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LEBANESE MUSLIM ASSOCIATION

Our Community, Our Future



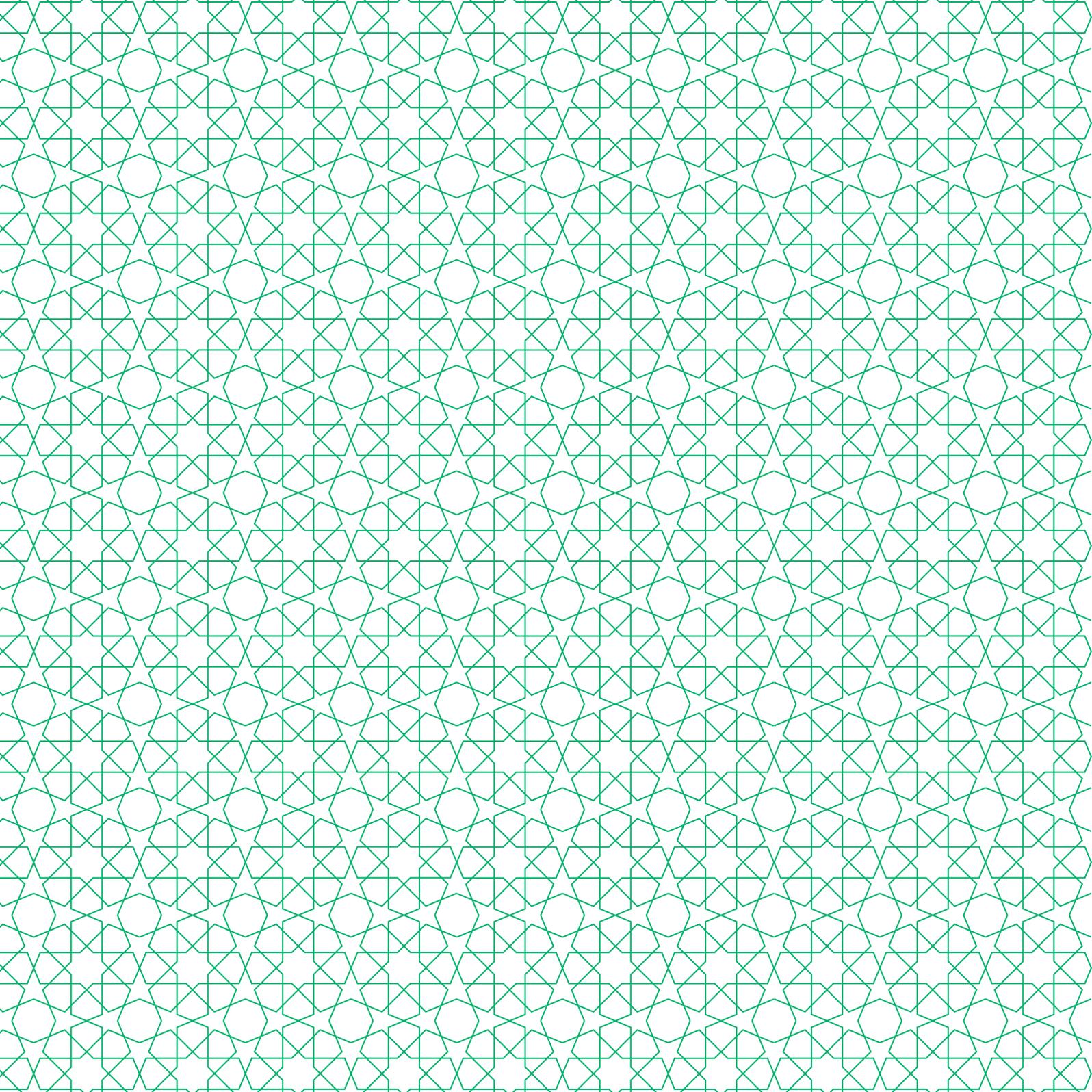
Envisioning the Future

MUSLIM YOUTH SUMMIT

FOCUS ISSUE:



