

THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE
« THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO'S EXPERIENCE
TO COUNTER TERRORISM

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In the name of God, The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Mrs. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to present to you, within the time allotted, the most prominent elements of the policy of managing religious affairs in the Kingdom of Morocco in view of their relation to combatting terrorism. As is well known, terrorism consists of carrying out violent acts to force people to accept a certain pattern in politics and in life on the basis of deviant interpretations of religious texts, interpretations the overwhelming majority of Moslems unequivocally rejects. Furthermore, the religious conscience of this majority springs from assumptions which terrorism tries to take advantage of through various means. Among these:

1. The belief that religion gives meaning to life,
2. The view that some events that have taken place in recent history are ambiguous and tend to disturb the conscience that believes in the ideal values of religion,
3. The view that justice at all levels is a central value in religion,
4. The perception that religion encompasses all the basis of life and that regulates it for both individual and community,

On this basis, the idea of terrorism can infiltrate people's minds through capitalizing on the vulnerability of the Moslems' lives, especially in the following three aspects:

1. Political legitimacy from the viewpoint of commitment to the fundamentals of religion,
2. Interpretation of texts in the absence of a respectable qualified religious authority,
3. Absence of or shortcomings in religious leadership and supervision or religious services.

The policy of the Kingdom of Morocco in the field of religious affairs management emanates from the nature of the Moroccan system of government which has, for more than ten centuries, been built on the principle that the ruler; that is, His Majesty the King, derives his legitimacy from his being Commander of the Faithful, and his being committed to safeguarding religion, and to protecting the religious constants of Morocco in accordance with the developments of every historical period.

Let us now turn to the three aforementioned aspects and see how the policy pursued by the Commander of the Faithful has prevented terrorism.

- 1) The legitimacy element, with its two complementary factors: reform and action in accordance with the religious fundamentals,

The case of Morocco is considered exemplary in the legitimacy of the religious ruler, for the institution of the commander of the faithful, in its symbolic and functional dimension, has its roots in Islam. This institution rests on the allegiance which is a formal contract of loyalty for the ruler's in exchange for the ruler's commitment to protect what the Islamic jurists (*fuqahā*) call the "fundamentals of religion". These include five fields:

- defending religion,
- protecting life,
- guarding against harmful ideologies,
- preserving property and,
- defending honor and dignity.

These fundamentals include guaranteeing all the rights stipulated in modern constitutions, in addition to the protection of religion. Worth mentioning is that the allegiance contract in Morocco is a written document rewritten every time a new king ascends the throne. Allegiance is renewed every year on Throne Day. One aspect of the harmony of the present times is that the annual expression of allegiance is no longer sworn by notables and dignitaries, but is pledged by locally elected officials. Regarding religious life, allegiance is renewed every week during the Friday sermon in which prayers are made for the king in the presence of millions of worshippers.

This system boasts a rich historical experience and a rational and emotional perception in communication with the Islamic community. Another spiritual dimension is the Sharifian lineage from the Prophet, as well as a rich history in preserving territorial integrity, and vigilance against colonization.

Commitment to the fundamentals of religion continues today through reformist actions which allow for the realization of the aforesaid fundamentals in all of their detailed ramifications which include politics, economy and society in a modern fashion consistent with the Constitution.

Since the onus to defend religion and to look after its affairs rests on the institution of the Commander of the Faithful, the logic of allegiance leaves no room for any political project based on religion. Politics is regulated by the Constitution and exercised by stakeholders within its own institutions, its own language and by its own rules.

Concerning the preservation of the other four fundamentals, religion aside, they require the implementation of reforms, foremost of which are security, justice and improving living conditions. Therefore, Moroccans, in their daily lives, judge the reformatory actions of the Commander of the Faithful by his protection of the fundamentals of religion through an ongoing activity whose manifestations are equally going out to pray in public and inaugurating a mosque, and launching economic, social and educational projects, including initiatives that consolidate solidarity and combat social marginalization and exclusion.

Among the measures that reinforce legitimacy and reform, and in which historical continuity is clear, is the commitment to the fundamentals of religion as endorsed by all Moroccans for ten centuries. In addition to the institution of the commander of the faithful, these fundamentals are:

- a. Ash'ari doctrine ,as it does not excommunicate people, nor does it accept death sentences for transgressing the Divine Decrees, notwithstanding those subject to the judicial system,
- b. Maliki school of jurisprudence (*madhab*) for its three distinctive features:
 - Its rich variety of methods to derive rulings from their sources;
 - Its flexibility in integrating local cultural practices within the sphere of Islamic Law;
 - The importance given to public interest, which in our age confers legitimacy upon the laws that serve interest without contradicting Islamic Law. Moroccan religious

scholars have issued a unique ~~unique~~ fatwa (ruling) on the issue of public interest in Maliki *fiqh* (jurisprudence) stipulating that the laws that are promulgated in Morocco all have religious legitimacy. This ruling which was firmly established by the religious scholars of Morocco reassures the religious conscience in the face of the new developments, especially in the field of democratic practices. The goal of this reassurance is to avoid the perception that we need another system to apply the Sharia.

