir Antony Fisher.

Ozlem Caglar Yilmaz

Ozlem Caglar-Yilmaz is the member of the Board and the executive director of ALT. She has been with ALT since she was an undergraduate student, since 1993. She has decided to work on investing in ideas after previously being involved in politics and some business. She speaks on civil society, liberal democracy, Turkey’s democratization and liberalization. institutional development, delivers guidance on how to effectively disseminate ideas, and how to develop interest in ideas of liberty. She writes commentaries, translates, and edits articles and books, develops and conducts collaborative projects, organises training seminars, conferences and workshops with opinion leaders and intellectual entrepreneurs. She is the editor of the online commentary in Turkish www.hurfikirler.com. Yilmaz studied politics and public administration at Hacettepe University, Ankara.

Annexure III: Advisory Board

Atilla Yayla

Atilla Yayla is a Turkish political scientist and a leading proponent of liberal democracy in Turkey. He is the founding member of the Association for Liberal Thinking in Turkey. He is currently a professor of political science in Istanbul Medipol University.

Hicham El Moussaoui

Hicham El Moussaoui is a Professor of Economics at the University of Sultan Moulay Slimane, Morocco. His Research fields incorporate: Cooperation in social dilemmas, economic analysis of institutions and development, incentives, economic freedom and Islamic economics.

Syed Kamall

Dr. Syed Kamall MEP is a former British academic and the Chairman of the European Conservatives and Reformists, which the third largest of the eight political groups in the European Parliament. He is the first Muslim to be elected as a European Parliament political group leader and is the most senior elected British politician in the EU Parliament. Syed became a Conservative Member of the European Parliament (MEP) in May 2005. He is a Visiting Fellow at Leeds University Business School. Syed is passionate about community-led non-state solutions to tackling poverty. He has also spoken and written about tackling radicalisation in local communities. Dr. Kamall is one of the founding members of the Istanbul Network for Liberty.