

**REPORT TO
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
FOR CONVEYANCE TO
WYCLIFFE GLOBAL ALLIANCE AND SIL INTERNATIONAL**

**FROM
THE WEA GLOBAL REVIEW PANEL**

**APRIL 15, 2013
(Finalized April 26, 2013)**

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2012, the World Evangelical Alliance leadership agreed to facilitate an independent external review of Wycliffe and SIL International's practice of the translation of the words for "God the Father" and "Son of God." The review was intended to focus on SIL's Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms, to set boundaries for theologically acceptable translation methodology particularly in Muslim contexts, and to suggest how to implement the recommendations practically.

This transparent and independent review was facilitated by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and carried out by a global panel of evangelical biblical scholars, theologians, linguists and missiologists from international settings, including representatives from countries with majority Muslim populations. The WEA secured the services of Dr. Robert E. Cooley to moderate the work of the panel. In July 2012, Dr. Cooley met with WEA personnel to begin the panel formation process. A pool of 86 prospective scholars was reviewed, with 24 candidates selected for invitations to panel service. These candidates represented the diversity of needed scholars and included persons from diverse global contexts, with a mix of men and women, and with none who had any working relationship with Wycliffe and SIL International at present or in the past. The Panel formation was completed by September 30, 2012 with 12 outstanding members prepared to undertake the review process.

WEA remained totally independent from the work of the Panel, and it was agreed that the outcomes of the process would not necessarily reflect the official view of the WEA. The Panel had free access to Wycliffe and SIL International resources needed to complete its mandate, and the Panel wishes to express its appreciation to Wycliffe and SIL International for supplying all requested data and resources. Both Wycliffe and SIL International have agreed to accept the outcomes of the Panel's work and recommendations. They will communicate this work and recommendations clearly and broadly. Funding for the Panel's work was provided by several of the Wycliffe Global Alliance Participating Organizations.

In preparation for its first meeting, Panel members reviewed all Wycliffe and SIL International documents relating to the Statement of Best Translation Practices for the purpose of identifying issues, designing study methodologies, and becoming acquainted with available resources.

The first meeting of the Panel was held in Toronto, Canada, on November 28-30, 2012. The meeting agenda included considerable time for the Panel to identify translation issues to be studied and translation practices needing extended investigation. This process resulted in the establishing of three Work Groups to serve as the basic framework for the on-going evaluation process. The groups included a Biblical Group, a Cross-Cultural Communication Group, and a Guided Process Group. These groups were assigned study topics and issues to investigate, employing personal study and electronic conversations, and utilizing case studies and data supplied by Wycliffe and SIL International.

The Panel gathered in Istanbul, Turkey on April 9-13, 2013, for the final work of crafting its recommendations and preparing the final report to be submitted to The WEA on April 15, 2013. The work in Istanbul was intensive and covered the full range of agreed-upon mandates.

The Panel anticipates that following the submission of the report, the WEA will arrange with Wycliffe and SIL International for arrangements on communicating the work of the WEA Panel. Further, the Panel has agreed that a representative group of its members may meet with leaders of Wycliffe and SIL International for the purpose of clarifying its report and recommendations.

The Panel expresses gratitude to the personnel of the WEA for facilitating its work with efficient and effective support. Further, gratitude is expressed to Wycliffe and SIL personnel for providing timely access to requested data and resources. Although the Panel members represent diverse fields of scholarship and hold particular understandings of translation issues, we can report that a joyous and consensual conclusion was reached in the finalization of this report. The report is submitted with profound gratitude for the opportunity to serve Christ and his Kingdom.

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REPORT ON DIVINE FAMILIAL TERMS

We, as a panel appointed by the World Evangelical Alliance, have been charged with the task of auditing the Wycliffe and SIL practices related to the translation of divine familial terms. These terms include principally (but not exclusively) the word for “father” used in reference to God and the word for “son” and the phrase for “Son of God” used in reference to Jesus.

We begin by acknowledging with thanksgiving and admiration the invaluable work Wycliffe and SIL personnel have done and are doing in making God’s Word available to new audiences. We appreciate Wycliffe’s and SIL’s commitment to the accurate communication of the Word, and we consider ourselves privileged to help in the process of ensuring accurate translation. We recognize that all involved are responsible to the one heavenly Father and are under the authority of his Word.

We also acknowledge that it is not appropriate for outsiders who do not know the target language of a given translation to dictate to translators skilled in that language how they should do their work or to make sweeping judgments, allegedly valid for all target languages, about the translation task. At the same time, we believe that there are overarching principles that can govern translation efforts in all languages.

Translators need to consider four primary contexts if the message of the Bible is to be accurately and clearly communicated to an intended audience today. The first context is the Old Testament, focusing on the covenant relationship between God and Israel and the development of the concept of Son of God as Messianic King. The New Testament, the second context, builds on this Old Testament context and focuses on Jesus Christ as the unique Son of God who is the Messianic King, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant relationship in believers, the sons and daughters of God.

The translators’ own cultures are the third context, which involves their cultural milieu, the interpretive tradition in which they work, and their methodology for understanding Scripture.

The fourth is the context of the intended audience. Good communication will take place only if significant attention is given to understanding the receptor audiences, in this case various Muslim groups, and their cultures. Most are influenced by qur’anic views, e.g. the belief that for Jesus to be God’s son would require God to have a sexual consort (6:101) or that Christians believe that Jesus and Mary are gods beside God (5:116). These beliefs make the translation of divine familial terms an especially sensitive issue in Muslim contexts. There may be other issues that are culturally sensitive, but this report does not address such other issues because of the narrow nature of the Panel’s mandate. The Panel does not intend that extrapolations to other potential issues be made from its recommendations.

The panel has considered the questions at hand in the light of these contexts, and makes the following ten recommendations. The first three of these recommendations concern translation

methodology, the fourth concerns the use of other kinds of literature besides Bible translations in ministry to Muslims, and the final six concern guided processes for ensuring accuracy and accountability in Bible translation. The ten recommendations are stated in the subsequent pages. Then each of the first four is discussed in some detail. The report concludes with a brief postscript.

