



#### President

Irfan A. Khan

raoirfanahmad@yahoo.com

#### Vice President

Ghazali Basri

Ghazali.basri@gmail.net

#### Secretary General and

#### Treasurer

Mohammad A. Siddiqi

m-siddiqi@wiu.edu

#### Executive Committee

#### Members

Saleha Abedin, Saudi Arabia

imma@zajil.net

Amir Al-Islam, U. S. A.

Amiralis@aol.com

Zahid Bukhari, U. S. A.

zhb@georgetown.edu

Sulayman Nayang, U. S. A.

Sulaymann@yahoo.com

#### Regional Representatives

##### Africa

Mustafa Y. Ali

moustaphali@yahoo.com

##### Europe

Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid

imamsajid@gmail.com

##### Middle East

Saleha Abedin

imma@zajil.net

##### North America

Sulayman Nayang

Sulaymann@yahoo.com

##### South Asia

Anis Ahmad

anis@riphah.edu.pk

##### Southeast Asia & Pacific (AUSTRALASIA)

Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman

Kamar\_oniah@hotmail.com

# The World Council of Muslims For Interfaith Relations (WCMIR)

NEWSLETTER

WWW.WCMIR.ORG

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## Dialogue of Civilization: Ideals and Realities

I say to the people in the West that if we are proud of the ideals that we aspire - despite closing our eyes to the failure of many of us in living up to those ideals - then we should also be able to appreciate Islamic ideals, without being obsessed by the action of many so-called Muslims.

**Likewise**, I very clearly see the fallacy of those Muslims who speak against the 'West' with great irresponsibility - who would even see the West as a great criminal. They would say that earlier, the Western powers colonized the whole world, killed millions of innocents citizens in the First and Second World Wars and in the Holocaust. The West invented nuclear bomb and used it on innocent citizens. And today also the West wants to dominate the whole world. It would keep its huge stock of nuclear weapons but would not let other nations develop any ability to produce nuclear weapons. And they would add many other charges some of which will be true and some may not be true. Similarly, the people in the West will point fingers to Muslims and Islam and label charges; some of these charges may be true while some may not be true or may lack proper perspective.

So far as the reality is concerned, both the Western World as well as the Muslim World conduct themselves alike - as degenerated faith communities would do - always making high claims but remaining below the mark, in their actual performance.

**The job to be done is, therefore, quite clear: Those who want to engage in dialogue need a strategy and a plan to answer the following question.**

**How can conscientious people in both the parties work together for common ideals, counteracting these realities and save the world which is moving toward self-destruction?**

To be able to correctly answer the above question, one needs to understand that God is, in fact, working on two planes.

**First** is the plane of Innate or Natural Guidance. All the progress in science, technology, art, literature, philosophy, law and, in fact, in all the fields of human life comes also from God. Through this God keeps improving our abilities and skill to understand and live by Divine Guidance. And God still has high expectations from humankind - in spite of all the continuing bloodshed and corruption which continues in the human world.

**Second** is the plane of Revealed Guidance. God is still hopeful that the true followers of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and other prophets and messengers of God, will strive toward the fulfillment of Divine expectations. [As we know, according to the Qur'an, prophets and messengers of God were sent every where in the human world with Divine Guidance. I just mentioned the three most revered messengers in the West.]

In fact the two planes compliment each other. The Divine intention was to awaken the followers of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (and other prophets). God only intended to guide them and help them in their leadership task.

**Contemporary interfaith movements** have to strive hard so that peoples of the world can understand the real purpose of God in giving us the opportunity to live in 21st Century. We have to forge strong alliances to expose people who foster pseudo-religiosity, whether these people are in the West or among the Muslims. True religious people are concerned about all human beings regardless of their color or creed. They are against tyranny, injustice, poverty, hunger, violence; they stand for peace and justice, for love and respect, and for mutual understanding.

The dialogue of civilization can not progress if we do not understand the fact that the ideals of all faith communities are enshrined in the same message that God gave to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad, and all the other prophets. We need to correct our understanding of the "reality," for "When the reality arrives, the falsehood will fade away." (17:81, Qur'an). Let us strive for dialogue; let us struggle for peace.

