



**Center for Global & Strategic Studies
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UAE's Role in creating Tolerance and Harmony in the

International Arena

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Tolerance is a virtue and a fundamental part of the Islamic culture. We are taught to be tolerant at individual and societal level. In the times when more and more countries are turning to look inwards, UAE has adopted the outward approach. The approach of forming a pluralistic society. A society that promotes interfaith harmony and multiculturalism. UAE is positing its self as a role model state for tolerance and acceptance of other faiths and communities. It started this journey towards tolerance

started in 2016 with the establishment of the Ministry of Tolerance. H. H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister and Vice-President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai announced structural changes to the 12th Cabinet, reinforcing the UAE's commitment to eradicate ideological, cultural and religious bigotry in the society. Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi was the first Minister of State for Tolerance. Since then the ministry has worked on various levels to promote its agenda of creating a more open-minded image of UAE in the eyes of the world.

National Festival of tolerance:

In the year 2018, a festival was organized to celebrate the country's culture of tolerance, harmony, and coexistence among the dozens of nationalities living together. The inaugural National Festival of Tolerance kicked off with the Walk of Tolerance in Umm Al Emarat Park in Abu Dhabi in Nov 2018. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, led hundreds of people of all backgrounds, including those with disabilities, in a show of solidarity. It was the first of 100 planned events of this festival. The main aim of the program was to engage and encourage all categories of individuals from society to utilize their potential in promoting the values of respect, peace, tolerance, and coexistence.

Year of Tolerance:

After winding up the first national festival of tolerance, On 15 December 2018, H. H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed declared 2019 as the Year of Tolerance. This was announced with the same aim of making UAE a pluralistic society that has acceptance for people

from all walks of life. With over 200 nationalities living peacefully together, UAE has already achieved the status of being an accepting and open-minded society. Where everyone has the freedom to follow his/her religion, to act upon his/her beliefs freely without any fear of being treated as an outcast.

The Year of Tolerance will focus on five main pillars:

- To deepen the values of tolerance and co-existence among cultures by teaching the youth the values of tolerance
- To solidify the UAE as the global capital for tolerance through a series of initiatives, projects, and dialogues between various cultures and civilizations
- To implement multiple cultural programs and make contributions to build tolerant communities
- To focus on legislative and policy-oriented objectives that contribute to mandating cultural and religious tolerance via dialogue
- To promote tolerance through targeted media initiatives and projects.

Among other initiatives for the year, 2019 are the 'Tolerance Talks 2019', a series of seminars that feature distinguished leaders, notably Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance, to highlight the noble ideals and message of tolerance the UAE seeks to convey to the rest of the world. UAE has the potential to become the catalyst of tolerance across the region and bring about a new age of enlightenment.

Pope's Visit:

In a historical event, Pope Francis visited the UAE in Feb 2019. It was a first-ever visit by a pontiff to the Arabian Peninsula. This visit was welcomed by people across the UAE as a sign of acceptance and tolerance for other religions. Pope landed in Abu Dhabi where he was greeted by Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan. The Pope took part in an interfaith conference and held a Mass which was attended roughly by 120,000 people. This visit is considered as a significant interreligious event in modern memory. This momentous occasion reflected the UAE's openness and commitment to inclusivity and freedom of worship.

Hindu Mandir:

During this wave of tolerance spreading across UAE, in 2015 it was decided that a Hindu temple would be built in Abu Dhabi. This decision was announced during the official visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Force gifted the land for the mandir. As a place of harmony, it will welcome people of all faiths to experience and understand Hindu culture and spirituality. Built according to the precepts of the ancient Hindu Shilpa shastras. This is a very bold move by the UAE administration because it goes against the traditional values of the state. Factions of extremists might be against this decision but when a state decides to change the nature of its society it needs to take tough decisions like this.

Conclusion:

In the 21st century, the thing which should scare everyone should be intolerance rather than tolerance. Genuine tolerance means engaging with different people with civility and respect. Not having the patience to tolerate people from different walks of life or from different religions should have been eradicated by now. We have seen so many atrocities conducted by one group towards another throughout human history. Now is the time that we as a human race should put humanity first. See each other as humans rather than Muslims, Christians, Hindus, etc. Pluralism should be the way of life for societies across the globe. Everyone should be free in practicing their religion and living their life the way they want to. UAE is leading with an example of developing such a society. It is the only example found in the Arabian Peninsula. Whereas the west is way ahead in tolerating multicultural society than the east.