**CNN Interview with Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah**

**President of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, UAE**

**Interviewed by Becky Anderson**

**Translated into English**

**Question 1:**

**Why are we seeing such extreme violence in Muslim countries?**

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: This question, I believe, is one that is put forward by everyone, including journalists, politicians, and even international organizations. I believe every individual and every group has their own answer for it. The response can refer back to historical conditions or to special interests, or it could go back to some religious explanation. For this reason, the answer that I’m going to present is my opinion about the matter: the Islamic world is experiencing a great deal of violence, and, at times, this violence is blind: In other words, the violence doesn’t distinguish among people, neither enemies nor friends.

The question is complex; consequently, the answer to it has to be complex; it is not simple. The Muslim world has experienced different conditions in many historical stages – at one point it witnessed occupation, then relative independence, and then it moved to a condition that we could call “in decline” because of the poor conditions it was in and because of internal and external conflicts. It is also a part of the world that experiences a lot of poverty and regression economically, industrially, scientifically, and intellectually, and for this reason, we see the ideological differences that arise sometimes. Those differences sometimes vary greatly. For instance, sometimes there are government systems in the Muslim world that correspond to the systems that we see in Europe, which the Western societies have adopted, and this has lead to ideological Western winds alighting upon them offering alternatives.

So this complex picture is what has led to the current conditions. It involves historical grievances, unemployment, poverty, political and social conditions, as well as an extreme religious element. Most likely, this question is being directed at that last element – the extreme religious element. But the other elements are what form the basis of these revolutionary conditions. For that reason, it is not possible for a cleric to respond or even to put forward solutions to all the of problems, but we can at least attempt to address this problem at hand, despite its complexity and its relationship to the other problems in order to convince those who stir up the violence that their methodology and their vision is not a sound one from the religious perspective. We can also convince others to not look at the Islamic religion as monolithic and not make generalizations attempting to thrust upon it the accusation that this represents all of the Islamic religion so that we may persuade them that these people and their behavior do not represent the Muslim religion.

I express my gratitude to you for what you said at the outset: that you want to see true Islam presented to those who are ignorant of the true Islam. I sense that the American people are in need of having the Islamic religion presented to them, and we are doing so not falsely but are presenting to them what we actually believe is the true religion of Islam. Just as we present it here, we present it there the same way. This is the understanding of the scholars – or rather of the vast majority of the scholars, in order to be fair.

Furthermore, it is also the understanding of the majority of the common people in the Muslim world, despite the amplification of the voice of violence and extremism above the voice of moderation, and despite the excessive justifications of violence over the justifications for peace. Despite all of that, we believe that what we are saying truly represents Islam. So we gathered a large number of scholars with this perspective to clarify this vision to people here internally and to the world in general.

**Question 2:**

**How would you explain the holy word ‘Jihad’?**

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: As for the conflagrations in the Muslim world that some are calling “jihad,” we don’t call them jihad because the concept of jihad does not apply to those conflagrations. Subsequently, the work that we are engaged with along with other scholars is helping people to understand the true meaning of the word “jihad,” since jihad has reasons, conditions, and constraints. All of the shariah, which is Islam’s sacred law, is based upon sound reasons that have their conditions in order for the understanding to be sound. So these conflicts that are occurring are *not* jihad. Jihad occurs between states as a response to aggression in the same way that the charter of the United Nations puts forward the right of self-defense. Jihad at the outset of Islam was in a world that did not have international covenants. There were no borders except those that were imposed by force of weapon or by great distance. Furthermore, there weren’t any nuclear weapons. Also, there wasn’t the ability to express one’s religious opinions, what we now call “freedom of religion.” It was these conditions that jihad came out of. But in the current conditions, jihad resorts to another understanding, and that is beneficial work; it is religious when it involves religion, but it also includes what is beneficial towards people or charity towards humanity – humanitarian actions. All of this is considered jihad, and we have clarified that the proper concept of jihad does not apply in these current conditions to civil wars or internal conflicts from diverse elements within society. Sometimes warring factions utilize religious arguments between the Sunni and the Shia that occur inside Muslim countries and as well as aggression against others who are outside of the Islamic societies in order to justify their “jihad.” However, unjust belligerence cannot be used to repel aggression. This is *not* jihad. And this is the explanation that I give to groups of these elements that form the background for these violent actions that they call “jihad.”