*Irfan Ahmad Khan, Ph. D.*

President, WCMIR,

Chair, IEP21

Director, Association for Qur'anic Understanding

# News From Across the Globe

## WCMIR – Africa Region Dr. Mustafa Ali

Dr. Mustafa Ali in August 2006, participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Religions and Peace (WCRP) where over 800 delegates and observers from over 100 countries, drawn from the world's religions gathered in Kyoto, Japan for its 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The Assembly endorsed a Declaration on Violence Against Children.

Dr. Ali also participated in celebrations where ninety young persons from 30 countries converged in Assisi, Italy to celebrate 20 years since the late His Holiness Pope John Paul II led world religious leaders to pray for peace. The meeting which took place from 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2006 attracted participants from 12 faith traditions, including the Bahais, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Tenrikyos, Sikhs, Taoists and Zoroastrians, was the first in scale and representation of young people to assemble in Assisi for an interreligious dialogue meeting.

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Dr. Ali joined the United Nations in his capacity as GNRC Coordinator for Africa to mark the United Nations Day for International Peace. During the celebrations that took place on 21<sup>st</sup> September, children and young people flew 'Kites for Peace' in Dar es Salaam, where the group was joined by the other peace lovers and representatives from the United Nations and the Diplomatic Community.

In the coming months, GNRC Africa will hold a training workshop in Zanzibar for GNRC Peace Club Leaders where they will be introduced to Peace Building Methodologies. In early 2007, Dr. Ali will attend an Intercultural Dialogue meeting in Mombasa Kenya, organized by the British Council, and will be attended by scholars and practitioners in Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue from Africa and Asia.

## Reporting from Bangkok, Thailand

Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf, who is the head of the department of religion at the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religion, Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand visited Germany between 10-16 September 2006 at the invitation of the Goethe Institute under German government's "Dialogue with Islamic Culture" program. The aim of the visit was to learn about the efforts undertaken by the German government in the area of religious integration between Christians and Muslims in Germany.

Between 7-11 November 2006, Dr. Yusuf was in Sydney, Australia at the invitation of the Lowy Institute, Sydney to participate in a one-day workshop on, "Islam in Contemporary Thailand" where he delivered a paper on the topic, "Islam and State in Thailand – A Case of Muslim Minority in A Non-Muslim Majority State." In November, 2006, Dr. Yusuf participated in the 3rd

AMAN assembly of the Asian Muslim Action Network at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Jakarta, Indonesia where he organized a workshop on the topic, "Minorities in Asia: Integration or Segregation". The workshop discussed the situation in a number of Asian countries where religious minorities have been caught in dilemmas such as that of maintaining religious identity and way of life at the same time adherence to and loyalty for majority rule. Ruling majority prefers assimilation, minority resist or opt for self determination. The workshop discussed how differing positions create conflict and even lead to loss of lives. The workshop addressed and explored the best possible alternatives in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation states of Asia. There were papers presented on the situation of religious minorities in India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand.

## Inter-civilizational Youth Engagement Program

WCMIR Australasia, together with IEP21, JUST, ABIM and the International Youth Centre, is organizing an Inter-civilizational Youth Engagement program to be held in **Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 17 June to 24 June 2007**. We are inviting about 120 youth leaders, aged between 20 to 25, from all over the world, of various faiths, nationalities, and ethnicity.

The objective is to give these leaders of tomorrow the opportunity and the experience to engage with each other and subsequently to foster networks among themselves and those they represent in the hope of building a more multi-religious and multi-civilizational world tomorrow. The program is interactive in nature with only 5 lectures throughout the one week.

Speakers will be President of WCMIR, Prof Irfan Ahmed Khan, President of IEP21 Dr Jim Kenny, President of JUST Prof. Chandra Muzafar, Regional Representative of Australasia Dr Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, and a special invited guest, Dr. Karen Armstrong. Also in the program will be workshops, visits, building networks, cultural presentations and games. The multi-religious, multi-racial and multi-cultural environment of Malaysia hopefully will give these youths a real life situation of what pluralistic living is all about.