- c. The third fundamental or choice after *ʿaqīda* (creed) and *madhab* (school of jurisprudence) is the preservation of the spiritual dimension of Islam known for its mysticism (Sufism), because it rests on the principle of calling the soul to account as a means to reach ethical perfection that is required in every transaction or coexistence among people. Sufism is also a method to raise the awareness of the sanctity of the Other; it curbs unhealthy enthusiasm for racial and tribal belonging, and sets up institutions that provide assistance, protection, education and development.

Needless to say that these fundamentals in the Ashʿari doctrine, in the Maliki denomination and in the spiritual behavior are shared by Morocco and West African countries, preserved and studied by the religious scholars, used as guiding principles by the imams; similarly, magistrates draw insights from them when forming judgments in Morocco and in these countries.

Having reviewed the aspects of legitimacy, reform, and commitment to the fundamentals as elements that leave no room for terrorist thought, we shall now turn to the elements pertaining to the need for a qualified religious authority whose role is to issue fatwas and to interpret texts. The Commander of the Faithful, Muhammad VI, has modernized this body

through legal and constitutional organization. In the history of Morocco, this body was known as "*mashiykhat al-^{ul}ma*" (Order of religious scholars) which is represented today by the High Council for Religious Affairs and by the local councils affiliated to it. The laws by which it is governed stipulate the role of the religious scholars in a number of domains, such as implementing the fundamentals of religion, especially in mosques, the intellectual enhancement of the caretakers of religion and of the general public, which would definitely curb negative phenomena such as terrorism. Their role in providing guidance and in directing people's behavior also includes the dignity of the individual, the Divine Decrees and human rights in general, a role they perform in accordance with the traditions of the Sunna and the acts of the founding fathers. They exercise it within the sphere of freedom and legality, and their educational roles are in conformity with the great principle known in Islam as "enjoining good and forbidding evil". More often than not terrorism abuses this principle to disturb public life in societies and to contest the legitimacy of the ruler. However, the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil, which the Holy Koran has put forth to protect the Islamic city against immorality, finds today great potential in the mechanism of democracy. In keeping with the teachings of the Koran, the religious scholars are educated according to this noble principle, and the State uses all necessary means of deterrence and restraint to enforce it.

This logic and harmony require that the institution of the High Council for Religious Affairs take charge of issuing fatwas pertaining to political life and social activity, while people's statements on religion remain mere opinions whose free expression is guaranteed so long as do not violate the law. Morocco's experience has established that, as days goes by and through consolidating the authority of the qualified religious institution in the field, the public is increasingly able to draw a distinction between collective fatwa emanating from the specialized institution, and the improvised statements of the various forums, regardless of whether their authors are moderate or extremists/

One manifestation of the religious scholars' protection of the Islamic community against extremist ideology is their refutation of this ideology at the level of the reading of texts. They have advanced a legal analysis of the ten terms used by terrorists which are: *pre-Islamic mindset, leaving communal consensus, no rule but the rule of God, abandoning madhabs, Salafism, loyalty and rejection, enjoining good and forbidding evil, excommunication, consultation and jihad*. They have thus demonstrated through legal proof in the proceedings of a symposium published in 2007 that there is no cogent proof for terrorism in religion; that anyone who verbally declares his conversion to Islam cannot be described as being imbued with a pre-Islamic mindset; that the inability to achieve perfection in ruling, at any level, does not warrant excommunication and deception; that in ruling focus is on the purpose rather than on the nomenclature; that the concept of absolute sovereignty is a novelty in religion; that the Kharijites' idea to excommunicate a person who commits major sins is in contrast with the foundations of the Sunnah; that abandoning *madhabs* creates a void to be exploited for ill-intended purposes; that the concept of Salafism is being used wrongly so as to destroy much of what the Moslems have built through their hard work and through *ijtihad* to achieve human perfection; that the concept of faithfulness and rejection which originally promotes solidarity has been misinterpreted and has become a source of confusion and fighting; that enjoining good and forbidding evil should be made use of only when it is in compliance with its principles; that excommunicating a person who adheres to divine unity is unlawful by unequivocal texts; that jihad has its own rules, canons and provisions in Sharia, which is in stark contrast with terrorism forms.