Extremism – A Root Cause Analysis



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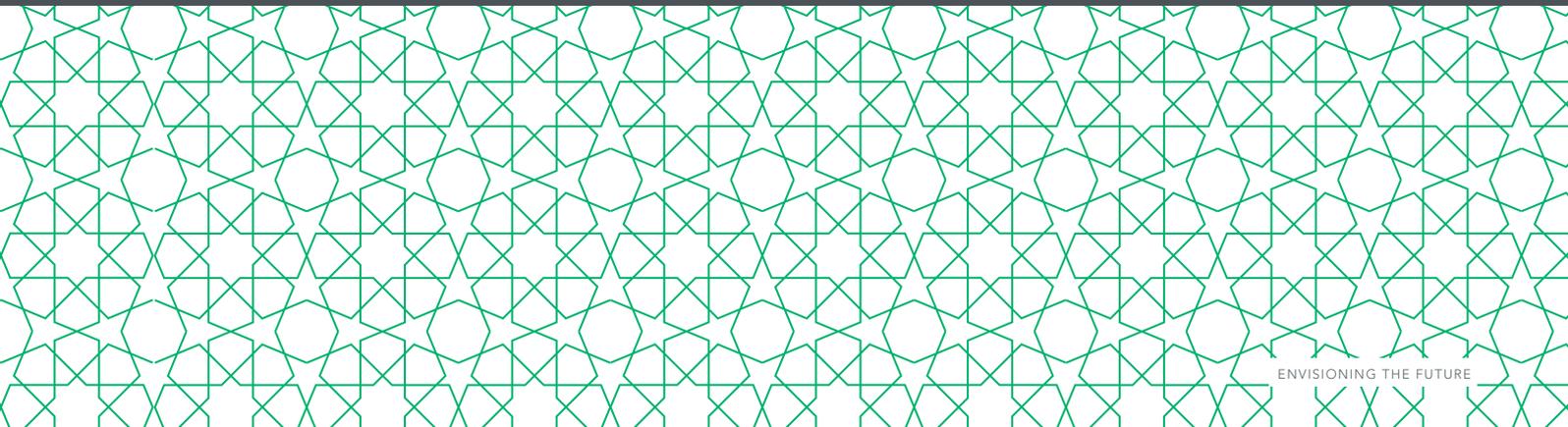
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Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the recent summit organised by the Lebanese Muslim Association on January 16th-17th 2016.

The workshop was held at LMA's library and was attended by invited members of the Australian Muslim Community. The summit was designed primarily for the representatives of the Australian Muslim Community to engage in a conversation on the reach, impact and preventative strategies of extremism in the Muslim Community. Three vital themes informed the discussion:

- (i) The root causes of extremism;
- (ii) The effectiveness of current community strategies;
- (iii) Recommendations for how the causes of extremism can be prevented. It is in this order that this report documents the responses made by summit participants.





01 Summit Background

1.1. Summit Goals & Objectives

The goal of this summit was to gather leaders and thinkers of the Australian Muslim Community and facilitate a conversation on the reach and impacts of extremism in the Muslim community in Sydney, and to suggest strategies that might mitigate it. To achieve this goal, a two-day interactive workshop was held at the LMA on 16-17 January 2016, attended by 28 participants. One virtue of the summit was that it brought together members of the Australian Muslim community with diverse areas of expertise.

The summit had the following objectives:

OBJECTIVES



- 1 Explore current understanding of the concepts of 'religious extremism', 'Islamic extremism', and 'radicalisation';



- 2 Engage the attendees in a series of conversations on creating opportunities for empowerment and for combating negative narratives about Muslims;



- 3 Brainstorm solutions and develop recommendations for what forms of influence Australian Muslims can generate in addressing violent extremism both in wider Australia and in the Muslim community.



1.2. Strategy & Approach

In line with its overall strategy that a grassroots perspective from young Muslims is essential in contributing to a discussion on the socio-political issues enabling extremism in Australia, the LMA recognised the importance of mixed methods in facilitating a conversation among the participants. To this end, the summit comprised a number of diverse sessions over the two days, which were organised according to the following principles:

- To equip attendees with a set of analytical tools and concepts useful for discussing the issues at hand;
- To provide participants with a language of religious and academic commentary on various dimensions of the topic in order to help them navigate their way through this highly complex social issue;
- To facilitate an interactive environment where attendees could work together to brainstorm ideas and identify their own opinions and responses to a number of set questions concerning the aforementioned objectives of the summit.



