

Health Education Through Religion

*The Role of Religion and Ethics
in the Prevention and Control of AIDS*



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INTRODUCTION

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God has created man in the best form, and laid down for him, within the precepts of the heavenly codes of life (Shari 'a), principles and rules that would ensure for him a happy, normal life, and would guarantee his family and society protection against all harm. God has drawn man's attention to the importance of health. The Prophet Mohammad is reported to have said: "*Whoever wakes up in the morning healthy of body, safe within his neighbourhood and in possession of his daily bread would be as if he has won the whole world*". It is also said in the New Testament: "*Glorify God with your bodies and your souls, which belong to God*".

God has then urged man to preserve his health, and warned him against exposing himself to danger or destruction. He spurred him to keep away from sins, overt and covert. Religious teachings have given as much attention to the health and well-being of society as they have to that of the individual person. The Prophet Mohammad says: "*There shall be no infliction of harm on self or others,*" which is a rule defining the bounds of a person's behaviour so as not to cause harm to others. In all divine messages we find numerous statements instituting concepts of health protection and disease prevention, and highlighting forms of sound life, as well as regulations to bring the enjoyment of freedom and human rights within proper limits.

The progressive development of life on this planet has brought about a number of deep and rapid consequences. The changes in human behaviour caused by increased population, mass immigration, better and faster means of travel and communication, technological achievements and other social and economic developments are manifest to us all. Despite the undoubtedly positive aspects of all these changes, their negative impact on the balance of man's personality, the family structure and the cohesion of society is now clear to every one. These crucial changes have been accompanied by a weakening of religious restraints and moral modes of behaviour, to varying degrees, among individuals and societies. This has led to the spread of alien and unnatural behaviour patterns that have ushered in what can be called behavioural diseases, including all types of sexually transmitted diseases, not least of which is the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

The spread of sexually transmitted diseases is now rampant the world over, with over 250 million new cases every year. Over the last ten years, AIDS has affected between eight and ten million people. This figure is expected to rise to about 40 million by the year 2000. Furthermore, despite the fact that science has been able to determine this disease's natural history, its progress and the way it destroys all of the human body's defences, until the victim eventually reaches the inescapable fate of death,

scientists have not as yet discovered a cure or a vaccine that would protect humans against its dangers.

In the circumstances, avoiding the risk factors proves to be the only weapon available in combating this disease, and this can be achieved by adopting responsible, sensible and rational behaviour. In other words, a return to the proper moral framework taught by religion. Fortunately for us, religion continues to have its influence and sacredness in countries of this Region, the cradle of divine religions. The health programmes that we are implementing jointly with Member States have confirmed that the best guarantee of success for any health programme, and the best way to persuade people of its efficacy and gain their support for it, is to base the programme on the people's own culture, traditions and religious beliefs. This is the cornerstone in the philosophy of primary health care.

Preachers and welfare workers, mosques and churches alike, have an important role to play in this process. Were it to incorporate the call to good health in its message, a religious order would be perfectly capable of achieving wonders in the area of health and well-being. For this purpose, we invited a select group of religious, legal and medical scholars and scientists, to share with us their views and expertise on the best way to utilize religious teachings for the purpose of protecting individuals and groups against AIDS and all other sexually transmitted diseases. The result of this consultation is a series of objective recommendations given at the end of this booklet. Dr Mohammad Saleem al-Awwa was kind enough to prepare this booklet, summarizing the outcome of the two-day Regional Consultation. I have great pleasure in presenting this work to the reader, hoping sincerely that it will be enjoyable, useful and of help in highlighting the religious and ethical aspects of this complex and increasingly serious problem.

PREFACE

It is unlikely that mankind has ever faced an epidemic as dangerous as the one we have come to call the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome or AIDS, for short. Certainly, humanity has never given so much attention to or shown so much fear of a disease as it does with AIDS.

AIDS is a terminal disease for which doctors, have no effective cure as yet. Infection is predominantly through sexual intercourse performed under certain circumstances or in certain ways. Apart from this, no one knows when it first afflicted humans, nor can anybody predict, let alone claim to know, what will befall the human race as a result of its spread over the coming years.

The mystery surrounding this disease is made much more complicated by the fact that, years after it was first discovered, it became clear that its infection had been widespread in many countries before the disease was even detected by scientists and before the first AIDS case was diagnosed in 1981.

Scientific sources concerned with monitoring the spread of AIDS point out that by the year 2000, the number of cases is likely to reach 40 million, of which 30 million will be among adults and the rest among children.

The same sources say that if the spread of AIDS continues unchecked, with no effective and accessible cure becoming available to those infected, the number of cases is likely to reach uncontrollable proportions.

The present situation is no better than that which is being predicted for the future. The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that between 300,000 and 500,000 people will suffer symptoms of AIDS every year, i.e., between 1,000 and 1,400 cases a day⁽¹⁾.

All this no doubt justifies the horror expressed by the concerned agencies and institutions, as well as by ordinary people. It also justifies the interest shown by various specialist bodies, headed by WHO, in providing information, advice and knowledge with regard to prevention methods against this very serious disease.

With scientific and medical efforts still unable to find a vaccine or a cure that would protect people against the AIDS epidemic and its horrors, the only way to combat the disease is through prevention, slaving off the evil before it strikes and keeping away from the sources of danger.

Nothing can be more helpful in this preventive effort than religious teachings and the adoption of proper and decent behaviour, as advocated and urged by all divine religions.

The World Health Organization, and the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office in particular, have conducted some experiments in this field. In the health programmes carried out in collaboration with Member States, it has taken account of indigenous

traditions and cultures that are basically built on religious beliefs. The effect has been tremendous, as can clearly be seen in encouraging public response to these programmes.

Accordingly, WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office took the initiative to organize a Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the field of the prevention and control of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases to which a select group of experts in the fields of religion and medicine have been invited.

The Consultation was held on 9 and 10 September 1991, at the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office in Alexandria, and was attended by the WHO's Regional Director and a large number of directors and advisers at the Regional Office. It was also attended by ten prominent legal and religious scholars, both Muslim and Christian (See Annex II). A number of papers were submitted and distributed for study and consultation. As a result, several recommendations and conclusions were formulated. (Annex I). These dealt with the importance of religion and its role in the field of prevention of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. They also highlighted the role of religious establishments and the media, the rights of victims and those who come in contact with them, the effect of prevention and diagnosis procedures on human rights, early marriage, the laws dealing with patients and infected persons and doctors' duties.

This booklet is an attempt to present to the reader a comprehensive summary of that Consultation.

While taking due care and attention to make this booklet useful for specialists dealing with real and potential cases of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, the World Health Organization addresses this paper in its present form, initially, to non-specialists in general and to those working in the fields of public information and education as well as promoters of educational, cultural and social guidance activities in schools, colleges and similar institutes of education, as well as among industrial, sport, recreational and other groupings.

AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases – A General Threat

Until very recently, some people used to believe that the Arab-Muslim parts of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region were safe from the spread of AIDS and from the devastating effects of other sexually transmitted diseases, especially those reaching world epidemic proportions. However, research and studies as well as the available statistical data have shown that this belief is totally false. With regard to AIDS, there are at present "specific indications of the fast spread of the disease locally in almost all countries of the region, especially among certain groups such as drug addicts, prostitutes and homosexuals where rates of infection have soared in recent years" (2).

As for other sexually transmitted diseases, indications confirm that "infection and spread rates continue to rise. The factors causing this perhaps include the increase in population movement, for natural or industrial reasons, urbanization and increased tourism, all of which have their impact on people's morals and behaviour patterns" (3).

"The importance of the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases generally in the fight against AIDS, increases when we realize that the presence of a sexually transmitted disease raises the chances of catching the AIDS infection by more than 300%" (4).

These diseases are seen to be much more serious when we remember that "the highest rates of incidence occur among those who are between 20 and 24 years of age, followed by the 15 -19 year age group and then the 25 - 29 year group" (5).

Despite all that, this Region is fortunate in the sense that moral and religious values still have an undeniably deep influence over its people.

The practical message of this booklet, is exceptionally important, as it emphasizes religious and ethical values and encourages healthy behaviour as a preventive method to be used against the rampant scourge of AIDS and all other sexually transmitted diseases. No country in the world is immune from these diseases which, once allowed to spread, can gather greater momentum with far-reaching destructive effects on man. After all, it is people who build human civilization and are the prime beneficiaries of all moral and material progress.

Since AIDS mainly spreads through both heterosexual and homosexual activity and among drug addicts, especially intravenous drug users or those who use contaminated needles, the exposition of religious teachings relating to such types of behaviour is essential in building protective and preventive barriers against infection and disease.

Religion and Sensual Pleasures

It would be useful to state here that religion has a well-known, universally agreed stand on sensual pleasure, which does not approve either total indulgence or total prohibition. All religions allow certain kinds of such enjoyment that are known in religious language as permissible, and censor others that are designated as forbidden.

No divine scripture received by any of the prophets and messengers absolutely prohibits sensual pleasures or permits their unrestrained indulgence. Total prohibition is contrary to basic human nature. This basic human nature comprises, inter alia, desires and urges that have to be satisfied in various sensual ways. Total permissiveness, however, changes man from a rational, highly honoured being into a dumb creature that sinks to a level lower than that of animals, which hanker after the satisfaction of their instinctive desires and simply do what pleases them and avoid what does them harm.

Since the modes of transmission of the AIDS infection and other sexually transmitted diseases mostly revolve around human pleasures and the types of behaviour within which man seeks these pleasures, it is important to study the effect of religious observance and the adherence to the behavioural values instituted by religion and the moral values it recommends on man's attitude to sensual pleasures and how they are to be gratified. Such a study can be of immense value for the programmes devoted to the control of the AIDS epidemic and other sexually transmitted diseases. It requires first of all the identification of which sensual pleasures are permissible and which are not, in order to ensure that by following religious teachings people would effectively steer away from behaviour patterns through which this individually and collectively devastating epidemic can spread ⁽⁶⁾.

The gist of religious teachings in this regard is that religion encourages and advocates marriage and prohibits all other alternatives for sexual enjoyment. Religions also prescribe the preservation of the human rational faculties and prohibit the use of all kinds of substances, such as drugs and narcotics, that may impair them, regardless of the manner in which these substances are taken or administered. They also urge public cleanliness and promote public health to a degree that protects human beings from risks of infection by destructive diseases, the most dangerous of which, in this day and age, are sexually transmitted diseases, and AIDS in particular.

Chastity: an Objective of Marriage

The two main religions of the Eastern Mediterranean Region attach great importance to marriage and marital relationships.

- 3.1 In the Glorious Quran, its primary source of law, Islam pays particular attention to marriage, showering it with such distinctive veneration that makes it unique among all human contracts ⁽⁷⁾.

The Quran makes clear that marriage is a divine favour that God bestows on His servants: *“God has given you spouses from among yourselves and, through your spouses, sons and grandsons; He has provided you with good things: will they then believe in falsehood and deny God’s favours ?”* (16;72).

The creation of spouses is described as a sign of God’s limitless power: *“Among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, that you may live in peace with them, and spread love and compassion between you and them; surely, there are signs in that for those who reflect”* (30; 21).

Islam makes it the responsibility of society as a whole to facilitate marriage for both men and women. In the Quran we read: *“Give in marriage those among you who are single and those of your male and female slaves who are pious. If they are poor, God will grant them sufficiency of His bounty; for He is munificent, all-knowing. Let those who cannot afford to marry live in continence until God grants them sufficiency out of His bounty”* (24; 32-33).

Islamic statements point out that among the purposes of marriage, is the protection of men and women against immoral behaviour resulting from sexual permissiveness. A married person is, generally speaking, satisfied with what God has lawfully provided for him or her, and would not go beyond that and infringe upon the limits laid down by God. It is for this reason that the Prophet of Islam (peace be on him) urges those who can afford marriage not to delay it. He says: *“Young men ! Whoever has sufficient means should get married. It would help him to lower his gaze and protect his chastity. But those who cannot should resort to fasting for fasting is a good restraint of the sexual drive”* (Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim on the authority of Abdullah ibn Massoud).

Emphasizing that chastity is one of the aims of marriage, the Prophet says: *“When one of you looks at a woman (in a sensual sense) he should go to his wife for that would satisfy his desire”* (Related by Muslim on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdulah).

“Islam also enjoins upon its followers to practice and enjoy sex fully within marriage making it a commendable act, worthy of reward. It advises gentleness and tenderness in courtship, foreplay and eroticism during love-making, and requires the two spouses to help each other attain pleasure and satisfaction from the act”⁽⁸⁾.

The Quran has, in general terms, restricted sex to marriage and considered any sexual activity outside it a forbidden transgression. God says in the Quran: *“And those who are mindful of their chastity, (fulfilling their desires) only with their spouses and whomever their right hands may possess, since then they are free from blame. Those who hanker after anything beyond that are indeed transgressors”* (23; 5-7).

- 3.2 Christianity’s encouragement of marriage and its interest in it are well documented in both the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible.

We read in the Old Testament that it is God who made the institution of marriage appropriate for human beings: *“Then the Lord God said, ‘ It is not good that the man (Adam) should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’ ”* (Genesis: 2, 18). The Torah also looks at men and women in similar vein: *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh”* (Genesis: 2, 21 passim).

Christian scriptures also take an interest in marriage, which they consider as sacrosanct, and urge that *“the husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband”*, maintaining that this is a right specifically for them to exercise to the exclusion of everyone else, for, *“the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does”*. (1 Corinthians: 7, 2-4).

