

## DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



Mohamad Zaidin  
Mohamad<sup>1\*</sup>  
Sofyuddin Yusof<sup>2</sup>  
Ahmad Zahid Salleh<sup>3</sup>  
Abdillah Hisham<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Malaysia



(+ Corresponding author)

### ABSTRACT

#### Article History

Received: 7 August 2017  
Revised: 25 August 2017  
Accepted: 4 September 2017  
Published: 11 September 2017

#### Keywords

Dialogue  
Clash  
Globalization  
Garaudy  
9/11 Tragedy  
Huntington

This article discusses the developmental history of “dialogue among civilizations”, which begins with the emergence of the term until the modern era. This article found that fluctuations in the debate on “dialogue among civilizations” were influenced by current global situations, especially that of global politics. The French-Muslim philosopher Roger Garaudy (aka Ragaa Garaudy) first coined the term “dialogue among civilizations” around the 70s and it then attracted the attention of societies around the world, both in the West and in the East.

**Contribution/ Originality:** The article's main finding shows that the 9/11 tragedy has contributed as the most significant factor and impact on any discussion pertaining civilizational dialogue either in academic or politic venue.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Interaction between civilizations and the call for a prosperous world through understanding and mutual accord between all parties has been going on long before the emergence of the term “dialogue among civilizations”. This need not be questioned further since civilization itself in its natural form is characterised by interaction and ‘borrowing’ something from the previous civilization as well as ‘leaving something’ for the current civilization or the next civilization (Rafi, 2007). Hence, what will be discussed here is how “dialogue among civilizations” (*hiwar al-hadarat*) emerged and developed until the current globalization era. From a historical perspective, “dialogue among civilizations” has gone through four stages before it became an international and global humanitarian issue, which was during the 70s, 90s, early 21<sup>st</sup> century and after the 9/11 tragedy (Mohamad *et al.*, 2015).

### The 1970s

In 1977, the French philosopher Roger Garaudy wrote a book entitled *Les Dialogue des Civilisations*. This book is presumed to be the forerunner in adducing the term “dialogue among civilizations” in French. This book was intended to defend the issues arising from the “dialogue among civilizations” based on certain arguments and

contemporary state of affairs. Besides that, Garaudy in his book tried to elaborate on the perception of over-loading Western civilization and renewing the Western perception about other civilizations by acknowledging and giving due recognition. The book had portrayed Garaudy as the first to coin the term “dialogue among civilizations” and a scholar who was truly committed to championing the issue of dialogue (Al-Milad, 2006).

Furthermore, this book is also about the development of his ideas regarding the need to bridge the communist ideology and Christianity that was occurring in the West. Hence, he believed that this view needed change and expansion so that it was not limited solely to the Western scope although its benefits and needs surpassed the limits of other civilizations. Garaudy had focused on discussions and the emphasis on dialogue between the West and Islam in his books *Promesses de l’Islam (Wuud al-Islam)* and *L’islam en Occident: Cordoue, une capitale de l’esprit (al-Islam fi al-Gharb: Qurtubah Asimat al-Ruh wa al-Fikr)*. He unreservedly defended Islam, besides introducing and bringing into prominence the beauty of Islam, which he presumed to be the third element in the formation of Western civilization. According to him, Western civilization did not begin in Italy but in Spain when it was under Islamic rule. Moreover, at the end of his book, *L’islam en Occident: Cordoue, une capitale de l’esprit*, he hoped that Andalusia and Cordova would again deliver holistic literatures on civilization as before (Gharudi, 1991).

