

Forum Explores Issues of Social Coexistence

In the evening of Tuesday, Rabi AlAwwal 9th, 1431AH corresponding to February 23rd, 2010, Sheikh AbdulRahman AlMuhrij delivered a lecture entitled "Peaceful Coexistence in the Saudi Society; Necessities and Challenges" in Althulatha Cultural Forum in Qatif. Mohammad AlShioukh, the program's moderator, introduces the lecturer who has a bachelor degree of Sharia from Imam Mohammad bin Saud Islamic University. He attained his master degree in Islamic Criminal Legislation from Naif Arab University for Security Sciences and his Ph.D. in Family Therapy from Columbus University in the United States. Sheikh AlMuhrij works as a consultant in AlMawaddah Center for Social Rehabilitation in Jeddah, has a set of books in various fields as well as several participations in media and satellite channels.

AlShioukh explained the importance of coexistence in the light of sectarian, cultural and regional diversity in Saudi Arabia, how all of these varieties enrich the society, and how imposing certain trends to all of those varieties would hinder their natural development. He wondered about the possibility of achieving such coexistence in the light of current crises due to the rapid transformations in the society, culture and economy of Saudi Arabia. He, also, referred to some initiatives by intellectuals which made lately like the Charter of National Coexistence and different national communications initiatives, and wondered about the possibility of promoting them in order to avoid devastating social tensions and disputes.

Sheikh AbdulRahman AlMuhrij said that he communicated with different Saudi intellectual trends and social groups because of his work in family therapy. He stated that there are many people who accept the concepts and principles of coexistence and communication in general, but leaderships in the society have reservations over declaring their position and acceptance to others due to opponent social pressures. He stressed that leaderships should have firm will in confirming principles of peaceful coexistence and defending them.

He talked in details about reasons of inconsistency between social and religious groups in Saudi Arabia, and pointed to the lack of communication between parties. He explained how such lack of communication causes misunderstanding of others and creates false stereotypes of them. He referred to the passive influence of media as a second factor; especially satellite channels that broadcast fruitless sectarian debates programs which concentrate on showing historical controversies and differences. He indicated another reason which is the limited number of effective initiatives by different parties which consequently leads to their affection by the ongoing negative events.

Dr. AlMuhrij cleared that the ongoing communications between intellectual elites may lay the bases for enforcing a state of coexistence in the Saudi society as well as developing effective initiatives through carrying out collective works and researches in various fields. He mentioned some principles of social coexistence strategies like providing public freedoms and avoiding interfering in personal and doctrinal convictions. He emphasized the importance of preventing all forms of extremism which are the main reason that hinders peaceful coexistence in the society.

A group of journalists and intellectuals participated in the program. Muneer Alnimer, a journalist in Riyadh Newspaper, stressed the necessity of enacting transparent laws and legislations that restrain violating the rights of others, and referred to the significance of the Charter of National Coexistence that was suggested by Sheikh Hasan Alsaffar and Sheikh Mohammad AlDuhaim. Ahmad AlAraibi, a member in Altajdeed Cultural and Social Society in Bahrain, discussed the issue of referring to history which is full of contradictions as well as the importance of respecting freedoms and privacies of individuals.

Saeed AlKhabbaz confirmed the role of the political factor in the development of social and sectarian coexistence disputes whereas Mohammad AlDa'louj confirmed the need for equality between all citizens to achieve social coexistence. Eissa AlSharji, an Islamic researcher, explored the dimensions of religious sects; Shiite and Sunni, from the aspect of political leadership and dealing with others.

As for sheikh Hasan AlQarous and Mukhlif AlShemari, a human rights activist, they both discussed the challenges that confront peaceful coexistence and hinder national unity like radical and provocative attitudes and complicating administrative procedures, and stressed the importance of eliminating all forms of discrimination between citizens. Jafar Alshayeb, the Forum's sponsor, reviewed the initiatives of coexistence charters by prominent Sunni and Shiite figures, and hoped that they become a way for communication and coordination between those figures.