(Due to the fact that this document is a private report, not an academic article for publication, it does not include citations of sources. The Panel members acknowledge that we have drawn from hundreds of scholarly works related to the issue before us. It should be noted, however, that our discussion of the four cultural contexts in the preamble just above is specifically indebted to Shaw and Van Engen, *Communicating God's Word in a Complex World* [Rowan & Littlefield, 2003]. Shaw and Van Engen refer to four horizons in appropriate communication.)

Recommendations

1. The WEA Panel (hereafter referred to as “Panel”) recommends that when the words for “father” and “son” refer to God the Father and to the Son of God, these words always be translated with the most directly equivalent familial words within the given linguistic and cultural context of the recipients. In the case of languages that have multiple words for “father” and “son,” translators should choose the most suitable words in light of the semantics of the target language. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.6, 1.5.1, 1.5.2, 3.2.)
2. The Panel recognizes that there is significant potential for misunderstanding of the words for “father” and “son” when applied to God, and that in languages shaped by Islamic cultures, the potential is especially acute and the misunderstandings likely to prove especially harmful to the reader’s comprehension of the gospel. Therefore, in case of difficulties, the Panel recommends that translators consider the addition of qualifying words and/or phrases (explanatory adjectives, relative clauses, prepositional phrases, or similar modifiers) to the directly-translated words for “father” and “son,” in order to avoid misunderstanding. For example, as the biblical context allows, the word for “father” might be rendered with the equivalent of “heavenly Father” when referring to God, and the word for “son” might be rendered with the equivalent of “divine Son,” “eternal Son,” or “heavenly Son” when referring to Jesus. The Panel also encourages translators to use paratextual material to clarify and avoid misunderstanding in these cases. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 1.5.4, 3.2.)
3. The Panel recognizes that the phrase for “Son of God” has varied nuances in its different New Testament contexts, especially in light of the Old Testament background to those contexts. In the case of most languages, the biblical context should enable the reader to discern the nuances of the phrase for “Son of God,” and translators need not make adjustments to the translated text, although they may want to indicate nuances of meaning in paratextual material. But, when and if necessary, the Panel recommends

that translators convey nuances of meaning from the biblical context in the translation through the addition of qualifying words and/or phrases (explanatory adjectives, relative clauses, or prepositional phrases). For example, the phrase for “Son of God” in a context of Messianic kingship might be rendered with the equivalent of “anointed Son of God” or “royal Son of God.” (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.4, 0.7, 1.1, 1.5.4, 3.2.)

4. The panel recognizes that some of the disagreement over the translation of the word for “father” and the phrase for “Son of God” has resulted from overloading the translation by attempting to address too many possible meanings and misunderstandings. The panel recommends that in addition to translating Scripture, translators consider additional ways of communicating the message of Jesus to Muslim audiences. These can include such literary genres as *tafsir* (commentary), *qusas al-anbiya* (stories of the prophets), and *sirah* (life stories). But these should not be considered or presented as biblical translations unless they abide by the first three recommendations. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.7, 1.1, 1.5.1, 1.5.4, 4.1.1, 4.2.1-4.)

5. The Panel recommends that Wycliffe/SIL incorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines related to ensuring that translators determine what context should serve as the controlling principle for the translation of divine familial terms, including:
 - a. Local testing of peoples’ reactions to a translation, seeing to it that local expertise -- exegetical, linguistic and historical -- are at the outset part of the team in designing the feedback mechanism for testing reactions of the targeted group to translation of divine familial terms. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.4, 0.7, 1.1, 1.5.1, 1.6, 2.1.)
 - b. Enabling translation teams to account not only for the particular audience for whom the translation is being prepared, but also how to consider the impact on local groups with secondary exposure to the translation (overhearers such as

existing local churches, close language groups, and so on). (This recommendation pertains to the Wycliffe/SIL Best Practices statement 0.4, 0.7, 1.1, 1.5.1, 1.6, 2.1.)

6. The Panel recommends that SIL incorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines for the translation team on differentiating the translation of divine familial passages when the primary audience of the Bible translation is local believers versus when the primary audience is local unbelievers (including how to determine when this is necessary and how to accomplish it when it is deemed necessary). (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.7.)

7. The Panel recommends that SIL incorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines on a process by which likely divine familial language controversies are to be handled and personnel held accountable for those translations where Wycliffe and/or SIL has a major stake. Especially for translations over which controversy is likely to ensue, the guidelines should:
 - a. Give the translation team a process to determine when Wycliffe and/or SIL might institute some type of “familial language audit group” (or other appropriate title) utilizing both internal (local believers/informed culture bearers who may or may not be Christians) and external (translation experts) resources. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 2.1.)
 - b. Address such things as the composition, task/limitations, and process of the “familial language audit group”:
 - i. Composition: The Panel recommends that whenever possible the group should include local believers from a variety of perspectives and disciplines and also local experts who may not be believers but know the cultural and linguistic nuances of their mother tongue. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 1.6, 2.1.)

- ii. Task/limitations: For example, the “familial language audit group” would focus their audit on the controversial familial language passages of the translation.
 - iii. Process: This would include how such audit groups might be constituted, how they determine their decisions, how they communicate the decision, Wycliffe and SIL policies on the public/confidential nature of any audit reports that are generated, and so on.
8. The Panel recommends that SIL incorporate into the Best Practices statement guidelines related to “ownership” of the translation. The Panel recognizes that each project is different and needs to be evaluated independently. Therefore the Panel recommends that Wycliffe and SIL add guidelines in these areas:
- a. Negotiating the interests and demands of a) the end-users, b) believers in local contexts, c) scholarly and other relevant hermeneutical communities (including existing local church resources), d) patron donors behind the translation. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.4.)
 - b. The role(s) that foreign translators, missionaries and experts take in the process and choices made in translating familial language in the project.
 - c. Handling situations in which different groups in a single locality have different opinions on the familial language translation choices and determining the local hermeneutical community that best represents the target audience. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.7, 1.1, 1.6.)
 - d. Guide translation teams on handling questions concerning the relationship between foreign funding of translations and resulting demands on translation decisions and practices.
 - e. Establishing procedures that will ensure that the research on reception of the familial language translation actually reflects local understandings and asks the kinds of questions that will not skew the data towards researcher or patron

community bias. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 0.4, 0.7, 1.1, 1.6.)

