

**Makram Mohammed Ahmed writes from the Wadi
Al-Natroun Penitentiary: The Rank and File has a
Discussion with their Leadership in the Courtyard of the
Penitentiary**

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Fall 2004

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Acknowledgements: Many thanks to Michael Fishbein for supporting my work on this text. All errors are, of course, my own.

I chose to be seated in the midst of the rows of the rank and file of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* in the commons of the penitentiary Wadi al-Natroun in order to observe at a short distance the events of the first meeting between what was close to 500 cadre of the *Gama'a's* ranks (captive and imprisoned) in this penitentiary and four of ranking members in its leadership, Karam Zohdy, president of the *Gama'a*, Nageh Ibrahim, its theologian, Ali al-Sharif, the most prominent member of the leadership, and Ossama Hafez , the most popular of the group among the ranks of the *Gama'a*.

The four prominent leaders came to the penitentiary Wadi al-Natroun in order to present to their rank and file—after an absence lasting twenty years—the new vision they had reached and which they recorded in four books after a comprehensive review of *Gama'a* thinking. The conclusion that they reached was that the initiative to end violence needed to be publicized, even if unilaterally, to prevent the spilling of Muslim blood, to preserve the unity of the *umma*, and to adhere to sound Islamic law which forbids the killing of Muslims and branding them infidels and forbids the killing of civilians and tourists and prohibits revolt against a Muslim ruler because this revolt carries in it great losses damaging the society of Muslims and destroying their unity. Also they came to the conclusion to ban extremism in religion because the man who overtaxes his animals with coarse treatment and cruelty does not cross the land, nor does he preserve the back of his beast. They arrived at the necessity of placing strict guidelines on the practice of *hisba* which loses its legitimacy in the presence of the state apparatuses which oversee the implementation of law and restrict the right of the *hisba* renderer to advice and light rebuke if a legitimate representative for the law or the police are not there to forbid the objectionable behavior and prevent its occurrence.

Individual members of the *Gama'a* came from their cells in the penitentiary after the *maghreb* prayer in orderly lines led by a representative of the *Gama'a* from each cell block, their clean *gallabiyyas* pure white. They sat calmly and orderly in their seats in the commons of the penitentiary which was guarded from above the walls by soldiers carrying guns and it was lit by a bright light, and hung on the walls were billboards written by the *Gama'a* calligrapher 'Amr Taha Gadawee after being granted permission by the administration of the prison, which were written in a microchrome substance and carbon stone and hibiscus juice announcing the subject of the meeting “the initiative to end violence...a realistic view and an examination based on *sharia*” and welcoming the shaykhs as “distinguished members and a sight for sore eyes” and urging a united *umma* in the face of oppression of foreign enemies and promising security to the land of Kinani, and faith that “Peace yaa Egypt, you are the object of hope”, and announcing obedience to the shaykhs to carry out *sharia* and religion.

Directly facing the straight lines of white *gallabiyyas*, the four leaders sat on a platform and behind them eighteen of the second strata leaders who the *Gama'a* appointed commander for the provinces of Egypt in the violent period.

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The meeting began immediately after they finished the sunset prayer in their cells and continued until midnight and was not interrupted except for the evening call to prayer. A member pronounced the call asking permission from the *Gama'a* president Karam Zohdy who confirmed the duty of giving the call at its appointed time but that it was permitted to postpone the prayer until after the meeting ended..., and during this period my basic concern was to make certain that the leadership of the *Gama'a* would say to their rank and file the same ideas and views that I heard from them when I met with them in the Scorpion prison the previous week.

I witnessed with my own eyes that the four leaders possess the courage to announce their new thought before their rank and file clearly and candidly without leaving the opportunity for speculation or confusion or using ambiguous (two-faced) language or the desire to use language to save face especially on complex issues which formed a complete overturning of the thinking of the old *Gama'a*. The thinking calls for putting the interest of the state ahead of the welfare of the *Gama'a* because the state is a Muslim state and its institutions are legitimate institutions deserving respect and compliance with their laws...and not to call them infidel or traitorous and calling for not hurting foreign tourists because the entrance visas which they carry mean that the state grants them safety and it is not the right of anyone, whoever he might be, to violate the pledge of security a muslim gave to the foreigner even if the foreigner is a combatant (*muharib*) because that is the law of God and the Prophet's *sunna*.

I saw that the four leaders were speaking the same language and I did not perceive any disparity in their ideas and I did not notice any differences in their theological interpretations. The four were one voice, one ideology, and following one line, despite the fact that each of them spoke about a particular subject.

Karam Zohdy, president of the *Gama'a*, talked about the reasons for the initiative and its phases and why it was twenty years late, and why it was stalled for five whole years after the Luxor incident. He also spoke about the goals of the initiative and its aspirations..., and I think that he was sincere when he said "we did not ask anyone for permission in this initiative and we do not lay down a single condition, and we do not demand anything from the state, and our goal and our intention was God's approval after a comprehensive review of the provisions of *sharia* and a complete study of the practical considerations of the national welfare which emphasized the necessity of change of the thought of the *Gama'a* and its programs".

Ossama Hafez talked about the dangers of the absence of regulations on *hisba* and I think that he possesses great courage when he says that *hisba* cases need to be restricted to the responsible state apparatus and the police and state security and the censorship board whenever their representatives of it exist, otherwise society will be transformed into a type of chaos and also that all of the citizens, headed by the Muslim youth, should cooperate with these apparatuses as they undertake their duties. In the absence of representatives of these apparatus, it is permitted that a Muslim prevent the objectionable behavior through advice and rebuke without giving himself the right to punish.

A sound example that he gave was: is it permitted for a Muslim when he sees a pickpocket

stealing a wallet of a rider on a bus to stay quiet or does he have an obligation to stop this objectionable behavior?

I also think that he showed the utmost sincerity when he said that the *hisba* renderer ought not to spy on people and hone in on their indiscretions or think bad things about them or speak harshly to them in giving advice because kindness and sympathy and forgiveness and a tender heart were the most prominent characteristics of the Prophet and if he had been coarse and hard hearted then the people would have dispersed from around him.

Ali al-Sharif talked about the prohibition on killing civilians and tourists and he described the two acts as a “great sin” religious law condemns and which reflect the misuse of the idea of *jihad* and the shameful ignorance of the objectives of the law and violation of the interests of regular people (God’s servants). The climax of his statement was when Ali al-Sharif said that: we want a youth who builds and not tears down and protects the state and helps maintain its institutions, who respects the law and is a bulwark against the branding of Muslims as infidels and leads to faith with wisdom and good counsel.

Nageh Ibrahim talked about the dangers of extremism in religion because extremism in religion has the same effect as negligence, two faces of the same coin, such that you alienate people from the soundness of religion that demands each Muslim not disturb the scale and weigh fairly and not shortweight (give too little), implementing the will of the Lord to make the Islamic *umma* a moderate *umma*, attending to the hereafter as if the *umma* would die tomorrow and attending to this world as if it will live forever.

