French official lauds Qatar for promoting dialogue

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The Senate Council of France H.E. Abdulla Tamrugi commented on developing countries and congratulated the State of Qatar for promoting the exchange of dialogue, political wisdom and experience on democracy and free trade and stressed that terrorism is a war that is the enemy of non-Muslims and Muslims alike.

Despite the entire civilized world's efforts, Iran is determined to continue on its path towards attaining nuclear weapons and this is not just international, but a threat to our citizens and the world. The question we must now ask ourselves is how will the balance of power in this region change with the 'Shiite bomb' and what would be its effect on the Gulf, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and so forth, and how will Iranian nuclear capability affect longer-term relations between Sunni and Shiites in this part of the world in the years ahead?

Blackwell reiterated that an attack is not imminent, the United States and its allies are doing everything possible to persuade us from using this terrible set of choices, and let us pray that all this combined with diplomatic efforts succeeds - but for that to happen there would have to be a profound change of policy in Tehran in order for us to successfully enhance democracy and combat terrorism in this region and beyond in the years ahead.

Gregory Meeks, stressed the importance of conversations to take place between America and the Middle East in order for common concerns to be addressed. In this regard, he said: "You can change situations, you can change governments without bloodshed, and we are all in this together."

As the case of the late Dr Martin Luther King said "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

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Arab media lacks credibility: Expert

DOHA: A media expert yesterday blamed the Arab press for not putting into perspective, why a relevant society like Denmark allowed cartoons blasphemer the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) to be published.

Ramez Mala, Professor of Communication Arts at the Lebanon-American University, Beirut, in a speech at the roundtable on media and press, held as part of the 6th Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade, said, the Arab media failed to convey to its audiences the reasons that caused such cartoons to be published by the Danish daily. "No body went and asked why it happened," he added. He said that a lot of the controversy that occurred as a result of these caricatures could have been better explained had the Arab media or at least, some sections of it, taken time to put the issue in some perspective.

He lamented that most often, media in the Arab world focused on distant and large issues which had no solutions such as answering the question of whether there exists water on Mars. The media, he said, had some freedom of expression but this was severely restricted when it came to dealing with local sensitive issues. "Freedom of expression is significant only when they deal with such sensitive issues," he emphasised.

He said, the Arab media lacked credibility among its own viewers who rely upon a foreign channel to confirm any news, expecting it to be uncorrupted or unbeleivable. He cited the example of the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak who, in early 1990s, had endorsed a CNN-based statement he depended upon the US-based network for accurate news coverage about Iraq, following the occupation of Kuwait. "Such an endorsement speaks much about the Egyptian intelligence, considering that Egypt had 30,000 troops on ground in Iraq," he noted.

The session was chaired by noted Qatari media expert and researcher, Dr. Ahmed Abdul Malek and moderated by Radu Khawaj, Chief Executive, Near East and Gulf Military Analysis. Panelists included Brian Hamman from the BBC, Robin Wright, Diplomatic Correspondent, Washington Post, Dan Rather, Anchor, CBS, Lee Smith, media expert, from the US, among others.

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CSOs compromising with regimes: Expert

DOHA: Three different trends affecting the Civil Society Organisations have converged in the development of democracy in the Arab world, an expert in the field, said here yesterday.

At the session entitled Civil Society Organizations, Dr. Hussain Shabnam, Director of Iraq's network of human rights organisations, said, one of these trends was that CSOs are now being pressured with non-democratic regimes in the Arab world, instead of engaging in a positive conflict aimed at fostering democracy. Other trends are CSOs engaging in programmes aimed at elevating the CSOs and working with the regimes which helped the governments to ensure their will, while the third, and the one that was mentioned, is the role played by CSOs and governments engaging in cooperation with regimes with respect for one another. CSOs, he said, should play a positive role in boosting democracy in the region provided they followed the third trend.

Chris Doyle, Director, Council for Arab-British Understanding pointed out that in many instances, there was a disconnection between the various Non Government Organizations. He cited the example of Iraq where such NGOs, primarily engaged with providing relief to the Iraqi civilians, had to travel in convoys escorted by the coalition forces. This dent the belief that such NGOs were free from government support and, hence, were unnoticed or targetted. Firstly, they were often the country.

The disconnect between the various NGOs, he pointed out, was also apparent during the December 2004 Tsunami where various organisations were trying to provide relief without coordinating their efforts for better results.

The session, held as part of the ongoing 6th Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade, was moderated by Dr. Yusuf Mohammad, Obaidallah, Member, National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), Qatar with Aiko Yamasaki, Vice Minister Parliamentary Secretary of Japan, Dr. Hamid Abla, Director, Arab and Mediterranean Studies Centre, Qatar University, cementing, and Jane Barness, Executive Director, National Security Centre for National Policy, US, among others.

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Editor criticises silence on Israel nuclear capability

DOHA: So much has been said about the Iran nuclear issue at this conference (the 6th Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade) but not a word has been uttered by any speaker about Israel's nuclear capability, a celebrated Arab journalist, who is taking part in the key convention.

Abdul Bara Addawan, editor-in-chief of Al-Quds Al Arabi, a prominent London-based Arabic daily, made the above comment at the forum here yesterday during a question and answer session.

Israel, said Addawan, had some 3,000 nuclear heads but nobody at this conference mentioned this, while many referred to the Iran issue.

Addawan said that Israel killed 3,000 innocent people in the Palestinian territories and 'terrorism' was defined as an act of killing and terrorising innocent civilians. In self-defence, Palestinian killed 660 mostly Israeli soldiers and they included some settlers, he said.

Present at the session on enhancing democracy and combating terrorism was also the former Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister, Dr. Sheik Hamad bin Jableh Al Thani. He said: "For the first time I agree with you."

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