The attendees were introduced to a particular method that helps identify the possible reasons or root causes for an effect or problem, the Fishbone Diagram.

In line with the first principle, the summit began by introducing attendees to the overall purpose of the event and setting the agenda for the next two days. The first session, run by Sahar Dandan, Program Director at the LMA, provided participants with the key tools and methods necessary for undertaking a 'Root Cause' analysis. The attendees were introduced to a particular method that helps identify the possible reasons or root causes for an effect or problem, known as the Fishbone Diagram. This technique of analysis was used to structure the brainstorming sessions on the second day of the summit.

Further, in order to help attendees navigate their way through this multi-faceted issue, the summit held three sessions in which two subject matter experts provided their own commentaries on different dimensions of the topic. The first one of these sessions was delivered by Dr Yassir Morsi and focused on the dominant discourse surrounding religious



extremism in Australia and globally. As such, this session contextualised the meaning of 'Islamic extremism' within the current political climate facing Australian Muslims, discussing in particular the impacts such a term has, the type of narratives it creates and the reasons as to why it is used so often. The two other talks delivered by Shaykh Walead Mosaad, on the other hand, offered religious commentary on the questions of what is extremism and what drives the extremism of Muslim actors. Hearing the wider Islamic perspective on this issue was essential to understanding how best a Muslim community should seek to address the challenges facing young people, as manifestations of a more systematic problem.



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Finally, on the basis of its third organising principle, the summit organised three sessions in which attendees shared their own opinion on the following questions:

- a. How do we, as Muslims, define extremism?
- b. What impact does extremism have on us as a community?
- c. What are the best methods to combat this narrative?

The last one of these three discussion sessions was the only participant contribution session, and as such was essential to this report. Here, the attendees were split into small groups of two or three and worked with facilitators to develop recommendations for the report based on the information and discussion sessions earlier in the summit that had constructed the framework for the contributions. The contributions were to be primarily focused on what Australian Muslims can and should do to influence and change religious extremism both in wider Australia and in the Muslim Community.

1.3. Session Titles

Session One	Root Cause Analysis, <i>Sahar Dandan</i>
Session Two	Understanding a Narrative: Extremism and Muslims in Australia, <i>Dr Yassir Morsi</i>
Session Three	Extremism in Islam, <i>Shaykh Walead Mosaad</i>
Session Four	Establishing the Problem Areas: Facilitated Discussion
Session Five	Our Capacity as a Community: Facilitated Discussion
Session Six	Reshaping a Conversation on Identity, <i>Shaykh Walead Mosaad</i>
Session Seven	Addressing the Problem Areas: Contribution Session

1.4. Summit Program

Envisioning the Future

Extremism – A Root Cause Analysis

16-17 January 2016

Lebanese Muslim Association Library, Lakemba

DAY 1

9.30 – 10.00	Welcome <i>Mostafa Rachwani, Project Officer, LMA</i>
10.00 – 12.00	Session 1: Root Cause Analysis <i>Sahar Dandan, Program Director, LMA</i>
12.00 – 12.30	Break
12.30 – 13.30	Session 2: Understanding a Narrative: Extremism and Muslims in Australia <i>Dr Yassir Morsi</i>
13.30 – 14.30	Lunch
14.30 – 15.30	Session 3: Extremism in Islam <i>Shaykh Walead Mosaad</i>
15.30 – 16.00	Break
16.00 – 17.00	Session 4: Facilitated Discussion

DAY 2

9.30 – 10.00	Opening <i>Mostafa Rachwani, Project Officer, LMA</i>
10.00 – 11.00	Session 5: Facilitated Discussion
11.00 – 11.30	Break
11.30 – 13.30	Session 6: Reshaping a Conversation on Identity <i>Shaykh Walead Mosaad</i>
13.30 – 14.30	Lunch
14.30 – 16.00	Session 7: Addressing the Problem Areas: Contribution Session
16.00 – 17.00	Conclusions and Feedback

1.5. Feedback on Summit

At the end of the summit, participants were asked for their views on the effectiveness of the workshops. In general, positive feedback was received. Most participants stated that attending the workshop was a useful or valuable experience for them. Their feedback indicated that the summit was effective in raising their awareness of the challenges facing the Muslim community.