9. The Panel recommends that Wycliffe and SIL consider how to better publicly disclose translation decisions and considerations, including appropriate means of publicizing:
 - a. What Wycliffe and/or SIL has done regarding those translations for which Wycliffe and/or SIL was responsible but which have not followed the Best Practices and the Panel's recommendations. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 6.1.)
 - b. How Wycliffe/SIL will monitor compliance with the Best Practices statement and the Panel's recommendations. (This recommendation pertains to the Wycliffe/SIL Best Practices statement 6.1.)

10. The Panel recommends that Wycliffe and SIL work with an external group or agency (such as WEA) to establish policies and procedures of accountability related to the Best Practices statement and the Panel's recommendations including review by an external group or agency. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 6.1.)

Discussion of Recommendation 1

Recommendation 1 Repeated

The WEA Panel (hereafter referred to as “Panel”) recommends that when the words for “father” and “son” refer to God the Father and to the Son of God, these words always be translated with the most directly equivalent familial words within the given linguistic and cultural context of the recipients. In the case of languages that have multiple words for “father” and “son,” translators should choose the most suitable words in light of the semantics of the target language.

Rationale for Recommendation 1

a. The words for “father” and “son” are among the most common ways the New Testament describes God and Jesus.

The word *pater*, referring to God, occurs in the following passages:

Mt 5:16 and throughout chapters 5-7, 10:20 , 10:29-33, 11:25-27, 12:50, 13:43, 15:13, 16:17, 16:27, 18:10, 18:14, 18:19, 18:35, 20:23, 23:9, 24:36, 25:34, 26:29, 26:39, 26:42, 26:53, 28:19

Mk 8:38, 11:25-26, 13:32, 14:36

Lk 2:49, 6:36, 9:26, 10:21-22, 11:2, 11:13, 12:30-32, 22:29, 22:42, 23:34, 23:46, 24:49

John 1:14, 1:18, 2:16, 3:35, 4:21-23, 5:17-45, 6:27-65, 8:16-54, 10:15-38, 11:41, 12:26-28, 12:49-50, 13:1-3, throughout chapters 13-17, 18:11, 20:17-21

Acts 1:4, 1:7, 2:33

Rom 1:7, 6:4, 8:15, 15:6

1 Cor 1:3, 8:6, 15:24

2 Cor 1:2-3, 6:17-18, 11:31

Gal 1:1-4, 4:6

Eph 1:2-3, 1:17, 2:18, 3:14, 4:6, 5:20, 6:23

Phil 1:2, 2:11, 4:20

Col 1:2-3, 1:12-3:17

1 Thess 1:1-3, 3:11-13

2 Thess 1:1-2, 2:16

1 Tim 1:2

2 Tim 1:2

Tit 1:4

Phm 3

Heb 1:5, 12:9

James 1:17, 1:27, 3:9
1 Pet 1:2-3, 1:17
2 Pet 1:17
1 John 1:2-3, 2:1, 2:13-16, 2:22-24, 3:1, 4:14
2 John 3, 4, 9
Jude 1
Rev 1:6, 2:27, 3:5, 3:21, 14:1

Notice that the word occurs in 25 of the 27 New Testament books and that it is very prominent in three of the four Gospels. These passages include references to God as the Father of believers and to God as the Father of Jesus. Among the latter, note especially the references to God as “God the Father” (e.g. John 6:27; Eph 5:20), references to God as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (e.g. Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 2 Thess 1:1; cf. very similar expressions in Eph 1:17 and 1 Thess 3:13), and Jesus’ references to God as “my Father” or “his (own) Father” (e.g. Mt 16:27, 25:34, 26:29; Mk 8:38; Lk 2:49, John 2:16, 5:18, 14:2; cf. Mt 18:14).

The word *huios*, referring to Jesus, occurs in the following passages:

Mt 1:1, 1:23-25, 2:15, 3:17, 4:3-6, 8:20, 8:29, 9:6, 9:27, 10:23, 11:19, 11:27, 12:8, 12:23-40, 13:37-41, 14:33, 15:22, 16:13-16, 16:27-28, 17:5-12, 17:22, 19:28, 20:18, 20:28-31, 21:9, 22:42, 21:15, 24:27-44, 25:31, 26:2, 26:24, 26:45, 26:63-64, 27:40-54, 28:19
Mk 1:1, 1:11, 2:10, 2:28, 3:11, 5:7, 8:31, 8:38, 9:7-12, 9:31, 10:33, 10:45-48, 12:35, 13:26, 13:32, 14:21, 14:41, 14:61-62; 15:39
Lk 1:32-35, 3:22-23, 4:3, 4:9, 4:22, 4:41, 5:24, 6:5, 6:22, 7:34, 8:28, 9:22-35, 9:44, 9:56-58, 10:22, 11:30, 12:8-10, 12:40, 17:22-30, 18:8, 18:31-39, 19:10, 20:41, 21:27-36, 22:22, 22:48, 22:69-70, 24:7
John 1:34, 1:49-51, 3:13-18, 3:35-36, 5:19-27, 6:27, 6:40, 6:53, 6:62, 8:28, 8:35-36, 9:35, 10:36, 11:4, 11:27, 12:23, 12:33-36, 13:31, 14:13, 17:1, 19:7, 20:31
Acts 7:56, 9:20, 13:33
Rom 1:3-4, 1:9, 5:10, 8:3, 8:29-32
1 Cor 1:9, 15:28
2 Cor 1:19
Gal 1:16, 2:20, 4:4-6
Eph 4:13
Col 1:13
1 Thess 1:10
Heb 1:2-8, 3:6, 4:14, 5:5-8, 6:6, 7:3, 7:28, 10:29
2 Pet 1:17

1 John 1:3-7, 2:22-24, 3:8, 3:23, 4:9-15, 5:5, 5:9-13, 5:20
2 John 3, 9
Rev 1:13, 2:18

These passages include Jesus' many self-references to himself as "Son of Man," a phrase that can be understood as a divine title in light of its background in Dan. 7:9-14. Notice the prevalence of *huios* in all four Gospels. Among these uses of *huios*, the phrase for "Son of God," referring to Jesus, occurs in the following passages with or without the definite article:

- *ho huios tou theou* – Mt 16:16, 26:63, Mk. 3:11, Lk 4:41, 22:70; John 1:34, 1:49, 3:18, 5:25, 11:4, 11:27, 20:31; Acts 9:20; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:13; Heb 4:14, 6:6, 7:3, 10:29, 1 John 3:8, 4:15, 5:5, 5:10-13, 5:20; Rev 2:18
- *huios tou theou* – Mt 4:3, 4:6, 8:29, 27:40; Mk 3:11, 5:7; Lk 4:3, 4:9, 4:41, 8:28; Jn. 10:36
- *huios theou* – Mt 14:33, 27:43, 27:54; [Mk 1:1], Mk 15:39; Lk 1:35; John 19:7; Rom 1:4

These references show the prevalence and centrality of the words for "father" and "son" in the New Testament. This prevalence testifies to the importance of fatherhood and sonship in the biblical presentation of God, an importance that constrains translators to render these words with the most direct equivalents possible.

b. The words for "father" and "son" are among the most important ways the New Testament conveys the central truth that Jesus is and has always been in a relationship as Son to his Father—derived from God and possessing the same divine characteristics (and thus fully divine), and yet distinct from God the Father as well.

The various passages in which the New Testament uses these words to indicate the unique relationship of Jesus to God include references to Jesus as God's own Son or own unique Son (e.g. John 3:16-18; Acts 13:33; Rom 1:9, 5:10, 8:3; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 4:4-6, 2 Pet 1:17, 1 John 4:10, 5:9-12, 5:20, 2 John 3), references to Jesus as the Son (e.g. Mt 11:27; John 3:36; 1 Cor 15:28; Heb 1:8; 2 John 9), Gabriel's reference to Jesus as "Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:32), and Peter's reference to Jesus as "Son of the Living God" (Mt 16:16).

Notice also Jesus' striking statement in John 5:26 that the Father has life in himself—distinguishing him from all creatures, and in the same way, the Father has granted the Son to have life in himself. The Son's life is both non-contingent—thus putting him on the same level as God—and derived/granted—thus making him Son and not Father. Notice also Jesus' affirmation in John 17:20-26 that love, unity, and glory, have characterized his relationship with the Father from before the foundation of the world.

The New Testament uses other means as well to emphasize that the Son has always been Son to the Father (see John 1:1-3 for the use of the word for "Word" to state the same truth), but the words for "father" and "son" are a crucial part of the way the New Testament reveals this truth. Translators should render such crucial words as directly as possible.

c. The word for "son" is among the most important ways the New Testament links believers to Jesus and at the same time distinguishes us from Jesus. He is the unique Son of God, and we become adopted sons (and daughters) through faith.

The New Testament uses various words and phrases to show both the similarity and the difference between the way in which Jesus is God's Son and the way in which Christians are God's sons/children, which provides for a richness of interconnection. These include:

- The use of the word *huioi* ("sons") or *tekna* ("children") to refer to believers as children of God (e.g. Mt 5:9; John 1:12-13; Rom 8:14, 8:19, 9:26; Gal 3:26, 4:6-7; Rev 21:7).
- The use of the word *adelphoi* ("brothers" although the plural usually includes sisters as well) to refer to believers as siblings of Christ (e.g., Rom 8:29; cf. Mt 13:43).
- The use of the word *kleronomoi* ("heirs") to refer to believers as God's heirs and of *synkleronomoi* ("joint heirs") to refer to believers as fellow heirs with Christ (e.g. Rom 8:17).
- The use of the word *huiotesia* ("adoption as sons") to refer to the status/relationship that believers are given by God (e.g. Rom 8:23, 9:4; Gal 4:5).
- The use of the word *Abba* (Aramaic for "Father"), as a way Jesus addresses God and, by the Spirit of Jesus, believers may address God with the same word (e.g. Mk. 14:36, Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6).

These passages indicate the centrality of the word for “son” in the biblical presentation of salvation, and this centrality as well demands that translators render the word with the most direct equivalent possible.

d. Father-son relationships are universal in human experience.

In ideal cases, human father-son relationships include both the fact that the son shares a common human nature with his father, and the loving relationship that grows out of that natural bond. It is true that in many cases, fathers love their children poorly or not at all, and it may be true that in some cultures, fathers are not even *supposed* to love their children. But parent-child (and thus father-son) relationships are about as close to a universal aspect of human experience as one can get. Accordingly, the words for “father” and “son” have great cultural and linguistic transferability and can be used in all translations.

e. Most Muslims know that Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God and have heard that the Bible describes him as such. Non-direct translation of the words for “father” and “son” may create problems in that Muslims will think our new translations have altered the Scriptures.

One longstanding obstacle in reaching out to Muslims is the deeply-rooted Islamic conviction and claim that the current Bible we have (both Old and New Testaments) is corrupt. Christian apologetics in the Middle East have long responded to this accusation by challenging those who make it to bring out any evidence that Christians have falsified the Bible. In many cases, apologetics depended on the fact that problematic issues in the biblical text were neither removed nor softened in the course of history, but rather retained and maintained (as manuscripts and textual critical studies show when comparing older texts with current translations). Translating the words for “father” and “son” in non-direct or less direct ways could belie the Christian heritage of apologetics and add substance to the Muslim claim that Christians have corrupted the Bible.