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During these long hours, the audience listened very politely and not one of them departed from the good behavior of the dialogue. When the time for questions came after the four leaders ended their statements (opening remarks), a great number of the rank and file came up one after the other to the microphone asking if the initiative was a tactical act or a strategic goal? They asked about the legal judgement of their previous acts and what was the fate of some brothers of theirs who had died in fighting which was (subsequently) established violated the sound *sharia*. They asked about the verdict of religion of what Bin Laden did in the events of September and about the results of the initiative and its cause and why did it take so long and what is the position of the government on it?

I vouch for the fact that the responses were frank and clear, which sincerely reflect the new thinking and new vision that breaks with the thought of the *Gama’a* and its old vision...but what really surprised me was that the great deal of respect the rank and file of the *Gama’a* had for individuals who had been cooped up in prison for long years and maybe each one of them was asking himself now about the purpose of what he had done in his youthful years, but they still carry “for his shaykh” love and obedience and respect, despite his being on the verge of middle age and that it became clear to him that the *Gama’a* had taken a false turn.

Certainty I do not possess a surgeon's scalpel so as to investigate hearts and intentions but what occurred before my eyes for five whole hours or more was not played out like a well rehearsed scenario or a meticulously produced play — as some believe — for it was a living human scene, overflowing with multiple shades of sincerity merged together with organizing strength and the effectiveness of the leadership and the influences of religious training on the youths all interwoven; furthermore, great influence can do magic to a person when we respect the humanity of people and their ability to reason even if they were subject to imprisonment.

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I should have liked to have postponed my remarks to a future issue after I should have finished an examination of the details of this tremendous event which changed the thinking of one of the most dangerous of the violent groups in Egypt and the Arab world, if not the most dangerous, with more than 15,000 cadre who became involved in violent fighting with the police and security services continuing for 18 years and were behind the assassination of the late president Sadat and Doctor Rifat al-Mahjoob former speaker of the parliament and was behind the assassination attempt against President Mubarak in Addis Ababa and the attempted assassination of Safwaat al-Sharif Minister of Information in Heliopolis and was behind the attack on tourists and the assault on the Copts and was behind the assassination of a large number of policemen and officers and which built the infrastructure for terrorism in Egypt and opened the door to Afghanistan and is accused of killing the thinker Farag Foda and the attempted assassination of Naguib Mahfouz, likewise that supported the assassination which the *Gama'a* set up which included a large number of Egyptian intellectuals and writers and was behind the assault against a large number of churches beginning with the church of Masara if the church of Abu Qirqas and which created the bombs of nails which exploded in the caf Wadi al-Nile in Midan Tahrir and the cafes of Assiout.

And if circumstances give me the opportunity to sit with the shura council of the *Gama'a* and discuss their four books after they reviewed their old thinking, and I closely follow their final meeting with their rank and file in the penitentiary Wadi al-Natroun, and after that these leaders tour each of the prisons in Egypt, spreading their idea of new revisionism to the rank and file without meeting any opposition to the initiative from the perspective of this rank and file, then it is incumbent upon me that I say that the state and society lend a helping hand to this initiative and that all of the state apparatuses cooperate with its good progress and that none of the partisan and executive institutions take on a passive or complaining position because the success of the initiative means assurance of the stability of Egypt and its security. In addition to that, it will be the first time that Egypt is able to filter out (eliminate) violence through a conscious process. In the initiative, the *Gama'a* undertook a review of its ideas to discover its infringement of Islamic law and its injustices against the interests of the people. The role of the state was to respect the humanity of those in the prisons and improve their treatment and to give them the opportunity to acquire books and reference works and the

opportunity for discussion and their capability to spread this dialogue to include each of the prisons of Egypt.

It is true that the seed of violence may be an incorrect idea that takes over the minds of inexperienced young people, provoking them to take the law into their own hands to become the judges and not the callers to religion, misdirected and not on the righteous path. Also, the truth is that destroying the humanity of those in prison may help to create a new generation that is more dangerous and more violent, and this is what happened unfortunately during the Nasserist period when each of the violent groups came out from under the “coat” of the Muslim Brothers within the prisons. It is better that Egypt benefits from its bitter previous experience, for entering into a new human experience really possesses all of the possibilities of success.

Thanks to the security services of Egypt for the wisdom to push for an objective and humane solution to the problem of the violent groups and terrorism in Egypt.

The meeting began with a few words from the president of the *Gama'a* to the *Gama'a* rank and file.

Karam Zohdy: Maybe the logical question to begin with is how the initiative started, and what was its status those long years in which we were behind bars and why not undertake this research and the initiative twenty years ago or during this period?

The truth is that after the events of 1981 for some time we continued taking steps on two serious issues for the enforcement of a compromise between Muslim youth and institutions of the state because we knew for certain that Muslim youth in this country were distanced from serious and significant issues and from raising the issue of Islam and elevating the issue in this country.

We learned very well that when we saw much corrupt heretical ideology attempting to be pushed on us within the prisons and detention camps one calamity after another (occurred) until they distanced us completely on the subject of Islamic work to the point that they dropped the hostility between us and between those rebelling against this state. No sooner had the animosity been dropped when they increased it explosively. We understood that and we critically examined the issues for a while and we began agreeing on the (re)conciliation since the 1980s.

The first was when your dearly departed Shaykh Mohammed Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi came and informed us that he had the permission of high ranking officials in the state to participate in a discussion with us to find a solution to the problem and we agreed and we were happy with that except that brothers in other conflicting groups hastened to break this compromise in order that they waylay it (cut off its path) and years passed. The period of the 1990s began and this was a deeply dark and dispirited period. We almost did not see the faintest bit of hope or ray of light and the incidents followed consecutively in a chain of action and reaction until the issue arrived at the stage of great misfortune in 1993 and we hurried to immediately send for wise men, scholars, and thinkers in this country...we sent for professors of the cultured elite and Islamic theologians and nationalist theorists and all of them were quickly named to the