Initiatives that worked well in the summit included:

- Being able to express their own voices on an issue of high significance and with direct implications for their own lives as Australian Muslims;
- Having the opportunity to engage in a critical dialogue with other members of the Muslim community;
- The formal talks that allowed new insights and critical perspectives on various dimensions of the issue.
- The facilitated discussion sessions allowed attendees to work with and learn from other group members.

Areas which could be improved were:

- Having some empirical data and/or material relevant to the issue under discussion that could have assisted in participants' work on recommendations.



02 Findings

2.1. Identification of Root Causes

ALIENATION & MARGINALISATION

Alienation, social isolation and marginalisation were identified by participants as important factors that might make some young Muslim men susceptible to moving towards extremism. Participants stated that disenfranchisement in a social sense resulting either from discrimination and social exclusion, or from experiences of trauma, prevent affected individuals from feeling connected to a community and from participating fully in the wider society. Some participants working closely with the Australian Muslim community reported a familiarity with individual cases where a disconnection from family and a lack of supportive family environment often exacerbated the experience of marginalisation. It was also stated that those families with experiences of a series of trauma often lacked support from mainstream services such as welfare and social services due to lack of awareness of existing resources and programs.

Although not identified as a root cause, a related point that some participants raised was the shortcomings of the capabilities of Muslim

organisations in Australia in providing support and guidance to those marginalised members of the community.

LACK OF SOCIAL BELONGING

The absence of a sense of belonging was identified as another major root cause of the susceptibility of some individuals to the lure of the extremist ideology and practice, an element that is also deeply interconnected to the abovementioned root cause. According to most participants, a lack of belonging within one's own ethno-religious community as well as within the wider Australian society is what drives some young Muslims to search for something which can help affirm in them a sense of identity. For most participants, such issues with identity and belonging were largely shaped by experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia. The shared view was that the second and third generation Muslims living in Australia are still considered as immigrants despite being born here. As such, they feel like their sense of belonging to the Australian society is being constantly questioned. The 'othering' and marginalisation of Muslims as 'second-class citizens' were identified as key problems, which many young people are left to deal with. Other dominant themes mentioned under this topic involved the negative media representation of Muslims and Islam, negative attention from the security forces, and experiences of everyday racism.



INTERGENERATIONAL ISSUES

Some participants highlighted the intergenerational gap and discord between parents and children as a major challenge for the well-being of Muslim families. A loss of parental authority, family breakdowns, and parents' lack of knowledge about the support systems concerning child-rearing were identified as key problems that many families are faced with.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Although external factors alone do not determine and explain why some Muslims become drawn to radicalisation, participants referred to a series of external factors, which shape Muslims' feelings of injustice, including, among others, Western foreign policy, the military intervention of Western governments in Muslim-dominated countries, the growing anti-Muslim sentiment in many Western countries in the 9/11 era, and the wider war on terror.

POLITICAL POWERLESSNESS & LACK OF CIVIC & POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Some participants made the point that many Australian Muslims experience political powerlessness when it comes to advocating for issues surrounding Muslims and Islam and making a difference in the majority community's institutions. This experience

of powerlessness is detrimental to feeling a sense of belonging within the wider Australian society, and for participating in its political institutions. Political powerlessness causes frustration and results in disengagement with socio-political life. Insufficient 'civic and/or political engagement' was another expression that some participants used to refer to this problem.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

Several participants commented that low socio-economic status and disadvantage could be a relevant dimension of why some young Muslim men might choose to join extremist groups. A related point that was suggested involved problems with access to available support networks and programs.

- Problems with the transmission of Islamic knowledge
- A lack of purposefulness and aspiration in life.