Garaudy suggested that the West should examine itself and the history of its people, correct their views on the world and build alliances with other civilizations. Besides that, the West should also learn and build a fruitful future together with other civilizations (Mohamad et al., 2013). Unfortunately, these enthusiastic suggestions did not receive proper attention because it was presumed to be comments and sharp criticisms against the West. At the end, it was a call that went unheeded. This failure is evident when efforts by Garaudy to build an international institution for “dialogue among civilizations” in 1976 and later to rejuvenate a project to make Cordova a centre for Western civilization did not eventually materialize. In the 1980s, Garaudy again criticised the Western world for selfishly becoming egoistic and building enmity. According to Gharudi (1991) the West was actually to blame for forming the ‘egotism’ (*al-usuliyyat*) in civilizations. The emergence of ‘egotism’ in other civilizations was only a reaction and challenge to ‘Western egotism’.

Although in general, the call for “dialogue among civilizations” did not receive proper attention; hence, several series of meetings and discussions were successfully initiated. Two conferences were held in Barcelona, one in 1977 and the other in 1986, which was attended by participants from various religions and faiths. The following conference was organised by *Mu’assasat Al al-Bayt* in Jordan and attended by various parties, mainly religious bodies such as *al-Lajnah al-Mustaqillah li al-Alaqa al-Islamiyyah al-Masihiyah* from Britain, *al-Markaz al-Urthuduksi* from Switzerland and *al-Majlis al-Babarwi li al-Hirwar bayn al-Adyan* from the Vatican. In December 1989, the *al-Ta’lim al-Dini li al-Mujtama’ al-Mu’asir* seminar was held in the Vatican in Rome and in 1990, a conference on religion and war was held in France (Al-Jirari, 2000). These dialogues, although not very prominent, had indirectly portrayed efforts to consolidate the relationship between civilizations.

At the first stage, the “dialogue among civilizations” is more towards dialogue between religions. This could be because religion was seen as the best instrument to improve the relations between civilizations and also because the religious groups were more open and rational.

### The 1990s

This era could be presumed to be an age of re-awakening of the “dialogue among civilizations”. This awakening occurred due to provocative ideas put forward by Samuel Huntington in his article ‘*The Clash of Civilization?*’ in 1993. The article published by the *Foreign Affairs* journal had generated tremendous discussions on the matter and was later published as a book entitled *Clash of Civilizations and Remaking World Order* in 1996 (Chiozza, 2002).

This book had shocked the world at that time, especially the academics and the international political stage because of its nature of provoking and inviting suspicion as well as prejudice. This situation had caused much trepidation and fear among the international society about the possibility of a cold war between civilizations (Al-

Milad, 2006). Moreover, its effects were even thought to be more terrible and frightening compared to the cold war between America and Russia that had just ended. The trepidation was made worse by the nuclear program scenario between America and Iran that was reaching a climax and a great possibility of causing a clash of civilizations as predicted by Huntington.

Hence, in reality Huntington had succeeded in putting the discussion on the clash of civilizations onto a world stage (Mohamad *et al.*, 2015). This situation had again indirectly attracted the world's attention during occasional discussions pertaining to the dialogue between civilizations as a response and alternative to the theory on the clash of civilizations as adduced by Huntington. In addition, the dialogue on civilizations was from time to time given notice by the world's society in a hope that it would overcome or at least reduce the tension and trepidations, especially between the Islamic world and the West.

In the Islamic world, the *Islamic Education, Science and Culture Organisation* (ISESCO) was seen to play a more significant role in "promoting and marketing dialogues between civilizations" at a more prominent level. This Islamic body was given the responsibility by the *Organisation of Islamic Conference* (OIC) to make the "dialogue among civilizations" concept a success. Since Islamic culture happens to be the main branch of ISESCO; thus, this makes ISESCO the most appropriate organization for handling the mission on "dialogue between civilizations". ISESCO was given the duty to look into several main elements of Islamic culture that supported the "dialogue between civilizations" concept such as being universal (*alamiyyah*), comprehensive (*shumuliyyah*), and truthful (*misdaqiyah*). Thus, due to the open participation by the Islamic world, programs pertaining to the "dialogue between civilizations" became increasingly overwhelming and comprehensive. This had led to the Director of ISESCO, al-Tuwayjri, admitting to these positive developments (Al-Tuwayjri, 1997).

