

BIRTH OF THE INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS ASSOCIATION (IMPRPA) – A BOOST FOR MUSLIM GLOBAL PRACTITIONERS

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This article discusses the events and reasons in realizing the "International Muslim Public Relations Practitioners Association" or "IMPRPA". It also discusses the discussion occurring during the inaugural IMPRPA Congress in Kuala Lumpur. It includes the discussion regarding the many misconceptions about Islam, not only among non-Muslims but even within the believers and what efforts can be undertaken to correct it. The writer also suggests ways to make the IAMCR relevant to all. Relevant concepts in making public relations relevant and Islamic like shura, public consultations and many more are also discussed. This paper is based on personal experience and interviews with relevant personalities and organisations. It also includes literature reviews.

Keywords: Prophet Muhammad, IAMPRC, IMPRPA, democracy, public consultation, public engagement, shura, Islam, Muslim, and religion.

Introduction

The effort to unite public relations professionals across the world have been an ongoing effort since the late 1940s. During that period several British and Dutch public relations professionals deliberated on the needs to organize their profession into a transnational society. Their aim was to enhance standard of public relations practice globally and improve public relations practitioners' quality. The endeavour bear fruit when on 1st May 1955 the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) was officially established.

Today, the IPRA claims that it is: "the most genuinely international grouping of public relations practitioners worldwide, active not only in promoting exchange of information and cooperation in every sector of the profession, but also in building a programme of professional development opportunities and other initiatives aimed at enhancing the role of public relations in management and international affairs." Further, the IPRA claims that currently it is "the most representative international network of top-level professionals in the field" and "is a reflection of its members over the years, a dynamic professional body that still retains the fellowship of its origin." Also, IPRA claims that today it is promoting "the profession in the developing countries and Eastern Europe" and is "addressing keys issues such as the environment or the assessment of quality in public relations practice."

For the promotion and safeguarding of the public relations industry and professionals in the Middle East, "MEPRA" ("Middle East Public Relations Association") a non-profit body was established. One of its top objectives is to "highlight the strategic role of public relations in the Arab world and help set high standards for quality and ethical conduct by consultancy firms."

Other primary objectives of MEPRA include: (1) "Promoting the public relations profession and serve the interests of the communication industry by helping shape discussions on core principles, trends and standards; (2) "Committing to drive growth and setting standards of excellence in the public relations and communication industry in the Middle East; (3) "Partnering with leading institutions and public relations expert to share knowledge through a wide variety of resources for communication professionals in the regions; (4) "Committed to advancing the public relations industry in the region, while nurturing the professional development of individuals; and (5) "To be the unique voice that represents the public relations and communication profession in the Middle East."

Clearly public relations professional or industry body at the national, regional or global level top priority is to safeguard and promote its business and profession. On the other hand, the need to protect and improve the image of Islam and Muslims become increasingly urgent in incident like the September 11 and the growth of violent groups claiming to represent the religion in their terrible actions. Thus, the pressing need to unite Muslim public relations professionals throughout the world to form a global organisation to effectively counter the image issue confronting Islam and Muslims become very urgent. These include the needs to neutralise and counter the propaganda issued by terrorist groups claiming to represent Islam in order to get their recruits and funding, reaffirming Islam as a peaceful religion and that Muslims are peaceful in nature, and spreading the knowledge of Islam to all, Muslims and non-Muslims in order to create a proper understanding of the religion as a benevolent and peaceful one.

Birth of IAMPRC/IMPRPA

The First Muslim Public Relations Practitioners Global Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from December 5 to 7, 2011 was considered a great success. It gave birth to the "International Association for Muslim Public Relations and Communication Practitioners" or in short "IAMPRC" later to be named "IMPRPA" or "International Muslim Public Relations Practitioners Association".



Banner of the IAMPRC Congress

Two hundred Muslim PR practitioners including three non-Muslims colleagues from 33 countries attended the global congress. A significant number of the participants felt that it was great success. This was concluded by both Muslims and non-Muslims participants. As a participant to it, I fully agree with their observations. Mind you, this is not because it was held in Malaysia, my home country. I made this conclusion after talking to more than 30 participants local and international, Muslims and non-Muslims, plus 10 paper presenters about what they felt about the Congress. One of the non-Muslim participants noted that: ***"I'm pleased to report the congress comprised three full days of frank, open and critical discussion, both in sessions and in corridors during breakouts. Perhaps no definitive answers to the big issues were determined, but definitely an excellent selection of presentations focused on real areas to tackle, with ongoing work and considered thought for now and in future."*** (Judy Gombita posted to the *PR Conversations*, December 2, 2011).

The inaugural Muslim PR practitioners Global Congress giving birth to IAMPRC and later renamed IMPRPA were jointly organised by the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Federation of ASEAN Public Relations Organisations (FAPRO) with the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) as the secretariat and the Kargozar Public Relations Institute (KPRI), Iran. The Hibiscus PR & Communications Sdn Bhd, headed by

Shameen Abdul Jalil together with IEC-IIUM managed the first Muslim PR Practitioners Global Congress very well.

The idea for establishing an International Muslim Public Relations Practitioners Association was first proposed by the writer when he attended an international public relations seminar in Tehran, Iran at the invitation of the Kargozar Public Relations Institute of Iran in 2008. The five reasons offered for the formation were (1) uniting all Muslim public relations and communication channels across the globe; (2) enhancing their professionalism by sharing experience and expertise; (3) protecting the good name of Islam and enhancing the understanding of the religion through unity as well as sharing of experience and expertise; (4) cooperating with all relevant professional bodies to safeguard and strengthen the position of Muslim public relations and communication practitioners; and (5) working toward having an accreditation programme for members.