2.2. Effectiveness of Current Community Strategies

A number of issues were raised in relation to the efficacy of current community strategies:

- A commonly shared view among the participants was that Muslim community organisations had limited influence on issues concerning the well-being of Muslims in Australia. The need for more effective strategies and support systems to address this was stressed. A key pressure that Muslim organisations face today concern the need to adapt their vision and agendas of service provision according to the changing needs of the communities. Most organisations were established by first-generation migrants and with an aim to cater for the community's religious practices. Underlying the point that Muslim communities in Australia are now becoming predominantly second and third generation, participants emphasised the need for more inclusive and effective community strategies that take into account the specific needs and issues of different sectors of the community.

This need for a greater capacity to ‘influence’ was emphasised not only in relation to the issue of service provision inside the community. Participants also argued that Muslim organisations need to fulfil more effective roles in advocating and lobbying for issues essential to Muslims within the broader Australian public sphere.

- Overall, the following areas were identified in which community organisations need to take a more proactive and efficacious role:
 - Advocacy
 - Leadership
 - Social service provision
 - Community development
 - Education
- Participants generally felt that Muslim organisations should develop their leadership skills and organisational expertise to negotiate more effectively Muslim’s place in Australia.
- Some of the recommendations made about capacity-building focused on the Lakemba Mosque. Some members of the group suggested that the Mosque should serve more as a multi-purpose centre rather than merely as a place of worship.



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It was also suggested that the Mosque needs to develop more inclusive agendas for different gender and age groups in order to attract more members of the community. One suggestion made was the introduction of a playgroup for mothers.

- Some participants emphasised the need for the institutionalising of local initiatives in order to make Islamic education more appealing to young people. A lack of investment in scholarships was identified as another shortcoming.
- A small number of participants argued that different Muslim organisations compete in their agendas rather than unite for the greater good.

2.3. Problem Areas Found

The participants were asked to identify the key problem areas that require addressing to effectively tackle 'religious extremism.'

Although some of the responses overlap with some of the reflections already summed up in the section on 'Root Causes', a summary of their opinions is useful for bringing to our attention what they perceived as problems areas of priority:

- Marginalisation of Muslims and their negative representation, particularly in the media;
- Lack of effective community programs targeting young people;
- Lack of awareness about available support systems;
- Limited civic engagement
- Lack of investment in Islamic scholarship (in order to address misinterpretations of the Quran, we require trained, sincere, faithful scholars to transmit sacred knowledge accurately.)
- Socio-economic disadvantage
- Lack of effective leadership in the Muslim communities in Australia;
- Lack of educational programs to enable youth to enhance their skills through varying outlets (e.g., arts, sports, etc.) in order to develop confidence in their ability to create, produce, and express their thoughts;
- Interventionist foreign policies and government policies which make Muslims feel alienated;
- The very use of the term 'religious/ Islamic extremism.' Generally, a consensus emerged among the participants that these expressions should be identified as an influential discourse on Muslims produced by the media and governments of Western countries and that their use should be opposed. Participants made at least two critiques of this discourse. Firstly, the term 'religious extremism' was criticised for its

positing of an assumption that religion constitutes the source of extremism. One attendee suggested that 'violent extremism' serves for a better way of framing the issue than 'religious extremism' as it avoids a juxtaposing of religion (Islam) and extremism as two inherently interrelated categories.

A second criticism regarding the discourse concerned the use of the terms 'extremism' and 'radicalisation.' Pointing out that becoming 'extremist'/'radicalised' and engaging in violence are two different phenomena, some participants argued that the mere fact of being radicalised does not explain why some people might resort to violent acts. In other words, the religious orientation or belief, in itself, does not explain the choice of action. Thus such discursive framing was said to not accurately describe the issue at stake here. The first recommendation that emerged from the group discussions, therefore, highlighted the need for a language that better captures the complexities of the problem.



03 Recommendations

Based on the discussion of the issues raised during the summit, participants suggested the following recommendations be considered for combating extremism and for building resilient Australian Muslim communities:

3.1. Recommendation #1: Advancing Youth Initiatives

Participants proposed a number of recommendations directed at young Muslims and tailored around employment, education, recreational facilities, participation and civic engagement, professionalism and personal development, and psychological wellbeing.

