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The World Council of Muslims For Interfaith Relations (WCMIR)

NEWSLETTER

WWW.WCMIR.ORG

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Approaches to inter-faith dialogue

Let me begin by saying that there is no inter-faith without faith. A meaningful dialogue is only possible when people have a deep conviction that their faith has something to offer to the wider society in which they live. In dialogue, mutual understanding cannot be strengthened unless both convergence and divergence are held in a creative relationship.

Inter-faith dialogue is not based on a model of negotiation between parties who have conflicting interests and claims. Rather it sees its role as a process of mutual empowerment for the faiths involved. It is about engagement in public concerns and the joint pursuit of social justice, human dignity and constructive action on behalf of the common good of all citizens. In this endeavour followers of faiths are expected to draw upon their spiritual resources. In fact the demands that our faiths put on us, in a simple and straightforward manner, are demands that require enormous courage and charity.

On many occasions, Muslims have asked, what is the use of inter-faith dialogue? We have our religion, and the only meaningful contact with other religions is in doing *da'wah* (i.e. giving the message of Islam to those who are not Muslims or who are lapsed Muslims). It has been said that dialogue with other faiths is 'a waste of time' - and especially so with Christians. They 'are trying to reduce the impact of *da'wah*' by involving Muslims in dialogue.

Let us be very clear that *da'wah* is about 'communication' and 'invitation' to Islam and not about conversion. Dialogue, on the other hand, is about talking with, and not simply talking about, people of other faiths, beliefs and persuasions. The reality is that the differences of religions are the plan of God, and it is going to remain so forever. The human burden is to connect with the others in dignity and with respect.

Here are just two reasons why Muslims should participate in dialogue with other faiths, and with Christians in particular. **Firstly**, Christianity is an important part of western society and culture. It is one of the defining forces of Western civilization. Despite its denominational variations and historical developments, the concepts of God, prophethood, sin and salvation are overwhelmingly provided by Christianity. In fact it has provided a soul for Europe. Ethics and morals in the West have a strong connection with Judeo-Christian traditions on the one hand, and with Greco-Roman civilization on the other. Therefore, Muslims who want to engage in *da'wah* have to grasp the understanding of the Judeo-Christian perspective of God, revelation, prophets, sin and salvation. Once Muslims study these aspects of society, they are at once engaged in a dialogue not only with Christians, but also with the West and the Western perceptions of all that religion represents. For those who believe that there is an urgent need to understand the culture in which we live, maintaining a dialogue with Western non-Muslim society becomes imperative. **Secondly**, there is a common thread that links so many faiths to God. Those who believe in God, despite the fact that their confessional identity is different, are under obligation to join hands in a process where people of diverse faiths can come together. This is in order to face mutually perceived problems, such as ecology, social and moral issues, the value of education, use and abuse of the doctrine of human rights, the exploitation of women, child labour, etc. These are just a few of the important issues about which we could engage with others. In other words, the areas which the Qur'an describes as *ma'ruf* (good) and *munkar* (bad) are the very areas of our engagement in dialogue.

Dr. Ataulloh Siddiqui

Founding Member, WCMIR

Director of Marfkfield Institute of Higher Education, Leicester, U. K.

President of Christian-Muslim Forum in England,

Founding member of the 'Leicester Council of Faiths' (estd.1986)

News From Across the Globe

World Peace begins in Heathen, (Korea) in the Bell Park of Peace for Life

Dr. Irfan Ahmad Khan, President of WCMIR, represented the Islamic World at the World Peace Bell Park that symbolizes world peace in Korean peninsula. The bell will ring, hopefully, after one year at the unification of Korea. The Peace Bell will be smelted from shell cases and bomb fragments from DMZ and divided regions. On Oct. 30, 2007, the World Peace Bell Park had its ground-breaking ceremony which was attended by World religious leaders represented in the Peace Council. The World Peace Bell Park stands by the side of the Peace Dam which was built in 1990 in reaction to a dam in North Korea that posed a threat to the people of Seoul if the water was released all at once. It is built at the edge of Lake Parich at the bottom of which several thousand Koreans, Chinese and US soldiers are buried.

Dr. Irfan also attended the Niwano Peace Foundation Committee meeting, held in Tokyo, Japan in September, 2007, to decide the outstanding international award for peace. In July he attended an international conference on "Globalization for the Common Good," held in Istanbul, Turkey. He also visited many cities in India and Pakistan and attended various interfaith meetings.

ISNA Office of Interfaith and Community Alliances,

in conjunction with the Union for Reform Judaism, has helped in creating a dialogue guide for mosques and synagogues to facilitate understanding between the two faith groups. This initiative hopes to provide a vital link between the two religions. The dialogue guide will be implemented in communities where there is both a mosque and a synagogue interested in participating.