“Mediation Committee” and they moved closer to a solution for the problem of Muslim youth and the state. But this attempt also failed due to the actions of some people to undermine it, perhaps intentional or perhaps unintentional. The hopelessness continued to settle on this reconciliation and years passed increasing its darkness until 1997 when the issue reached a climax and we decided that we would plunge ourselves into the stagnant water to stir it up until peace and quiet returned to the country and we stopped the bloodshed, so we sent the initiative with one of the brothers accused in court case 235 and lived with us in the same cell block. He announced it inside the courtroom without seeking permission to do so or arranging it with anyone and without informing the police or any officials. Everyone came to a standstill with the (announcement of the) initiative due to their sheer amazement, “we announced in it that we do not require conditions or make requirements” but we want the end of military operations within the country and outside of it, also the end of issuing statements which provoke them (military operations), and because we are sincere in the initiative the white hands (of peace) are extended to be embraced and announced to the group...The initiative was supported by Islamic thinkers, some scholars who work for the interest of the nation, and journalists. The group announced that it needs to extend its hand to its sons and listen to them and welcome what they say and then examine the results...But this did not stop there from being a second group of complainers and detractors of the initiative who considered it merely a (strategic) plan and a short break (from violence). They said a lot about it but God wanted it to be widespread in a period that did not exceed three months from July to October 1997 and it walked in the path of peace until the Luxor incident which we consider a stab in our backs before it was a stab to others. So the initiative was buried and was not accepted at this time and it was said that publicly (the *Gama'a* espoused) dialogue but secretly (they espoused) killing. The initiative continued to be moribund until 1999 when Doctor 'Amr Abdul Rahman announced that he supported what the brothers in prison had announced on the issue of the initiative, then the brothers on the *Gama'a's shura* council abroad announced their support for the initiative. Thus the leadership of the *Gama'a* began to be represented by a single group backing the initiative and interaction began until we reached the beginning of this year, 2002, and we were able to more actively promote it in many places, the most important of which was in the prisons, where we began meeting with *Gama'a* brothers within prison and talking with them and meeting with them about the legitimate path and revision which does not carry bad intentions in it. So (while) the initiative was tantamount to a loss of face, it is not possible for a person to lose his face by seeking the satisfaction of God so therefore the success of the initiative was pure of intention. The prison conditions improved a lot and thousands of brothers were released from prison without one of them disagreeing with the principles of the initiative. However, a group of them served as an example for promise keeping and the group began came together from here and there without wanting compensation extending their hands to this initiative.

Ossama Hafez: One of the most important research areas of the review is related to the

issue of “*hisba*” and the discussion that has been raised about it.

Hisba is society’s agency for facing (dealing with) deviations and crimes that occur. The wise *sharia* urges opposition to these infractions and made that a religious duty. However, this is not performed in an unsystematic way. Therefore since its early days, Muslim society has been keen on placing regulations on the use of *hisba* to avoid transgressions which might result from opposing these transgressions out of a lack of knowledge or a poor understanding. Therefore Muslim society restricts *hisba* to an appointed *muhtasib* who takes charge of the matter and it is the police and the (government) apparatus that opposes these infractions.

Aside from this apparatus, the *sharia* obligates society to help in opposing these reprehensible actions by way of helping this apparatus or by itself opposing (the reprehensible actions) in the absence of this apparatus. To the extent that society welcomes the *hisba* renderers and condemns the transgression it will enjoy progress and growth and vice versa.

But this does not mean that we leave the rendering without rules; rather there are strict regulations. Among them is that whoever embarks on it needs to be knowledgeable of the rules of *hisba* and that the intention motivating them is good and aims at what God wants and to serve society. Except when bad opinion overwhelms him, he needs to be of good opinion and not investigate the imperfections of people or spy. Also, the *hisba* renderer must not inflict damage on others when he carries out *hisba* wrongfully because “Do not hurt (someone else) and (they will) not hurt (you)” and it not possible that we get rid of a transgression with a bigger transgression. Among the most important of the protocols also is that *hisba* does not take place except on issues which rely on definitive texts or on which the *ulema* agree. As for issues that the *ulema* disagree on, *hisba* is not permitted.

It is necessary that the *muhtasib* be characterized by kindness “if kindness is within anything it is beautiful and if kindness is taken out then it is ugly”, “(he) who lacks kindness lacks all goodness”, so kindness has an important place in *hisba*; indeed God made it one of the important reasons the people crowded around the prophet “and if you were rude and coarse of heart then they would not have sat around you.”

Maybe one of the most important things that some people raise about the question of *hisba* is the issue of individual people in the citizenry undertaking *hisba* themselves. Here we can say that the *ulema* emphasized that the *muhtasib* carry out his duty in stages, none of which can be ignored.

The first stage is informing because it is supposed that the person being corrected doesn’t know that what he is committing is an infraction. Thus you must first inform him. Following that is the stage of warning with gentle words and the choice of most delicate words until the person being corrected welcomes the call of the *muhtasib*. If all of these steps fail and the person being corrected insists on disobedience here follows the stage of reprimand and censure, but stern censure and coarseness are a last resort because they are basically illegal. The final stage of *hisba* involves the possibility of intervention with force if all of the previous stages were not successful. Forceful intervention itself has stages that are passed through and these stages each

have the condition of not allowing harm to Muslims because harm of Muslims is prohibited and *sharia* does not permit it except for the greater good and protection of Muslims.

Someone may ask: is it required that I remain passive if I see my sister or any woman and there is someone attempting to rape her or I find a pickpocket stealing the wallet of a rider on a bus?

Of course, neither religion, honor, nor chivalry commands that one remain passive, but the prevention of transgression has limits and each of these restrictions has the condition of not inflicting damage. The problem which began involving *hisba* was because of violations which were occurring in its use and ignorance of the specific rules of *hisba*. So that as a result, other people (i.e. those outside the *Gama'a*) thought that those undertaking *hisba* want the execution of power out a desire to establish a state within a state because the rules that govern *hisba* are not implemented and it is not possible that we deny these violations in the implementation of *hisba* that helped (cause) the existence of these feelings.

One of the most important forms of violations was that some people would block the path of a man walking with a woman in the street and stopping them and demanding personal identification from them. This activity is not legally permissible because the basic thing is that Muslims should think well of each other and continue to think well of each other until there are signs of transgression.

Also, some people obstruct (the path of) music groups as they return from wedding parties, smashing their musical instruments and beating the members of the group as a punishment to them for the transgression they have committed. This act has in it more than three violations. The first is that there cannot be *hisba* except if a transgression is occurring, as for a transgression that has already been committed, *hisba* is not permitted. Secondly, beating after the completion of the transgression is not *hisba* but rather is a punishment, and punishment is the job of a judge and not the job of the *muhtasib* or an ordinary person. Thirdly, the beating required here is not a violent beating but rather a beating that ends the transgression. As long as he desists from committing the transgression, beating him another time is not permitted.

Another example of violations in *hisba* is that sometimes someone comes to the mosque and alleges the existence of a transgression in one of the houses and then goes with some people and enters the house and brings out the transgressor into the street and reviles him publicly. In this act there are more than six violations because *hisba* is not permitted unless a visible transgression (is taking place), so it is not appropriate to search for the transgression. Furthermore, publicizing (the transgression) is not permitted. Also, the primary job for the *muhtasib* is to prevent transgressions and not seize the person committing the transgression and inflicting punishment on him because this is the job of a judge.