ADVANCING EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES

The need to develop innovative initiatives that assist young people in enhancing their employability was highlighted. To this end, relevant government bodies can dedicate their attention and resources to offer special initiatives for those young people struggling to set up their own enterprises or who are unemployed. The development of social enterprises where young people could be employed for training purposes and special apprenticeship programs were proposed. Such initiatives, it was argued, would empower young people by ensuring that they have access to the support and skill development they need, enhancing, in return, a will to create change.

FOSTERING EDUCATION

Participants discussed the importance of educational initiatives especially for the social integration and empowerment of marginalised youth. Recommendations made in this area pertained to both general education and



Islamic education. It was emphasised that inclusive support systems should be devised which would comprise educational initiatives, endowments and scholarship schemes. The setting up of local and/or international student exchange programs was also proposed in order to enhance in young peoples knowledge about different Muslim and non-Muslim communities and to promote cross-cultural and religious understanding.

The need for making Islamic education more appealing to young people was also highlighted.

PROVIDING RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Another recommendation concerned the provision of recreational facilities for young people and fostering participation in sports and arts.

ENHANCING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & PARTICIPATION

One of the challenges that participants noted in encouraging young Muslims' participation and civic engagement was a lack of platforms where they could express and discuss issues affecting them.

One suggestion made was the establishment of an Australian Muslim Youth Network which would bring together representatives from diverse Muslim communities. The Network, it was argued, would aim to create awareness



It was emphasised that inclusive support systems should be devised which would comprise educational initiatives, endowments and scholarship schemes.

about youth issues and to offer them an institutional platform for practicing advocacy.

Participants also highlighted that attention should be given to best practices. One group referred to an example from the US context, noting that the Council on American-Islamic Relations offers formal internship programs for young American Muslims who are willing to take up internship at various government institutions. Such initiatives would allow deeper familiarity with the mechanisms and processes of political governance, as they would adapt young people with know-how about how to navigate the government system.

The significance of enhancing youth participation and engagement in sports and arts was also highlighted. One attendee who specialises in the area of sports reported, based on the information she was provided by her local council (Auburn), that participation in sports has recently been declining in all sports clubs.

SUPPORT IN PROFESSIONALISM & PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Another recommendation proposed the need for support in professional and personal development and leadership. A key finding emanating from the discussions was that many young people search for mentoring. It was suggested that community-based organisations could take up a more proactive role in providing young people the mentoring and training they need.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Participants underlined that having role models from their own communities could have helped built self-confidence in young Australian Muslims. Thus a suggestion was made to make individual stories of those successful Muslims with noble conduct more publicly available.



3.2. Recommendation #2: More Effective Community Organisations

Participants recognised the significant role to be played by community organisations in strengthening Muslim communities in Australia and in facilitating Muslims' participation in their local communities as well as in the larger society. They made the following set of recommendations in this regard:

- Muslim community organisations should enhance their leadership capabilities.
- A more effective role in advocacy is necessary.
- Community organisations should develop local strategies to create educative and personal development opportunities and mentoring for young Muslims.
- Community organisations should use their resources more effectively in service provision and in informing community members about the types of support systems and networks available.

3.3. Recommendation #3: Improvements in the Transmission of Religious Knowledge

Within the religious sphere, the need for a more active engagement of Muslims with their local mosques was highlighted. To enable this, participants suggested that:

- The development of the mentoring and leadership skills of imams is essential.
- The religious qualifications of religious scholars and imams should be made publicly available (e.g. by setting up a website). This could assist individual Muslims in finding out from whom to seek advice.
- Mosques should function as a multi-purpose centre.
- Inclusive support systems need to be built, which cater for the diverse needs of different segments of the community.

