Dear brothers and sisters: Last Friday, I dealt briefly with the history of Qur’an compilation. I will continue today with the same subject. I mentioned that the primary collection of the Qur’an took place during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr. During the Caliphate of ‘Uthman the Qur’an was compiled but written without diacritical marks. Thereafter, adjustments were made to make the text more easily legible. Dots were added to certain letters to distinguish them one from another. Diacritical marks were then added and, finally, punctuation in the form of pause marks and circled verse numbering. Critics use the fact that these things were introduced after the Prophet’s [pbuh] death to cast doubt on the text’s authenticity.

Dear brothers and sisters: The authenticity is based on two factors:
1- As mentioned before, the text collected under Caliph Abu Bakr was a series of documents written by scribes who heard it from the Prophet [pbuh] himself. Thus, anything not approved by the Prophet [pbuh] was rejected.
2- In order for any verse to be verified, it had to be memorised by at least two of the companions. Abu Khuzaimah Al-Ansari was an exception because the Prophet [pbuh] equated his witness to that of two men. Once, the Prophet [pbuh] was looking for a companion who had memorised a certain verse and found only him.

None of the companions objected to the new codex. Muslim nations everywhere happily welcomed the achievement of the Caliph ‘Uthman. Several copies were made and ‘Uthman sent them to different Muslim provinces, e.g. Kufa and Hijaz. ‘Uthman ordered that all other copies of the Qur’an be destroyed because some people made notes in them and other copies were incomplete. All new copies were then made from the official text [which was called Mushaf ‘Uthman]. In this way the Qur’an was preserved from change, distortion or loss.

Dear brothers and sisters: The two compilations from the Caliphates of Abu Bakr and ‘Uthman were considered to be the same, taken from the handwritten documents the Prophet [pbuh] dictated to his scribes. After dictating, he had the text read back to him so that he could correct any errors and approve authenticity. No modifications were made during either caliphate. The copies of both compilations remain the same to this day. Gathering the separate documents in one place was the purpose of the first collection, which was made during the reign of Abu Bakr but no complete compilation was made at that time. This process is called in modern terminology a project of compilation. One scholar said: “It is as if you find separate papers, gather them together and tie them with string to prevent them from being scattered.”

Dear brothers and sisters: The third stage was the addition of signs such as dotting and diacritics that were added to the Qur’an after the time of the Prophet [pbuh] and his companions. The dots were added as syntactical marks by Abu Al-Aswad Ad-Doaly during the reign of Mu'awiya Ibn Abi Sufian [661-680 CE]. They were applied to letters by Nasr Ibn Asem and Hayy ibn Ya'amor during the reign of Abd Al-Malik Ibn Marawan [685-705 CE]. These dots do not affect the real words of the Qur’an. Rather, they are tools to assist in reading the Qur’an, especially after many non-Arabs embraced Islam. They distinguished different letters and guided readers to pronounce them correctly. Previously, Muslims had to memorise by ear. As these additions are neither from the Qur’an itself nor from revelation, they are not distortions or modifications of the Qur’an. Scholars declared them among the good innovations that enable proper Qur’an recitation but do not affect the meaning, which is the same with or without the additions.
Dear brothers and sisters: The second stage was the invention of a system of diacritical marks [damma, fataha, kasra] by Al Khalil Ibn Ahmad Al Farahidy [d. 786 CE]. An example of this is: (bismi-ilahi arrahmanirahim). If there were no signs, one could mistakenly say bismu -llahu arrahmanurahim, so these signs help correct pronunciation of the Qur’an. Other signs indicate when one may, must or must not stop. These signs are:

1. ج: It is permissible to stop or to carry on.
2. صلى: It better to carry on.
3. ﷺ: It better to stop.
4. ل: Do not stop.
5. س: Pause without taking breath.
6. م: Stop.
7. .. ..: Stop for one only or carry on without stopping.

There are also divisions of the stop, such as the test stop, the compulsory stop and the optional stop. The last of these is of various kinds; complete [تام], sufficient [كافي], good [حسن] and repulsive [قيبي].

Finally, the arrangement of the Qur’an and other additions, such as basmallah at the beginning of every surah, circled verse numbers, symbols for prostration and marks indicating the ends of theحزب, الأربع and الجزء are all merely aids to reading and recitation. They do not affect meaning. Scholars continue to set rules for the Qur’an and its sciences, such as those of tajweed and different kinds of recitation.

Dear brothers and sisters: The best way to learn the Qur’an and how to recite it properly is as Prophet did with Jibril. Listen to a qualified sheikh or scholar. In this way, one learns proper pronunciation of the letters. This cannot be achieved without a qualified teacher.

Finally, we ask Allah to guide us all.