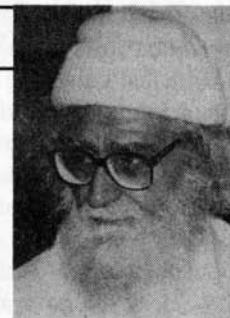


Interview: Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



We need peace in the world, not population control

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan is an internationally known Islamic scholar and president of The Islamic Center in New Delhi. He is also editor of the monthly magazine Al-Risala, and author of a number of books. The Maulana was interviewed in New Delhi by Susan Maitra.

EIR: With many others around the world *EIR* welcomed and strongly supports the peace agreement negotiated between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) late last year. It is *EIR*'s view that the economic development protocols of the agreement must be set into motion at the earliest to cement the accord, and ensure real peace.

For this and other reasons, we believe that India could play a very important role in helping implement the peace plan. India is a longtime defender of the PLO, but has cordial relations with all other parties in the region as well, and India has the engineering expertise and experience to contribute usefully to getting the development plans going.

What is your thinking on this? How do you view the Middle East peace process at this point? Do you think India could play a role?

Khan: The peace agreement arrived at between Israel and the PLO in 1993 was, as I see it, less than ideal, yet I welcomed it, because, to my way of thinking, life boils down to a willingness to accept less than the ideal. This is to adopt the possible as compared to the impossible. When the choice lies between the possible and the impossible, wisdom lies in opting for the former, as the latter is unattainable. Non-acceptance at that stage would have left the Palestinians with no gain whatsoever and no stepping-stone to a better future. As such, the best formula of realistic politics is to concede that politics is the art of the possible.

An important lesson should be learnt from the partial nature of the PLO's success. The freedom movement in Palestine was launched after the Second World War, at which time another freedom movement was launched in South Africa. Today, the latter movement has succeeded to the extent that a black leader has become the President of the country, whereas in Palestine, Palestinian leaders are still very far from their original goal. This historic experience proves that

nonviolence, both as a policy and in practice, is far more powerful than violence. What Palestinians failed to achieve by violence was achieved in South Africa by nonviolence.

As regards India's role in this case, I have no great hopes of its intervention, for although India is a great country with an intelligentsia which is in favor of maintaining peace not only in Palestine, but on a global level, its political leadership is not competent to perform this task.

India is a great country, but for want of a competent leadership, it has played no important role in the past, nor perhaps will it be able to do so in the future. However, if my appraisal is proved wrong, I shall be the happiest of men, as I hold the establishment of peace to be the most important task facing us today.

I agree, on the other hand, that India can make a substantial contribution to the development plans of West Asia. Thanks to the promotion of technical education, a class of professionally well-qualified technologists has come into existence in the country, along with a strong business class which has been on the rise for the last hundred years. This is an ongoing process, which has been given a great boost by the present liberalization policy of the government of India, and as a result of which we may rightly feel optimistic about India's future role at home and abroad. With this professional elite to draw upon, India is certainly in a position to contribute to the developmental works of this region.

EIR: In September, the United Nations is holding the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt. At a preparatory meeting recently in New York, Prof. Amartya Sen, the Indian economist now teaching at Harvard University, said that two approaches to the population issue—the apocalyptic malthusian approach and the developmental approach—were heading for a clash in Cairo.

The malthusian lobby says rapid population growth is the cause of poverty and underdevelopment, and is pushing hard for a strict population reduction policy to be enforced by the United Nations. Developmentalists, like Professor Sen, argue that the malthusian scare about population growth is uncalled for, since food production has kept up with popula-

tion growth in both China and South Asia, the two major population areas of the world. Professor Sen also argues that the idea that something drastic must be done about the world population is "tremendously dangerous" because it diverts attention from long-term solutions through social and economic planning and education.

The government of India has been silent on the issue in recent years and an aggressive non-governmental (NGO) population control lobby is active in the country. In your view, does the government of India need to take a more decisive stance against the "apocalyptic malthusian" approach?

As a large developing nation, India will have a significant voice at the Cairo meeting. What do you think India's position should be at the Cairo conference?

Khan: On the question of population control, I fully agree with the developmentalists, whose theories have been borne out by the events of modern history. Since the publication in 1789 of the malthusian theory that the increase in population would always outstrip the food supply, resulting inevitably in poverty, the population of the world—there being little to check its growth—has increased tenfold. According to Malthus, most of the people living in the world today should already have starved to death. As I have pointed out in my book *God Arises*, no such thing has happened. The reason for Malthus's faulty prognosis was that, although he had correctly gauged the increase in population, he failed to arrive at a correct estimate of the world's potential to grow foodstuff. His error resulted from his being acquainted only with traditional agriculture. He had no knowledge of modern, scientific methods. This shortcoming on his part rendered his entire calculation inaccurate.

In this instance, I fully agree with Professor Amartya Sen. This is the scientific viewpoint and all the facts corroborate this theory.

In the Indian context, to attach importance to population control is to turn a non-issue into an issue. There is one real issue in India and that is education. I am of the firm view that in the present situation, education must take a position of preeminence, for it is the lack of it which is the root cause of the majority of our problems.

As Mrs. Indira Gandhi once said, "Development is the best contraceptive." And education is fundamental to all development. This is the stand which India should take at the Cairo conference.

EIR: The Vatican has already spoken out strongly about the "lack of ethics" in the preparatory document for the conference, and will take an active role in the proceedings in Cairo. It is well known that Islam, like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, does not consider human beings to be "problems" on this Earth. What is the Islamic Ummah doing to counter the campaign of the malthusian NGOs and U.N.

population control lobby?

Khan: The Muslim community is not at present engaged in any planned activity. Just as it is the Islamic viewpoint that men should live on Earth in such a way that they benefit others, at least do not create problems for others, it is also held that no artificial checks should be applied to nature. Nature's processes should continue unhindered, and it should be our principal aim to see, not that they are checked, but that they are rendered more fruitful. Our efforts should be channeled not into population control but into establishing peace in the world, and into practical matters such as ensuring that there is no disruption in the distribution of foodstuffs, etc.

EIR: Do you think this is an issue on which a "grand alliance" of leaders representing the major religions could be formed? What would be necessary to form such an alliance?

Khan: A grand alliance of religious leaders would undoubtedly be a very positive step in the right direction. This would certainly help to give a constructive orientation to the prevailing situation. Making efforts to bring about such an alliance would be a social service of the first order. In this, the Vatican and Al-Azhar should jointly take the initiative. [Al-Azhar is a very prominent Islamic university in Cairo and one of the oldest learning institutions of the Islamic faith—ed.]

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