Plain text representation:

The newly founded al-Ittihad al-Alami li-Ulama al-Muslimin (The International Association of Muslim Scholars, IAMS) aims at establishing a “global Islamic authority.” The driving force behind the IAMS is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Qatar-based Egyptian scholar, and one of the main players in current Islamic debates.

The principle aim of the IAMS is to serve the international community of Muslims and help them safeguard their cultural identity. It also aims to promote moderate Islam by offering an alternative international network to that of militant Islamists. Al-Qaradawi outlined the main characteristics of the new association as being Islamic (representing all Muslims), global (aiming to get its message across the entire world), people-oriented (sustained by the trust of Muslim peoples worldwide), independent (not connected to governments or political parties), scientific (referring to Ilm, i.e. an association of ulama), missionary (using communicative methods to promote Islam), moderate (eschewing extremism and bigotry), as well as energetic (translating its words into action). The association’s basic principle is to apply a “middle way for the Islamic community of the middle” (al-minhaj al-wasati lil-umma al-wasat). The founding declaration of the association speaks out against undemocratic rule and calls for the enforcement of equal legislative rights for men and women.

As yet the networking capacity and authority of this collective of ulama is unclear. The association seems to be mainly al-Qaradawi’s project and thus far all detailed information on the IAMS to date has been published only via al-Qaradawi’s private website.

A global scholar

Clearly, the establishment of the IAMS would not have been possible without the commitment of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, born in Egypt in 1926, living in Qatar since the 1960s, and generously financed by the State of Qatar. The two basic ideas that characterize his work are that of balance (al-wasatyya)—and unity of the umma. Based on the ummatan wasatan concept of the Quran (2/143), al-Qaradawi argues for a balanced implementation of Islamic law, meaning both the balance between new and established views as well as between different doctrines. He believes that fatwas (legal opinions) should always be composed “according to the spirit of mediation” and that in doing so one should resort to all legal traditions within Islam. He describes his approach as the “method of the middle way” (minhaj al-wasatyya) which goes beyond a mere juridical context. It implies that the ulama are responsible for the moral guidance of the Islamic community as only they have the necessary expertise to properly interpret Islamic law. Al-Qaradawi stresses that it is the duty of the ulama to make their knowledge public. Consequently, al-Qaradawi is committed through a series of projects for the umma, which he understands as a global Islamic community. Ever since new media allowed, he has been presenting his views to global audiences, accordingly he has been a regular guest on the programme al-Sharai‘a wa l-‘ayrat on satellite TV al-Jazeera since 1996, publishes in the Rewat wasat al-‘umma wa al-ru’us wa al-masalim, July 27, 2004, http://www.qaradawi.net.

Notes
4. See Y. al-Qaradawi, Al-Fatwa bayna t-indibat wa t-tasayyub (Cairo, 1998); Y. al-Qaradawi, Fatawa mu’assima, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1993).

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