At this stage, the international community was more concerned about the issue of "dialogue between civilizations" compared to the previous stage. This was evident from the increase in the number of conferences and topics that were more comprehensively discussed. Among the several international conferences held within this period were:

- a. *Multaqa Ahl al-Kitab: Itizam min Ajl al-Salam* in Madrid, Spain in November 1994.
- b. *Barcelona Declaration* in Barcelona, Spain in December 1994.
- c. *Hiwari al-Thaqafat fi Nitaq Mashrut Turuq al-Iman* in Rabat, Morocco in June 1995.
- d. *Yawm Ta'ammuli hawl al-Hiwari bayn al-Adyan al-Tawhidiyyah al-Thalathah* in Rabat, Morocco in April 1998 (Al-Jirari, 2000).
- e. *The Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs* in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from 23 to 26 January 1999 (ISESCO, 2004).
- f. *Islamic Symposium on Dialogue among Civilizations* in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran from 3 to 5 May 1999.
- g. *The Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers* (Session of Peace and Partnership for Development) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 28 June to 1 July 1999.
- h. *The Islamic Commission for Economic, Cultural and Social Affairs* in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from 22 to 26 January 2000.
- i. *Francophonie and Arabic World: Dialogue of Cultures* in Paris, France from 30 to 31 May 2000 (ISESCO, 2001).
- j. *Dialogue and Coexistence among Civilizations and Cultures* in Berlin, Germany on 5 July 2000.
- k. *The Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs* in Dakar, the Republic of Senegal from 25 to 26 October 2000.
- l. *The Islamic Summit Conference* (Session of Peace and Development) in Doha, Qatar from 12 to 13 November 2000 (ISESCO, 2004).

Hence, it can be concluded that the “dialogue among civilizations” at the second stage was much more developed and accepted by the international community. This extensive acceptance indirectly portrays the international community’s rejection of Huntington’s theory of clashes.

### Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The “dialogue among civilizations” was first officially recognised by the world when the United Nations declared 2001 as the ‘Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations’. This event began when the then President of Iran, HH Khatami made a suggestion at the UN Summit on 21 September 1998 that the UN should inaugurate 2001 as the ‘Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations’. On 16 September of that year, the UN delivered resolution A/RES/35/22, which stated that the UN was very serious and committed in lending support to the “dialogue among civilizations” and declared 2001 as the ‘Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations’ (ISESCO, 2004).

In 2001, during the 55th UN Summit, a resolution (A/RES/53/23) dated 11 January 2001 was passed in order to emphasise the intense desire of the UN and mutual interest of the “dialogue among civilizations” to the world. Several matters were presumed to be the basis for the resolution, such as:

- a. The need for a concerted and collective effort in order to sustain tolerance-based relations among a variety of races, to eliminate the threats to peace, to support world recognition towards basic human rights and freedom for all.
- b. The benefits of civilization are the allowance of rights to all humans, which becomes the source of inspiration and development for all of humankind.
- c. Tolerance is the most significant value needed for the formation of international relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which would then lead to well-being and “dialogue among civilizations”, respect among humans who share different beliefs, culture and language. These differences should not instil fear or concern as to whether they would turn into the cause of conflict but rather should be proudly accepted as something special in human civilization.
- d. Globalization should not be solely limited to the question of profit but more importantly, it is a global challenge to consolidate cooperation and mutually accept the various cultures that exist. The basic element in this initiative is to respect all civilizations and seek common values to be used as shields against all threats to a peaceful world and the expansion of human civilization.
- e. The UN, specifically UNESCO and also other world bodies including relevant NGOs, would diversify the planning of appropriate programs relevant to culture, education and society in order to promote the “dialogue among civilizations” concept. Among the programs planned were seminars, research workshops as well as forming academic syllabuses related to the issue of “dialogue among civilizations” (ISESCO, 2004).