Paul says in his First Letter to the Corinthians, *“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion”* (7, 8 passim). He also says to them, *“Now concerning the matters upon which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband”* (7, 1- 2).

- 3.3 By preserving their chastity within marriage, Muslims and Christians protect themselves against the most risky source of infection with the AIDS virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. This objective can only be achieved through chaste, clean marriage. It is for this reason that Islam prohibits marrying prostitutes. Following the revelation of the Quranic verse which says, *“The Adulterer may marry only an adulteress or one who associates partners with God. All this is forbidden to believers”* (24; 3). The Prophet, (peace be on him) instructed one of his companions not to marry a prostitute with whom he had a relationship prior to his becoming a Muslim. He said to him: *“Do not marry her”* (Sunan An-Nassa’ie)⁽⁹⁾.

According to the Glorious Quran, God permits marriage with virtuous women who are believers or followers of earlier religions (i.e. Christianity and Judaism) because such women are chaste and of good moral calibre. It also allows marriage for men on condition that they also are chaste and not promiscuous. Whoever rejects this Quranic ruling and does not observe it is an infidel whose marriage

can only be recognised by infidels like himself. Anyone who accepts this ruling but acts contrary to it by establishing a forbidden relationship is considered an adulterer.

The Quranic verse cited above follows the verse dealing with the flogging of adulterers: *“As for the adulteress and the adulterer - flog each of them with a hundred lashes”* (24:2). In this instance the punishment is physical, while the other is a moral one. The prohibition of marriage to adulterers, both male and female, is akin, in modern convention, to stripping someone of his nationality or national honour, or depriving someone of certain rights⁽¹⁰⁾.

Christianity also forbids marriage to both male and female, adulterers and considers *“marriage to a divorcee, man or woman, whose divorce came about as a result of committing adultery”* as unlawful⁽¹¹⁾.

Adultery between two Christians prohibits either party from entering into a marital relationship with the other⁽¹²⁾.

- 3.4 Thus, according to religious law, marriage is the only permissible way that God has prescribed for men and women to enjoy the physical aspects of the sexual relationship. All other forms of sexual contact that take place outside a proper marriage are sinful and unlawful. Perhaps it is interesting to reflect here that the phenomena of espousal and the existence of the male and the female are not exclusive to man. Duality is a fundamental and constant feature of all God's creation. God says in the Quran: *“Glory be to Him Who created all pairs out of what grows in the earth, among (mankind) themselves and out of that of which they have no knowledge.”* (36:36) *“And out of everything We have created a pair, so that you may remember”* (51:49).

Therefore, one of the prominent themes emerging during the Regional Consultation on the Role of Ethics and Religion in the Prevention and Control of AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases, is that “marriage is a major solution to these problems, as it protects young people. Nevertheless, it is tremendously difficult to achieve. It is just not sufficient simply to advise young people to abstain from sexual activity while all around them is inviting and full of temptation. We must, therefore, facilitate marriage and remove all financial, social and traditional obstacles that prevent it”⁽¹³⁾.

One of the Consultation's final recommendations is that “in order to protect young people against sexual misdemeanour, early marriages must be encouraged by solving the social and economic problems that are currently causing the average age at which people get married to be high. Early marriage must also be accompanied by a call for proper family planning in order to delay pregnancy and childbirth”.

Prohibition of sexual Relations Outside Marriage

The religions revealed from on high provide a second ring of protection for individuals and society against the adverse effects of unrestrained sexual freedom. This can be seen in their prohibition of all kinds of extra-marital relationships.

- 4.1 Islam, and indeed all divine religions, outlaw adultery and block all the roads leading to it. Adultery inflicts considerable damage upon family genealogy, honour and future generations and causes numerous family break-ups as well as the disintegration of the ties that bind family groups together. It brings about an oppressive spread of licentiousness leading to a total moral breakdown. All this explains Islam's strong condemnation of adultery, which is only matched by its condemnation of drinking intoxicants. The Quran says: "*Do not commit adultery, for it is foul and improper*" (17:32).

Islam's general approach in forbidding any action is not limited to its verbal condemnation, but always entails closing the doors that may lead to committing it. For this reason, Islam forbids men and women meeting alone privately or in seclusion. It does not allow wanton mixing of the sexes, forbids lecherous gazing at the opposite sex, looking at those parts or other people's bodies which Islam requires to remain covered in public, and the excessive display of physical beauty and adornment.

Islam does not simply forbid adultery, but considers it a crime as well, proposing a stiff deterrent punishment for it. In the Quran we read: "*As for adulterer and the adulteress, flog each of them one hundred lashes; do not have any pity on them with regard to God's injunctions, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let their punishment be witnessed by a number of believers*" (24:2).

While proscribing indecency in general, Islam describes adultery a shameful act of obscenity, saying in the Quran: "*Do not come near to any shameful indecency, whether open or secret*" (6:151). Prohibiting adultery in this way and prescribing a specific punishment for anyone proven guilty of it indicate the gravity of the subject and God's wish, in His wisdom, for people to avoid the act itself and any other action or behaviour that may lead to it.

Adultery is strictly forbidden by Christianity as well, as both the Old and New Testaments make absolutely clear.

The seventh commandment given to Moses states: "*You shall not commit adultery*", while the Old Testament says, "*He who commits adultery has no sense*," (Proverbs:32). In the Book of Matthew, Jesus is quoted as saying, "*But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (Matthew: 5, 28).

Adultery has been branded by all Prophets as "*unclean*" "*indecent*" "*profane*" "*capricious*" and a "*vile lust*" ⁽¹⁶⁾.

St. Paul goes even further by prohibiting mixing with adulterers, when he says, "You shall not mix with adulterers. . . do not mix or eat with their like . . . isolate the bad from amongst you" (I Corinthians: 5, 3-9).

Christianity considers adultery as the only justification for divorce. We read in the Book of Matthew (19:9), "*Whoever divorces his wife except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery*". Such a strong censure can only show how vile and wicked adultery is taken to be in Christian teachings, which do not permit divorce as a general rule, but allow it, and may even make it compulsory, where adultery has been committed by either spouse.

4.2 Observance of religious teachings prohibiting adultery is one of the most effective methods of avoiding the risk of infection with AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. This becomes even more significant when we understand that infection comes about chiefly as a result of sexual contact, whether between heterosexuals or homosexuals.

4.3 Just as divine religions prohibit adultery, they also forbid homosexuality, especially between men.

The Glorious Quran has on many occasions referred to the sin of the people of the Prophet Lot to take some examples : "*And tell of Lot. He said to his people: 'do you commit indecency with your eyes open, lustfully seeking men instead of women? Surely you are an ignorant people?'*" (27:54-5). Describing those people's confrontation with Lot, God Almighty says: "*You have sex with males and abandon your wives, whom God has created for you: Surely you are great transgressors*" (26 :164-166).