## Inter-religious Seminars

Dr. Kamar Oniah, the Regional Representative of WCMIR Australasia was invited to a few inter-faith programs, local and abroad, the most outstanding being Red Cross International Seminar on Human Security (13-14 June, Kuala Lumpur) and the Catholic National Education Convention of Australia (27-29 September 2006, Sydney). Dr. Ghazali Basri, the Vice President of WCMIR too had participated in interfaith Dialogues at home and abroad, including Indonesia and Iran.

## WCMIR President Visits U. K.

In a meeting held on January 24 at Markfield Center, Leicester, WCMIR president, Dr. Irfan Ahmad Khan, met with WCMIR European Representative, Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid, Dr. Manazir Ahsan, Director General of Islamic Foundation and Chair of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, Chair of the MCB's Interfaith Relations Council, and Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui, one of the founding members of WCMIR.

Dr. Khan briefed the participant about the history, background, and some of the activities of WCMIR since its inception in June 2001. Dr. Irfan emphasized the need for a Europe wide meeting of Interfaith group and people. Dr. Abduljalil Sajid said that WCMIR must work with the representative body of respective countries in Europe in order to advance interfaith activities in Europe. It was agreed that at an appropriate time a Europe-wide meeting will be organized in partnership with some other conference or with other organizations. Dr. Irfan Informed about the International Youth seminar to be held in Malaysia in June and asked for youth participation from Europe.

## WCMIR European representative

attended several meetings, conferences and seminars during the months of October, November and December of 2006. **Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid** participated in a meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders in **Oslo, Norway** and also addressed a gathering of Imams and other Muslim leaders in Oslo. Imam Sajid and his wife Jamila also visited several cities in **Australia** as a guest of Initiatives of Change. Their mission was to build bridges between Muslim and non Muslim Australians. They traveled to seven different cities and met with both Muslim and non Muslim leaders and masses. Imam Sajid also traveled to **Singapore, Indonesia and Fiji** during his bridge building mission.

Imam Sajid emphasized on absolute moral standards set forth in Qur'an and Sunnah and asked Muslims to become practical embodiments of honesty, unselfishness, love, peace and tolerance. He advised Muslims to make meaningful contributions to the society they live in and take full responsibility for their actions. He emphasized upon Islam's focus in creating an all inclusive society and open dialogue with people of all faiths and inclinations.

## WCMIR President and Secretary General hold meetings in Chicago.

During December, 2006 and January, 2007, WCMIR Patron Dr. Hamid Hai hosted two meetings at his residence in Burr Ridge, a Chicago suburb. The December meeting was attended by Dr. Irfan Khan, Dr. Ahmadullah Siddiqi, Dr. Hamid Abdul Hai, and Mr. Munib Hai. ( see next page ——>)



## **Palestine Peace Not Apartheid**

By **Jimmy Carter; Simon & Schuster, 2006.** An American President writes a candid account of his knowledge of the Holy Land and his personal experiences of dealing with the principal actors among Jewish, Palestinian and American leaders. President Carter insists upon Israel to withdraw to pre 1967 borders and stop the apartheid in Palestine. He asks Palestinians and Arab leaders to fully recognize Israel and help stop terrorism.

No American President has said it so clearly as Carter says in this book that, "There will be no substantive and permanent peace for any peoples in this troubled region as long as Israel is violating key U. N. resolutions."

While one may not agree with all that Carter has said in this book, there is no doubt this is a challenging, bold and courageous book. President Carter talks of justice for all peoples in this region; he asserts, rightfully, that there could be no peace without justice.

## **Muslim Women in America. The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today**

By **Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith and Kathleen M. Moore, Oxford University Press, 2006.** The treatment and role of women are among the most discussed and controversial aspects of Islam in the West. One of the most frequently asked questions in interfaith sessions is the status of women in Islam and the role they could play in a Muslim society. Even though Muslim women are increasingly becoming more visible in American Muslim endeavors, the stereotype about them continues to cloud their image as well as the image of Islam in the West in general and America in particular.

The authors, three leading women scholars of Islam in the U. S., "look at the ways in which American Muslim women have tried to create new paradigms of Islamic womanhood..." The book surveys the various ways, both in thought and in action, in which Muslim women in America are engaged in Islamic discourses both within and outside of the Muslim community.