Further Discussion of Potential Translation Decisions related to Recommendation 1

The recommendation of the Panel that translators use the most direct words possible is quite simple to follow in the case of languages that have only one word for “father” and one word for “son,” or even in languages that have several words but one word dominates semantically. The situation becomes much more complicated, however, when there are several widely-used words for “son” in a given language. For example, there may be words for “social son” (in contrast to “son by nature”) or “royal son” (either in contrast to “son by nature” or as a label for one of several natural sons). Translators may want to consider these alternatives to the word for “son by nature,” either because such alternatives may be less likely to connote sexual procreation, or because in that culture natural fatherhood is not associated with love and nurturing. However, in such cases translators should be very cautious about these possibilities, since words that reduce the potential for those two misunderstandings could also blur the distinction between Christ as the unique Son of God and believers as sons/children in a different way (by adoption). For example, in a given language a word for “social son”—the one whom the father loves as his favorite, even if he is not a son by nature—might seem attractive to translators trying to avoid the connotation of sexual procreation. But the very fact that such a word lessens *that* connotation may also mean that the word in question lessens the connotation that the “social son” is of the same nature as his father. In such a case, it may be easy for readers to get the impression that the social son is simply a special kind of believer, a son of God in basically the same way Christians are but to a higher degree. The uniqueness of Jesus as God’s *only* Son would be obscured, and thus, the triunity of God as a fellowship of three equal persons would also be obscured. This misunderstanding would be far graver and harder to correct than the misconception that the Son’s begetting involved sexual intercourse by God or the misconception of failing to see the dimension of love in the Father-Son relationship.

Therefore, translators should have very strong reasons for departing from a word for “son by nature” in favor of a word for “social son” or the like. In languages/cultures where the word for “father” connotes *nothing but* “begetter” and the word for “son by nature” *nothing but* “one

who has received half of his genes from his “father” (that is, in cultures where the natural fathers do not love or care for their children and are not expected to), there may be a need to look to one of the other words for “son.” But even in such cases, it is important to consider the fact that the idea of fatherhood and sonship in such languages/cultures needs to be redeemed by contact with the Christian understanding of the way God’s fatherhood is the basis for human family relationships. Such redemption of the concepts of fatherhood and sonship will surely involve much patience, teaching, explanation, and prayer. Perhaps the way Bible translation can facilitate such a task would be by creating phrases that link natural fatherhood to nurturing and loving relationships, rather than by abandoning the words for natural fatherhood and sonship and replacing them with other words. The use of compound phrases in place of the simple words for “father” and “son” may be the best way to present the truth of Jesus’ relationship to God (he is of the same nature, and the Father has eternally loved him), of exposing the inadequacies of a given culture’s understanding of fatherhood, and of showing the similarity and difference between Jesus’ relationship to God and ours. (This will be discussed further in connection with recommendations 2 and 3 below.)

Another important translation decision will be that of how to show that Jesus is God’s Son by nature and believers are sons/children by adoption. The way translators handle this task will depend heavily on whether the word for a son by nature and the word for an adopted son are the same in the target language. If those words are the same, then it should often be plausible to use the same word of Christ and Christians, and to use adjectives and other qualifiers to make the distinction in the same way the Greek New Testament does. But if those words are different in the target language, then the qualifying adjectives may become redundant, and it will be important for translators to make sure that the *similarity* between Christ and Christians—both are members of God’s family—shines clearly. There may also be languages/cultures in which there is no concept of adoption at all. Such situations will pose significant problems to translators, who may well have to utilize explanatory phrases in place of the words for “adoption” and “adopted.”

Discussion of Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2 Repeated

The Panel recognizes that there is significant potential for misunderstanding of the words for “father” and “son” when applied to God, and that in languages shaped by Islamic cultures, the potential is especially acute and the misunderstandings likely to prove especially harmful to the reader’s comprehension of the gospel. Therefore, in case of difficulties, the Panel recommends that translators consider the addition of qualifying words and/or phrases (explanatory adjectives, relative clauses, prepositional phrases, or similar modifiers) to the directly-translated words for “father” and “son,” in order to avoid misunderstanding. For example, as the biblical context allows, the word for “father” might be rendered with the equivalent of “heavenly Father” when referring to God, and the word for “son” might be rendered with the equivalent of “divine Son,” “eternal Son,” or “heavenly Son” when referring to Jesus. The Panel also encourages translators to use paratextual material to clarify and avoid misunderstanding in these cases.

Rationale for the Recommendation

- a. People in Islamic contexts may misunderstand father/son language as implying that God had sexual relations in order to beget Jesus, and they are taught to abhor the possibility that God could have a Son.**

Three well-known statements from the Qu’ran are worth noting here:

5:116 claims, “And behold! God will say, ‘O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, ‘Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God’?””

17:111 affirms, “Praise be to God, Who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) dominion: Nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation, yea, magnify Him for His greatness and glory!”

19:88-92 argues, “They say: ‘(God) Most Gracious has begotten a son!’ Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, That they should invoke a son for (God) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of (God) Most Gracious that He should

beget a son.”

These passages (especially the third one) illustrate the depth of the Muslim abhorrence to the idea of God possessing a son, and also the degree to which that abhorrence is based on a misunderstanding of what the Bible actually teaches about Jesus’ relationship to his Father. In light of this severe misunderstanding and the abhorrence stemming from it, translators need to take great steps to avoid miscommunication when describing God as Father and Jesus as Son. While the Panel believes (as stated in recommendation 1) that it is not permissible to seek non-direct translations of the words for “father” and “son,” the Panel also believes that translators can and should take other steps to avoid this misunderstanding.

b. There is biblical precedent for the use of qualifying adjectives or phrases to avoid misunderstanding of the word for “father” when applied to God.

As indicated above, “father” language describing God is very prominent in the book of Matthew, occurring in Mt 5:16, throughout chapters 5-7, 10:20, 10:29-33, 11:25-27, 12:50, 13:43, 15:13, 16:17, 16:27, 18:10, 18:14, 18:19, 18:35, 20:23, 23:9, 24:36, 25:34, 26:29, 26:39, 26:42, 26:53, and 28:19. Also noteworthy in Matthew is the frequency with which the word for “father” is modified by the adjective for “heavenly” (see Mt 5:48, 6:14, 6:26, 6:32, 15:13, 18:35) or the prepositional phrase for “in heaven” (see Mt 5:16, 5:45, 6:1, 6:9, 7:11, 7:21, 10:32-33, 12:50, 16:17, 18:10-19, 23:9). These qualifying constructions serve to avoid a potential misunderstanding of the word “father.” It is referring not to human fathers but to God. But the fact that Jesus (as reported by Matthew) uses phrases such as “heavenly Father” rather than just the word for “God” indicates that he wants to *refer* to God while showing that God is in a fatherly relationship with us.