The Glorious Quran describes what befell the people of Lot for their persistence in perpetuating that sin, and in being the first to practice it, by saying: "*And then We utterly destroyed the rest; We pelted them with rain, and evil was the rain that fell on those who were forewarned. Surely in that there was a sign, yet most of them did not believe* : (26:172-174).

4.4 Not only does Islam pronounce homosexuality as forbidden, but it also prohibits unnatural sexual activity between men and women. Several *Hadiths* have reliably reported the Prophet, (peace be on him), as having strictly forbidden anal intercourse. One such *hadith* says, "*God shall not look at a man who has an anal intercourse with his wife*" (17).

4.5 Islam has also prohibited sexual intercourse during menstruation. This is made very clear in the Quran as it says: "*They ask you about menstruation, say: 'It is an indisposition, so keep away from women during their menstrual periods and do not touch them until they are clean, and once they have become clean, then (you may) have sexual intercourse with them in the way God enjoined on you, for God loves those who turn to Him in repentance and keep clean*" (21: 22)⁽¹⁸⁾.

4.6 As it forbids adultery, Christianity also prohibits all kinds of unnatural sexual relationships, including homosexuality of men and women (Leviticus: 20,13;

Romans: 1, 26 and 1, 27). According to Christianity, marriages between a woman and a homosexual man and between a man and a lesbian woman are not valid ⁽¹⁹⁾. Indeed, in the Old Testament, we find an explicit prohibition of homosexuality, as we read that, *"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them"* (Leviticus: 20,13).

In his First Letter to Timothy, St. Paul says: *"The law is not laid down for the just but for the . . . , immoral persons, sodomites. . ."* (Timothy 1:1,70). In his Letter to the Romans, he says, *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. . . , For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions; their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men . . . , though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die"* (Romans 1: 1, 18-32).

Prohibition of Drugs and All Intoxicating Substances

- 5.1 All divine religions prohibit taking substances that cause damage to the brain, or induce unconsciousness or impairment of the mind.

Muslims are agreed, and so are all creeds, that the overall objective of the law is the preservation of the five basic essential elements of human life: belief, body, mind, offspring and properly⁽²⁰⁾.

Narcotic drugs have been prohibited by Islam as a consequence of the prohibition of intoxicating drinks, which are felt to be at the root of all grave and serious offences. Alcohol is at the same time the main substance that has a negative effect on the mind. This prohibition is absolute. Drinking intoxicants, trading in them, and indeed the mere handling of any of them, are considered in Islamic law offences that incur punishment.

Let us look at what the Quran has to say with respect to the prohibition of intoxicants. *“Intoxicants and games of chance, idolatrous practices and the divining of arrows are abominations devised by Satan. Avoid them, so that you may prosper. Satan seeks to stir up enmity and hatred among you by means of intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God and from your prayers. So, will you not, then, desist ?”* (5: 90-91).

This represents one of the most powerful types of prohibition in the Quran, as it covers the following important points:

- 5.1.1 Branding intoxicating drinks as an abomination.
- 5.1.2 Classifying them on a par with games of chance, idolatrous practices and the divining of arrows, all of which have been pronounced as absolutely forbidden in statements that combine authentically with a definitive import.
- 5.1.3 Branding them as devised by Satan.
- 5.1.4 The use of the imperative ‘*avoid*’ makes the injunction much stronger and more significant than it would have been had the word ‘prohibited’ been used. The implication here is to avoid intoxicating drinks in all forms and situations, including drinking, trading and carrying or freighting them, or giving them as gifts, etc.
- 5.1.5 Equating drinking intoxicants with idolatrous practices, which God has so severely forbidden in the Quran: *“Avoid the filth of worshipping idols and avoid falsehood”* (Pilgrimage: 30).
- 5.1.6 Making the avoidance of intoxicants a precondition for prosperity. A believer cannot be happy with himself while practicing what is detrimental to his prosperity and happiness.
- 5.1.7 Stating that intoxicants stir enmity and hatred between people.

- 5.1.8 Describing them as a means Satan manipulates to turn people away from the remembrance of God, which is always a source of peace and reassurance .
- 5.1.9 Prayer is a deterrent against indecency and sinfulness, and it is through drinking that people are prevented from observing the duty of prayer.
- 5.1.10 The relevant Quranic verses forbidding intoxicants are concluded with the rhetoric form: *“Will you not, then, desist ?”* This is the strongest form of threat. On hearing it, the Prophet’s companions response was, *“We do, Our Lord: We do!”* ⁽²¹⁾.
- 5.2 The ruling with respect to drugs is the same as that on intoxicating drinks. Umar ibn Al-Khallab says: *“Prohibited intoxicants are those that influence the functioning of the mind”*. Any substance that siezes the human mind and subdues or impairs its faculties of discretion, recognition and judgement would be considered unlawful in accordance with the edicts of God and His Messenger, until the Day of Judgement ⁽²²⁾.

The Prophet is quoted as saying: *“Every intoxicant is unlawful. Every narcotic is unlawful. If a substance intoxicates when taken in large quantities then every small quantity of it is forbidden. Whatever influences the functioning of the mind is forbidden”* ⁽²³⁾.

The prohibition of such substances is in consequence of the malice and harm they cause. The AIDS epidemic has revealed a new kind of threat, hitherto unknown to man, which is the possibility of infection with AIDS and similar fatal diseases, when drugs are taken by intravenous injection, using contaminated needles, were this to be the only threat posed by the use of drugs, it would have been cause enough to make it forbidden. However, we have the consensus of religious scholars that all types of drugs that influence the human mind are not permissible to take.

- 5.3 Christianity also prohibits the use of such substances that clearly affect the functioning of the mind. We read in the Old Testament that, *“Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the hear”* (Hosea: 4,11).

The isolation of unhealthy members of society is another Biblical precept. These undoubtedly include drug addicts, especially intravenous drug users ⁽²⁵⁾.

We can now see that, for Christians and Muslims, the two predominant faiths in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, religious observance leads to one and the same conclusion: the elimination of all, or most, means and routes that lead to the infection with and spread of, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Doing Away with Pretexts Justifying the Unlawful Behaviour

Islam, and generally all other religions, are not content with simple declarations or warnings with respect to unlawful or harmful activity and behaviour. They are eager to prevent and eliminate the means leading to such activity and behaviour. In this context, Muslim jurists formulated a legal principle known as *Sadd-u-Thara'ie*, which means, in practical terms, closing the doors or removing the means which lead to what is unlawful. This principle entails the prohibition of certain substances or activities for the simple reason that they would lead to a forbidden action or behaviour. Some of these substances and activities might not be unlawful in themselves, but they become subject to prohibition when they can lead to some other activity that is expressly forbidden.

The object of this ruling is to “cleanse the social atmosphere of all provocative agents of temptation and sensuality and causes of deviant behaviour, as far as possible”⁽²⁶⁾. In themselves, these agents may be prohibited, permissible or even recommended.