## **Jesus and Muhammad The Parallel Sayings** Edited

by **Joey Green, Seastone, Berkeley, California, 2003.** This is a book that presents the saying of Jesus (PBUH) from the New Testament and the parallel Islamic teachings either from Qur'an or from the Hadith. These quotes clearly show that the core values of Islam and Christianity — love, peace, compassion, forgiveness, and repentance— are essentially the same. No one can deny the theological differences in the core beliefs of the two religions; however, as says Dr. Kenneth Atkinson in his introduction to the book, "Christians and Muslims have much wisdom to teach one another."

In his foreword to the book, Former ISNA Secretary General and now the Director of ISNA's Office of Outreach and Interfaith notes that, "After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, we who treasure peace and freedom feel an intense desire to strengthen the bonds between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This modest book sends a powerful message of respect for religious pluralism, coupled with the challenge for us all to discover the core values we share."

### **Visit Our Website at WWW.WCMIR.ORG**

**Send your feedback and comments to further improve the website.**

**We will designate one page for each region. Regional representatives are requested to send necessary information and material for their respective web pages. All of you are encouraged to send your activities reports and announcements that may be posted on the site. For all site related matters please e-mail to m-siddiqi@wiu.edu**

**WCMIR Chicago** (...Continued from the prev. page) The meeting considered various proposals forwarded by Dr. Aslam Abdullah and agreed that the International Iqbal institute for Research, Education and Dialogue as well as the North American Association for Muslim Professionals and Scholars (NAAMPS) could be the co-sponsors of the WCMIR US regional conference. Participants also agreed with Dr. Abdullah's suggestions about the topics to be discussed during the conference. The meeting decided to invite few more brothers and sisters from the greater Chicago area before deciding further about WCMIR, USA.

Another meeting of WCMIR was held again on January 28th, 2007. Dr. Hamid Hai graciously hosted the meeting at his residence in Burr Ridge, Illinois. In addition to the participants of the previous meetings, Dr. Zia Usman, Dr. Shahid Siddiqi, Brother Azam Nizamuddin, Dr. Nusba Parveen, Sister Atiya Usman and Sister Nilofer Hai also participated in the second meeting. A detailed discussion took place about making WCMIR more relevant to the interfaith work in the U. S. in general and Chicago area and the Midwest in particular. Brother Azam Nizamuddin pointed out that there is a need to revisit the issue of WCMIR's mission, vision and objectives within the context of Interfaith work in the U. S. Dr. Shaihd Siddiqi and other participants also agreed that we need to more specifically define WCMIR mission and objectives for WCMIR, USA before we could organize a conference. Brother Azam agreed to provide a short write up for further discussion and action. Later in his write up Brother Azam emphasized the need to develop a document for dialogue for the 21st century.

### **Inter-Community Peace Initiative (ICPI), India**

Professor Iqbal Ahmad Ansari, convener and coordinator of ICPI and a founding member of WCMIR, held a meeting at Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, India on 10th February, 2007. The purpose of the meeting was to adopt a common minimum agenda for protection of civilians during all situations of use of force by any party. The meeting discussed a draft declaration for the protection of innocent persons during armed hostilities. It also discussed the need to develop institutional mechanism for peaceful resolution of disputes within a country as well as between countries. It was decided to launch a campaign under the name of 'Shanti Pahal' as part of the ICPI's initiatives. Shri Babu Lal Sharma of Gandhi Peace Foundation will be the convener of the campaign. Dr. Rajiv Vora, Dr. N. K. Afridi, Dr. Kusum Lata Chadda, and Mr. Faisal Khan will be the co-convener. Dr. Iqbal Ansari will continue to coordinate all program and activities.