**Question 3:**

**President Obama quotes you as saying ‘we must declare war on war, so that the outcome is peace upon peace’.**

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: I think that Obama quoted this in the context of peace and wasn’t quoting it in the context of war. I think he intended to mean that Islam is a religion of peace, and that one of the scholars of Islam said that we should wage war against war in order for there to be peace upon peace, and that war against war here meant peace against war and didn’t meant killing, which is in line with what I meant. What Obama said was good because it was in the context of peace, so I have to agree with him. It was my word he was quoting in a good context, and I appreciate that fact.

**Question 4:**

**The US president asked the world or to challenge the perverse ideas of ISIS (Daesh). I am going to show you a recent training a video called ‘The blood of Jihad’. I wonder how you believe you can challenge this propaganda being released by the organisation which is being used to pull in disenfranchised and disillusioned young individuals. This is the video sir.**

*(A video was then shown to Shaykh Abdallah with the additional question for Shaykh to respond to)*

**How do you counter the message of ISIS?**

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: This is a great challenge, and it is a challenge that has to be confronted with a strong response. This is what it means to wage war on war. And the response to this challenge is something that I was discussing today with a group that I had invited from various countries, which is that the scholars have to organize a countertrend against this trend of violence because this challenge is an existential challenge; it is challenging our existence. And its treatment has to come from Islam itself, using the same language that the extremists understand. For sometime now, we have been crafting the appropriate language. I began to write 15 – or maybe even 20 –years ago addressing this ideology because I believe that the response to this challenge cannot come from outside of the Islamic religion but has to come from the heart of the religion itself. We have to clarify that their approach is not correct and that blind conflict is unacceptable in Islam. War is sometimes a necessity that arises out of specific conditions between conflicting states as a result of one’s aggression and belligerence. Hence, war in Islam is not acceptable, except out of necessity, in extenuating circumstances. Islam does not call to war. Islam invites to peace. Therefore, opposing this challenge demands great media efforts; political, social, economic efforts; as well as educational efforts in the universities and also those involving our youth. We have to present to the youth nourishing ideas, both spiritual and practical, so that they are engaged in things other than these blind conflicts that have no benefit in them.

**Question 5:**

**With respect Sir, given the slick propaganda video with the likes of ‘The Blood of Jihad’ the likes of ‘Dabiq’ the magazine that ISIS releases, there are those that say that scholars are no longer relevant to this younger disenchanted disenfranchised Muslims. Your response?**

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: This has elements of truth. But it also has its own reason. The scholars themselves are in need of introspection amongst themselves. But they also need a space where they can freely declare their views, and this can involve satellite channels and other means of communication using the modern tools. So scholars need to reassess their knowledge and their attitudes, but they need a space to do that where they can move freely, present their visions, and seek to understand the current realities in order to offer something to the masses.

Had it not been for the space that was provided in Abu Dhabi, we wouldn’t have been able to do anything. The people here gave us a space that enabled us to speak freely. We need more space like this. We need satellite channels in order to reach people, and we need means of communication, the Internet and social media because to a certain degree, scholars today are incapacitated. But at the same time, if they gave it more consideration, they would be able to challenge these ideas that are out there because, in reality, the scholars are the only ones who are able to challenge those ideas. Military opposition is not enough, and I think the world is beginning to admit that. Military solutions are not effective solutions in reality because even though one group can be stopped today with military might, another will emerge somewhere else if the ideas aren’t stopped. So the real solution is an intellectual and social one. It has to be a complete, a holistic solution. The scholars need to keep up with the recurrent situations so that they can present a sound vision and offer their medicine from the pharmacy of Islam. I’d like to add to this that one of the philosophers said that when civilization becomes sick, it is the philosophers who are the ones that are able to treat it. So I would say that the global civilization right now – and I don’t just mean the Islamic – is sick, and it needs to be treated. And the treatment is one that religious people have to help with and also the political elites, doctors, the social scientists, the economists – all of those that are educated have to provide a holistic vision that all of the segments of society can rally around. So it’s important to cultivate this group because civilization is sick.

