

## **The 41st Niwano Peace Prize Awarded to**

### **Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer**

Reasons for Selection

Flaminia Giovanelli

During a period marked by some of the darkest hours the world has faced since the beginning of the Millennium, with two major wars underway and more than fifty-five armed conflicts between states, I carry the responsibility and honor to announce, on behalf of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee (NPPC), that the 41st Niwano Peace Prize shall be awarded to Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer.

A Palestinian-American scholar and peace activist, Dr. Abu-Nimer has dedicated his entire life, since his youth, to the cause of peace and interfaith dialogue. Given that his homeland, Israel/Palestine is currently torn apart by one of the worst wars in the region, and considering that the title of his initial book is "*Conflict Resolution between Arabs and Jews in Israel*" (1993), I believe that it is both fitting and timely for the committee, which is tasked with honoring and encouraging precisely those who dedicate themselves to interreligious cooperation in the cause of peace, to award him this year's prize. What is most impressive about Dr. Abu-Nimer is his holistic contribution to the cause of peace, which combines the practice of conflict resolution and peacebuilding with teaching.

Dr. Abu-Nimer's teaching is of two kinds. First is teaching of an academic/theoretical nature, focused on peacebuilding learning and taking place mainly at *American University* in Washington D.C. and other university-level institutions. He engages in a second, more practical type of teaching, aimed at resolving ongoing conflicts, including through the instrument of development, at the various institutes he himself created or helped to create around the world. These include the *Salam Institute for Peace and Justice* in the United States, the *Peacebuilding and Development Institute at American University*, the *Center for Conflict Resolution and Mediation at Guilford College* in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the *Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute Foundation* in the Philippines. Dr. Abu-Nimer's dedication to peace, rooted in his Muslim faith and Sufi teachings, serves as a source of inspiration for his work, reflecting the religious values instilled within his family. For over 60 years his grandfather and uncle were the imams of his hometown, an interfaith village in the Galilee, Northern Israel, where Muslims lived alongside numerous Christians and Druze. The 2024 Niwano Prize recipient has always been convinced that Islam offers a robust framework within which to promote peace, building on values integral to the faith such as forgiveness, "which liberates the soul," and reconciliation. "Non-violence itself," he said, "is part of theology and the concept of mercy is the basis of Islam since Mercy is one of the Names of God." From 1993, Dr. Abu-Nimer has significantly contributed to the exploration of Islamic principles such as reconciliation, forgiveness, and nonviolence, thereby advancing the theological understanding of Islam's stance on peace.

Dr. Abu-Nimer's rich biography illustrates how his personal and professional journey is marked by a minority status. It begins with the circumstances and place of his birth in 1962 in the Galilee; the environment in which he pursued his undergraduate and graduate studies: the *Hebrew University* in Jerusalem (1981-1987); and the setting in which he completed his doctorate: *George Mason University* in the U.S. (1993). Dr. Abu-Nimer effectively and constructively navigated this status, however, championing the rights and dignity of every man and woman from all ethnic and religious backgrounds through a holistic methodology and a vision for change that links head, heart, hand, and spiritual identity.

His roles as a negotiator, mediator, and peacebuilder have made it possible for him to engage in conflict resolution in numerous parts of the world. He began his peacebuilding journey in 1982, shortly after the *Oasis of Peace Village (Nave Shalom)* was founded near Jerusalem. His training in dialogue facilitation mainly focused on teaching participants to enable dialogues between Arab and Jewish youth. From the early 1990s, Dr. Abu-Nimer worked on Catholic-Protestant relations in Northern Ireland and Buddhist-Hindu relations in Sri Lanka, where during the civil war (1999-2007), he supported and advised the launching of the *Muslim Peace Secretariat* and the *Peacebuilding and Development Institute Sri Lanka*. Between 1999 and 2005, our prizewinner served as an advisor to the leaders of various Islamic separatist groups and the *Office of the Peace Process in Mindanao*, Philippines. Additionally, they were one of the first founding facilitators of the *Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute Foundation*. Between 1993 and 1999, Dr. Abu-Nimer conducted most of the conflict resolution and peacebuilding training for civil society and faith-based organizations in the Arab Region for the *Search for Common Ground's* program. As part of these efforts, he helped establish the first conflict resolution and community mediation center in the Gaza Strip in 1996. Moreover, when ISIS was in Northern Iraq in 2015, Dr. Abu-Nimer went to Erbil to train young religious leaders how to promote interreligious understanding and led a solidarity delegation to the holiest temple of the Yizidi in Lalish, Iraq.

Dr. Abu-Nimer has also shown his dedication to peace and dialogue on the African Continent. During ongoing conflicts in Darfur, Niger, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Nigeria, among others, he worked with religious leaders to counter violence committed in the name of religion and to overcome religious divisions. Through *Salam Institute* work, and between 2008-2016, Dr. Abu-Nimer led a major initiative to train teachers and students in Islamic religious schools (Qur'anic School-Madrasa) in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

Already a full professor at the *School of International Service (SIS)* of *American University* and the Director of the *Peacebuilding and Development Institute*, Dr. Abu-Nimer was designated as the inaugural Abdul Aziz Said Chair in International Peace and Conflict Resolution at SIS in September 2023. In addition to his scholarly career, Dr. Abu-Nimer has initiated numerous interreligious projects at the *King Abdullah Center of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue (KAICIID)* and led them in their initial phases, including international fellowships, interreligious regional platforms, and the *European Muslim Jewish Religious Council*, among others. He also acted as Senior Adviser for 8 years of this important Center—the first intergovernmental organization dedicated to interreligious and intercultural dialogue—and as a board member, he has participated in the nongovernmental organization *Nonviolence International (NVI)* for the past 28 years.

Finally, his publishing output is extensive. He has authored, edited, and coedited more than 17 books on faith-based and interfaith peacebuilding. Among his notable works are: *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam: Theory and Praxis* (2003), translated into five languages; *Evaluating Interreligious Peacebuilding and Dialogue* (2021); *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East* (2007), and *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (2007), translated into four languages. In addition to having been a cofounder and co-editor of the academic publication *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Dr. Abu-Nimer has authored numerous articles in refereed journals, such as the *International Review of Education*, the *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, and many others. In summary, Dr. Abu-Nimer stands out for his holistic contribution to the field of Peacebuilding through Interreligious Dialogue. His diverse impact stems from his ability to engage effectively on multiple levels: firstly, with people at the grassroots, secondly, with structures and institutions, including educational institutions, and thirdly, at the policy level. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, the Niwano Peace Prize Committee is delighted to choose Dr. Mohammed Abu-Nimer to receive the 41st Niwano Peace Prize.