The rationale for choosing the year 2001 as the Year of “Dialogue among Civilizations” was symbolic in nature due to the world crossing from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Besides that, the world hoped to see a new fostering of relations between the world’s societies based on an optimistic attitude, mutual trust and the wish by all parties to attain peace and well-being. It also intended to avoid the tumultuous events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from repeating itself because that century was full of wars and human conflicts such as WW1, WW2, the Gulf War, the Cold War and various other forms of crisis and disputes (Karen and William, 2003). With this proclamation, “dialogue among civilizations” was discussed and debated at the global level. It is seen as the main instrument for building and consolidating diversified thinking and cultures as well as global peace. Humankind must take cognizance that this difference is a reality that cannot be avoided and is not a cause of disputes and confrontations, as stated by Huntington. The short time between the announcement of the ‘Year of Dialogue among Civilizations’ and the 9/11 tragedy had slightly disrupted the planning of the “dialogue among civilizations” program. Among the conferences

that were held during the third stage was *The Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers* in Bamako, Republic of Mali from 25 to 27 June 2001 and the *Dialogue among Civilizations in a Changing World* in Rabat, Morocco from 10 to 12 July 2001 (ISESCO, 2004). It could be concluded that the involvement and commitment of the UN in the “dialogue among civilizations” programs had undeniably given impetus or a new momentum to the development of these programs. Similarly, efforts by various parties, either from the Islamic world or from the West, were presumed to have obtained the acknowledgement of the world since the UN supports these efforts.

### After The 9/11 Tragedy

Attacks on the *World Trade Centre* (WTC) and the Pentagon di America on 11 September 2001 had brought the “dialogue among civilizations” to a more meaningful level. Generally, this tragedy had both negative and positive effects. The negative effect was the emergence of a bad impression towards Islam or Muslims, otherwise known as ‘Islamophobia’. The positive effect was noticeable when the international community began to realise the seriousness of the discord prevalent in world politics at that time. The tragedy had intensified the desire of the world’s community for a “dialogue among civilizations” because that would be the best initiative taken to avoid a recurrence of the tragedy. This intense desire should be translated into reality and the “dialogue among civilizations” cannot be purely rhetorical without any change in the form of action and regional cooperation as supposedly forthcoming. The “dialogue among civilizations” program for 2001 was actually drawn up and scheduled to begin on 24 September 2001. However, 13 days earlier the 9/11 tragedy had struck (ISESCO, 2004). The tragedy had jeopardised the program; nevertheless, it had inadvertently strengthened the resolute of all parties concerned and intensified the efforts into a more serious and comprehensive initiative towards a “dialogue among civilizations”. Among the conferences that were held were:

- a. *Dialogue among Civilizations: Theory and Practice* in Tunis from 12 to 13 November 2001.
- b. *Dialogue among Civilization for Coexistence* in Damascus, Syria from 18 to 20 May 2002.
- c. *Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (Session of Solidarity and Dialogue)* in Khartoum, Sudan from 25 to 27 June 2002 (ISESCO, 2004).
- d. *Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures: Comprehension and Mutual Understanding* in Liechtenstein from 23 to 24 October 2002.
- e. *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Diversity within Complementarily* in Frankfurt, Germany from 29 to 30 September 2003 (ISESCO, 2004).
- f. *Human Civilizations and Cultures: from Dialogue to Alliance* in Tunis from 30 January to 1 February 2006 (ISESCO, 2007).
- g. *African Regional Conference on the Dialogue among Civilisations, Cultures and Peoples in Abuja*, Nigeria from 20 to 21 June 2006.
- h. *Cultural Diversity: A Bridge between Cultural Heritage and the Culture of the Future* in Bucharest and Sibiu, Romania from 7 to 8 June 2007.
- i. *Dialogue among Civilizations: the Copenhagen Agenda, The Copenhagen Conference on Education for Intercultural Understanding and Dialogue* in Copenhagen in 2008.
- j. *Al-Mu'tamar al-Alami li al-Hiwar* in Madrid on 18 July 2008.
- k. *Dialogue among Civilizations: Summit of Heads of State of South East Europe: Management of Heritage Diversity and its Promotion for Tourism* in Cetinje, Montenegro from 3 to 4 June 2009.
- l. *Mu'tamar li Hiwar al-Hadarat "Mubadarh Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn li al-Hiwar wa Atharuha fi Ishacat al-Qiyam al-Insaniyyah* di Geneva, Switzerland from 30 September to 1 October 2009.
- m. *Summary of the High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures* in the Headquarters of UNESCO on 18 February 2010 (Anon, 2012).