The President of the Kargozar Public Relations Institute Iran Mehdi Bagherian welcomed the proposal and the need to urgently realise it. He suggested that Malaysia should be a better place to form and launch the Muslim PR and communication practitioners' global association instead of Iran. His rationale is that Malaysia will be more acceptable to certain nations compared to Iran as it is being seen as a moderate Muslim nation if it is to be realised quickly. The writer informed the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia President Shameen Abdul Jalil of this suggestion of which she most welcomed it. Consequently, both Shameen and Mehdi Co-Chair the first Global Muslim Public Relations resulting in IAMPRC birth. The inaugural Congress was implemented to create a platform for dialogue among Public Relations professionals on how to be more effective, discussions on current world issues and the essential role of Muslim PR practitioners.

According to the Co-Chair of the 1st Global Muslim PR Congress, Shameen Abdul Jalil about 200 Muslims and non-Muslims PR and Communication professionals from nations including Malaysia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Turkey, India, China, Fiji, United States of America and Egypt participated.

The keynote speakers for the 1st Global Muslim PR Congress included Imam Feisal Al-Zahrani Rauf from New York, Faisal Al-Zahrani, President of IPRA Gulf Chapter, Mehdi Bagherian President of Kargozar PR Institute, Tehran, Dan Tisch, Chairman of the Global Alliance for PR and Communication, Lugano, Switzerland, Humeyra Sahin from Istanbul plus 30 illustrious speakers worldwide.

According to Shameen Abdul Jalil, there were four significant outcomes of this First Muslim Public Relations and Communication Practitioners Global Congress: (1) the launch of the International Association for Muslim PR Association (IAMPRC); (2) the Kuala Lumpur

Thank You Letter to World Editors from IAMPRC; (3) an Exhibition in conjunction with the Congress and (4) a special publication on the proceedings. The most significant result is of course the formation of the International Association for Muslim PR Association or the IAMPRC. This 2nd IAMPRC Congress proves that it cannot only be sustainable but also grow stronger and more influential. Insha-Allah or God willing it will be realised.

Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Malaysia's Former Prime Minister in addressing the Global Congress delegates at the opening dinner and Global Muslim Public Relations Awards Ceremony referred to two prerequisites of public relations practice for Muslims: "**justice** and **accountability**". According to him: "These key Islamic prerequisites incorporated in public relations have their source in the two primary sources of Islam: the Qur'an and the **Sunna** -- every word, deed, and approval ascribed to the Prophet. These key prerequisites were indispensable for Muslim PR practitioners wanting to uphold the professional ethics and values established by the Prophet Muhammad, SAW."



Receiving awards for "excellent contributions in the field of public relations serving world communities" at the first Global Congress for Muslim PR from Tun Abdullah.

Further, in highlighting the Conference importance, Tun Abdullah declared: "We can show that Islam's legacy to mankind's progress is not merely frozen in a golden age centuries ago, but a continuous, ongoing contribution." Tun Abdullah further urged: "Muslim PR practitioners should pool resources to reshape perception of Islam" (Abdullah" *Bernama* December 6, 2011)

Another dignitary speaking at the Congress, Malaysia's former Deputy Minister for International Trade and Industry, Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir, also "urged Muslim public relations (PR) practitioners to play their role in correcting whatever misconception or wrong

perception of Islam. He said they should also refute the malicious disinformation and spin which were intended to give a false picture of Muslims." He added: "Prejudices, racism and Islam phobia are tangible expressions that do not go away easily. So, effective PR is one method to address these problems and reinstate the truth. Muslim PR Practitioners Should Correct Misconception of Islam" (*Bernama* December 6, 2011).

The Concept of Shura

A recurring theme for the three-day Global Congress was the notion of *shura* (شورى -*shūrā*, an Arabic term) referring to the collective and community or public consultation in Islamic thought and its seminal role in Muslim public relations. I fully believe that shura or public consultation or engagement should be the core element of the Muslim PR and communication practice. Thus, it should be an essential part of the public relations professional education and training, especially for Muslim students and practitioners plus those living the Muslims majority nations.

Sadek Jawad Sulaiman in his article *The Shura Principle in Islam* (1999) reaffirmed that "Shura, as a principle, is rooted in the Quran itself. The Quran has presented shura as a principle, and not as a system, of governance. The distinction is important to note, because the Quran thereby has left it to successive generations of Muslims to continue to strive toward a more perfect realization of the shura principle."

Sadek Jawad Sulaiman (1999) explained the shura principle in Islam as follows: "It is, as I see it, essentially *parallel* to the democratic principle in Western political thought, having analogous aspects and about the same tendency or direction. It is predicated on *three basic precepts*. *First*, that all persons in any given society are equal in human and civil rights. *Second*, those public issues are best decided by majority view. And *third*, that the three other principles of *justice, equality* and *human dignity*, which constitute Islam's moral core, and from which all Islamic conceptions of human and civil rights derive, are best realized, in personal as well as public life, under *shura* governance." I agree with Sadek explanations of the shura principle and believe that it could be utilized for an excellent practice of Islamic Public Relations.

Further, Sadek Jawad Sulaiman (1999) stated that: "In the Quran, two modes of political consultation are mentioned. In the one, the Prophet Muhammad is asked to *consult* with his companions, but, ultimately, *to decide on his own*. In the other, the community of the faithful is described as the one *that (among its other attributes) administers its affairs by mutual consultation*. In the one, consultation is mandated but is not binding; in the other, it is depicted as constituting the very process by which binding

decisions on public matters are reached. In the one, the Prophet is personally involved, in the other; it is the community deliberating on public matters collectively. The conservative, not to say reactionary, view on *shura* recognizes it only as discretionary, non-binding consultation. These views, needless to say, is the one the powers that be, presumptuously comparing themselves to the Prophet, find more to their convenience. But it is the more progressive and, I submit, more authentic view of *shura* as a *binding decision-making process* that is gaining ground in the contemporary Islamic thrust for reform." I believe the view of Sadek Jawad Sulaiman is good for excellent PR practice.