### **Dr. Hamid Abdul Hai, WCMIR Patron, writes from Montana**

that, "After starting work in Great Falls, Montana, about two years ago, I was alhamdulillah able to form an interfaith group. Although it is a small town (population 60,000), I was fortunate to get together with representatives of most religions, including Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Bahai, Jewish, and several denominations of Christians, in addition to Muslims. It has been an active group. We meet every month, and usually have a presentation by a member of a particular faith group. On occasion we have had discussions on a particular topic such as after-life, determinism, how to deal with other faith groups, etc. It has been a very friendly and cooperative group, and we have learnt a lot and enjoyed the discussions and presentations. We also participated in a "Food for the Poor" campaign, joining with several churches for this purpose. Many people in this town had never had a chance to interact with a Muslim before, and because of this work some churches have had me give presentations on Islam. The local Jewish group asked for a presentation on the Qur'an. It has been a very positive experience for all. One has the opportunity in these forums to correct the numerous misrepresentations about Islam, answer questions and clarify issues regarding Islam. My permanent base is still in Chicago, though I go and do professional work in other states. On those weekends in which I am in Chicago, I try to keep in touch with other interfaith groups in Chicago as well."

### **ATTENTION READERS**

Please send your reports (300 words maximum) and any interfaith focused article (500 words maximum) to **m-siddiqi@wiu.edu**. All files must be in MS Word. The next issue of the Newsletter will be published insha Allah in May, 2007. You may also send a detailed position paper on an interfaith focused issue. Position papers may be put on our website at the sole discretion of WCMIR Executive Committee.

# Dr. Asad Husain: A Tireless Interfaith Worker, Activist, And Leader

## More Than Half A Century of Community Service in the United States



Dr. Asad Husain came to the U. S. in 1954 with an M. A. from Patna University, Bihar, India. In the U. S. he got another M. A. in journalism and a third in international relations. He earned his Ph. D. from University of Minnesota in 1965. Dr. Husain joined the Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago in 1969 where his distinguished career as a professor of political science lasted for 29 years. His first book, *British India's Relations with the Kingdom of Nepal, 1857-1947* (George Allen & Unwin Publishers) was published in 1970 and the second, *Conflict in Asia: Case of Nepal* was printed in 1979. He also has many scholarly papers to his credit. His latest book that he co-authored with Prof John Woods and Dr.

Javeed Akhtar, *Muslims in America: Opportunities and Challenges*, was published in 1996 by the International Strategy and Policy Institute (ISPI). In this book he co-authored along with his son, Imran Husain, a detailed article, "A brief history and demographics of Muslims in the United States." He has also contributed a chapter on Muslims in Chicago in Yvonne Haddad's book on *Muslim Communities in North America*. Dr. Husain also published, along with his wife Dr. Asifa Anwar, a comprehensive annotated bibliography of literature on issues related to Muslims in South Asia covering 200 years.

Dr. Asad Husain is not only a thorough Academician and a scholar, he is also a community leader and an activist. He is among the founders of a number of important organizations both in this country and abroad including the Consultative Committee of Indian Muslims (CCIM), the Muslim Community Center of Chicago (the MCC), the American Federation of Muslims from India (AFMI), and the Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, based Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs.

At Northeastern, Dr. Husain founded the Summer Institute of Islamic Studies in 1983 and successfully directed it for about two decades. The Institute served high school teachers in Illinois in orienting them with the basic teachings of Islam and in preparing them better teach their students subjects related to Islam, Muslim culture and the Middle East. As its director emeritus, Dr. Husain still contributes to enhance people's understanding of Islam.

DR. Asad Husain was instrumental in reviving the Council for the World Parliament of Religions (CPWR) and played an active role in hosting the conference in 1993 after it was first convened in 1893. Dr. Husain served on CPWR Board of Trustees until his health allowed him to actively participate. He worked closely with Catholic leaders to establish Catholic Theological Union and the Cardinal Bernardin Center.

Dr. Asad Husain's close interaction with Catholics won him the honor and recognition from the Late Pope John Paul II who honored him with the 'Papal Knighthood' award which was founded in 1909. He is the only Muslim to receive such an honor from the Pope.

