

## **The State of West-Islamic Relations**

It is impossible to find a nation, in the world today, which is homogeneous. In every country you will find social groups made up of people of different backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, races and religions. People from diverse backgrounds do not lead separate lives. They are part of social groups that interact in all aspects of life. The rapid increase of Muslim populations in the west, have created great interest in better understanding and addressing current tensions between Islam and the West. With this in mind, the AWARE Center, The Advocate for Westerners-Arab Relations, was established to promote positive, constructive relations between Westerners and Arabs and to be a starting point for creating mutual understanding, tolerance and respect. Our differences can be a catalyst for learning, cooperation, and respect – not a cause for conflict. Only in this spirit of mutual respect we can effectively apply universal principles of brotherhood and compassion to face any challenges.

The relationship between Islam and the West is an old and ever evolving one. Recently, many factors such as the rise of Islamic militants, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have given rise to misunderstandings and aroused animosities between Islam and the West, with many in both worlds viewing the other as an inscrutable and menacing force.

Over the past years, Islamophobia has increased in the west. In Arab and Muslim countries, a distrust of Western foreign policy is escalating. We stand at a crossroads. On the one hand, the ongoing conflict produces fear and the notion that we live in an increasingly unstable world. Conflict-driven media reinforces this idea. Violence dominates the headlines,

leaving the indelible image of a world doomed to conflict. Yet, on the other hand, an interest in one another's cultures and beliefs developed out of the tragedies like the ones of 9-11, 7-7 and 4-3 . Concerned leaders and individuals created a surge of cross-cultural understanding.

The work of AWARE Center focuses on improving the relationship between Arab and Westerners through friendship, dialogue and mutual understanding. Our aim at the AWARE center is not only to help Arabs and Westerners, to understand and respect their differences, but also find a great deal of common ground.

We are very optimistic and hopeful for a future relationship that is progressive instead of reactionary, collaborative instead of isolationist, and understanding instead of fearful.