Thus, it is very clear that "the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad encourage Muslims to decide their affairs in consultation or engagement with those who will be affected by that decision." It is clearly a praiseworthy and encouraged activity not only by the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad but in democratic nations in which the numbers are fast increasing. Frequently, it is used in organizing Muslim community affairs like managing mosques or Islamic organizations. Actually, in some Muslim nations it is a common terminology in naming parliaments.

It is noted that "the first mention of the *shura* is stated in the 2nd Surah of the Quran 2:233 in the affair of the collective family decision. It is in regard to weaning the child from breast feeding or the mother's milk. This verse advices both parents to decide by their mutual consultation about weaning their child and not independently by one party."

In fact, the 42nd Surah of the Quran is called *Shura* and its 38th verse commends that "shura is praiseworthy life style of a successful believer. Also, it advices that people whose matter is being decided be engaged or consulted." The Quran declares:

"Those who hearken to their Lord and establish regular Prayer, who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation among themselves; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance (are praised)."

Further, in the Quran "the 159th verse of the 3rd Surah commands Prophet Muhammad to seek the opinion of Muslims or to consult with them. This verse actually makes a direct reference to those Muslims who disobeyed the Prophet Muhammad. It reveals that the ordinary and fallible Muslims opinion ought to be consulted. The verse states:

"Thus it is due to mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently, and had you been rough, hard hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you; pardon them therefore and ask pardon for them, and take counsel with them in the affair; so when you have decided, then place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who trust."

Undoubtedly, the shura is increasingly becoming very relevant today, especially in regard to practicing excellent public relations. Its positive impact on those practicing it and on the target publics can be most profound, not only at the family level but at all levels including at national and international plane. Evidently, the Quran ensures that the practice of shura benefit all matters at the entire level of society with optimal impact. For example: "the first verse only deals with family affairs. The second proposed a lifestyle of people who will enter heavens and is considered the most comprehensive verse on shura. The third verse advices on how mercy, forgiveness and mutual consultation or engagement can win over people."

Incontrovertibly, the Quran continuously advices Muslims to conduct themselves all the time through interactive communication or two-way or mutual consultation to ensure better understanding between humans regardless of creed or race or even nations.

Actually, certain modern Sunni Muslims "believe that Islam requires all decisions made by and for the Muslim societies must be made by shura of the Muslim community involved." As such, shura should be the foundation for implementing representative democracy and an Islamic public relations practice. However, in traditional practices, shura would mean the leaders consulting with their advisors and deciding after taking their opinions into consideration. In this context, the PR practitioners can only advice their clients accordingly after consulting with their intended publics or having shura with them. Clearly, the traditional interpretation of shura must be reviewed to make it more relevant to today's requirements or needs.

Today, sadly, there is the tendency to believe that good governance which included public consultation or shura and public relations have originated from the West. Lecturers who have studied in the West, especially in the United States of America, further convey this fallacy to students in non-western nations, including Islamic countries. The reality is every civilization and each government will have to practice public consultation and effective public relations within its own context and environment in order to be sustainable and effective. In Islam, shura or public consultation is encouraged, if not mandatory.

According to Sadek Jawad Sulaiman, the principle of shura in Islam is predicated on three basic precepts. There are: "(1) All persons in any society are equal in human and civil rights; (2) Public issues are best decided by majority view; and (3) The principles of justice, equality and human dignity, which constitute Islam's moral core, ... are best realised, in personal as well as public life, under shura governance (1999, Al Hewan Center, Inc.). I

believe there is a difference between how the Sunni and Shia interpret shura, but both refer to consultation.”

Clearly, shura is akin to public engagement or public consultation. Both terms are relatively new terms, unlike shura, which began with Islam. According to England University Funding Agency public consultation is used to describe “the involvement of specialists listening to, developing their understanding of, and interacting with, non-specialists” (HEFCE, 2006). “It describes the many ways in which governments or institutions connect and share their work with their publics. Done well, it generates mutual benefit, with all parties learning from each other through sharing knowledge, expertise and skills. This process or action can build trust, understanding and collaboration, increase the sector's relevance to, and affect, civil society.”

As public relations practitioners are bridges or moderators between our organisations and all the target publics, we need to further enhance our public consultation or engagement skills, that is if I may say so our shura expertise. I believe IAMPRC can play this essential role by having regular training for Muslim PR practitioners and even for the non-Muslim ones with regard to promoting the practice of shura.

Today, these terms share most commonly with participatory democracy and seen by many as complementing representative democratic systems. Thus, shura or public engagement puts decision-making powers more directly with the people or in the case of organizations in its ordinary member's hand. This engaging or participatory or shura approach demonstrates that “no one is a master of another” and that all of us are equally dependent on each other while being Muslims we are all equal in the eyes of Allah SWT. Thus, practicing shura I believe will enhance democratic practices to enhance decision-making processes and sense of belonging that motivate citizens or members to participate actively for everybody betterment. Today many Muslim nations or the so-called ones are perceived as undemocratic. Surely, they are not practicing shura like they should as Islam prescribe. The IAMPRC, now IMPRPA as a body for Muslim PR and communication experts can play an essential role promoting shura.

Thus, it is strongly feel that shura which is essential to the practice of democracy and a prerequisite for good governance should be very agreeable to the current universal practice. Therefore, it is fully believe it will have an excellent acceptance level not only to the West but also to all religious faiths who give priority to open communication and the voice of the people of which the world major religions promote.