The fourth type of violations that were occurring is that some youth were sprinkling acid on the face of women under the pretense that they were not veiled.¹ This is an abominable thing

¹I have inquired locally and *mutabarijja* in the Egyptian context means unveiled. According to Hans Wehr it refers to a woman who is adorned.

and it is not possible that *sharia* or religion or *fiqh* approves of it. He (the *muhtasib*) wanted to fight a small transgression like being unveiled by committing a bigger infraction, which was mutilating a person's face. In addition, this act has a negative effect on the people and (has led to) their aversion of Islamic groups and to the call to Islam. This is what happened in Assiout and is the reason for a panic and very big outcry that affected all of those wearing beards in Egypt and affecting the stability of the city, which hurts the call to Islam.

'Ali al-Sharif: The biggest of the mistakes that occurred was the misinterpretation of the meaning of *jihad* and the use (of that interpretation) in the killing of civilians or tourists, despite the fact that this is not the true meaning of *jihad* in Islam. Islamic *sharia* comes to improve the lives of people and help people, and not (to bring them) unhappiness. *Jihad* was ordained (by God) but it was instituted in order to bring a permanent end to strife and idolatry from the face of the earth and therefore the prophet, peace be upon him, and his followers waged *jihad*. It is because of *jihad* that the Islamic state was transformed from a small village to the largest state in the world. (The true meaning of) *jihad* has been wronged these days on account of a group of people who dare to undertake *jihad* without sound understanding, so *jihad* is pointed to as a great sin. These days a lot of Muslim youth have rebelled against the Muslim state and its institutions, fighting them on the pretense of *jihad*. The result was that the Muslim youth brought great corruption unto themselves and weakened the nation. Muslim youth fought for the sake of the call but preventing the call...they fought for reducing detainees in prisons thus increasing the number of detainees. They did not reap anything from their fighting except threatening evil and this was an injustice to (the idea of) *jihad*. It is incumbent upon people to understand that as long as the result of fighting is bad and the yield is evil, we cannot describe this fighting as legitimate. Rather, it is legally prohibited since Islam never brings evil.

Having agreed on this issue, it is necessary that we know that Islam prohibits the killing of civilians and the killing of those accorded protection or tourists and makes killing both sorts of them a grave sin.

Regarding the killing of civilians, Islamic swords (i.e. *jihad*) has morals, and the Islamic armies have morals and the Islamic constitution does not kill for injustice, and killing in Islam is prohibited equally for a Muslim or a non-believer. Killing is only justified for the greater good and this is the spread of the religion. Were it not for that, killing would remain, at its essence, prohibited.

We all have read about the Islamic conquests...have we ever heard about the Islamic army killing people?...The Islamic armies were only fighting armies which took up positions before them and fought by lifting a sword in their faces. This happened in the conquest of Egypt and in all of the countries.

Islam did not come to kill but came for compassion. When a victory is obtained for Islam, it sheathes the swords and prohibits fighting and begins the call with wisdom and good counsel.

Islam commands us not to attack anyone save he who fights us or who raises his swords to our faces. As for civilians, killing them is prohibited.

Al-Hassan al-Basri says that the meaning of non-aggression in the Koran is the prohibition on the mutilation of a corpse or theft of booty and the killing of women and old people and monks and the burning of trees and the killing of animals without benefit. Likewise the prophet, peace be upon him, prohibited the killing of children and the very sick and the blind, and slaves.

And like them, peasants do not fight and should not be fought and the same for craftsmen and traders and other non-combatants. The one time where killing is justified in Islam is in war.

As for non-believers, the justification for fighting them is if they rise up to fight, and not because they are non-believers. Thus a nonbeliever that sits in his house or in his field cannot be killed or fought. Thus if someone does not prevent Muslims from practicing the religion of God there are no damages from the non-believer except to himself. Consequently it is not permitted that he is killed because Islam does not come to kill people. Islam is not a fox killing all that it fights or a deadly cancerous disease destroying humanity. Instead it is a religion of compassion and righteous guidance and the prophet, peace be upon him, said: "If one man converts to Islam, it is more to my liking than the killing of 1000 non-believers." Thus the essence of this religion is the righteous guidance of humanity and not the destruction of humanity. We want youth to prosper and not lay to waste, to preserve the state and its institutions, to respect its laws and to help the people find the righteous path and be a bulwark against attempts to seduce them to infidelity.

As for the prohibition against killing those with a protected status, this raises the issue of tourism. Safety in Islamic law is the promise of being safe from harm and safety is permitted (by *sharia*) in the Islamic state because it is a great and stable state and whoever enters it is affected by the Islamic religion and does not have an effect upon it. Therefore God opened the doors to the Islamic state so that the non-believers see the beauty and justice and good aspects of Islam and so they might be rightly guided and enter into Islam.

If the government gives security to the people who didn't enter into Islam (after the Islamic conquests), it is prohibited to kill them, fight them, take their money or hurt them. There are people who have the right to give security and they are the rulers who possess (this right) to grant safety to a group of non-believers when they believe it is in the best interest. Therefore it is only the head of the army who possesses (the ability) to grant security for the opposing army. As for individual Muslims, it is the right of any individual to grant security to any foreigner even if he is a non-believer or combatant. Thus it is the (sacred) right of Muslims alone that whoever obtains (the promise) of security from any individual, able-minded Muslim adult man or woman, his blood and money and honor are prohibited from all Muslims except if the leader finds his presence harmful to Muslims. The (promise of) safety is concluded and becomes effective in anything that the non-believer construes as such. The result of which is it is the thing that the non-believer understands not the intention of the Muslim.

The result of that is that the tourist who comes to Egypt with a visa from the state and does not know (there is) any difference between the government and the Islamic tendency, or the tourist who comes by way of an Egyptian sightseeing company or at the invitation of an Egyptian (is protected). Thus it is prohibited to kill the tourist in all of these situations because he comes to Egypt believing that he has obtained security.

We are not permitted to say that each group explains security (assurance of protection) as it sees it because there are many groups and each group sees security from its own particular perspective. It may ensue upon difference of opinion that harm takes place where corruption, lack of order, killing and fighting are and therefore it is better to leave these issues to the state because killing of tourists is prohibited in all cases.

Maybe some people disagree and say that female tourists are entering unveiled and how do we not permit killing them. I say to them being unveiled, if the girl is Muslim, is a small infraction and not a large one and the judgement of *sharia* is ten lashes, not killing. If a Muslim woman is killed because she is not veiled then this is against the law of God and (he who killed her) is killed because the judgement for being unveiled in Islam is to be whipped and not killed. So all the more reason not to permit the killing of an unveiled non-Muslim.

Also, it is not permissible to kill tourists because one of them is a spy, for this is not the work (i.e. responsibility) of an individual but rather is the responsibility of the institutions of state which have a responsibility for looking into this issue. Furthermore, it is not logical that we kill four million tourists based merely on the suspicion that there is a spy among them!

Nageh Ibrahim: I cannot imagine talking about the initiative without going into three important issues: exaggeration in religion, the branding of Muslims as infidel, and considering the history of revolt against the state and the tragedies and weakness this has caused Islam. Therefore we devoted a large place for these issues in the four review projects.