WCMIR and IEP Meet in Chicago to Discuss the 2009 International Conference on Globalization for the Common Good.

Dr. Irfan A. Khan, Dr. Mohammad Siddiqi, Dr. Hamid Abdul Hai, and Dr. Abdullah Ahsan met with Mr. Jim Kenny and his colleagues from the International Engagement Project (IEP) in the last week of December, 2008 in Chicago to discuss about the Eighth Annual Conference of the Globalization for the Common Good. The conference will be held in July 2009 at Loyola University campuses in Chicago. President of the University has approved the request to be the major sponsor of the conference. WCMIR agreed to be among the co-sponsors.

WCMIR European Representative Imam Dr. Abduljalil Sajid

visited 36 times various European and Scandinavian countries for Interfaith during 2007. He chaired European and Muslim Dialogue meetings in Brussels. Dr. Sajid also visited Mexico City for 11 Sep Memorial and to give a lecture at Monterrey University. He was also invited by East-West Institute of New York to speak about "Islam and Roots of Radicalization." Imam Abduljalil Sajid is masha Allah very active in the interfaith work and currently the Chairman of Muslim Council for Religious and Racial Harmony, UK (MCRRH), Chairman, National Association of British Pakistanis (NABPAK), Chairman Religions for Peace UK and Deputy President of European WCRP, Chairman Taskforce for 2008 European year of Inter-cultural Dialogue, International Secretary World Congress of Faiths (WCF), Adviser to European Council of Religious Leaders/Religions for Peace (ECRL), Adviser to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) Europe and International Affairs Committee (EIAC), and Link Officer Brighton and Hove Interfaith Contact Group (IFCG) for National and International Inter-faith matters.

A prayer for Peace from Brother S. A. Rahman, Pakistan.

We all need to pray for one another, and to love one another. We should always pray for the safety, peace, love and brotherhood for people all over the world. Too bad we can't have an independence day for the entire world: A day of freedom from ignorance, hatred, war, illusions, power and control. A day where we can all love each other as human beings and toss away the weapons of war, and cast out our fears and hatreds from our hearts into the graves. We must mourn the graves of the innocents all over the world, and give the children of the world the hope of a peaceful, loving and beautiful world.

MY PRAYER FOR PEACE

Merciful God, please give to peoples of the world, the required wisdom and determination, to forgive and forget the bitterness of the past and learn to live in peace like brothers and sisters, by condemning the divisions and hatreds created in us (A'men) .

Dr. Iqbal A. Ansari Recognized and Honored

by the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Aligarh, India during the Republic Day Celebrations on January 26, 2008. Professor Ansari, a founding member of WCMIR and a retired professor of AMU, was among the three distinguished former professors of AMU who were felicitated with mementoes and recognized for their lifetime achievements to serve the university and the community at large. On December 10th, 2007, Professor Iqbal Ansari was presented with the "Citation of Excellence" award by the Center for Promotion of Human Rights Teaching and Research, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India on the occasion of 'International Human Rights Day' celebrations. Dr. Ansari is a renowned human rights scholar, activist, and leader. (iqbalansari35@gmail.com)

Dr. Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, Regional Representative for WCMIR Australasia

writes that WCMIR Australasia together with the World Movement for a Just World (JUST), the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), the World Assembly of Muslim Youth of Malaysia (WAMY) and IEP 21 organized a program, "Inter-Civilizational Youth Engagement Program (IYEP)" for five days, from 17th to 20th June 2007 (See full report below). Dr. Kamar Oniah had programs with Muslims and Catholics of Cotabato, Philippines from 24th to 30th June 2007 and initiated the formation of inter-faith networks between them. She found the communities very receptive to the idea and eager to work for a lasting engagement and cooperation. Cotabato is among the trouble spots in the Philippines where political struggle expresses itself into inter-faith and inter-community conflicts.

Inter-Civilizational Youth Engagement Project (IYEP 2007) Review (By Hafsa Ahsan).

On June 17th to June 20th, 2007 the first annual Inter-civilizational Youth Engagement Project (IYEP) Conference took place in Kajang, Malaysia. From thirteen different countries all over the world, 50 youth got together in the hope to build a future to establish firmer ties among different countries and a more peaceful future. Renowned speakers like Ms. Karen Armstrong, Dr. Irfan A. Khan, Mr. Jim Kenney, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar and Dr. Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman came to speak on different topics addressing the theme of the conference, "Building a Civilization of Peace." The conference was sponsored by different organizations like the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), the Inter-Religious Engagement Project for the 21st Century (IEP 21), the World assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), and the World Council of Muslims for Inter-faith Relations (WCMIR). The conference went with much success and helped the participants network and establish ties. It also helped motivate and guide them to help make a difference in themselves and their communities. There is much optimism on how the participants will carry out what they have learned and hopefully influence others.