Talking about the practice of democracy, we can remember the arrogant words of Tim Bell, the so-called founder of the British modern public relations industry saying:

"There's no Arab word for democracy. That is one of the difficulties." If you say: "Isn't democracy wonderful? and they don't have a word for it, then it is not surprising that they do not have the same view." Tim Bell, commissioned to work on a large-scale public relations drive preceding the handing over of power to an Iraqi government arrogantly and ignorantly said this when he was holidaying in Morocco. His message would be that democracy was 'the route to peace and prosperity' (*The Independent: How to sell democracy to Iraqis: Bring in Lord Bell, Saturday 13 March 2004*).

Maybe Tim Bell had conveniently forgotten or is ignorant of the fact that the word 'democracy' originated from ancient Greece and it was the Arab which have become rapidly civilized through Islam that conveyed the terminology to the West. Otherwise, the term would simply have disappeared. After all the practice of democracy can have many names. An old English saying noted "A rose by any name still smell as sweet."

Further, the western democracy is not necessarily the best way of governing a nation. Each nation may have their own needs and requirements to get the most from the government and the people.

Very appropriately, the 1st IAMPRC Global Congress rightly recognized the Prophet Muhammad SAW as the founder of Muslim public relations. As a Muslim, I should say with full believe and confidence, not only our greatest and last Prophet be recognized as the founder of Muslim PR but also the greatest for all time. His teaching should be the foundation of our practice. The IAMPRC or IMPRPA should be looking for ways to educate and train Muslim PR and communication experts to emulate our Rasulullah.

The IAMPRC statement issued at its inaugural Global Congress declared:

"Prophet Muhammad's communicative values of liberty, justice, modesty, and politeness were matched with practical deeds. His skillful use of rhetoric demonstrated his commitment for meaningful competent communication for humankind in general. His speeches demonstrate that he sought to see all humankind from the lens of kindness, modesty, moderation, justice, liberty, gentility, generosity and love."

At the 1st IAMPRC Congress: "many significant speakers also linked the core Islamic principles to public relations practice. Of particularly importance to public relations practice to them are justice, accountability and *shura* – the seeking of mutual agreement or consensus, without which no authority has legitimacy. They echoed Abdullah Badawi called.

One of the notable non-Muslim speakers, Chair of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, popular known as GA, Daniel Tisch similarly

highlighted justice, accountability and shura as the most significant ideas presented at the 1st IAMPRC Global Congress.

In a statement after the Congress: "Tisch referred to the concepts of justice and accountability -- long-established principles of the Islamic faith -- and their pertinence for the field of public relations in the modern world. According to Tisch, while different terms were employed in public relations theory, these principles were reminiscent of some of the most important trends relevant in public relations today. Tisch commented that while these are ancient ideas in Islamic thought, they could not be more relevant to modern PR." For example, Tisch consider the importance of ethics, transparency, authenticity, accountability and mutual understanding to successful corporate communication and stakeholder governance.

Daniel Tisch statement reflected increasing similarities in the public relations practice prerequisites to make the profession a very credible one and to ensure its standing can be quickly ascertained as a true vocation for all times.

Public Relations Strategies for Unity and Diversity

According to Daniel Tisch: "I drew heavily on this new learning in addressing my is ***PR strategies for unity and diversity.***" He felt that the idea of uniting a faith that is practised so widely -- from the Arab world to Asia to America and everywhere in between -- is challenging, as is the idea of bridging the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds while respecting diversity. Tisch proposed four reasons for this state of assigned topic, that affair:

1. "History shows us that 'unity' has often been achieved by conquest or by compromise -- but rarely through genuine consensus.
2. Even in countries that embrace *ethnic* diversity, there are limits on tolerance for true *cultural* diversity, including different visions of social order, politics and economics. (Consider the small Quebec town that shamefully banned the wearing of Islamic headwear by women, just on the off chance they might encounter such a situation someday).
3. Ethnocentrism remains a powerful and pernicious force -- whether manifested in horrific ethnic cleansing and civil wars or more subtle forms of discrimination and repression.
4. Even in a conference overwhelmingly dedicated to a message of hope and inclusion, one deeply misguided speaker caused considerable embarrassment by distributing a book on the alleged American-Zionist plot for world domination. While I absented myself from that session, it was a reminder that we still have far to go to achieve

mutual understanding, and that some people will never cross the divide (dtisch@argylecommunications.com).”

Generally, I agree with Tisch observations. His comments seem sincere. He does not sound condescending or self-serving as some Western experts or scholars do. Their writings generally can give the impressions that all the negative things happens only among Muslims or Islamic nations. These do not create goodwill and understanding, and more so for good communication. Thus, it must be stressed that negative behavior and actions happened in all religions and creeds or societies, traditional and advance. Some advance nations in the West would rather see an almost naked women walking happily in their streets rather than those fully covering themselves as they deem fit, may it by their cultural influences, religious leanings, or even their own choices.

Here, I would like to say something that always bothered me and I suppose most Muslims. The 9/11 tragedy that killed about 3000 innocent men and women and destroyed the World Trade Centre severely blemished Islam as the perpetrators are labeled to be not only terrorists but also Muslim fanatics or Islamist militant group. The perpetrators should only be labeled as terrorists, representing their groups rather than representing the more than one a half billion Muslims on this earth. After all, terrorists come from all religions and they are very rarely labelled as such.