The first issue is excess in religion since Islam bans excess as it bans immoderation and restriction, which are two sides of the same coin. It is possible that each of them leads to the destruction of the nation. Therefore Islam orders moderation “So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance.” Thus any nation or group that has excess in it will definitely be destroyed because they will not reach their goals and will not preserve their means (i.e. resources).

(Religious) excess has many forms the most important of which are rudeness, coarseness, and roughness, and therefore God orders that we speak to the people with kindness and the prophet orders us to instruct the people with good morals because morals can’t be separated (for different people).

This (idea of treating people with kindness) does not conflict with the necessity of speaking the truth but certainly the truth is bitter and we need not increase the bitterness with coarseness, impoliteness, and bad opinion. We need to say it (the truth) with sweetness and a smile and kind words and politeness.

Another form of excess in religion is the transformation of derivative things into basic things, (in other words) the transformation of small mistakes into large mistakes and large mistakes into blasphemy, and the transformation of things that are allowable into things that are not permitted and bad opinion of all of the people. The exaggerator in religion always wears dark glasses, not seeing anything in the people except evil. Therefore, the prophet, peace be upon him, said that: "Whoever says the people are damned is damned themselves". Therefore, it is best that a person have a good opinion of the people and find out their excuses (for transgressions) and not search out small mistakes like a hypocrite.

Among the forms of excess likewise is having a bad opinion of the dead, *ulema*, and *imams* of the religion who spend their lives for the sake of religion. Likewise, (it is wrong to have) an idealized view of society and to consider it a society of angels. (To do so means that) any simple mistake that people may make results in judging society as corrupt with no good in it, despite the fact that you will find mistakes in any human society and nobody is perfect apart from angels and prophets. Except that the purpose of the perfection of the prophets was that they were delivering the message of God, and therefore God prevented them from making mistakes since he does not mix the right with the wrong. Despite that, mistakes are found in the age of the prophet, though they were few. Even those that were found are not of interest to us. We are fighting sin and saving him (i.e. man) from disobedience and we open to him the sound path.

Thus an idealized view of society leads to one of two issues, each of them bitter. The first is the hopelessness of reform. The second is the accusation of society for all bad suspicions. In each of these two situations the exaggerator is detached from society and his call to religion dies with him because of his detachment and his hopelessness.

Also among the forms of excess is an interest in minor issues and preoccupation with them at the expense of the primary issues of the nation. (By focusing on inconsequential issues) we are forgetting that globalization wants to destroy the essence of the nation and that there is an enemy who wants to control the region and that enemy is Israel. We are forgetting that the nation is divided and its (ranks) are jagged. We are forgetting all this and thinking (instead) about minor issues and preoccupying ourselves with these issues like should *zakat* be paid in money or material goods? How (should one) pray after dinner in Ramadan, with eight bows or twenty bows? And should we fast during Ramadan with the call to prayer from the government mosque or before the call to prayer?

We leave the issues of the nation and (instead) attach importance to silly things and minor issues despite the fact that exaggeration supports the attempt to find a settlement for jurisprudential difference that have not be resolved for 1400 years. We know with certainty that these jurisprudential differences in Islam are minor, secondary issues and not basic issues or (ones related to) the pillars of Islam.

We are a moderate nation and do not import everything from Western civilization; at the same time, we take from Western civilization that which is good and admirable in it, as the

prophet took the idea of digging a moat from the Persians.

To either accept or reject Western civilization in its entirety is a mistake; likewise it is a mistake to be rigid or distinguished by flexibility in everything (all areas). Islam is the one religion in which you find constancy and flexibility at the same time. Constancy is present in the goals, inclinations and pillars of Islam. As for flexibility, it is found in the ways and means. Thus we take (i.e. accept) the internet, computer, and satellite channels while continuing to benefit religion and Islam.

The second issue is among the most ugly forms of exaggeration and it is the branding of others infidel. Those that charge other Muslims with unbelief confuse incomplete faith with a denial of faith thus making imperfection (a form of) denial (i.e. they equate imperfect or incomplete faith with a denial of faith). Thus they see whoever commits adultery or steals as an infidel (*kafir*). This is incorrect since infidelity or stealing are among (the forms of) incomplete faith but not (in and of themselves) a denial of faith. Faith is not denied easily and it is not for any person to scrutinize another person for committing an imperfection of faith. Nor is it “smart” to call a large number of Muslims infidel; rather, it is “dumb”. Thus an individual’s job is to let enter (incorporate) a greater number of Muslims from (a state of) disobedience to one of piety (obedience) and not to expel a greater number of Muslims to unbelief. This is because it is better that you make the mistake of calling (nonbelievers) Muslims than of calling (Muslims) nonbelievers.

We hear a lot of strange sayings from the group *Takfir* who make fun of some of the members of the *Gama’a* saying: “Those guys (in the *Gama’a*) don’t even know how to call a (lowly) detective a nonbeliever.” They think that this is shrewdness when in fact it is a catastrophe. Thus the trend toward *takfir* divides the *umma* and scatters it and the group *Takfir* is like a divisive bomb, every day they charge some of them with being infidel until the thing ends with one person only who calls himself an infidel. Thus this idea is not good for the nation...instead it is a fragmenting idea.

Therefore I say to any Muslim that just because you become a member of a Muslim group does not give you the right to call someone else a nonbeliever. The job of determining nonbelief is among the responsibilities of the religious interpretive scholars who have acquired a degree of independent judgement in the study of Islamic law.

We are peaceful (people), not judges. We are peaceful (people), not rulers. We are callers (to the faith), not tyrants seeking to control the people or call them nonbelievers. This is because calling a person a nonbeliever is virtually like killing a person.

Thus the rulers have their job and the individuals have their job and it is not our job to expel people from religion by charging them with unbelief; rather our job is to draw people into the religion of God and set them on the straight path.

Sometimes one of the brothers asks me: And what about the *Gama’a*’s understanding on the subject of *takfir* and so I say to him: We do not charge a Muslim with unbelief for disobedience, nor for (small) sins or major sins, to whatever extent (these transgressions) are

not permissible...We do not charge regular Muslims with unbelief for transgressing out of ignorance...and we don't charge the police with unbelief or the army or the state security or the intelligence service, nor do we charge the institutions (of the state). Since they (state institutions) are legal entities (rather than people), it is not permissible for them to be charged with nonbelief because the charge of nonbelief can only be attached to adult individuals. We do not charge any government employee of being a nonbeliever merely because he is a state employee. This type of employment does not identify one as being a nonbeliever nor does it specify his (level of) belief.

We do not charge with unbelief those who are associated with non-Muslims (literally, lie next to on-Muslims) in a superficial friendship as long as they do not love their doctrine (i.e. their religion) or support their religious edicts and there is not a goal on the part of the non-Muslim. Imagine there was an official who made committed injustices in a position then left this position and the official who came to take his place was worse than the original official and doubled the injustice. We would say that this (original) official should remain in the same position because it would reduce a great deal of the oppression and ward off the corrupt while attracting the beneficial thus escaping the worse of the two.