There could not be a more appropriate approach in the area of sensual and sexual desires and gratification. Without it, the requirement to refrain from unlawful sexual activity would be onerous, and could be even self-defeating. Religious teachings are normally geared to alleviate hardship and facilitate a clean and chaste life. The Quran emphasizes “*God does not wish to overburden you; He seeks only to purify you*” (5:6).

Among the practices and types of behaviour to which the principle of *Sadd-u-Thara'ie* applies and which relate to the prohibition of sexual activity outside proper marriage, are:

- 6.1 Entering people's houses without their permission. This is prohibited as the Quran says: “*Believers, do not enter homes other than your own until you have permission to do so and wish peace to their dwellers. That is best for you, if you would only reflect. If you find no one in them, do not enter them until you are given permission to do so. If you are told to leave, then go away, for it is right for you so to do. God is aware of what you do*” (Light: 27-28).
- 6.2 The directives to lower one's gaze and not look at those parts of the human body that could arouse sensual feelings. This is clearly laid down in the Quran: “*Tell the believing men to turn their eyes away (from carnal temptation) and preserve their chastity. It would make them pure. God knows what they do . Tell the believing women to turn their eyes away (from carnal temptation) and preserve their chastity, to cover their adornment, except such as is normally visible of it, to draw their clothes properly over their bodies, not to reveal their beauty to anyone except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' father, their sons, step-sons, brothers, nephews, their women folk or slave-girls, their male-attendants lacking in sexual drive and children who have no appreciation of women's nakedness. Let them also not move their legs when walking, so as to draw attention to their hidden charms. Believers, you should all repent to God, that you may prosper*” (Light: 30-31).

Commentators on the Quran have indicated that, the above injunction is "a command from God to His believing servants to turn their eyes away from what is not permissible for them to look at and only enjoy looking at what they are allowed to see. If one's eyes fall inadvertently on something that is not permissible to look at one must immediately turn one's eyes away"⁽²⁷⁾.

The *Sunnan* of the Prophet confirms this view. Muslim and others have reported that Jareer ibn Abdullah al-Bujali asked the Prophet (peace be on him) about the inadvertent glance. The Prophet replied, "*Turn your eyes away*"⁽²⁸⁾.

- 6.3 The display of charms and adornments. This is forbidden under this heading. It is not lawful for a woman to reveal too much or to deliberately try to attract men's eyes and their admiration. Such behaviour nullifies the effect of the injunction not to look at women lustfully and defeats the objectives of spreading virtue and cleansing society of all lewd and sinful practices.
- 6.4 The prohibition of sweet and sensual talk in women's conversation with men.
- 6.5 The encouragement of modesty, describing it as a branch of faith. The Prophet said, "*Faith consists of some and sixty or some and seventy points the first of which is the testimony that there is no deity but God and the last of which is picking up litter from people's path. Modesty is one of these points of faith*"⁽²⁹⁾.

The concept of modesty refers to man's natural feeling of shame when leaning towards committing something unlawful. This feeling acts as a deterrent against committing it. Whenever someone's instinctive desires have the best of him, one's inner sense of shame is revived, conscience awakened and ability to reflect, refrain or repent, heightened.

All ethical teachings and instruction of Islam are aimed at invigorating and supporting this intrinsic quality of human nature, and making it stronger with knowledge, understanding and feeling. The purpose is to make it part of the moral fabric of man's personality, and to protect and guard man's moral well-being. The Prophet says: "*Every religion has a basic code of morals, and the basic moral code of Islam is modesty*"⁽³⁰⁾.

Another *Hadith* says: "*Modesty can only bring about goodness*"⁽³¹⁾.

Modesty brings together all the characteristics of goodness in human nature and is an effective protection against all evil. The Prophet, (peace be on him) was full of admiration for those whose modesty was reflected in their behaviour. He always urged his companions to develop this precious moral quality.

Christianity also teaches and advocates moral ideals similar to those espoused by Islam. We read in the Old Testament: "*You shall not covet your neighbour's wife*" (Exodus: 20,17; Deuteronomy: 5,21). According to the New Testament, "*Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (Matthew, 5: 28). Christian teachings are full of high moral directives that provide for a clean and chaste human life. One of the most powerful of such exhortations is found in St. Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians

(4:3-8) in which he says to them, *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality; . . . Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy spirit to you”*.

St. Peter the Apostle confirms this in his First Letter when he says: *“Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles . . .”* (Peter 1: 2,11) He also says in the same Letter, *“ . . . do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, ‘You shall be holy’ for I am holy”* (Peter 1:1,15).

Thus we see that the teachings of both Islam and Christianity do not stop at advocating virtue, extolling and praising all that lead to it, and condemning immorality and all sinful activity that lead to it. Both religions go further than that and condemn the mere contemplation of sin or allowing oneself to be subject to its temptation.

Adherence to religious moral injunctions in avoiding immoral and sinful practices is not portrayed simply as a way leading to happiness in the Hereafter only. It has a role to play in the enhancement of the physical and moral purification of the human personality in this world as well. The Quran encourages certain actions because they are more *“wholesome”* and *“purer”*, praises those who obey as being *“goodly men and women”*. Disobedient individuals are described as *“wicked men and women”*. These distinctions are made on the basis that the former have respected and observed God’s messages and acted accordingly, while the latter have succumbed to their desires, and strayed away. In trying to satisfy their natural desires they have not been content with what is permissible and acceptable. They have let loose their desires and indulged in what is sinful and forbidden. It is sufficient as a motivation to abide by the religious commandment that one earns the quality of being *“goodly”* as a result. Similarly, being called *“wicked”* provides the incentive to steer away from sin. Such descriptions in religious books provide the right motivation for people with conscience and sincerity to bring their conduct in line with their beliefs.

Deterrent Penalties

The religious approach, as we have seen, relies heavily on the need to protect human beings against all gross indecency. It lays down a verdict of prohibition on all indecent and sinful practices, projects them as unpleasant and discourages believers from pursuing them. Religions also advocate preventive measures that would curb the spread of such practices.

People, however, are not of the same calibre and ability when it comes to religious observance and piety. There are those who possess sufficient willpower and strength of character that could not be broken by temptation and seduction. There are others who can neither resist temptation nor effectively restrain their desires. Such people fall into the traps of sin and vile behaviour.

For these people religions have prescribed some harsh penalties that aim to dissuade sinners and deter others who might be tempted to follow their example. Another purpose of these penalties is to restrict the spread of vice and misbehaviour and bring about reform in society as a whole.

- 7.1 The penalty for adultery in Islam is lashing for the unmarried offender and stoning for the one who is married. In the Quran we read: *“As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each one of them a hundred lashes. Do not pity them when it comes to God’s laws. if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let their punishment be witnessed by a number of believers”* (24: 2).