Along the same line, I wondered why the Christian United States of America (USA) who dropped atomic bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima in less than a century ago annihilating almost a quarter of a million people including babies and elderly and the severe hazardous radiations are still being felt today are not seen in the same light. “The atomic bombings of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan were conducted by the United States during the final stages of World War II in 1945. Germany was already occupied and Japan was about to fall. Many felt that at that time it not necessary to use the atomic bombs. These two events represent the only use of nuclear weapons in war to date. Within the first two to four months of the bombings, the acute effects killed 90,000–166,000 people in Hiroshima and 60,000–80,000 in Nagasaki, with roughly half of the deaths in each city occurring on the first day. The Hiroshima prefecture health department estimated that, of the people who died on the day of the explosion, 60% died from flash or flame burns, 30% from falling debris and 10% from other causes. During the following months, large numbers died from the effect of burns, radiation sickness, and other injuries, compounded by illness. In a US estimate of the total immediate and short-term cause of death, 15–20% died from radiation sickness, 20–30% from burns, and 50–60% from other injuries, compounded by illness. In both cities, most of the dead were civilians, although Hiroshima

had a sizeable garrison.” (Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 18 November 2012)

Christian USA is still happily destroying babies and elders in their drone attacks in Muslim nations, in particular the Islamic state of Pakistan. Those innocent killed are simply labeled as collateral damages. I am sure many Americans do like me labeling USA a Christian nation despite their leaders are sworn in by the bible. After all nearly all their leader are Christians, and rightly so very proud of it.

In addition, the USA abetted it closes allies in killing innocent children and elders wherever they deem fit and blindly defend them when criticised in the United Nations. So we must always remember what the USA will do and what they are capable of doing. Otherwise, it will be at their enemies’ peril. We must remember the orders given to kill are given by the USA government, unlike the 9/11 attack which was conducted and ordered by terrorist group. Therefore, the James Bond with the right to kill is a mentality in the white west governments and they rarely practice the right to differ or to be different as they loudly proclaimed.

Today, being the strongest nation or the sole superpower, I have the impression the USA and its allies never really care about their image. This is despite the fact that they would have spent some billion US dollars or even trillion on their propaganda efforts. Also, to their great advantage are the main global media are in their control or originated from their countries whose journalists write their stories from their public perspective that they claim as objective, while labelling others as subjective and biased. I am sure by now, the USA and its allies are fully aware that no amount of money can white wash or erased evil deeds when it is continuously perpetrated.

In addition, the western movie industries, especially in the USA, are generally playing an effective role in promoting their nations as champion of democracy and human rights while the actions of their governments prove otherwise. Their movie industries continue to produce movies that belittle Islam or stereotype Muslims negatively and to my amazement, many still were shown over TV, and sometime repeatedly in my country, Malaysia that projects herself as a moderate Muslim nation. Therefore, it is no wonder that Muslims, especially the young, remain in awe of the West, especially USA, and generally wish to emulate them after watching the constant negative stereotype portrayal of Islam and Muslims.

The West, especially USA seems to be overly fond of giving labels and stereotyping. Their labels and stereotyping can be misleading or even demeaning for nations, religions or people they labeled. Muslims should also minimise or stop labeling and stereotyping non-

Muslims as it will only worsened matters. It hampers effective communication and sustained bad relationships. In public relations, especially based in Islamic practice, we should as much as possible enhance interactive communication to erase labeling and stereotyping.

Nevertheless, I agree with Tisch that there are more reasons for optimism than pessimism in enhancing relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. Below, are his reasons I am agreeable to:

1. "For a historically high number of people, demography is no longer destiny – and diversity transcends demography. The advent of global culture, cultural cross-pollination and *hybridity* means we can no longer reliably predict how someone might think or feel simply because they happen to be young or old, Asian or Caucasian, urban or rural, white-collar or blue-collar, wealthy or poor.
2. Notwithstanding the ongoing conflicts between nations, never have we seen nations act together with greater unity of purpose. The leaders of Europe, struggling to save their common currency endures much criticism; but considers that for most of the continent's history these nations were organized into military blocs that were perennially on the brink of war. And in Asia, in less than a generation, China's image has been transformed from that of an enemy of capitalism to a potential saviour.
3. The emergence of the social web – and the consequent massive decentralization of communication power – is a force that makes 'command and control' forms of unity far more difficult – though we must never forget that technology can be used to promote hatred and division as easily as it can be used to promote love and understanding" (dtisch@argylecommunications.com)

Therefore, it is not surprising that I can support the two core strategies proposed by Tisch in working toward unity amid diversity. Today, increasingly more nations are celebrating diversity instead of homogeneity. This includes my own country, Malaysia. Even in a country that prided itself as the "Land of the melting-pot" like in the USA is now priding itself for celebrating diversity. I suppose the pot had melted or became too hot to handle. So I fully believe that the IAMPRC can be much stronger and influential plus global by not only just celebrating diversity but to promote it actively. One way is of course to work closely with the entire PR professional bodies, nationally and globally, Muslims or non-Muslims.

Tisch first strategy is co-creation. According to him: "there is need for neither conquest nor compromise if we commit to generating ideas together – as the 1st IAMPRC

Congress amply demonstrated. For him this is an area where those in the West can learn from Eastern traditions.”

Communications theorists K.S. Sitaram and Michael Prosser (2000) noted:

“...While Western philosophers place importance on the author and the originator of the idea, eastern philosophers did not do so because they believed the idea was more important than the originator of the idea itself. We know that some Hindu philosophers visited Socrates, but we do not know their names.”

Sitaram and Prosser argued: “Westerners tend to believe in communication as a linear process that begins with an information source and involves a transmitter and a receiver. Easterners tend to believe that there is no definite beginning or ending to any idea.” Since Islam is neither west nor east, but Universal, we should look into the Qur’an and the hadiths as well as in exemplary Muslim leaders, especially the Prophet Muhammad SAW and the four righteous caliphs.