As for the third issue, it is (related to) views in history of previous examples of revolution against the rulers. First there was the rebellion of Hussein bin Ali against Yazid bin Maouia, despite the fact that, Ibn Abbas advised al-Hussein against revolt and likewise he advised Ibn 'Amr and Abu Harira and Anis bin Malik similarly. They said to him that he would not harvest anything as a result of this revolt and he would be killed. Also, Hassan advised his brother Hussein when he said God will not give us the caliphate and the prophethood (together), we don't have anything except the prophethood. The caliphate will not be together with the prophethood. Despite all of this advice, Hussein still revolted and eighteen thousand of the people of Iraq pledged allegiance to Hussein. But when he arrived in Iraq not one person remained with him. The people completely left him and he found himself alone in the square. His courage did not benefit him and his army was vanquished and all of the house of the prophet were killed and none remained except the women and the army of Yazid bin Maouia came close to capturing the women.

The final example is the revolt of Ibn al-Shaath against al-Hijaj bin Youssef and Abdul Malik bin Maroun. Fighting continued for a whole year because this revolt and resulted in the killing of five thousand prisoners. The sum total of Muslims killed in this battle reached 150,000 and among them al-Hijaj himself killed 30 thousand Muslims. He asked any person from Iraq if they would testify (i.e. be witness to) unbelief and when they refused, he killed them.

These examples, however, really relate to a time other than now and circumstances and a reality that differs from our (current) circumstances and reality. But these examples carry important lessons and knowledge for us. The benefit from them is the important lesson for us regarding the dangers of revolt against the state in all situations. It is incumbent upon us

that we benefit from these experiences because the faithful do not bite its brothers from a lair (like a snake), and we do not repeat the mistakes of others. We do not want to mention these examples to defend rulers or to scold great Muslim *imams* like al-Hussein or Ibn al-Shaath. But we want to extract the warning and admonition from these examples in order to not shed the blood of one (i.e. someone) who is with God without a sound Islamic legal goal. “We did not cross (the land) and our back does not remain (i.e. the back of our animal)”.

Hafez Gabir (al-Ghanyem-Assiout): Is the initiative to end violence a tactical plan (i.e. move) to catch a breathe (i.e. rest) or is it strategic?

Karam Zohdy: Actually I always liked when one of the brothers asked this question about the initiative. The truth is that this question is out of place because it may be acceptable in a peace treaty with the Jews or the Serbs to have a temporary treaty for a particular time and then we return after that to war.

As for the peace or settlement treaties between Muslims it is not possible that there is the intention of betrayal, because the basis (of the relationship) between Muslims is that the reconciliation is good.

Thus in this initiative we as Muslim people who are brothers reached a settlement with Muslims peoples who are our brothers and our cousins. Since an Islamic group does not call anyone a non-believer, consequently when reconciling with Muslims, it is not possible that this reconciliation is temporary or tactical, rather it is a strategic examination and a lasting settlement.

Fadil Hassan Salih (Assiout): The events of September 11th raised a number of questions between supporters (of the attack) and those that opposed it...what is your opinion of these events and what about the issue of its effect on the Islamic and Arab world in general and on the Islamic movements in particular...could you shed some light on these events?

Nageh Ibrahim: With all respect to Shaykh Ossama bin Laden and all who work for Islam, from the first moment we knew this event was not in the interest of Islam, nor was it (Islamically) legitimate. Formal legal opinions and self interest (literally, benefits) emphasize that it was a mistake. We issued a statement at the time to this effect and we mentioned in it that the reason we rejected this event was that it killed about three thousand civilians and six hundred Muslims. We emphasized that the killing of civilians is a mistake, especially the killing of traders (i.e. businessmen). A long time ago, it was the source of a great deal of tragedy for Islam and among those tragic events was the attack of the Tartars which began with Muslims killing Tartar traders.

Among the other reasons that we refuted the September 11th incident was that interest of the group (i.e. Muslims) comes before the interest of individual and the interest of the state comes before the interest of the group. *Al-Qaeda* is known to all who serve Islam and with the

September 11th incident, *al-Qaeda* caused the destruction of the state without benefiting the group itself. Rather it killed itself. Thus the *al-Qaeda* organization destroyed the new state of Afghanistan and the *al-Qaeda* organization itself. Thus no group can be found and no state remains and no Islamic legal interest has been realized and no corruption has been warded off.

Also, Ossama bin Laden was planning to do something that was impossible. He wanted to drive Russia out of Chechnya and India out of Kashmir, to bomb Algeria, Tunisia, France, and Libya, and expel America from the Gulf. All of this is impossible even if bin Laden possesses great power.

During all the years of his life, the prophet never fought on two fronts at one time, nor did he fight two enemies at one time.

The second thing is that bin Laden believes in the principle of *jihad* for the sake of *jihad*, and that achieving results is not important. For him the important thing is to ignite the fire of *jihad* and this (view) is in error since *jihad* in Islamic law is for strengthening religion and not for shedding blood even if *jihad* is not the reason for the strife. Bin Laden waged war with the whole world and therefore when he was vanquished this was something natural (i.e. expected) so he can't blame God but must blame himself.

Khalf Ahmed Ali Othman (village of Mandara in Assiout): What is your evaluation of the results of the initiative?

Nageh Ibrahim: We have learned two rules from religion. The first is that if you know the truth and the right thing to do, you (should) do it, even if there isn't a (tangible) result in this world. The second thing is that if you follow the right path it is not necessary that God helps you and gives you the treasures of heaven. God gives you gifts that may not be apparent to you right now.

Our guiding light in that is our lord al-Hassan bin Ali when he gave up the Caliphate, "sainthood" was bestowed on him in this world and the hereafter.

It is enough that the initiative resulted in prisons that were previously full...are now empty. It is enough that the spilling of blood has stopped and the people, ourselves among them, feel safe and secure, and our families feel safe and pursuits have ended and suspicion has ended and bad thinking between us and between our families and our loved ones. There are no longer persons among us who intend evil for others.

It is enough that the bad reputation of Islam ends. In the previous period, there were people who were scared of any bearded person and they thought that each strand of hair from his beard was a pistol firing upon the people. Even if there are no good things that come from the initiative, it is enough to end the negative things. Nevertheless, positive effects exist. Thousands of brothers were released from prison who are now walking around the streets of Egypt safe and secure...All of the negative aspects of prison life ended and the door was opened to visits and time out of the cells and decent treatment. These are some of the results. You

find a lot of other results but there isn't enough time to explain them all right now. They are convinced that it is best to stop the flow of blood of Muslims...It is good enough that when the latest Israeli incursion into the occupied territories occurred, all of Egypt was united in its position. If fighting between the *Gama'a* and the government continued during the Israeli incursion this is the true tragedy and the reputation of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* and Islam would become a bad reputation.