The third loophole which terrorism is likely to abuse is the shortage of equipment and supervision at the level of religious services. The Commander of the Faithful has given special attention to this subject. Field achievements have become a sustained significant part in reformatory programs addressing this problem. One manifestation of the intensive work that has been carried out in this field is the immense body of

regulatory legislative texts, and the tenfold increase within one decade of State budget allocated to religious services. These include the following:

- a. Construction, renovation and equipment of mosques;
- b. Looking after imams and taking care of their material and social needs;
- c. Holding in-service training of imams under the supervision of the religious scholars;
- d. Training young imams from among university graduates;
- e. Training spiritual guides from among female university graduates who would provide guidance to women and men in mosques and in other institutions, such as schools, hospitals and prisons;
- f. Enacting laws that regulate relations with the caretakers of religion and between the State and the individuals who wish to contribute to building mosques and to their upkeep in such a way as not to allow their intervention to interfere with the fundamentals or/ to disseminate extremist ideology or political exploitation of religion in any form or shape;
- g. Providing administrative supervision that can closely follow the local management of religious affairs;
- h. Structuralizing religious education which, until the advent of the modern school, was *the* prevailing trend. In Morocco, it is characterized by the full memorization of the Koran before studying Sharia and linguistic sciences at a later stage. This education is still found in a few schools, some of which are run by the government, but most are financed and managed by private donors under the supervision of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Throughout history, this education has been a fortress for spreading moderate religious ideology; however, some of these private persons and societies, due to internal or external incentives and through alien doctrinal and denominational directives, have during the last four decades been capitalizing on this education with a view to breeding extremism. To plug this loophole, and to

guarantee the sound teaching of religion, the Commander of the Faithful ordered that religious education be regulated in such a way as to meet the requirements and to preserve its particularity, and to enable its students to build bridges with public education by studying modern sciences sufficiently enough so as to allow them to pass the exams leading to the various vocational and academic specializations. Private schools have joined this reform whose implementation is evident in the fact that these schools have been receiving financial assistance from the State's budget. This assistance includes student grants, compensation for educational and administrative supervisors, and other things such as dorms, restaurants and libraries.

The policy of managing religious affairs as planned and directed by the Commander of the Faithful in the Kingdom of Morocco finds its roots in the political contract by virtue of which the Commander of the Faithful is in charge of protecting religion within doctrinal and denominational fundamentals which Moroccans have endorsed for centuries. This protection and development legally entails that the religious scholars guide people to a moderate understanding of religion and supply them with the fatwas that emanate from the institution rather than from individuals, and away from extremism. This protection is further consolidated through providing religious services which in our present time is an urgent social need. It is a natural policy that did not come as a response to the phenomenon of terrorism; but it protects against terrorism which infiltrates the minds through the loopholes mentioned above. This complementary religious policy can inject into the body of the Islamic community the required immunity against all forms of terrorism, because it is a convincing policy for all the efficient parties, namely the religious scholars and the imams, and this policy can negate confusion caused by the social media. It is a policy that provides a model which is compatible with the religious conscience, with freedom and with beneficial social change.

By way of conclusion, we can confirm that the terrorist movement is essentially limited to one immediate literal reading of the religious texts, cut off from their temporal and objective contexts. When the followers of this movement shift to political activism, they believe that their reading of texts allows them to use violence to impose their ideas on people. In this sense, they adopt the following attitudes:

1. Destroying the doctrines of the overwhelming majority of Moslems, which doctrines rest on the effort of diverse forms of reasoning as formulated by the most eminent erudite founders of religion;
2. Combatting any spiritual education and its symbols;
3. Contesting all forms of governance or of life that preaches pluralism and tolerance.

This terrorist mind shows the importance of the work we have tried to present, namely:

1. The conformation of a political legitimacy reinforced by reform in all the fields of progress;
2. The presence of religious supervision and leadership that includes theologians and imams, well-trained and conversant in the ultimate goals of religion;
3. Providing religious services to the community of the believers, away from any ideological instrumentalization. The upgrading of religious education is very relevant in this respect.

These are the aspects of religious affairs management as planned and directed by the Commander of the Faithful. This policy ensures for the community its immunity against terrorist ideas, even if this policy which finds its origins in the history of Morocco, in its culture and its realities, was not designed as a mere reaction to terrorism.

Thank you for your attention