Tisch believed we needed to embrace that idea – and create content together. I agree with him. We urgently need to do it. I am sure there is a lot that we can learn from each other. The more we work together, I believe, the more we will understand each other, and the better it is for the world. Thus, if other faiths want to form their own Global PR bodies we should not be unduly worried. Instead, what IAMPRC should do is to work with them. Maybe, if they desire it, offer them our assistance since IAMPRC have the experience. Then, it would be much easier for us to cooperate in creating the content for a better world.

Tisch second strategy: “is the search for universal principles – while respecting diverse applications.” According to Tisch: “in his country and many others, aboriginal peoples have a history of oral storytelling: the basics of the story are always the same, but the specifics will depend on the communicator, the audience and the context.” It is the same in my country, Malaysia. “So let it be with our communication: unity in our ideas, diversity in their applications.”

According to Tisch: “This idea has long animated the work of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, enabling the Global Code of Ethics, the Stockholm Accords, the World Public Relations Forum and many other examples of consensus-based collaboration.” I am sure that IMPRPA would be happy to work with GA in all efforts promoting the practice of communication and public relations as well as enhancing the knowledge of Islam to all those interested.

IMPRPA for Moderate Islam

What make me so happy about the inaugural IAMPRC Global Congress in Kuala Lumpur was that the image of moderate Islam shone brightly. Tisch, the current GA President who claimed to be a global soul with a Jewish-born father and a Catholic-born mother, found it was a great honour for him to stand in solidarity with Muslim public relations practitioners, using communication to understand our diversity, while finding unity in both our profession and our humanity.

In Tisch, own words: "In accepting the invitation, I looked forward to participating in a small way in the bridging of a vast global divide. But my journey brought an unexpected surprise: a front-row seat at an intelligent, anxious and cautiously optimistic discussion among moderate Muslims from 23 countries about their faith's global brand, and the role public relations could play in its future."

Another non-Muslim who claimed to be an atheist and a former chair of GA, Toni Muzi Falconi, who attended the IAMPRC inaugural Global Congress in Kuala Lumpur, also reported positively on it. In his PR Conversations blog (21st December, 2011) Toni Muzi Falconi wrote: "I'm pleased to report the congress comprised three full days of frank, open and critical discussion, both in sessions and in corridors during breakouts. Perhaps no definitive answers to the big issues were determined, but definitely an excellent selection of presentations focused on real areas to tackle, with ongoing work and considered thought for now and in future." He felt that the 1st IAMPRC Global Congress promoted "**The Voice of Moderation and Harmony**". As a participant to the 1st Global Muslim PR Congress I shared his opinion. I feel IAMPRC should promote and sustain the image of "The Voice of Moderation" for it to attract memberships and supporters.

Toni further noted: "A widespread sense of satisfaction was palpable at the event, having succeeded in what initially appeared to be a difficult journey. The general feeling of success melded with a second, intense sense of responsibility and some apprehension on what the future might hold for the newly created International Association for Muslim Public Relations and Communication Practitioners, reflected in the unanimously approved umbrella conference theme: **The Voice of Moderation and Harmony**. An explicit invitation to join the new association is extended to interested non-Muslim practitioners—this author has already applied for membership." I hope Toni membership has already been attended to and he has been notified of its outcome.

Toni must be duly impressed with the 1st Global Congress considering what he said in his PR Conversations dated November 24, 2009. Toni wrote: "Let me tell you about myself, from this perspective of course. I am not religious (although I have, as 90% of

Italians, been baptised), yet I teach public relations in Rome at a University of the Vatican (LUMSA). No one in the University has ever asked me if I was a Catholic, and when other do I reply that I am an atheist... In principle therefore I am not particularly eager for public relations professionals to belong to religiously based professional organization (having been one of the founders of the global alliance. you may imagine that for me even a national perspective is doubtful, as I believe that today, in this world, public relations approach and/or practice is either global or is not. But this is my personal opinion and certainly many of my co-bloggers and visitors have different and interesting views.”

In this same PR Conversations Toni asked me: “Maybe you would like to ‘open’ the discussion on public relations and religion with a ‘guest post’ here on PR conversations. If so please send me a maximum of twenty lines so that I may post it on your behalf.”

My response to Toni appearing on PR Conversations (December 3, 2009) are as follow: “With regard to dialogue on religion, it would be good to have it. Religions are supposed to make the world a better place. Some might not believe in religion and god and that is their rights. The most essential thing is we are all friends and try to make this world a better place. In any religion, since the dawn of humans there will always be followers who want to exploit it to achieve their own selfish means. I feel that our profession can be among the best profession to promote goodwill and understanding across the religious divide.”

It is wise for the IAMPRC/IMPRPA to award Toni Muzi Falconi for his “excellent contributions in the field of public relations serving world communities.” I am sure there are other non-Muslim PR professionals and scholars who deserve it. However, let us not forget the Muslim professionals and scholars who have contributed accordingly. Equally, important IAMPRC must make it awards something very prestigious.

Toni discussed the issue that many participants of 1st IAMRC Global Congress argued that the universal perception of Muslims was predominantly based on misconceptions and stereotypes perpetuated by the media systems in the Western world. He pointed out that as such, it is the social responsibility of the large majority of moderate Muslim public relations practitioners, students, teachers and scholars to collaborate on a planned—and acutely aware—effort to re-establish a more balanced perception by the media and other publics. He felt that the likelihood of success would increase by attracting and convincing non-Muslim colleagues worldwide as to the worth of this endeavour. I feel Toni suggestions are worth considering. This is in the light the challenge Muslims are facing with regard to their image.

Toni added that with this in mind, efforts should focus on bridging the existing knowledge divides *between* Muslim practitioners, *as well as* between IAMPRC and non-Muslim colleagues. I would add other relevant organisations. In this way, all could support and champion a global effort.