**Question 6:**

**I know that the UAE were being very vocal in encouraging, reflecting and the sharing of ideas. Does that mean all ideas or only the ideas that are acceptable to the leadership here?**

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: What I have experience with, are the ideas of peace and Islamic thought. These are what I put forward and brought to the Emirates, and they welcomed it. We gathered here from almost all the different countries. We had over 250 scholars from different schools and persuasions, yet the Emirates welcomed us all. I don’t know of anyone who was refused entry among those we invited. And these are the means that were put forward. Some people disagreed about certain things, as scholars will never agree on everything. They don’t all have the same methodology. Despite that, we were able to discuss these issues in the Emirates without people attacking or opposing us, so this effort is something we have tested and been able to achieve in the Emirates with the leadership of the Emirates. It is a great service to peace, as to our Muslim community, as well as to humanity because this is a humanitarian issue that concerns all in the world, and it is not just simply the Islamic world. Unfortunately, some of the earth’s inhabitants are now moving towards annihilation; perhaps even the whole world is moving in that direction.

**Question 7:**

**There are those that see the extremist violence that we are witnessing today as purely a symptom of the vacuum of the Sunni leadership that exists. Do you agree?**

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: In reality, as I had said earlier, this is about the problem of violence, and so it’s a situational (temporary) problem and it develops in the world. In some ways, we can call it episodic, and it takes different forms at different times and afflicts different people or different countries at different times. And this is caused by different philosophies at different times. For instance I remember, forty years ago, people were talking about violence and extremism that came from Communism that was based on Marxist ideology. In America, McCarthyism emerged as a result of this violence. The enemy of civilization at the time was Communism, and from that arose National Socialism: the Nazis.

Now, at this particular phase, at this particular time in history, we are seeing it among some of those who consider themselves Sunnis, and it is based upon grievances and many other issues. It is possible for us to say that the violence didn’t just emerge from religious extremism but actually from historical grievances and also from a void of sound political leadership and a void in terms of regulating individuals and also a void in education. The educational institutions weren’t able to present a mature intellectual response that would have helped avoid violent responses, despite the grievances and victimization, despite the problems. However, the violence being perpetrated is not limited to people who are Sunni. There are others that are committing violence too, but theirs is more of an organized violence. There is a type of oversight here. So the idea that it is just the Sunnis committing violence is not correct because the violence is not coming just from Sunnis. It is coming from others as well, but the difference is that when it comes from others, it is, [for example, in the form of] a remote control. It is directed from somewhere else. On the other hand, the violence of the Sunnis is a more wild, unrestrained type of violence.

Unfortunately, the terrorism that is found in these different schools in Islam and other religions is a type of energy. Energy can be used for good; if it is used for good, then good comes out of it, but if it is used for bad – for instance, making nuclear bombs that can be blown up – then bad results or havoc ensues. The same is for the nature of religion: [good comes from good and bad from bad]. So we have to look at the current moment that we find ourselves in, and it is necessary that we address it, but it is important that we do not make these generalized judgments, such as that the Sunnis were always like this or that Islam was always like that. We cannot judge a religion by a particular moment in its history because these problems are seasonal problems based upon conditions. They have causes, and among those causes are oppression and grievances. The United Nations has failed in addressing a lot of these problems. In fact, not just the United Nations, the whole world has failed in removing a lot of the [legitimate] grievances people have. They failed in addressing the [very real] economic problems [many people endure]. And so these are some of the reasons for the violence [that we are seeing].

**Question 8:**

To some Sir, in the West you are a controversial Muslim leader, the allegation is that you signed a fatwa post 2003, on killing US soldiers. Did you?

*Shaykh Bin Bayyah*: I haven’t ever issued a fatwa to kill anyone. My fatwas are for supporting, promoting and protecting life. And I never ever give a fatwa that has to do with death and killing. Perhaps there were some resolutions at conferences that I was involved in that denounced [certain policies, such as,] for instance American occupation or Israeli occupation [of other lands], but I don’t believe that denouncing occupation is a fatwa to kill anyone. In fact, I can never recall giving a fatwa that harmed anyone let alone that was calling to anyone’s death. I call to life! I call to life! I don’t call to death, I don’t call to kill anyone, and if anyone claims this or are making allegations, let him bring his proof.

Thank you very much.