Translators working in Muslim areas may need to follow the same practice in order to avoid a greater misunderstanding. The danger is not that Muslims would take these

passages as referring to human fathers, but that they would understand them to imply that God sexually begat the Son. To avoid this misunderstanding, translators may need to use a phrase equivalent to “heavenly Father,” “Father in heaven,” or “spiritual Father,” whenever the word for “father” is applied to God in Scripture. Alternatively, translators may find that phrases equivalent to “God who is Father” or “God who is the true Father” succeed in avoiding misunderstanding while still retaining the most direct equivalent to the word for “father.”

In light of this biblical precedent regarding the use of qualifiers for the word “father,” the Panel believes that when necessary, translators may legitimately follow a similar pattern when translating the word for “son” or the phrase for “Son of God” in reference to Jesus. In order to avoid the misconception that Jesus was physically generated from God, translators may render the phrase for “Son of God” with the equivalent of “heavenly Son of God” or “divine Son of God.” Translators may also want to consider other possibilities for rendering the genitive idea in the phrase for “Son of God.” Phrases equivalent to “the Son belonging to God,” “the Son who comes from God,” or “the Son who derives from God” may help to avoid misunderstanding, while retaining the most direct equivalent to the word “son.”

Again, the Panel wishes to encourage translators also to make use of paratextual information to bring clarity and avoid damaging misconceptions.

Discussion of Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3 Repeated

The Panel recognizes that the phrase for “Son of God” has varied nuances in its different New Testament contexts, especially in light of the Old Testament background to those contexts. In the case of most languages, the biblical context should enable the reader to discern the nuances of the phrase for “Son of God,” and translators need not make adjustments to the translated text, although they may want to indicate nuances of meaning in paratextual material. But, when and if necessary, the Panel recommends that translators convey nuances of meaning from the biblical context in the translation through the addition of qualifying words and/or phrases (explanatory adjectives, relative clauses, or prepositional phrases). For example, the phrase for “Son of God” in a context of Messianic kingship might be rendered with the equivalent of “anointed Son of God” or “royal Son of God.”

Rationale for Recommendation 3

- a. There are several important aspects to the Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman background to the way the phrase for “Son of God” is used in the Bible.**

First, the phrase grows out of the Ancient Near Eastern concept of covenant, in which the suzerain (king) called his vassals (subjects) “sons,” and the vassals called the suzerain “father” (e.g. 2 Kings 16:7). Correspondingly, the suzerain was himself regarded as a son of the gods. This background informs the understanding of Israel’s messianic king as God’s son in Psalm 2, Psalm 110, and 2 Sam 7:14, and these passages in turn inform Luke 1:32 (“he will be called the Son of the Most High”) and the quotation of 2 Sam 7:14 in Heb 1:5. In light of this background, the phrase for “Son of God” in the New Testament sometimes has the connotation of “royal Son.”

Second, and closely related, the Jewish eschatological hope that God would in the last days restore his fatherly rule over his people is part of the background to the developing understanding of the Messiah during the Old Testament. In light of this background, the

phrase for “Son of God” in the New Testament sometimes has the connotation of “Messianic Son” or “anointed Son.”

Third, the idiom “son of X” in ancient Near Eastern (and to some degree also in Greco-Roman) literature grows out of the fact that in the ancient world, fathers determined much of the identity of their sons. A son followed his father’s trade, inherited the family estate, led much the same sort of life, etc. This background informs the usage of the phrase for “son of X” in the Old Testament and in certain New Testament passages as well. “Son of X” means “similar to X because one is derived from X and possesses the same characteristics.” Sons are like fathers because they come from their fathers and, to use later terminology, have the same nature as their fathers. By extension, the phrase for “son of X” may mean simply “possessing the characteristic X” (e.g., “sons of thunder” in Mark 3:17, “son of encouragement” in Acts 4:36). In light of this background, in certain New Testament passages, the phrase for “son of God” may mean little more than “similar to God.” This is especially the case when the phrase “son of God” is on the lips of a Gentile, as in Mark 15:39. The centurion’s statement that Jesus was “the Son of God” may mean that Jesus was like God, that he had characteristics the centurion associated with God, such as righteousness/innocence (cf. Luke 23:47). Jesus, he thought, was “the righteous Son of God.”

In most cases, it may be sufficient to explain these nuances in paratextual material, without adding anything further to the translated phrase for “Son of God.”

b. The biblical precedent of adding qualifying adjectives or phrases to the word for “father” may be followed to add nuance to the word for “son” when applied to Jesus.

In the Panel’s discussion of recommendation 2, it was indicated that in Matthew, Jesus often adds the word for “heavenly” or the phrase for “in heaven” to the word for “father” when speaking of God. The Panel believes that this precedent can be followed not only to avoid misunderstanding, but also to add nuance to the readers’

understanding of the phrase for “Son of God.” Phrases equivalent to “royal Son,” “anointed Son,” or even “righteous Son” will help convey the nuances of the uses in the individual contexts, when translators deem that simply explaining the nuances in the paratextual material will not be sufficient.

It should be noted that in order *both* to avoid misunderstanding *and* to convey appropriate nuance, it may be necessary for translators to use longer phrases such as the equivalents of “divine royal Son of God” or “royal Son who derives from God.”

- c. Conveying varied nuances of meaning through different qualifiers, while still retaining the same direct translations of the words for “father” and “son,” preserves consistency and enables readers to see the connection between various passages referring to God as Father and Son.**

The SIL Best Practices statement 3.2 emphasizes the importance of maintaining concordance as much as possible, but not at the expense of comprehension. The Panel believes that consistency and comprehension do not need to be at odds with one another and that following this recommendation will enable translators to preserve both. The Panel also emphasizes that preserving concordance regarding words that refer to Jesus is very important. It is important that readers see the various nuances of the phrase for “Son of God.” It is equally crucial that readers recognize that the one who is righteous, anointed, royal, etc., possesses these functions as God’s unique Son.

Discussion of Recommendation 4

Recommendation 4 Repeated

The panel recognizes that some of the disagreement over the translation of the word for “father” and the phrase for “Son of God” has resulted from overloading the translation by attempting to address too many possible meanings and misunderstandings. The panel recommends that in addition to translating Scripture, translators consider additional ways of communicating the message of Jesus to Muslim audiences. These can include such literary genres as *tafsir* (commentary), *qusas al-anbiya* (stories of the prophets), and *sirah* (life stories). But these should not be considered or presented as biblical translations unless they abide by the first three recommendations.