Further, Toni noted that similar to how most public relations conferences fixate on why public relations practitioners have such a poor reputation, *in this case* reputation issues have a double-edged sword: being in PR *and* being a Muslim. Thus, according to Toni this emphasizes even more the case to undertake what many called a “rebranding effort.” He observed: “The more aware agreed that, similar to the simple but diffused PR reputation issue, the challenge really lies in day-to-day behaviour—in other words, from PR practitioners and Muslims alike.” *Here, I feel we should take note of what Toni had noted and take appropriate actions to enhance public relations experts reputation, Muslim or otherwise.*

Reactions to the Formation of IAMRC

I feel it is also essential to consider Toni’s observation that the younger delegates have some critical remarks regarding the decision to create a global PR association with a defined religious corollary, which was openly discussed. This particular topic attracted some comments from his blog. For example Judy Gombita (December 28, 2011) asked: “Toni, I’d be interested in knowing why the younger Muslim PR practitioners objected to the concept of – a religious-based PR practitioners’ association and Islamic PR becoming a specific curricula subjected for Muslim PR student. Gombita is it because they identify less with the “religious” aspect of being Muslim and more with the inherent cultural values.”

Toni’s reply to Judy Gombita (December 28, 2011): “Some of the youngsters I spoke with in Kuala Lumpur, after having read my comment, sent me messages asking me to elaborate on these issues, but did not really feel up to the psychological challenge of actually doing this in public. Mind you, I do not think it is because what their peers frighten them or seniors might say. It is just that the reputation of this blog finishes by intimidating some of the less-certain wishful *commenter’s.*”

Toni answered Judy specific question as follows: “During the conference, I tried to get the younger Muslims’ point of view. They argue that, being Muslims, they do not really feel that much different from youngsters with other beliefs. And this fairly resonates with the argument I often use in my global relations and intercultural communication class at NYU: i.e., that younger generations living in large urban centers have more in common today in

Rio and Shanghai than they have with their respective elders who live only a few miles away in the country.....”

I can appreciate Toni’s viewpoint. Those who dealt with young people all the time will realize that they are more global or universal in their outlook. Today, with the global media and the Internet pervasive presence their thinking will be more universal. I have been teaching multi-racial and multi-religious students for more than 30 years have long realized that youngsters whatever their creeds or ethnicities have more in common with their age groups wherever they are and not to their elders even in their own home. I am sure we will see similar phenomena across religions. As they grow older with more experience and wiser they tend to appreciate the importance of belonging to an organisation that provide them security and a better future. This is more so with their increasing engagement with the social media.

Hence, it is essential for IAMPRC to make the extra effort to attract students and young Muslim PR and communication professionals to its fold. I would like to suggest that IAMPRC create the Student Chapter so that those in this category can do something that are of their interests and benefits. We can learn from the various PR professional bodies that already have the student chapter. The IAMPRC can also have a special committee to meet the young Muslim PR and Communication professionals needs while preparing them for leadership positions. It is important that our young PR and communication people be given the opportunity to voice their interests, questions and comments so that IAMPRC can be seen as proactive to their aspirations and thus enjoys their enthusiasm and involvement.

Here, I would like to remark on Toni’s views on the three initial themes emerging as content for Muslim “rebranding”. The three were: (1) Branding Feisal and other icons as champions of Islamic moderation; (2) Arguing the positive health consequences of the halal food consumption (today an annual USD3.2 billion market); and (3) Advocating the convenience of Islamic finance services (i.e. no interest charges).

I agree with Toni’s feeling that the three themes need a better framing. As he said, ideally it should be from other attendees or Muslim PR practitioners, scholars and students as well as ad hoc PR programs. I feel IAMPRC should consider his suggestions.

Also, I agree with Toni when he said additionally it would be beneficial to identify other coherent themes that emerged from the 1st IAMPRC Global Congress. I would like the IAMPRC executives to look into it and take appropriate actions. Conversely, what would we like IAMPRC to be? Is it to be a professional body or do we want it to be commercially oriented or a combination of both. All present at the 2nd IAMPRC may want to decide what it should be. Our decision today will decide the future direction of IAMPRC.

The earliest remark I can detect in regards to the formation of a global Islamic PR body was on the Internet PR Conversations dated July 18, 2006 posted by Toni Muzi Falconi of which he received 16 comments. He wrote, "The very recent formation of a confederation of public relations associations of Islamic Countries is a good reminder of the role of a professional association." He asked whether GA should accept member associations from Cuba, the Republic of China or the newly formed Confederation of Islamic Public Relations Associations, which happens to be headquartered in Iran. Personally, I believe we should. Others do not agree. What is your opinion please?"

Another early remark about the formation of a body like the IAMPRC was posted by Donatella Lanzen (PR Conversations – September 1st, 2006). Lanzen said: "Confederation of Islamic Public Relations interests me a lot. I think we should let them in, but under what terms and conditions in view of the present scenario? Please circulate further info on the mission and purposes of this Confederation and their members. Maybe it could be a way to get closer views and real approach on what the Islamic world is wishing to achieve. Maybe just for one Public Relations could be, at least from my personal viewpoint, an inroad to some sort of understanding between the western world and the eastern world. I am profoundly proud of being a westerner and instinctively hate the way the Islamic world is doing and the way the western world gives in and surrenders. In any case, it is an interesting subject."

The above remark about forming a body like the IAMPRC is interesting as it reflect the mentality of a Westerner towards Islam and Muslims. "I do not really know what he meant when he said: "... instinctively hate the way the Islamic world is doing and the way the western world gives in and surrender. As I know, the West is still trying to impose their views as superior to all non-Westerners or even non-Christians. We do not know how many Westerners have similar negative view of Islam and Muslims and their pride of being Westerner or Christian. Normally, Westerners reflect white Americans or Europeans. Interestingly, he had no objection for an Islamic PR body to become a member of GA. Actually, my monitoring of the PR Conversations blog I have not come across anyone objecting to a Global Muslim PR body in becoming a member of the GA.