In the *hadith* of the Prophet there are to be found definitive rules, as documented by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others, with respect to the punishment of the married adulterer and adulteress, which is death by stoning⁽³²⁾.

- 7.2 In the Old Testament there are also statements specifying death by stoning as the enforceable punishment for both adulterers: *“Then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbour’s wife; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you”* (Deuteronomy 22:24).

In case a woman was forced into committing adultery, the Old Testament prescribes punishment only for whoever forced her into it. It says, *“But if in the open country a man meets a woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But to the young woman you shall do nothing; in the young woman there is no offence punishable by death, for this case is like a man attacking and murdering his neighbour”* (Deuteronomy - 22: 25-26).

- 7.3 For homosexuals, the Old Testament prescribes the penalty of death. It says, *“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them”* (Leviticus - 20: 13).

- 7.4 In Islam, it is absolutely forbidden to consume or take intoxicants or drugs and narcotics, or to deal with them in any way. Any violation of the relevant orders and commandments earns a befitting punishment in accordance with the Islamic penal code which provides a system for cases where no definite penalty has been specified in the Quran or the *Sunnah*. Islamic law allows for discretionary punishment in these cases. The range of punishment can go as far as the death penalty itself, especially in serious offences that threaten the security and well-being of society as a whole.

In Islam, every offence, whether of commission or omission, is subject to this system which provides a protective measure and gives the penal and judicial authorities the flexibility to decide the relevant and suitable punishment in each case, so as to protect public morals.

Muslim criminal law, and religious rules in general, aim to protect moral values in the face of transgression by those who are not deterred by teaching or advice. Indeed, this attitude of religious law in protecting moral values, by all available means, is based on the fact that the laws themselves are established on ethical foundations. Human actions, attitudes and behaviour are all judged by how close to, or how far from, the ideal moral model they are. For this reason, Islam has condemned those who demonstrate, by word or action, their desire to see evil and immorality spread and become commonplace in society.

The ideal moral model was preached by Prophets before Mohammad, whose mission was to complement and crown theirs, as confirmed by the Prophet Mohammad himself in his statement: "*I have been sent in order to bring noble moral behaviour to complete fullness*"⁽³³⁾.

Religious Teachings and the Concepts of Freedom and Human Rights

- 8.1 From our summary of religious teachings and rules, it is clear that they advocate certain forms of restrictive and penal measures with respect to certain types of human behaviour. This may seem to invalidate or contradict the concept of personal freedom, as some modern writings have claimed.
- 8.2 It is beyond the scope of this discussion to go into the intellectual, philosophical, legal or social aspects relating to the concept of personal freedom or what influence it may have on the legal system or the social make-up of behavioural values.

Suffice it to stress here that, for the purpose of this discussion, what is understood by personal freedom is one's right to enjoy any God-given talents and aptitudes as well as the facilities available in this world, in any manner one desires.

- 8.3 According to Islam, this right branches out of the concept of permissibility which is a fundamental feature of human life. This concept is clearly expressed in many Quranic statements, such as: *"It is He Who has created for you all that is on earth"* (2; 19), and, *"Say: 'Who has forbidden the beauty which God has brought forth for His servants, or the good things of life?' Say: 'These are for the enjoyment of the believers in this life, and on the Day of Resurrection shall be theirs alone'. Thus We make signs plain for those who have sense. Say: 'My lord has forbidden all indecent acts, whether open or secret, and He has forbidden sin and wrongful oppression, and that you associate with Him in worship what He did not sanction, or to tell of God what you do not know'"* (7;32-33).

The last two verses define the two components of personal freedom, as established by Islam. The first one affirms the permissibility of enjoyment, which the Quran calls *zeenah*, (which in its literal sense means: adornment) as a favour coming from God, and explains the reason for its existence as being "provided for His servants".

The second verse gives the other side of the concept of personal freedom, by confirming that what God has forbidden is indecency whether it relates to belief, behaviour or speech, both open and secret, public and private. He has also forbidden sin, which is a name for all indecent thoughts, words and deeds, committed in defiance of the guidance given by God and His Prophets. According to the Quranic verse, quoted above, God has also prohibited all forms of wrongful oppression, including the deprivation of the human soul of the permissible material enjoyments and allowing it to hanker after what is not permissible. The passage ends by condemning the distortion of God's laws by man, so as to allow indulgence of what is forbidden and to shun lawful and pleasant behaviour.

These two verses, which represent the basic code of guidance with respect to freedom to enjoy the God-given life on this earth, bring into focus the fact that Islam, in agreement with all other divine religions, does not define personal freedom in the same way this has come to be understood in the modern world after the Second World War. According to this modern concept, everyone has the right to have as many, so-called "free", sexual relationships as he or she may desire. Society thus sheds its prudent image which helps protect individuals against corruption and moral misconduct. It acquires instead a permissive and promiscuous outlook which permits individuals to do everything they consider proper. For Muslims, therefore, and indeed for all religiously-minded people, the idea of personal freedom is quite different from that understood by those who venerate and consecrate the individual as such, giving little or no regard to his beliefs or behaviour⁽³⁴⁾.

- 8.4 Personal freedom, according to Islamic law, is guaranteed outside the area marked by the commandments and prohibitions stated in the Quran and the *Sunnah*. Once a definite ruling is established by either of the two main sources of Islamic law, personal freedom becomes subject to that ruling.
- 8.5 The available literature on the prevention of the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases deals with the effect of medical procedures relating to the testing of suspected or potential carriers, and the futility of the procedures of quarantine and isolation, as well as with the restrictions imposed on dealing with those who have caught the infection employing them or allowing them to join schools and colleges. Moreover, these procedures have an adverse impact on human rights because they undermine these rights, in a general sense, and lead to discrimination between certain groups of the human race for reasons which may be beyond their control⁽³⁵⁾.
- 8.6 Religious and international views on human rights do not, in fact, differ very much, except that in a religious context, these rights are exercised within the framework outlined by religion with regard to human behaviour.

Whereas one of the policy guidelines of the World Health Organization, relating to the fight against the AIDS epidemic, is to "support the current efforts being made in the area of human rights", it is difficult to imagine these efforts bearing fruit in the Eastern Mediterranean Region unless the concept of "human rights" is understood in the light of the religious beliefs that prevail in the countries of this Region.

- 8.7 One of the human rights recognized by international law is the right of 'privacy' which gives everyone the privilege to choose his or her private relationships and practices as they please. However, in a society observing religious teachings, this right, as well as the right of personal security, is exercised within the values relating to personal and collective morals. Accordingly, Article 17 of the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam states that: "everyone has the right to live

in an environment that is free from moral corruption and disease, which enables him or her to develop his or her personality morally, the society and the state being bound by law to guarantee that right”⁽³⁶⁾.

Article 24 states: “All rights and freedoms guaranteed by this Declaration are governed by the rules of Islamic law”.