Rationale for Recommendation 4

a. Translation does not stand alone in the process of evangelism and discipleship.

The Panel recognizes that the challenges of communicating divine familial relationships to Muslims are not primarily linguistic, and therefore does not consider that such challenges can be overcome by translation alone. Other means can and should be utilized alongside the translation of Scripture. These means can and should give due attention to Muslim ways of communicating, including such literary genres as *tafsir* (commentary), *qusas al-anbiya* (stories of the prophets) and *sirah* (life stories). Christians may prepare culturally-sensitive presentations of the life of Jesus and other Christian events and use these in ministry. Because these are stories drawn from the Bible, rather than translations of the Bible itself, translators and ministers may see fit to describe God and Jesus more generically in these stories, rather than using the divine familial terms. These stories could be used to introduce Muslims to the gospel message while delaying dealing with the potential misunderstandings that the divine familial terms present until inquirers have shown more interest in Jesus.

In any specific case, options or possibilities to use stories drawn from the Bible need to be carefully researched. Such genres should never be confused with or presented as translations of the Bible and should not be called *Injil* (Gospel) or the “Meaning of the Gospel.”

b. Muslim and Christian views of Scripture and translation differ significantly.

An additional challenge is that the Muslim view of Qur’anic translation differs from the Christian view of Bible translation. The Qur’an is seen as untranslatable, whereas the translatability of the Bible is seen by many Christians as part of the Good News. Because of this a Christian view of Bible translation may need to be explained in introductions to translations.

Furthermore, Muslims are familiar with editions of the Qur’an in which the Arabic text is presented on one side of the page and a translation (called the “Meaning” because in Muslim view the text is not translatable) is presented on the opposite side. Translators may wish to adopt this format for Bible translations, because it is a familiar and comfortable format for Muslims. In such a format, the Greek or Hebrew original with interlinear translations of the words can be placed on one side of the page, and a literal, or alternately, meaning-based culture-sensitive translation may be placed on the opposite page. Here, however, one must note an important difference of opinion regarding the status of what is placed on the opposite side from the original-language text. From a Muslim point of view, the material on the opposite side is the “Meaning of the Gospel.” But from a Christian point of view, the translated Gospel/Bible *is* the Gospel/Bible. Therefore, the Panel affirms that such a translation, even if it is called “Meaning” in accordance with Muslim custom, should follow the three recommendations above for rendering the divine familial terms.

Postscript

In our work as a Panel, we have attempted to take into consideration the different sides of the current debate about divine familial terms. We have endeavored to affirm as valid the concern of some translators to do all that is possible to mitigate or remove the severe misunderstandings that the words for “father” and “son” may create in the Muslim world. At the same time, we have also sought to affirm as valid the concern of other translators that the translated text point clearly and consistently to Jesus as God’s unique Son. Our research and deliberations have led us to what we consider to be a biblically-grounded method of preserving both of these concerns. We offer these recommendations with the hope that they will not add to the divisions that currently exist, but that the Holy Spirit may use them to promote a more united and powerful witness on the part of ministers of the gospel in the Muslim world and beyond.

Panel Response to SIL Best Practices Statement

Best Practices Statement	WEA Panel Response
0.1 Bible Translation is an integral part of the worldwide Church's participation in God's mission.	Affirmed
0.2 Our desire is for Scripture in the language that people understand best.	Affirmed
0.3 Scriptures need to be accurate, clear and natural and in a form that is appropriate in the language community.	Affirmed
0.4 The host community plays a key role in translation decisions, including the translation of key terms.	See recommendation 3, 5, 8a and 8e and related discussion.
0.5 While no translation can completely communicate the whole meaning of the original text, the translation must be as accurate as possible, and sufficiently accurate to be accepted by the community as authoritative.	Affirmed
0.6 We affirm the eternal deity of Jesus Christ and require that it be preserved in all translations. Scripture translations should promote understanding of the term "Son of God" in all its richness, including His filial relationship with the Father while avoiding the implication of sexual activity by God as much as possible.	See recommendation 1 and related discussion.
0.7 Given the richness of meaning in the Scriptures and the diversity of audiences, SIL supports various styles of translation. Translations should be evaluated in light of their main intended audience and context.	See recommendations 3, 4, 5, 6, 8c and 8e and related comments.

1.0 What are the principles for choosing between different renderings in translation of divine familial terms?

Best Practices Statement	WEA Panel Response
1.1 Comprehension in the target language determines the choice between renderings, and the rendering used must be in conformity with scholarly, exegetical consensus within Christian orthodoxy.	See recommendations 3, 4, 5, 6, 8c and 8e and related comments.
1.2 Avoid theological bias, but have sufficient depth and integrity to allow for theological reflection.	Clarify the phrase "theological bias" throughout the statement.
1.3 The form or forms used should make it possible to build up the full range of meaning of this term in the source text by observing their use in the various contexts in Scripture.	See recommendation discussion 2b.
1.4 The proposed terms should be carefully researched, tested extensively and evaluated over time as the translation product goes into use.	Affirmed
1.5 There should be a guided process, by the following steps, for working through the rendering options:	See comments on each sub-point under 1.5.
1.5.1 Consider the literal rendering for the text and add necessary paratext, then test (text+ paratext) in the local community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.	See recommendation 1, 4 and 5 and related discussion.
1.5.2 Consider clearly familial, but non-literal options for the text (e.g. "God's one-and-only" [Son implied]) and find several options. For each of these add the necessary paratext, test with community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.	See recommendation 1 and especially "Further Discussion of Potential Translation Decisions Related to Recommendation 1."
1.5.3 Review all options from steps 1&2 and then choose the one with which is most effective in communicating meaning, is most economical, and respects the preference of the intended audience of the translation product.	Reconsider in light of recommendations for 1.5.1 and 1.5.2 above.
1.5.4 If no possible option has been identified through this process, non-literal options for the text may be considered which conserve as much of the familial meaning as possible, provided that the paratext includes the literal form.	See recommendations 2, 3, and 4 and related discussion.
1.6 Throughout the process there should be consultation with other local partners, and the translation consultant needs particular sensitivity not to impose his or her own preferences.	See recommendation 5, 7b1, 8c and 8e.