## 2. CONCLUSION

Generally, the 9/11 tragedy had left a deep impression in the minds of the global community on the issue of regional security. The series of discussions and meetings between academicians and world leaders on the issue of “dialogue among civilizations”, as mentioned earlier, had shown an increase in awareness. Hence, it is still in the discussion stage and does not indicate cohesive efforts by the world’s leading nations. The United States response through the campaign on the “war on terror” in Afghanistan and Iraq is against the values upheld according to the “dialogue among civilizations”. In summary, the significance of the “dialogue among civilizations” in the context of stability and peace is obviously uncontested. However, the awareness and sincerity of the world’s leaders from the United States, Britain, Russia, Italy and France in assimilating the values perpetrated via the “dialogue among civilizations” are not yet evident and is still unsatisfactory.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Contributors/Acknowledgement:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Jirari, A., 2000. Al-Hiwar min Manzur Islami. Rabat: ISESCO.
- Al-Milad, Z., 2006. Ta`Aruf Al-Hadarat. Damshik: Dar al-Fikr.
- Al-Tuwayjri, A.A.-A.U., 1997. Afaq Mustaqbal Al-Hiwar Bayn Al-Muslimin Wa Al-Gharb. Rabat: ISESCO.
- Anon, 2012. UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/introducing-unesco> [Accessed 10 March].
- Chiozza, G., 2002. Is there a clash of civilizations? Evidence from patterns of international conflict involvement. *Journal of Peace Research*, 39(6): 711-734. [View at Google Scholar](#) | [View at Publisher](#)
- Gharudi, R., 1991. Al-Islam fi al-Gharb: Qurtubah Asimah al-Ruh wa al-Fikr. Muhammad Mahdi al-Sadr (Trans.). Beirut: Dar al-Hadi.
- ISESCO, 2001. A`Mal Al-Nadwah Al-Frankafuniyah Wa Al`Alam al`Arabi: Hiwar Al-Thaqafat. Rabat: ISESCO.
- ISESCO, 2004. White book on dialogue among civilizations: On the occasion of the proclamation of the year 2001 "United Nations year of dialogue among civilizations. Rabat: ISESCO.
- ISESCO, 2007. Proceedings of the International Symposium Human Civilizations and Cultures: From Dialogue to Alliance. Rabat: ISESCO.
- Karen, R. and T. William, 2003. The monadic democratic puzzle. *International Politic*, 40(1): 5-27. [View at Google Scholar](#) | [View at Publisher](#)
- Mohamad, Z.M., I. Basri and Y. Sofyuddin, 2013. Factors of the rise and fall of human civilization based on the perspective of Al-Quran. *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences*, 7(2): 164-172.
- Mohamad, Z.M., Y. Kamaruzaman, T.A.T. Mohd, H.R.S. Raja, M. Nik, Nik, Din., M. Zaiton, N.C.A. Normila, A.A. Noor, E. Rahimah and A.W. Najihah, 2015. The clash of civilizations: A historical perspective. *Social Sciences*, 10(3): 312-317. [View at Google Scholar](#) | [View at Publisher](#)
- Rafi, M., 2007. Dawabit Tadbir Al-ikhtilaf ma`A Al-akhar fi Al-Fikr Al-Islami. In. Mu`tamar Al`Alami al-Hiwar wa Ahammiyatuh fi al-Fikr Al-Islami. UAE: Jami`ah al-Sharqah. [View at Google Scholar](#)

*Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of Publication and Social Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.*