On June 8, 2009 my statement as President, Institute Public Relations Malaysia was published in the PR Conversations. It said: "Dear Toni, I feel as Public Relations Professional we should have an open mind. We should do our research before we conclude or make decision. It is always better to have as many members as possible. Even, if an organization originates from Iran it does not automatically means it is bad. We should communicate with them and see what their objectives are. If it is similar to Global Alliance, we should

communicate with all those wanting to be our friends. Let's not forget that more than 1.5 billion human beings are Muslims." This statement was in relation to the assumed formation of the Muslim PR confederation in Iran.

On November 24, 2009, another of my statement appeared in the PR Conversations, of which among others I said: "One of the members wrote she is very proud of being of Westerner and do not like what the Muslim world is doing. I am from the East and a Muslim. The arrogant attitude of Westerners did not augur well for any effective of communication. You can say many things but if we do not start on the premise of looking positively at each other and trying to understand why such negative attitude and conditions prevail we will not get anywhere. Actually, I propose for the formation of the Council of Muslim Public Relations Practitioners or whatever an appropriate name maybe when I was attending a PR seminar in Iran. I do not know if there are follow-ups by the Iranian. They have requested me to do it from Malaysia being fully aware of Iran's image in the Western World. I propose the Muslim Public Relations Association because I feel the professionals Muslims should make an effort to show that our religion teach peace and understanding. Of course as in any religion they are good and bad practitioners. Surely, the other religions are not as maligned by western scholars as Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. One of the results of a very bad act it seems that more people is trying to understand Islam. Strangely, it end up that more people are becoming Muslims than any other religion, Catholic included."

Some Concluding Remarks

However, I suppose in this rapidly globalizing world the need to understand each other better is essential if people of the world want to live in peace in harmony. For that I have propose for the formation of the Muslims Public Relations Association. I suppose the many different Christian groups are also having their own public relations practice and they should be encouraged to be members of GA. So do the other world religions or even the minority or even atheist. Maybe we should have a conference on religions and public relations so that we can learn from each other and appreciate one another better.

On November 24, 2009, Toni statement in the PR Conversations: "Hamdan, maybe you would like to 'open' the discussion on public relations and religion with a 'guest post' here on PR conversations."

On December 3, 2009, my response to Toni published in PR Conversations said: "With regard to dialogue on religion, it would be good to have it. Religions are supposed to make the world a better place. Some might not believe in religion and god and that is their

rights. The most essential thing is we are all friends and try to make this world a better place. In any religion, since the dawn of humans there will always be followers who want to exploit it to achieve their own selfish means. I feel that our profession can be among the best profession to promote goodwill and understanding across the religious divide.”

Sadly, the dialogue never happens. I pray the IAMPRC and now IMPRPA can initiate it to make it a reality. This I believe will show the true worth our profession. That is, experts at building bridges in an increasingly restless and violent world but yet rapidly globalizing and forging forward.

In my presentation, I have offered some suggestion as to how IAMPRC or IMPRPA can be a truly outstanding institution and I hope it can be considered. My suggestions include:

- (1) Making the IMPRPA a truly international body with its headquarters rotating among Islamic nations ensuring it can create a sense of belonging among Muslim PR practitioners globally.
- (2) Getting rich Muslim nations and appropriate foundations to support and fund IMPRPA making it sustainable and able to contribute significantly promoting the positive image of Islam and Muslims as well as uniting plus improving the proficiency of member PR practitioners.
- (3) Formulating and implementing communication strategies and programmes to neutralise and counter negative propaganda and psychological warfare against Islam and Muslims.
- (4) Organising relevant programmes and activities promote the better understanding of Islam among Muslims and non-Muslims.
- (5) Conducting regular research and monitoring on all issues pertaining to the interest of Islam and Muslims.
- (6) Centre for gathering all materials on Islam and Muslims for those interested in Islam and Muslims affairs plus practicing Islamic Public Relations.
- (7) Making shura as one of the primary foundation for teaching public relations and ensuring Muslim Public Relations practitioners employ shura effectively so as to ensure interactive ethical communication and engagement.
- (8) Networking with all organisations including non-Muslim professional public relations bodies that impact Islam and Muslims well-being, including image.

I am sure others will also offer realistic recommendations to make the IMPRPA a great body. I pray leaders of IMPRPA will consider all advices given and take the appropriate actions to make the institution we all can be proud of. Lastly, as IMPRPA is a

global body of Muslim public relations and communication experts it should be ever vigilant of any wrong perceptions or attacks on Islam and Prophet Muhammad SAW. The IMPRPA should take immediate actions to remedy it using the resources, expertises and contacts that it have.

The IMPRPA efforts should also be towards fellow Muslims who in their anger take negative actions and inevitably tarnish the good name of Islam and Muslims. Further, the IMPRPA should take immediate actions to advise them on the right actions that would not tarnish the good name of Islam and Muslims but instead will enhance it.

During the Second IAMPRC Congress in Tehran in December 2012 it is decided that it Third Congress would be in Kazakhstan. I pray it can be realised. Otherwise, another nation, including Malaysia or Indonesia by being a nation with most Muslims should do it. To date, no organisation or nation has yet to organise it. I like to suggest that the Kargozar Public Relations Institute (KPRI) in Tehran should conduct it a second time considering that the IMPRPA was given life in Iran and therefore it is only sensible that KPRI should nurture it until it can become a respected institution. Further, because the embargo on Iran has already been lifted and that IMPRPA is still with them that it would a great opportunity for to continue to lead.



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