Islam makes it clear that faith is the inexhaustible source of inner psychological peace. The Quran says, “*Whoever believes in God, God will guide his heart onto the right path*”. It warns sinners who refuse to repent that, “*If you do not (refrain from sin) then prepare for a war to be waged against you by God and His messenger*” (2;279). Who, indeed, can experience peace or enjoy psychological or personal security, if they are at war with God Almighty?

- 8.8 While modern trends in Western literature today tend to advocate separation of personal and public moral values and behaviour, an opposing trend, which has been slowly gaining support, sees this separation as artificial. It advocates that, in a civilised society, legal authorities ought always to take the initiative to safeguard, at least, the minimum socially agreed moral and ethical values.

This falls in line with the Islamic legal system and that of religion in general. This system attaches much importance to the protection and preservation of the moral values that should govern society, and in whose light all national and international codes of human rights should be interpreted and understood.

Whereas western legislators and intellectuals consider that the law should safeguard those moral values that have become traditionally accepted by society, Muslim jurists call for this protection to be extended to all moral and ethical values that should, according to religious perception, prevail in human society.

The difference between the two approaches lies in the fact that the Western view is satisfied with safeguarding those moral values that society has come to consider worth keeping. Thus when society's appreciation of some of those moral values changes, the values may not continue to deserve to be safeguarded by the legal system any longer.

Both Islamic and Christian legal thought, however, ordain that, through religious teachings, a set of values representing the moral and ethical norm should be maintained. Legal backing should be provided for that norm to ensure that it is preserved, promoted and respected by society at all times. This, in turn, is guaranteed by imposing penal measures for all forms of violation of the moral code of society.

This is clearly illustrated in the Islamic system of disciplinary punishments, or *t'azeer*, which affords the penal system the flexibility to deal with all types of violation of moral rules or norms for which no particular punishment or atonement is specified.

- 8.9 The major aim of promoting and supporting human rights is currently focused on eliminating discrimination against individuals, whose infection with HIV has

been confirmed. This aim is also guaranteed in both Islam and Christianity. However, in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, another premise has to be introduced which will not allow the promotion or encouragement of moral laxity and permissiveness or the disregard of religious guidance on right and wrong, under the pretext of protection of human rights.

Unless we are seen to truly appreciate this situation and introduce this important premise, we may easily allow a “credibility crisis” to develop in the relationship between those who are working to fight this dangerous epidemic, and their audiences. In this Region, any effort by anyone who does not show respect towards people's religious beliefs is doomed to failure and will certainly be in vain.

- 8.10 For this reason, the Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the Prevention and Control of AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases has stressed in its recommendations that “Human rights are guaranteed by all religions, and the call for personal freedom should not be used as a pretext to allow modes of behaviour that threaten the freedom and safety of others or that of society as a whole, including exposing them to infection”⁽³⁸⁾.

9

Religion and Health

From the discussions which took place at the Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the Prevention and Control of AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases, a strong basis emerged for the link between religion and public health.

This was widely welcomed, as the participants reached a consensus that, in an environment where religious influence is diminished, life seems to revert back to the jungle. It is, therefore, recommended that the participants would all become advocates and shepherds, in both the Islamic and Christian senses, of the teachings of their respective religions and their people. They pledged to promote and encourage adherence to religious counsel as a safeguard against the threat of moral and psychological corruption and degradation.

In this way, we shall be able to guarantee both spiritual and physical well-being and achieve an equilibrium which will help people to face life's responsibilities and obligations with both moral and physical, or spiritual and corporeal, fortitude.

Human nature is basically good, and if it is properly nurtured, it will yield the best results. Many parts of the world today, however, are in the grip of a credibility crisis between the teachers and leaders on the one hand, and the general public on the other. This crisis can only be overcome by society's leaders themselves becoming worthy examples, endearing religion and religious behaviour to people in general, and providing for religion to have its full effect in the field of health, and its two main areas of prevention and treatment.

Patient's Rights and Doctor's Obligations

AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases are different from other diseases to which people may fall victim. AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases are in a special category because of the sensitivity they create in the relationship between the patient and society as well as in between patient and doctor.

It is recognized that the standards of education about sexuality and health in countries of this Region are much lower than in many other parts of the world. Conversations on sexual relations are always shrouded in embarrassment, which prevents frank discussion and leads to ambiguity. Hence, participants in the Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the Prevention and Control of AIDS felt that it was important for them to deal with the question of the rights of patients and afflicted persons. They concluded that, no matter what the cause or the means of infection, the integrity of patients and afflicted persons should never be infringed, compromised or violated.

This conclusion is based on the strict religious prohibition of ridiculing or making fun of others. The Quranic injunction in this respect is very detailed: *“Believers ! No men shall deride other men: it may well be that those (whom they deride) are better than themselves; and no women (shall deride) other women: it may well be that those (whom they deride) are better than themselves. And neither shall you defame one another, nor call one another names”* (49;11). It is also backed by the general rule prohibiting causing harm to anyone as stated in the *hadith*: *“There shall be no infliction of harm on self or others”*.

Medical practitioners should inform their patients of the nature of their illness, and of the precautions necessary to prevent the spread of infection from the patient to others with whom the patient comes in contact, whether a wife, husband, children or other relatives.

Participants also agreed that a married person is entitled to be informed of his her spouse's infection. Both doctor and patient should cooperate fully, in confidence, in choosing the most suitable method and appropriate time to inform the husband or wife, as the case may be.

Participants also noted that laws of the countries of the Region remain short of being able to protect AIDS victims or carriers of the HIV virus. While these countries do cater materially and socially for victims of other diseases such as diabetes and psychiatric disorders, the current legislative and administrative framework in these countries does not provide similar care for victims of AIDS or carriers of the HIV virus.

To remedy this situation consolidated efforts, by experts and those concerned with medicine and social work, at both the individual and community levels, are required to provide victims with the social care and welfare they deserve. Work in these fields comes under the general framework of “charity” which Islam makes obligatory⁽⁴⁰⁾, as

well as the framework of the “cooperation” which is also made obligatory by the Quranic order. *“Help one another in what is good and pious”* (5:2). The Prophet says: *“Whoever is able to benefit his fellowman should do so”*⁽⁴¹⁾.

The role of the medical practitioner has also come under discussion. Agreement was clear that a doctor must be bound by the rules, requirements and ethics of the medical profession, including not abandoning the treatment of an AIDS patient, no matter how serious the condition may be. Practitioners are obliged to inform patients of the nature and extent of their affliction and explain to them their duty regarding the prevention of the spread of infection to others.

Since the incidence of AIDS in the countries of the Region is relatively new, the participants drew attention to the need for medical practitioners to keep abreast of new developments in the disease and the methods for its control. It must be ensured that medical personnel, with no knowledge of essential information on this disease, its symptoms, effects and the methods available for dealing with patients afflicted with it, are not allowed to treat cases of AIDS victims. Participants stressed the Islamic rule that *“whoever practices medicine without qualification should be penalised and made liable to make compensation (to those to whom he may cause harm)”*.

