

DECLARATION OF THE IHTIDA CONGRESS

It is Allah Almighty who sent the Prophets to call mankind to glorify Allah (swt) as the only one God and worship Him alone. Through the revelation of the Qur'an, the final message was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (saw) and remains until the Day of Judgment. This message has been shared with humanity since the first generations of Muslims and carried on till today. Through the efforts of Muslims, by the grace of Allah, many non-Muslim individuals and communities embraced Islam, and soon, Islam became a world religion. The journey to Islam is the journey to Allah. Despite many adversities in the present age we live, many non-Muslims continue to turn to Islam as a life choice.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs of Turkey (Diyanet), in collaboration with Konya Metropolitan Municipality, has held an international congress on Ihtida (Conversion to Islam) in order to address the issues related to conversion on November 26-28, 2021 in Konya. The two-day Congress first listened to the conversion experiences, explored more effective methods of da'wah (call to Islam), discussed crucial problems the converts are facing during and after conversion and exchanged views on solutions to these problems.

The Committee presents findings and proposals of the Congress as follows:

Findings:

1. The Prophet Muhammad (saw) was sent as a prophet of mercy to all humanity. Conveying the message of the Prophet (saw) to mankind is a religious responsibility of Muslims. Today, for various reasons, Muslims are experiencing difficulties in conveying this universal message of Islam properly.
2. Converts may face general problems such as isolation, socialization and relationships as well as issues related to belonging, professional life and restrictive policies and legislation regarding religiosity in public.
3. The teaching of Islam at higher education level is largely from an orientalist perspective and taught by non-Muslim academics creating misrepresentation of true Islam.
4. The major source of knowledge about Islam comes from the literature produced at the moment by either non-Muslims or marginal perspectives.
5. The presence of cultural diversities within Islamic communities may complicate the learning processes of Islam.

6. The misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in media and entertainment sector often have significant negative impact on new Muslims and their personal relations.
7. The fear of Islamophobic reactions from the society they live in often compels converts to conceal their Muslim identity in public, which may lead to compromise their quality of life.
8. The majority of converts do not receive the adequate support they needed in terms of spiritual, social, psychological and material needs after conversion.
9. Some organizations, communities and individuals helping new Muslims may present their approach or interpretation of Islam as the only truth of Islam, which leads to problems in new Muslims' understanding Islam correctly as well as causing negative consequences in the long term.

Suggestions:

10. Muslims should be encouraged to live and convey the beautiful, universal message of Islam as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (s). It is therefore necessary for Muslims to produce knowledge and appropriate discourses, and develop practical solutions to the material, spiritual and moral needs of the contemporary world.
11. Training programs can be provided to relevant individuals and organizations, each center has specialists who can provide support for converts.
12. More specific information on the challenges can be shared through social media in order to have great awareness of convert needs.
13. Converts and receiving communities should be aware of the cultural diversities within Islamic societies which may complicate the learning processes of Islam.
14. In the spirit of the brotherhood of the Ansar and Muhajir examples, support networks should be created to address the needs of both converts and their non-Muslim families.
15. Mosque sermons and educational activities should be tailored for individual needs and concerns of converts.
16. As the mosque is the core of life for most Muslims living in minority communities, the physical environment for both male and female Muslims, especially new Muslims coming from different backgrounds, should be improved.
17. Muslims, especially converts, in non-Muslim environments sometimes face discrimination in their daily lives and as such, legal civil mechanisms should be put into place to provide support for victims.

18. Media and literature containing reliable religious information for converts should be produced both in printed and digital forms. Documentaries, movies, serials and other artistic materials about Islam specific to convert interests should be made available.
19. Research should be carried out to explore effective means of coordination and collaboration of non-governmental organizations that carry out activities for converts.
20. Teaching of the recitation and meanings of the Qur'an should be facilitated through the mosques and religious institutions to be made more accessible for converts and general audience.
21. Academic studies on the theory and anthropology of conversion should be promoted through creating fellowships and scholarships.
22. Although diversity in the interpretation of Islam is welcome, it is not acceptable for any government to impose and mandate certain ideologically-desirable interpretations of Islam and their own rules.
23. It is recommended that Diyanet creates a specialist department to take the strategic lead on conversion and restructure international services accordingly.
24. Konya Metropolitan Municipality is greatly appreciated for hosting this pioneering Congress on Conversion and the Mayor's proposal to host a certain number of converts on an annual basis is indeed commendable.
25. This Conversion Congress should continue periodically, each addressing a specific thematic issue incorporating global perspectives and voices.