

August 31st, 2025

Dear colleagues and brethren in faith,

Salaamun 'Alaykum

I write in response to the open letter circulated on August 29, 2025, by Dr. Sayyid Amjad H. Shah Naqavi (London, UK) concerning the recent academic conference titled "*The Quran and Shi'i Islam: Texts, Studies, Legacies*" held in Toronto on August 25-26, 2025. The letter contains several unfortunate misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the Shi'a Research Institute and myself, Syed Muhammad Rizvi, its principal. Since this open letter has been circulated widely, I have been compelled to respond to it.

The conference was co-hosted by the Shi'a Research Institute—an independent academic establishment—and the University of Toronto. Its aim was to foster scholarly dialogue and deepen understanding of the Qur'an and Shi'i traditions. The call for papers attracted over 200 abstracts from scholars worldwide. A peer-review panel selected a small percentage of these submissions based solely on academic merit and their contribution to the field.

Scholars came from diverse institutions and countries, including Harvard University (USA), Exeter University (UK), McGill University (Canada), Orient-Institut Beirut (Lebanon), Max-Weber-Stiftung (Egypt), Utrecht University (Netherlands), Aix-Marseille University (France), the University of Qur'an and Hadith (Iran), and many others. Naturally, none of the scholars attended as representatives of their institution's or government's views. The diversity of participants reflects the conference's global and inclusive nature, which was guided by scholarly integrity and a commitment to academic excellence.

Among the accepted papers was one by Dr. Khalid Sindawi, a Palestinian professor at al-Qasemi Academic College in Baqa al-Gharbiya. His paper explored reports of the recitation of Qur'anic verses by Imam Husayn's severed head in Karbala, entitled "*Death Weeps, the Quran Speaks: The Recitation of Quranic Verses by Imam Husayn's Severed Head in Karbala — Bridging History and Doctrine.*" This is a topic deeply rooted in Shi'i devotional and historical literature. Dr. Sindawi, like other participants, was invited as an individual scholar. Neither he nor any of the other scholars should bear the burden of answering for their governments. Sayyid Amjad Shah, the author of the open letter, comes from the UK, whose invasion and occupation of Iraq contributed to widespread instability, countless civilian casualties, and the collapse of the country's infrastructure. I come from Canada, which has recently had to apologize for the establishment of residential schools, which aimed to eradicate Indigenous languages, cultures and identities. I certainly hope neither of us will be prevented from participating in scholarly forums because of these actions committed by our governments, which I'm sure both of us wholeheartedly condemn.

We categorically reject the notion that academic engagement with individual scholars constitutes political endorsement or complicity with their government's actions. The Shi'a Research Institute

remains firmly committed to justice, including upholding the rights and dignity of all human beings. We condemn all forms of oppression, including occupation, apartheid, and violence against civilians. These values are rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), and guide our scholarly and ethical commitments.

I wish the writer of the letter had remembered the Qur'anic command of "*O you who believe! Avoid most of the suspicions, for surely suspicion in some case is a sin,*" (49:12) and the saying of the Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (a) that "Place the act of your brethren in most positive form until [a proof] comes to you that overcomes it." (*Al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 362)

May the Almighty give us the ability to see the truth as it is.

Was-salaam

Syed Muhammad Rizvi
On behalf of the Board of Directors
Shi'a Research Institute
Canada