

## A Statement Clarifying the Real Situation at IslamOnline.net



1. IslamOnline.net came into existence at the end of 1999 as an idea adopted and sponsored by Al Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi. The Sheikh gathered a group of scholars and intellectuals to form an institutional committee under the name of “Gamaiyat Al Balagh” or El Balagh Organization. The society made Qatar their headquarters although funding for the website came from different people and countries.

2. The website has enjoyed editorial independence from its birth, by extricating its editorial content from its funding and sponsorship. The members of the General Assembly of Al Balagh are all Qataris in accordance to the Qatari law.

The assembly was responsible for auditing and approving the yearly budget, as well as the vision, mission and editorial policy of the website. Thus, the Cairo office was responsible for the production and management of the editorial content of the website under the auspices of Media International, which also encompasses projects and websites other than IslamOnline.net.

3. This was the relationship that bound the administration in Qatar and the Cairo office successfully, which eventually became an institution that not only boasted IslamOnline.net’s English and Arabic websites, but also included a website that catered to non-Muslims (ReadingIslam.com), an Academic website for researchers and intellectuals (BiblioIslam.net), a training center for Media and Social training (Tawasol), and a strong virtual presence through its existence on Second Life. The institution also formed a Project Management sector that implemented and managed websites for external clients, utilizing the institution’s long expertise in content management.

4. Approximately a year ago, a new Board of Directors was elected in Qatar. The board’s new members introduced a change in how the website would be funded. So, instead of having a diverse range of sponsors and funders from outside and inside Qatar, the funding became restricted to two entities inside Qatar. Two of the board’s new members were representatives from these funding entities. This move coincided with the construction of the

website's new building in Cairo. The expenses and preparation of this new building was primarily funded by sponsors from Saudi Arabia.

5. The new members quickly began talking about development, without proposing definite plans or tangible characteristics for development. Despite this, the executive managers in the Cairo office cooperated wholeheartedly with the Consultation Company, the Board of Directors had delegated to submit a development proposal. The company praised the cooperation with the Cairo office, although the Board had not consulted the office before choosing the Consultation Company nor was the Cairo office asked to participate in setting the methodology in which they were to work with. This resulted in the Consultation Company falling into many methodological mistakes, which were documented and presented to the Board of Directors responsible for the development plan.

6. Despite the cooperation, certain sources close to the Board of Directors and the Consultation Company leaked news that there was the intention of laying off employees and closing down some of the websites and projects. Unfortunately, this resulted in a lot of confusion inside the Cairo office. Rumors were leaked of the discontent of the new Board of Directors toward the editorial policy of the website and saw that it diverged from its original message, without clarifying how it diverged and what it diverged from precisely.

7. The cooperation between the Cairo office and the Consultation Company resulted in setting clear points for a comprehensive development plan on many levels. One of the items mentioned was the formation of a Board of Consultants that would be responsible for supervising the editorial content and setting strategic determinants for it. The suggestion was to include the Executive manager of the Cairo office and the Editor-in-Chief of the Arabic and English websites to this Board. Suddenly the vice-chairman of the Board in Qatar issued a declaration stating that all three of the persons holding the aforementioned positions would be relieved of their administrative duties. This decision came before any agreement to what would be the tasks and powers allocated to the new Board, or even who would be the substitutes to the three names suggested. This resulted in speculations that this was just a step in order to completely remove them from the institution.

8. Although there were underlying suspicions toward the supposed "development plans", especially with the delegation of someone outside the company with no media experience to manage the development initiative, the staff did not hesitate to uphold their responsibilities toward updating the website and did not let their worries affect the website's coverage. At this point, the staff agreed to communicate their concerns to Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi, the Chairman of the Board and members of the Board, by asking them to come to Cairo and clarify the situation. Sheikh Yusuf's office responded by saying that no employee would be harmed, whereas the Board ignored the request completely.

9. The truth behind the "development plans" was soon revealed when it became obvious that the new manager intended on laying off a large number of the staff by first targeting the employees who were in their probation period and those who worked under a "bonus" contract. Both the English and Arabic editorial boards decided that they would send a second letter to the Board of Directors to answer questions posed by the staff. Subsequently, a committee was sent to listen to the problems of the staff, which consisted of two Board members; but they refused to meet with the managers or the Editorial Board. They insisted on sitting with the staff individually, and that any person who desired to meet with them should submit a written complaint first. The staff objected to this and after negotiations a compromise was reached, and the result of the meetings was a number of reassurances to the employees from the members of the Board.

10. A week after the committee left, the truth behind the promises became evident: a legal committee was sent by

the Board to investigate the 250 employees who signed the letter sent to the Sheikh Al Qaradawi asking him to come to the Cairo office. This investigation was a precedent to a mass lay off of employees to deprive them of their financial rights. The committee asked to see the contracts of all the employees and all the papers relevant to them; this sparked an open protest by the employees inside the website's building. Evidently, all this had been pre planned by the Board in Qatar since they had asked for the passwords to the server sometime before and consequently closed access to the servers preventing any updates to be published on the website from Cairo. Since then the employees have been persistent in continuing their open protest until an agreement is reached that guarantee their rights. While the site continues to be updated from Qatar it has become clear that the Board is adamant in moving the website to Qatar.

11. It is very important to mentioned that 3 of the new board , who have a very high positions in "Gamaiyat Al Balagh", are behind all this, not all the new board.

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