

# A FORUM FOR ENGAGEMENT

*CILE's 4th Annual International Conference saw the research center rewarded for its evolving approach toward widening audience engagement and involvement for the most pressing topics of our time*



**U**pon its launch in January 2012, the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE), a member of Hamad bin Khalifa University's (HBKU's) Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, brought with it a crucial mission. With a view to reform and renew contemporary Islamic legal and ethical thought, the ambitions of CILE have been bolstered by the production, dissemination, and application of Islamic ethical thought and behavior. The key to its success has been constant and ever-

evolving engagement with its audience, the most impactful of which is its annual international conference. CILE's 4th Annual International Conference (CILE 2016) was held from 2-3 April 2016, bringing local and international speakers and attendees to the HBKU Student Center for an event titled 'Prioritizing Values in the Contemporary World: Islamic Contributions'. The event addressed four themes: Methodology, Politics, Asylum and Family, delivering separate sessions for each. Each session included keynote



Sheikh Chauki Lazhar, CILE Deputy Director.

Union of Muslim Scholars (TUMS), and lecturer in Applied Islamic Sciences at CIET Institute in Gent, Belgium and at Ibn Taymiyah Institute in France, explained the importance of each theme to CILE.

“We wanted to tackle important issues, but not without a methodological approach,” he said. “So we wanted to produce a methodological framework to address these contemporary issues from this framework. Typically the discourse on such subjects does not analyze day-to-day questions that people might have, and that’s what we’re trying to do.

“We consider ourselves

speakers, on-stage debates, and open discussions with assembled attendees and those watching the event unfold through online live streaming.

Sheikh Chauki Lazhar, CILE Deputy Director, member of the International



Dr Mohammed Ghaly, Professor of Islam and Bioethics and the Academic Director of CILE, at the conference.

## What is CILE?

CILE was founded on the principle that Islamic ethical reform and Islamic law are fundamentally linked. Therefore it leads the reform and renewal of contemporary Islamic legal and ethical thought and behavior by contributing a sustainable ethical framework for addressing contemporary global challenges. In addition to its annual international conference, the center offers seminars, public lectures, publications, and ethical training to different organizations.

academics, but we don’t want to be sitting in an ivory tower, far from the reality that people inhabit. Our findings and discussions have to be carried forward from this conference, not just by academics, but by everybody.”

### Contributing a vision

To that end, it is crucial for CILE’s conference to be seen to be inclusive and engaging. Though many of the center’s activities are aimed at worldwide scholars, it was important for the discussions at CILE to be understood by general audiences, so that they could also become a part of the discussion.

“Within CILE we have a vision to contribute to Islamic values and legislation, within the contemporary context,” said Dr Mohamed El Moctar Shinqiti, Professor of Islam and Political Ethics at CILE. “We have various activities, some of which specifically targets

academic circles, and others that are tailored for the general public, in order to raise awareness of CILE’s mission. Our annual conference is within the second category.

“When we organized the conference, we knew that it would not just take place within this building at HBKU. The followers of this conference are not just confined to these halls; we have thousands of people following our live streams online. There too we have received a great response to our discussions and speakers.

“It’s an international conference, and people around the world are watching it, discussing our themes, and interacting with our speakers through our Q&A sessions that invite them to send questions.”

The success of this approach was outlined by Dr Mohammed Ghaly, Professor of Islam and Bioethics and the Academic Director of CILE, who stated: “CILE has employed different mechanisms to spread the message of the conference and its intellectual contribution both inside Qatar and to the world beyond.

“For instance, more than 4 million people around the world watched the promotional video of the conference. Around 45,000 people from various continents saw the proceedings of the conference, via live stream technology. Some of the followers via live streaming could not only see but also interact with the participants in the conference by raising their own questions and comments.”

### Embracing inclusivity

The nature of such a conference might lead newcomers to believe that the focus, and topics of discussion at CILE 2016 would be solely for Muslim audiences, but that is not the case. The themes of the event were chosen due to the fact that they are global issues that affect people of all

creeds, and the event included the input and contribution of non-Muslim speakers.

Speaking to *The Foundation*, Dr François Burgat, a keynote speaker at the conference and Senior Research Fellow at the French National Centre for Scientific Research, said that the inclusive nature of CILE 2016 brought with it healthy debate that encompassed multiple viewpoints.

“I am a non-Muslim, so for me it was an honor to be a part of this debate,” he said. “As someone who has spent most of their life in the Muslim world I am interested in discussions that can heighten the level of debate and lower the levels of misunderstandings between Muslims and non-Muslims. We have a common goal to look at the values that unite us, rather than divide. That is the message that I wanted to promote at this conference.”

According to key figures at CILE, the success of this year’s conference in informing and spreading international debate is not something for which the center can risk becoming complacent. Preparation for each conference begins immediately after the previous one has concluded, and CILE’s approach continues to be one of embracing feedback in order to continue surpassing expectations.

“Every year we have an evaluation of the conference based on attendees, through a distributed form, or online, through feedback from international viewers,” said Dr El Moctar Shinqiti.

“We try to improve every year, whether by changing the topics or reviewing the criteria through which we select speakers. It takes time to collect and analyze that feedback, but ultimately it’s what drives the conference forward.”

## Themes of CILE 2016

*CILE 2016 addressed four themes, with two sessions taking place each day for experts and attendees to tackle the following subjects:*

- The **Methodology** session addressed the problem of contrasting values, and the methodology for finding a balance between these values.
- The **Politics** session explored alternatives to the exhaustion of societies through political conflicts..
- The **Asylum** session looked into the possible inspirations derived from the values of Islam, especially as to the duty of protecting and assisting people.
- The **Family** session focused on the role of legislative texts and biological knowledge to derive relevant ethical concepts.