Dr. Asad Husain played a major role in convening the first-ever Jewish-Muslim conference at the Glenco, Illinois based synagogue in 1995. He along with Imam Warith Deen Muhammad and many other Muslims participated in a day-long deliberation with Jewish Rabbis from all over the United States in understanding each other's faiths. Despite his failing health he still tries to participate in interfaith related activities and encourages people to have patience, tolerance and courage to deal with issues rationally and to the best advantage of all parties concerned. He attended, in 2003, an important national interfaith conference at Sacred Heart University. The conference was the last in a series of conferences on Jewish, Christian and Muslim dialogue. There he presented, along with Dr. Mohammad A. Siddiqi, a paper on "What do We want Others to Teach About the Islamic Ethical Traditions." The paper was later printed in a book, *What Do We Want The other To Teach About US?* Published, in 2006, by the Sacred Heart University Press.

In 1987, Dr. Asad Husain was appointed to serve as President of the American Islamic College in Chicago. He was AIC's president until 2002. Dr. Husain still hopes to resolve the problems of 'Stranded Pakistanis' in Bangladesh. He is the Vice President of the Resettlement Project. The International Strategy and Policy Institute honored him, in 2005, with a Life Time Achievement award recognizing his numerous services to the community at large.

Dr. Asad Husain lives in Wilmette, Illinois and aspires to help remove ignorance, poverty, and hunger from the world. His message is very simple: **Live and let others live in peace and with love.**

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## An Ethical Way to End the Iraq War

### A call for action by the Network of Spiritual Progressives

(For more details go to [www.tikkun.org/Iraqpeace](http://www.tikkun.org/Iraqpeace))

Signed by prominent Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders including Rabbi Michael Lerner, Rev. Tony Campolo, Sister Joan Chittister, Rev. John and Susan Gregory Davis, Rabbi Stephen B. Jacobs, and Dr. Irfan Ahmad Khan, this memorandum reminds American to accelerate their efforts to end the war in Iraq. It asks all Americans to strengthen Congressional resolve to end the war by contacting their representatives and asking them to cut funding for the war in Iraq. The ethical way to end the war is a bold suggestion to President George W. Bush for ending the war in Iraq in line with faith based traditions. It calls for a three pronged strategy.

**I. The War is wrong; Repentance is Necessary.** The remedy for wrong-doing begins with repentance. Therefore we propose that President George W. Bush go to the United Nations and confess that based on reports from intelligence experts, he believed that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Those reports were wrong and hundreds of thousands of innocent people have been killed and entire cities have been devastated. For the sufferings and deaths that have come from this invasion the President should ask for forgiveness. In case the President is unable or unwilling to pursue this path, we ask the Congress to pass a resolution rejecting the strategy of domination and embracing the strategy of generosity, and calling upon the world's peoples to forgive our society for the destructive path it has followed. It should then send representatives to address the U. N. and convey this appeal for forgiveness on behalf of the American people.

**II. We should call upon the Arab League to replace the U. S. and British forces with Arab soldiers.** Fellow Arabs know the language, understand the culture, and especially the religion of the people of Iraq far better than do our own soldiers, who are usually perceived as modern-day imitators of the Crusaders who once devastated Muslim countries. The U. S. and Britain should withdraw our forces as Arab forces take our place, give our bases to those forces, and require that any U. S. corporation operating in Iraq give at least the majority of its profits to the task of Iraqi reconstruction.

**III. Rebuild Iraq and launch a Global Marshall Plan: Generosity beats domination as a strategy for Homeland Security.** It is not enough to say, "We're sorry." We must commit financially for rebuilding Iraq. This financial commitment is little compared to two billion dollars a week the war is presently costing. The U. S. should commit at least 1% of its Gross Domestic Product each year for the next twenty years toward the goal of eliminating global (and domestic) poverty, homelessness, inadequate health care, inadequate education, and for repairing the environment. This provides a major step toward a strategy of generosity which is key to rebuilding respect and trust for the United States. It is this kind of generosity which is required by the Scriptures of all Abrahamic religions and should be pursued not only because it helps increase American security and respect for America around the world, but because it is morally appropriate and religiously mandated.

Please donate generously. Make checks/drafts/money orders payable to WCMIR and mail it to WCMIR, P. O. Box 142, Macomb, IL 61455, U. S. A. Donations are tax deductible for U. S. residents. All checks/drafts/M. O. must be drawn on a U. S. bank only.