'Amr Ahmed 'Ali (the city of Assiout): Is the military wing of the *Gama'a* really dissolved...and what is the reason for that?!

'Ali al-Sharif: Yes, the military wing has been dissolved because there is a complete contradiction between the existence of an armed military wing and the initiative. The initiative means the existence of good opinion and peace between us and the government. We will not raise arms again in the face of the government, while the existence of a military wing is the complete opposite of that.

Also, you do not find a state that allows the existence of something (i.e. a political body or organization) that breaks its rules. The state is sovereign and the Egyptian government prevents the presence of arms among the citizens otherwise there will be strife and malicious acts among the people. Thus it is not possible to find the police individually carrying guns and hiding among the sugar cane stalks and remaining silent because this is sovereignty of the state and its prestige and we reject that entirely. We emphasize that we completely finished with the subject of the military wing and there is no return of it and no flip flopping but after many good acts there will be good things for Muslims.

Karam Zohdy: The members of the military wing have retired and it is their right to retirement payments which will be paid by Shaykh Nageh Ibrahim.

Mustafa Mahmoud Daahee 'Ali (Derout bil Assiout): We thank you, our shaykhs, for clarifying for us that which was unclear...but I still have a question and it is: If some of our brothers were killed during incidents of fighting that have been determined to be against *sharia*...then what is their fate?

Ossama Hafez: The prophet, peace be upon him, mentioned in his sayings that the *mujtahid* who is correct in his interpretation earns two payments and the *mujtahid* who makes a mistake only receives one. So any person who formulates an independent judgement on a theological question and obtains the tools for *ijtihad* and searches far and wide for the truth and makes a correct judgement earns two payments and if he was not correct only gets one.

These words are meant for everyone who took this path in the past and did the right thing, had good intentions, searched widely (for the truth) and after that (still) made a mistake, for

these people there is still one payment. As for after the review and the *Gama'a* realized the truth and the lack of benefit from violence and it's (violence's) lack of legitimacy there is not any way to say that those who make a mistake now get paid because he who does not do right is also incompatible with Islamic law.

Mohammed Hassan Abdul al-Karim (Sahel Salim Assiout): If the initiative comes from Islamic legal convictions...then why was it delayed until now?

Karam Zohdy: We were not late in attempting to reach a compromise (in fact these attempts) to reach a compromise have been going on since the 1980s. Thus the initiative was not born on July 1997. Rather, the true initiative began in the beginning of the 1980s when we were trying to find a solution to this problem. Then things became serious and events escalated. We made a major effort and gathered the Islamic thinkers and searched widely in an attempt to find a correct Islamic legal solution for the situation we were in.

A group of brothers among the students of Islamic Science in the *Gama'a* exerted all of their effort to find a correct Islamic legal solution that goes along with the existing reality since the Islamic legal view (should be) analogous to the realistic view. Thus the initiative appeared in that time (under those circumstances). It was not abridged (i.e. delayed) but by destiny. Research on a solution began in the 1980s.

Abdul Rahman Mohammed Abdul Jawad (Deroot): We felt in the recent period that the government treated the sons of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* well...and if the government treated the sons of the *Gama'a* harshly, what will be the response...I wait for your answer?

Nageh Ibrahim: First, I am happy to hear that the prisoners have been moved to prisons closer to their villages.

Karam Zohdy: After the prison doors were opened and visits were allowed, one policeman entered and announced "yaa *Gama'a* yaa *Sunnis*...the prisons are opened and better and those that leave prison feel nostalgic" (because prison life isn't so bad anymore).

Nageh Ibrahim: The meaning of brother Abdul Rahem's question is that suppose that after one brother is released he is confronted by injustice from the state or from the police or one of the brothers in prison is beaten or tortured, or one of the brothers is detained...Of course this is possible. Not all policemen are on one level of understanding. Among them are individuals who don't understand the pace of the initiative and consequently it is possible that torture occurs especially on the part of the young officers because they are more tense (than more experienced officers).

It is possible that this occurs and (in fact) we expect it (to occur) because we are realistic

and do not look at things through rose-colored glasses or in an idealized way. The solution in each situation is basically our choice and (we choose) patience, pushing back this injustice with justice and confronting bad with good. As is said by God, “Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then between whom and thee there was enmity (will become) as though he was a bosom friend.”² The choice of patience is not a passive choice, but rather an active one. If it was a passive choice, God would not have ordered it for the possessors of patience (i.e. the group of prophets who exhibited special patience), “So be patient as they were patient.” And the Imam Ahmed bin Hanbil defeated al-Mamoun and al-Ma’tasam with patience.

Sometimes one of the brothers asks: And after that, how do we attain my truth (i.e. my due)...I say to him...First, we believe in the afterlife, suppose that this person did not attain your due this world...then isn’t there God and the afterlife and the reckoning and heaven and hell...you need to entrust this to God.

This does not prevent us, however, from doing (what we can) to lessen these injustices and to channel to the people the (spirit of the) descendents of the prophet who did not like oppression and they disavowed these injustices and they prevented any person from committing a misdeed without the right. It is incumbent on you (to complain), yet you lift the injustice from off of us. We have the means to lift it, but we need to forget completely the style of confrontation with the state. Thus it is not logical when one of the *Gama’a* is arrested that some of the brothers take up arms and confront the police because by doing that, we enter into (a cycle of) action and reaction and we return the ball another time and we send thousands back to prison and return to calamity.

It is preferable that we tolerate small misdeeds against us thus averting greater evils, especially since the small misdeed may pass easily. We need to learn that war can begin with anyone even in a village or small town, but it is not possible that any person end it. It is enough that I say that we have grown tired until we can stop the violence and the confrontation. It is incumbent on us to be mindful of that since in the course of war it is hard to solve any problem no matter how simple but in a time of peace it is possible to solve any problem no matter how large or complicated.

Karam Zohdy: Don’t worry brothers. There will not be problems and we trust in that.

Emad Hamid Abdul Fattah (Helwan - Cairo): Why did you clear up the issue of *takfir* in the books about the initiative which we read despite the fact that it is known that the *Gama’a* has not adopted this idea?

Ossama Hafez: It pleases me to answer the first question of a brother from lower Egypt...since the brothers from Assiout have controlled the questions by virtue of their majority.

²Koranic translation by Pickthal.

