



FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

FEBRUARY 2012

The AILC Foundational Principles

The American Islamic Leadership Coalition (AILC) is a diverse group of U.S. and Canadian Muslim leaders who have joined together to defend our nations' constitutions, uphold religious pluralism, promote international peace and security, and cherish genuine diversity in the practice of our faith of Islam.

For far too long, ideologically-motivated groups closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami and Wahhabism have dominated public discourse among Muslims in North America and Europe. While portraying themselves as the voice of “mainstream” Islam, these groups actually pursue a highly political “Islamist” agenda inimical to the interests of Muslims themselves, and humanity at large. Islamism, or political Islam, is founded upon the notion of Muslim supremacism, and calls for the establishment of an Islamic state or caliphate.

The founders of the AILC recognize that the majority of Muslims in North America, Europe and the Muslim world do not adhere to the tenets of Islamism. This “silent majority” of pluralistic, tolerant and peace-loving Muslims deserves appropriate representation in the public sphere, especially when it comes to discussing and formulating public policy with regards to Islam and Muslims. Unfortunately, Muslim groups that oppose Islamist ideology lack the immense financial backing often enjoyed by Islamists, who serve and benefit from the petrodollar-financed spread of Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood ideology.

The inordinate degree of influence that Islamists have obtained in Western societies—enabling Muslim supremacists to impact and at times even dictate government policies, as well as public discourse among the media, academia and society in general—compelled us to establish the American Islamic Leadership Coalition.

Our goal in doing so is to counter Islamist influence and provide a genuinely American representation of our faith community, by amplifying the voice of the majority of Muslims who live in North America, and are grateful for the blessings of freedom we enjoy here, rather than resentful or antagonistic towards the prevailing laws and culture of the West

What we stand for:

1. A firm conviction that the primary message and purpose of Islam is to share God's infinite love and compassion with all creatures. Any actions committed in the name of our faith that obviously contradict or obstruct this primary message and purpose arise from a deluded—and often, highly politicized—interpretation of Islam.
2. Definition of a Muslim as anyone who identifies him or herself as a Muslim. Period.
3. Equality before the law of every human being, regardless of race, gender and/or religion.

4. Separation of state and religion, and freedom of thought, expression and conscience, in accordance with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and Articles 18 and 19 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
5. Profound respect for Islamic scholarship, combined with a firm belief that no one claiming to be a scholar has the right to compel others to live according to his interpretation of Islam, and/or his legal dictates. We believe that every Muslim is equally entitled to his or her opinion concerning the religion of Islam, and to practice his or her faith in an environment free of intimidation, reprisal or violence.
6. We recognize the importance of religious values in encouraging people to live an honorable life of service to God and humanity, but firmly reject the Islamist claim that there is a theological requirement for Muslims to establish a so-called "Islamic" state and/or caliphate, or to formalize *shari'ah* as positive law, governing the lives of Muslims.

The AILC seeks to:

1. Provide Islam's silent majority with a vehicle to reclaim our precious faith from those who seek to exploit it for worldly purposes, including the acquisition of political power.
2. Offer a platform through which the silent majority of Muslims may express their diverse views of Islam to a wider audience, including policy makers, public intellectuals, the media and our fellow citizens in general.
3. Provide a distinct alternative to Islamist ideology.
4. Educate Muslims as well as non-Muslims regarding the difference between Islam as a pluralistic and tolerant faith, and political Islam, or "Islamism."
5. Expose the theological betrayal of the Qur'an and Sunnah (i.e., the example of the Prophet Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) by Islamism, and its disastrous impact on Muslim communities across the globe.
6. Educate Muslims about the personal and societal benefits, and strong theological legitimacy, of non-political Islam, which serves as a true path (*shari'ah*) to God.
7. Inspire Muslims to live in the "state of islam"—or self-transcendent awareness of and surrender to divine will—while recognizing and rejecting the deluded Islamist claim that God has commanded Muslims to establish an "Islamic state," or that their falsely divinized and all-too-human understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah is identical to God's will, which must be imposed upon others by force.
8. Reclaim the concept of *ummah* to signify the broader faith community of all humanity, as well as individual faith communities other than Islam; and reject any and all politicized use of the term *ummah* to describe a segregated and supremacist Muslim community.
9. Foster the development of an intellectual, social, cultural, legal and political environment that encourages the free and open discussion of Islam, including the difficult questions that must be addressed to transform Muslims' understanding of Islam, in order to live at peace with modernity and those of other faiths, while maintaining a profound and healthy respect for our own scripture (the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*).

The AILC seeks to prevent:

1. The instrumentalization of Islam for political purposes, and/or the exploitation of our faith community for political gain, whether by Islamists and their non-Muslim allies in the West, or their opponents.
2. The imposition of laws based upon a falsely divinized human understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah, as often occurs when Muslims idolize *shari'ah* without understanding it.
3. The preferential treatment of, or discrimination against, any community based upon its religious beliefs.
4. Legitimizing the practice of deception, intimidation and/or violence in the name of Islam.

The AILC rejects:

1. The persecution of Shi'ites, Ahmadis, Ismailis, Druze and Bohras, as well as those Muslims who have turned away from Islam and become agnostic, atheists or converted to another faith.
2. The persecution of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority states.
3. The practice of '*takfir*,' which allows so-called "scholars" and clerics to label fellow Muslims as apostates, and impose a death fatwa (religious opinion or ruling) upon them.
4. The judicially- and/or extrajudicially-coerced observance of any religious or cultural practice that strips the individual of his or her autonomy and equality.

Conclusion:

Some members of the AILC were born in North America, while others immigrated from various parts of the world, drawn by the freedom and opportunities offered by the West. Characterized by diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, some of us are strongly secular in orientation, while others are deeply rooted in the traditions of our faith, and thus intimately acquainted with its complex intellectual, theological, legal and spiritual dimensions. Regardless of our individual backgrounds, however, we share a common pride in our Muslim heritage, and optimism regarding Islam's ability to contribute to the further development of Western society, and humanity at large. As American and Canadian Muslims, we also explicitly embrace the U.S. Constitution and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as among our foundational and guiding principles.

We acknowledge that extremism is a major problem within the Muslim community, which brings shame and discredit upon all of us, while empowering those who seek to denigrate Islam as a religion of hatred, supremacism and violence. Rather than adopt a "victimization" mentality or be offended by such claims, we view them as a challenge to bring forth a profoundly spiritual, practical and beneficial manifestation of Islamic life and teachings. For we are convinced that the primary

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message of Islam is universal love, and that religion, properly understood, must function as a blessing, and not a curse, for all humanity.

The AILC thus looks to the future, and not to the past, for the best days of the Muslim community: a community that we hope will fully integrate and participate with other North Americans to morally and spiritually enrich a society that has long served as a beacon of hope, peace, joy and well-being for the rest of the world. May our nations, peoples and varied yet complementary faiths serve as a cornerstone for an emerging global civilization, in which different cultures and religions serve to mutually enrich, rather than threaten or destroy one another.

“And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all into a single community, but [He willed otherwise] in order to test you by means of that which He has vouchsafed to you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! For unto God must you all return; and then He shall make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ.”

(Qur’an 5:48)