04 Conclusion

The following key findings emerged from the two-day discussions held during the summit:

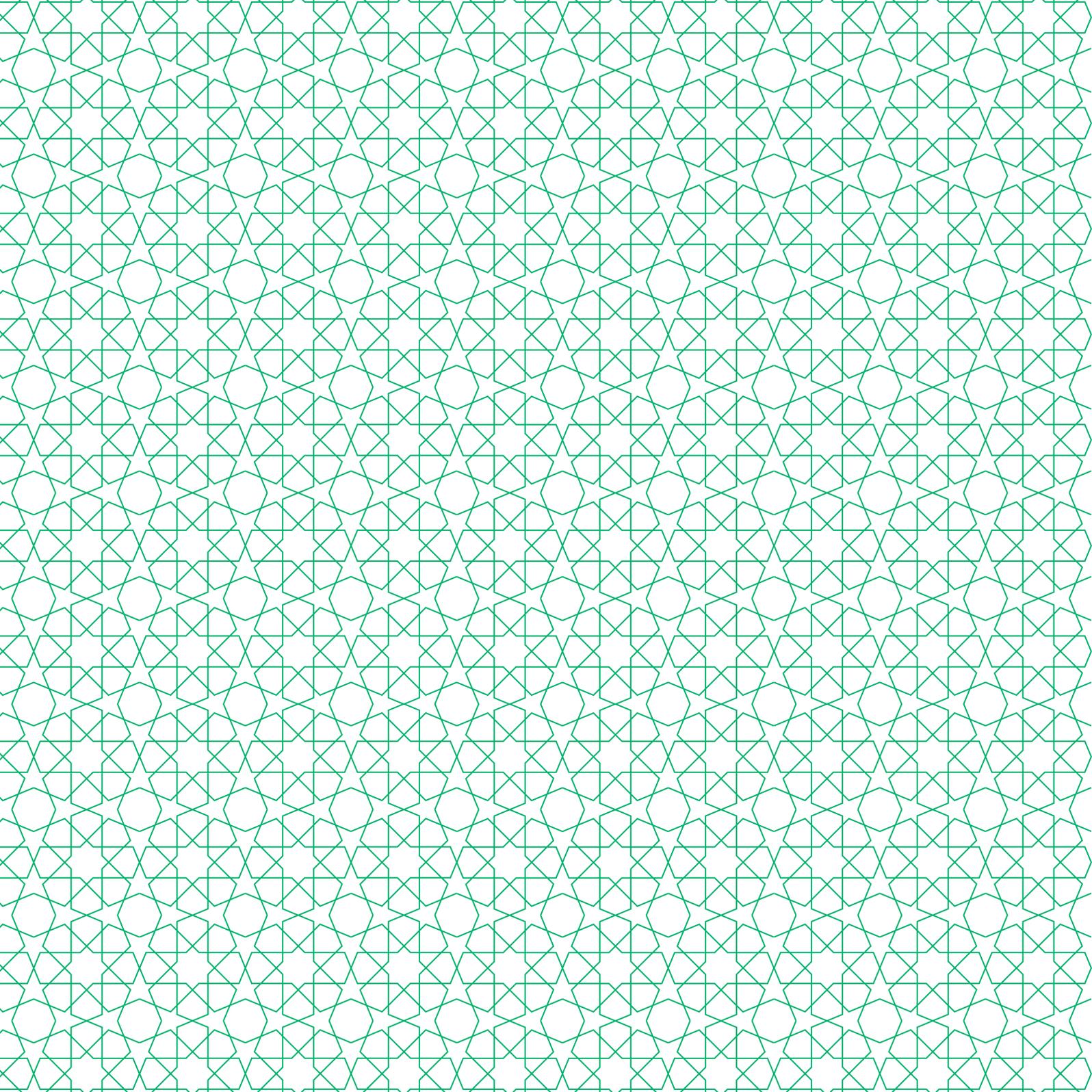


The issue of radicalisation should be understood as a sociological phenomenon rather than as a problem inherent to the religion of Islam. Its underlying multifaceted root causes are social and can range from the marginalisation, alienation, lack of sense of belonging, discrimination, political powerlessness, socio-economic disadvantage, personal/family trauma to Western foreign policy and misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam.

The existing community strategies dealing with this issue have limited efficacy.

The solutions for tackling this social problem should be sought not in reactive policies by political authorities, but in initiatives that invest in the capacity-building of Muslims communities. This requires, in the first place, the sponsoring of multifaceted initiatives and strategies to strengthen the position of young Muslims in the Australian society, especially in the areas of advocacy, political participation, education, and employment. Community-based organisations should also enhance their capabilities in providing the required social support to the members of the local communities, while taking a more proactive role in leadership, advocacy and mentoring.





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