Two Complementary Documents

The aim of this booklet is to introduce the role of religion and ethics in the prevention and control of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, and to convey a strong and direct message of warning about the risks and side effects of misbehaviour. It also urges people to observe religious teachings and cherish moral and ethical values that prevent individuals from getting involved in risky relationships. Furthermore, it aims to encourage them to develop the necessary self-control to prevent them from such dangerous practices, whose risks for human life as a whole are not yet fully understood.

It has “become very clear that the factors and conditions leading to infection by AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases can be avoided if people adopt proper and decent patterns of behaviour, and if they adhere to the fundamental teachings of religion and the moral ethos based on them, which have become the central component of the unique culture of the people of this Region, and their inherited traditions”⁽⁴²⁾.

Finally, the Regional Office is pleased to present the reader with two documents on this subject; the first one is the full text of the recommendations of the Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the Prevention and Control of AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (Alexandria, September 1991), and the second is “Health Promotion through Islamic Lifestyles: the Amman Declaration” (June, 1989, and the reference document attached to it.) These two documents, which we hope will help readers learn more on the subject of the present booklet, are included in issue number 5 of the Health Education through Religion series.

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- (36) Preamble to the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, August 1990, printed in *Human Rights*. The Arab Organization for Human Rights, 24 December 1990, pp. 160-166.
- (37) Al-Awwa, Mohammad Saleem. Moral Crimes Affecting the Family, *Al-Muhammah*, May-June 1987, p. 49.
- (38) Recommendation No. 12 of the Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the Prevention and Control of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. World Health Organization, Alexandria, Egypt, 9-10 September 1991.
- (39) Sahih Ibn Majah. *Op. Cit.*, p.39, *Hadiths* Nos. 1895 and 1896.
- (40) Al-Khayyat, Mohammad Haitham. The *Fiqh* of Health, pp. 33-35 (Arabic).
- (41) *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- (42) Invitation letter from the Regional Director for WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, to the Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the Prevention and Control of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases. World Health Organization, Alexandria, Egypt, 9-10 September 1991.
- (43) Gezairy, Hussein A. We shall Not Lose Hope, *World Health*, October 1990, p.2.

Annex I

Recommendations of the Regional Consultation on the Role of Religion and Ethics in the Prevention and Control of AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases

1. The battle against the AIDS epidemic calls for efforts and resources beyond those of the health authorities alone. All other sectors concerned and the religious sector in particular, are called upon to stand side-by-side in facing up to this challenge. Spiritual work must, at all times, be related to health and other efforts, and should not be confined to certain issues or times.
2. Mosques and churches have a fundamental role to play in educating society. They must, in addition to highlighting religious teachings, tackle those aspects relating to the prevention and control of diseases, including AIDS and all sexually transmitted diseases, taking into account the sound principles of freedom, human rights, social welfare and cohesion, personal relationships and family life. Health authorities must provide religious leaders with basic information relating to the incidence of these diseases in society, in order to incorporate such information into their religious instruction.
3. Since the highest rates of infection with the AIDS virus and all sexually transmitted diseases are found among young people and the working population, these sections of society must be targeted and given particular attention. In order to boost the effects of the media, education and communication efforts directed at these sectors and other groups at risk, scientific information must be combined with spiritual guidance in a well-organized educational effort. As well as involving religious leaders and institutions, this effort must enlist the energies of all those concerned with areas of health, education and social work.
4. Religious instruction must be introduced into school curricula at all levels of education, so as to support and complement other subjects, with the aim of building the personality of the individual in a way that is in harmony with the interests of others and those of society as a whole.
5. Sex education is essential within the appropriate considerations of age and educational standards. It must be complementary to health education and religious instruction. A balanced blend of these inter-related disciplines must be devised, with the ultimate aim of achieving a physical and spiritual balance compatible with the prevailing cultures and traditions of the Region .
6. The media and non-governmental organizations are important partners in the international effort against disease. In order to guarantee public support and participation, information on the scientific aspects of the problem and the relevant religious, behavioural and moral regulations must be made available to the media and non-governmental bodies.

7. Sex is a biological part of the human constitution. It has its own natural needs and demands which must be regulated and controlled according to the accepted social norms. To safeguard young people against sexual misbehaviour, early marriages must be encouraged by solving the current social and economic problems which cause marriage to be delayed. The call for early marriage must be accompanied by a complementary call for family planning and delayed pregnancy and childbirth.
8. Human rights are guaranteed by all religions. The call for personal freedom must not be used as a pretext for any behaviour which infringes on the freedom and safety of others, or those of society as a whole, including exposing them to infection.
9. Every patient has the right to adequate treatment, and patients must be made aware of how to prevent both the deterioration of their health and the infection of others. Religions do not allow the exposure of patients to discrimination, disgrace or neglect, for whatever reason, and no matter how their infection has occurred.
10. Protection and support must be extended to the families of affected people, so that they are able to provide the necessary care for their relatives who have caught the disease and overcome the gravity of their loss. Exposing such families to any kind of discrimination or hardship is contrary to the ethical principles prevalent in this Region.
11. Obligations on doctors and medical practitioners are regulated by professional laws and procedures which lay upon them the responsibility of reporting certain diseases. In addition to the need to inform a patient of the nature of his or her case and how to protect others against infection, husbands and wives have the right to be informed. Doctors must arrange for that in consultation with the patients themselves. Reporting a disease with the intention of preventing infection is a doctor's responsibility not only by virtue of the national laws in force, but according to all religious beliefs also. This procedure cannot be seen as breaking professional codes of confidentiality.
12. There are no objections to the use of condoms, whenever necessary, for the protection of spouses of infected persons. But the promotion of the use of condoms for purposes of protection against sexually transmitted diseases outside the framework of marriage is not acceptable. Chastity, fidelity and virtue must be upheld and encouraged. These noble qualities alone are sufficient to guarantee people's total safety and provide them with an effective safeguard against the scourge of disease and infection.

Annex II

List of participants

1. His Eminence, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Ghazali, Member, Islamic Research Council, Cairo.
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4. Dr Ahmed Omar Hashim, Vice-Chancellor, Azhar University, Cairo.
5. Father Athanasius Mikha'il Makram, Orthodox Coptic Patriarchate, Alexandria.
6. Father Wisa al-Qumus Guirguis, Orthodox Coptic Patriarchate, Alexandria.
7. Dr Mohammad Saleem Al-Awwa, Law Professor, Faculty of Law, Zaqazeeq University, Zaqazeeq.
8. His Eminence, Sheikh Salah Mohammad Rizk, Imam, Prophet Daniel Mosque, Alexandria.
9. Dr Mohammad Lutfi Al-Sabbagh, Professor of Islamic Studies at Riyadh University, Saudi Arabia.
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