



**AI Ethics: An Abrahamic commitment to the Rome Call**  
**January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Vatican City**

**Speech of**  
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In The Name of God, The Merciful, The Most Compassionate  
Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, and prayers and peace upon our master Muhammad, the last of the prophets, and upon his brothers the prophets and messengers of God.

Speech of His Excellency Sheikh Abdallah bin Bayyah

Given at *The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence:*

*The Commitment of the Abrahamic Religions to the Rome Call*

Vatican City, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Your Excellencies and Eminences,

I greet each of you by your beautiful names and qualities,

Peace, mercy, and the blessings of God be upon you.

At the outset, I am pleased to extend my sincere thanks to the organizers of this valuable initiative that focuses on the important topic, inspired by the 2020 Rome Call for AI Ethics and a continuation of its work.

The importance of this subject is evident since humanity has become, in a certain way, hostage to dangerous scientific developments such as nuclear weapons that have spread fear and terror in the heart of humanity, many of whom live under the threat of nuclear war that portends the possible annihilation of our species itself.

Dear participants,

Religions, at their core, seek to secure humanity's quest for happiness in both this world and the next. Therefore, all of our religious traditions urge us to seek out the means of felicitous wellbeing. In this regard, the religion of Islam encourages the acquisition of knowledge, seeking an understanding of the universe, and a perpetual increase in learning. The Qur'an states, "Say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.'" Knowledge, in its exhaustive meaning, of which we perpetually seek an increase includes both religious and worldly knowledge, which is the foundation of any successful civilization both spiritually and materially. Thus, when religious civilizations flourished, discoveries and inventions were made that enhanced human life. Religion was not a hindrance to innovation, but rather a stimulus that motivated creativity and achievement.

However, religious laws and commandments, in their endeavour to promote wellbeing and guidance, are keen to ensure that achievements in science and technological take into account ethical frameworks that preserve human dignity and the nobility of man, and, most importantly, protect life itself.

In this context, AI is among the most momentous creative innovations of human genius that have emerged moving from theory to application in a very short time. Its use now spans both the private and public sectors, and whilst it has already succeeded in various fields, its development continues due to a passion for innovation, invention, and sustained investment. Hardly a field today exists that is not directly involved in it, especially healthcare, transportation, education, training, and manufacture.

Thus, these technologies opened the door to a wide range of potentials and promising opportunities in various fields that can contribute to improving human life, and this is something we support and encourage. However, along with the great potential offered by these technologies, they also open the door to risks and fears of abuse and misuse, which could lead to catastrophic consequences for our shared humanity.

I do not wish to be pessimistic here in the manner of the Arab poet Abu al-Fath al-Busti who described man's toil as akin to a silkworm weaving itself into annihilation. He stated:

*Man toils like the silkworm which spends its life weaving only to perish confused inside its woven creation.*

Nonetheless, many forms of AI raise philosophical and ethical questions related to liberty, free will, and responsibility which call for a careful response. For example:

1. Who is responsible for the mistakes of artificial intelligence?
2. What will happen to communication between humanity because of these technologies?
3. How will artificial intelligence affect our behaviour and consequent actions?
4. How do we avoid artificial intelligence failures?
5. How do we control a system that may prove smarter than we are?
6. How can we be safe from the unintended consequences of artificial intelligence programs?

Not to mention the many questions that will unfold with time.

These dangers could pose a threat to humanity from the perspective of what we Muslims term the five protected universals: religion, life, reason, property, and human integrity, the last of which includes family and individual human dignity. The preservation of these five higher objectives of our sacred law remains an overarching priority. Artificial intelligence may pose a threat to life as an uncontrolled weapon used against humanity. It also poses a danger to human integrity because of the absence of privacy and the subsequent violation of information security. It may also cause the loss of money and property through electronic theft, piracy, and intrusions. Moreover, it can cause further division and disunity in societies by contributing to the spread of false information and misleading news and influencing voter opinions.

In the light of this, concerned religious leaders, technology companies, government actors, and others must cooperate to maximize the benefits of these technologies and reduce their risks. They

must do so by developing an ethical framework aimed at ensuring that the development of artificial intelligence complies with high and strict ethical standards which preserve human dignity and moral integrity.

To this end, it is necessary first to agree on the importance and the necessity of this matter, because failure to implement it threatens us with dire consequences, both morally and materially. Second, we must cooperate and participate as an alliance in designing an ethical framework that guides developers and helps them respond to the requirements of ethics with the demands of creativity and innovation.

This desired ethical system should be based on innate moral values, which are values common to all people, upon which no two people differ, and which are not affected by the vicissitudes of time, place, and human impulse. These are the natural rights of every human being by the very virtue of his or her humanity. “They are Divinely-granted rights granted to both the believer and the atheist,” as stated in the first amendment of the Charter of *The New Alliance of Virtue* in 2019.

These ethics include the values of virtue, mutual respect, solidarity, and cooperation in benevolence and the common good, as well as the values of honesty, justice, sincerity, integrity, responsibility, and transparency. These include the central values in the ethical system of all religions and worthwhile human philosophies.

The integration of this ethical system in the development of AI has many advantages for both the end users of these products and their developers because these ethical frameworks give them a clearer vision of what should be worked on, with a list of priorities and clear objectives.

Technical development must develop and focus on the existential challenges facing humanity in the areas of health, food, education, and work. Efforts must be made to contribute to the protection of our children from inappropriate content online.

It should also be recalled that the desire for material gain – which is not evil in itself and is in fact supported and supportive of development and production – should not prevail over the values of responsibility and the common good. In addition, focusing on the question of “how?” instead “why?” may lead to the development of products that do not aim at lofty goals and do not serve useful purposes. On the contrary, the question of “why?” leads to the search for the purpose of every act, allowing it to be guided by ethics and higher ideals.

Distinguished participants,

It is important to support AI with ethical standards, solidarity, and cooperation so that its development can be increasingly beneficial. The proposed ethical framework may serve analogously to a brake which protects cars from collision and destruction, or as a compass that guides ships in the midst of a vast ocean. Therefore, what we require today involves an awakened conscience that remains vigilant regarding the unintended consequences of artificial intelligence, so that these systems may eventually become self-regulatory.

In sum, laws and regulators must set standards that ensure the prevention of harm to individuals and societies by companies developing artificial intelligence applications. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says, “There should be no harm nor reciprocation of harm.” This principle is a governing principle because it suppresses the human desire for wealth under the pretext of development and discovery if this involves harm or reciprocation of harm with others. It also

protects researchers and scholars from interference in their work as long as their work does not lead to harming others or reciprocating the harm from others.

Finally, the prosperity and stability of societies is not measured by technical and economic advances alone. Rather, it requires the ability to enrich the world with valuable content and noble ideals, and it needs a comprehensive view of life based on harmony, coexistence, and cooperation. All of this confirms the need for ethical frameworks that illuminate the path and guide us upon it.

These sentiments reflect well the vision of our country, the United Arab Emirates, which is rooted in rational foundations coupled with high developmental aims, the most important of which include a positive outlook at the outset, effectiveness in implementation, and excellence in all of our endeavours. These were the values that the founding leader, Sheikh Zayed, may God have peace upon his soul, built the UAE upon. This legacy has been continued by his noble sons and is conserved under the auspices of the UAE's President, His Royal Highness, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, may God Almighty protect him, in his endeavour to make the United Arab Emirates a leading centre for innovation which includes artificial intelligence advancement.

I thank you once again for this kind invitation, and I wish our meeting every success.

Peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon all of you.