2.0 What are best practices for making exegetical decisions?

Best Practices Statement	WEA Panel Response
2.1 Exegetical decisions should be made by translation teams, on the basis of thorough Biblical-theological understanding of Scripture, which includes use of original texts, versions, credible commentaries, and respected Biblical scholarship, both local and global, in dialogue with their communities, partner organizations, and respected ecclesial authorities.	See recommendation 5 and 7
2.2 Translation consultants play an important role in supporting the translation process and are expected to operate according to best practices. SIL will hold its consultants accountable for operating in such a manner.	Affirmed

3.0 What are the best practices for establishing concordance with regards to 'Son of God' and familial terminology?

Best Practices Statement	WEA Panel Response
3.1 If necessary the introduction may explain terminology used for 'Son of God' and related familial terminology or direct the reader to the place where such explanations may be found.	Affirmed
3.2 Recognizable concordance (i.e., similarity of rendering in all passages) for the terms 'Son of God' and 'Father' should normally be maintained in the text but should not be insisted upon at the expense of comprehension.	See recommendations 1, 2 and 3 and related discussion.

4.0 Principles for Paratextual Information

Best Practices Statement	WEA Panel Response
4.1 Assumptions:	
<p>4.1.1 A translation of Scripture usually includes a text and paratext. The paratext consists of essential conceptual and background information needed by the readers to understand the translated text. It is produced by the translators with the expectation that the text will not be published without it. Paratextual information may be provided in a variety of ways including glossaries, footnotes, side-notes, mini-articles, section headings, introductions, cross-references, illustrations, and maps. In audio and visual scriptures, necessary paratextual information would be delivered in segment introductions.</p>	See recommendation 4 and related discussion.
4.2 Best practices for the paratext	
<p>4.2.1 The primary purpose of the paratext is to help the reader to infer the intended meaning from the text. It also presents more literal translations of phrases used in the text.</p>	See recommendation 4 and related discussion.
<p>4.2.2 The text and paratext should be crafted and tested together to achieve maximum understanding of the biblical meaning.</p>	See recommendation 4 and related discussion.
<p>4.2.3 When a key term is translated in a literal form in the text, the role of the paratext is to clarify its biblical meaning. When a key term is translated less literally in the text, the role of the paratext is to present a literal form of the key term as well as clarify its meaning.</p>	See recommendation 4 and related discussion.
<p>4.2.4 The paratext may also present common understandings for the reader's consideration, but not teach them as doctrines and practices.</p>	See recommendation 4 and related discussion.

5.0 Principles for different translations for different audiences and purposes

Best Practices Statement	WEA Panel Response
5.1 Where there are two (or more) socio-cultural communities within the same language group, we recognize that multiple translations may be needed.	Affirmed
5.2 The decision should be made on the basis of the widest degree of agreement possible among the stakeholders, ensuring that there is a plurality of significant voices from the language community.	Affirmed
5.3 We recognize the concern that multiple translations following different policies may cause confusion among local sub-communities. Therefore, through an appropriate forum, concerned groups should identify and agree on a strategy for adequate Scripture access for all parties concerned.	Affirmed

6.0 Additional considerations

Best Practices Statement	WEA Panel Response
6.1 For the sake of clarity, transparency and good relationships, any translation that SIL supports needs to be clearly identified as to its nature (literal, transitional, audience specific, etc.).	See recommendations 9 and 10. Additionally, the word "transitional" needs definition for the larger public to understand what is meant by it.
6.2 When working in complex situations, it is especially important to give careful consideration to many significant parameters when a project is initiated, including project <i>skopos</i> (i.e. intended purpose of the translation), organizational relationships and power structures.	Affirmed

Points of Clarification

Clarification for Recommendation #1, page 6

The following two sentences should be considered as one inseparable recommendation.

The WEA Panel (hereafter referred to as “Panel”) recommends that when the words for “father” and “son” refer to God the Father and to the Son of God, these words always be translated with the most directly equivalent familial words within the given linguistic and cultural context of the recipients. In the case of languages that have multiple words for “father” and “son,” translators should choose the most suitable words in light of the semantics of the target language.

Clarification for Recommendation #1, top of page 16:

The recommendation of the Panel that translators use the most direct words possible is quite simple to follow in the case of languages that have only one word for “father” and one word for “son,” or even in languages that have several words but one word dominates semantically.

The word “dominates” is merely intended to indicate an example where the choice may be simple and not to say that when a word is used more often than others it is necessarily the most suitable term.

Clarification for The term “Son by Nature” – page 16

“Son by Nature” is shorthand for the ideas that the son is derived from his father, has a shared identity with his father, is in intimate relationship with his father, and has unique status in relation to his father.

Clarification for Recommendations 5-10

Points 5-10 are intended to strengthen the Best Practices Statement. Wycliffe and SIL may very well be doing everything we propose already, but the Statement does not address these areas, hence our recommendations.

Clarification for Recommendation 9a

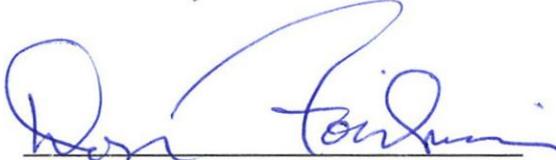
a. *What Wycliffe and/or SIL has done regarding those translations for which Wycliffe or SIL was responsible but which have not followed the Best Practices and the Panel’s recommendations. (This recommendation pertains to the SIL Best Practices statement 6.1.)*

Clarification: This includes what Wycliffe and/or SIL has done and also will do in the future regarding those translations for which they are responsible.

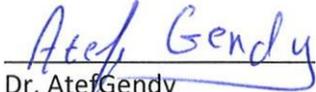
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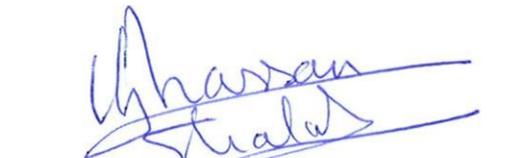

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