It is known that the branding of Muslims as infidel is not among the doctrines or thought of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*. Nevertheless, we resorted to explaining the idea of *jihad* and discussing it for a number of reasons. First, because of the conditions which the *Gama'a* are in these days. Thus everyone learns that the idea of *takfir* was originally established as a result of oppression which occurred in the prisons against the Muslim Brothers in early 1967. This idea came out and was disseminated as a result of this oppression. We were scared that the same thing would repeat itself with us during the stage of oppression which the brothers passed through in the past period with their co-mingling inside the prisons with other groups which brand elements of society as being nonbelievers. We are especially fearful that the influence on the brothers of the members of other groups will be strong given the absence of religious reference books which may be referred to by people to exactly know the ideas and meaning (of various concepts)...All of these factors are among the issues that led to its defilement (referring to the concept of *takfir*). The closest example of defilement that it is possible to come to is the idea of *takfir* because usually one finds an individual desire for revenge by those who were oppressed especially when he finds himself unable to take revenge himself so he falls back on the idea of *takfir*.

And among the things that we emphasize were important to explain was the subject of *takfir* that is before us now as are being clearly experienced in Algeria. Thus the groups that were there were not pursuing the method of *takfir* in the beginning. But when they entered into battles and the heat of confrontation became more forceful (as well as) the oppression upon them from the state, these groups became not merely regular *takfir* groups but rather “super *takfir*”. They were calling all of the people infidel and they were disregarding all of the limits in their rulings against individuals in a Muslim society as a result of a lack of learning and strong pressure and war breaking out there and the non-presence (existence) of *ulema* who would head for the correct path. Thus we were scared that this wrong-headed idea of *takfir* would creep into the minds of our brothers like this deviant idea of *takfir*.

Ahmed Mohammed 'Ali Habash (Abu Zabal - al-Qaloubiya): Regarding the issue of killing tourists...we are in need of simplification of some of the evidence which supports the prohibition on killing tourists in order that we understand the issue well?!

'Ali al-Sharif: Basically, in a Muslim state that is a sound and good state has an effect (on these tourists) and is not affected by them. Therefore, Islam opens the door of this state to the entrance of non-believers in order that they might see the beauty of Islam and its justice and good Islamic morals. Thus they enter the religion of God in droves “And if one of the idolaters seek protection from you, grant him protection till he hears the word of Allah, then make him attain his place of safety.”³ Thus if someone converts in that case, all is good and if he does not convert, then return him to his country in security.

Tourists come to the country by way of tourism companies or with a visa from the state.

³Koranic translation by Shakir.

Consequently, they are considered to be protected and it is not permissible for any Muslim on the face of the earth to betray this promise which was given to the tourists. The prophet, peace be upon him, strongly said to not kill the protected and he said that the curse of God, the angels, and the people (will come down) on those who betray the promise of the Muslim.

As a result, the entering of tourists in a country is with security given to them by the government or by a tourism company and consequently they come thinking that they are safe and they continue thinking that, thus it is not permissible to betray them. So, whatever the tourist himself believes is security is considered such. Thus if he enters the country and thinks that he is protected, then it is not permissible to kill him. Even the jurisprudential scholars say that if you opened the Koran and swore upon it that you would kill this nonbeliever and then he comes to you and the nonbeliever thinks that your words are a promise of security because he is ignorant of the Arabic language thus he drops his arms and comes to Egypt... this is security and it is not permissible to kill him.

It is completely necessary for this to occur regarding the entrance of tourists to Egypt and each brother is required that he put his nerves on ice and avoid fanaticism and exaggeration because the state has its domains and it is not permitted that we enter into them.

Ahmed Mohammed Fawaz 'Asqalani (Assiout): Is the weakness of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* or tangible pressure from state security the reason for issuing the initiative?

Nageh Ibrahim: The initiative does not have its basis in the weakness *Gama'a*. Evidence for this is that we offered an intermediary at a time when the number of prisoners was small and we were in a position better than this. We made a lot of offers before that, beginning in 1988 before anyone spoke of the weakness of the *Gama'a*.

This initiative has its basis in solid Islamic legal conviction in our hearts. At the time that we were confronting the state, we were clearly saying that we did not fear censure from the harshest of critics. We remained fighting and it was a mistake and not in the interest of Islam, or Muslims, or the Islamic nation, or the Islamic movement. We stated this opinion loudly and said that it was based on Islamic legal conviction, satisfying God, the great. We were not scared of anyone and we were not seeking any benefit and evidence of this is that we were in prison more than twenty-one years and if we stayed another twenty years in prison we would continue in this conviction.

This initiative does not seek reward and is not scared of anyone and not desiring anything and not afraid of anything. It is an Islamic legal conviction built on sound evidence from the Koran, the *Sunna*, and correct views of the current reality (and it is) forward looking (as well). Even in the basic statement of the initiative we did not ask for anything and we did not desire compensation. Also we said that we announced the end of militant operations in within Egypt and outside of it. Likewise, we stopped issuing statements encouraging militant operations without qualification or condition and from a single side. Even if the other side disagrees with

us we will continue in this position...

Therefore the statement of the initiative enjoyed the favor of a great deal of sincerity because we did not want one thing. We said that if we had achieved the stopping of bloodshed alone, it would have been enough and this would have been good for Islam and Muslims. It was this courage that was credited to the *Gama'a* in this time (1993 until 1997), especially since before its announcement no official or security service employee knew about the statement. Thus it was not merely a bargain with the government. If not for the Luxor incident, the fruits which we are harvesting now would have been realized in 1997. But the Luxor incident damaged the progress of the initiative for five years.

Thank God that right now while the whole world is arresting Islamists, Egypt is setting them free, that while the whole world is oppressing Muslims and chasing them and detaining them on the island of Cuba, Egypt is opening doors to them....this is the decree of God, the great and the beautiful, and we thank God for this divine decree.

Khalid Mohammed Abdul Lah 'Ali (Al-Badari- Assiout): Our shaykhs....dear ones...light of our eyes...question....do you consider a passport a promise of security?!

'Ali al-Sharif: Any security the non-believer believes is security is such even if this security is not true. Thus under Islamic law it is considered security, even if it just resembles security. Therefore if a foreign man came to an Islamic country and he is carrying a passport with an entrance visa from an Islamic country and he does not know that there is a dispute between Islamic youths or an Islamic group and between the government. It is not in his power to know the disputes between the currents (i.e. groups) found in the country...consequently, this tourist is safe and it is not permissible to expose him to injury or to betray him.

Historically, traders were not entering the Islamic state with a visa, but Muslims knew that they were traders from the camels they rode carrying goods (to sell) and it was forbidden for a group of Muslims to kill them despite the fact that they were coming from warring countries. What do you think of the man who enters the country by virtue of obtained from the state...if you kill this tourist then he will have been betrayed...and betrayal is forbidden in Islam.

Karam Zohdy: A passport is considered (a promise of) security, and this contemporary *fatwa* that *ulema* of this era agree with and we have not learned of one religious scholar differing with this order in all of the Muslim countries.

This *fatwa* is applied to the nonbeliever who enters our country with a passport and applies to the Muslim who enters the country of the non-Muslim country with a passport and a visa.

Of course, there are Muslims among tourists...this issue does not apply to them because they are of Islamic origin.