Dr. Iqbal Ansari writes from India that, "We have continued advocacy of Shanti Pahal's Citizens Declaration on Protection of Innocent Persons During Conflicts. A Memorandum on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights in India was submitted to the Regional Hearing organized by Eminent Jurists' Panel of the International Commission of Jurists in New Delhi. Citizens for Peace and Human Rights (CPHR) was constituted at Aligarh on 9th September 2007 whose aims and objectives include promotion of inter-community understanding, tolerance and mutual respect and advocacy of dialogue for peaceful resolution of inter-group conflicts and disputes. Gave a lecture on 'Culture and religion as resources for building peace based on human rights norms' in an International Conference on 'Power of Peace in a Globalizing World' organized in New Delhi by the Institute of Objective Studies in November 2007."

Prayer Is Part of American Identity

Dr. Sulayman Nyang

A number of questions can be raised about the National Prayer Breakfast and its relevance to the American experience and the American dream of being a better society and a God-loving community of believers.

I personally believe that bringing together national leaders in the religious community to pray together in appreciation of the wealth and material blessings of the society is commendable. Unless we are a nation of disbelievers who do not see any need to show gratitude to the Creator, prayer services are to be expected.

Another reason why prayer is needed is to show appreciation for our collective endeavor to serve our families and communities throughout the country in the firm hope that life without sacrifice is empty and cooperation without celebration of the good and the bad in this life is meaningless.

Since the beginning of this republic many an American has looked up to the heavens and sang praises to the Almighty. This pattern of expressing joy and gratitude will not disappear from this land. Our presidents have made it a part of their political discourses in their national addresses and many of our religious leaders do not hesitate a moment to send this message to their congregations. Whenever these

national leaders come together they reaffirm the collective American interest in thanking their Creator. They also reinforce the collective American recognition of the precarious nature of our existence and the primacy of hope and the life-inspiring power of prayers.

As an American Muslim I join other Americans in prayer at this time in our history.

I pray that Allah (God), the Creator of heaven and earth and the Master of the Day of Judgment, will guide our leaders and inspire Americans and other human beings to appreciate the power of love and the moral imperative of personal and collective responsibility. In my humble way I call upon Him to accept the prayers of all of us who care to pray, and to accept the inner feelings and thoughts of those who remain silent and quiet in their appreciation of the material success of their homeland and the absence of pain and terror in their daily lives.

Rise in demand to understand Islam is unprecedented,

notes Mohammad Ahmadullah Siddiqi, Secretary General of WCMIR. If Muslims have time and desire, there are opportunities in schools, colleges, churches, synagogues, and prisons. "At the campus of Western Illinois University, I have been invited to more than 10 classes last semester, while five professors brought their classes to the Islamic Center, and the same is true for this semester," observes Siddiqi. Churches in nearby communities in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri are also eager to invite Muslims for lectures and presentations. However, Muslims need to prepare themselves with the knowledge of Islam as well as Christianity and Judaism in order to be effective in establishing mutually beneficial relationships. It is true that Islamophobia is on the rise. Perhaps it is also unprecedented. However, the most effective way to deal with Islamophobia is to be proactive and to build bridges of understanding and trust among people and communities. This simple and short newsletter provides some foods for thought, some examples, and some practical guidelines.

Visit Our Website at WWW.WCMIR.ORG



BOOKSHELF.....

Interfaith Dialogue. A Guide for

Muslims; Author: Muhammad Shafique; Mohammed Abu-Nimer; Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007; Pages, 124; Paperback.

(ISBN: 1565643046). The purpose of this book is to guide Muslims who are interested and/or involved in building relations with Jews and Christians. Historically, Muslims have always had a rich resource of dialogue. They have successfully lived in plural societies. This is a useful book for Muslim interfaith activists. The book consists of five chapters and five useful appendixes. The first chapter presents a historical perspective on interfaith dialogue in the West. It also discusses Muslim's reluctance in interfaith engagement as well as the challenges posed by the emergence of radical evangelism. The second chapter provides step by step guidelines for interfaith dialogue including a basic model of an interfaith program. The third chapter discusses the Qur'anic perspective of the interfaith dialogue and the fourth chapter provides specific examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that highlights his treatment of non-Muslims. The last chapter discusses a case study of Rochester, New York Muslims' experiences in interfaith relations and dialogues between both the Muslims and Christians and between Muslims and the Jews. This chapter also provides suggestions for forming interfaith programs and educating the general public about Islam. The book also consists of a glossary of terms frequently used in interfaith dialogues, a partial bibliography, and a list of available resources.

Prince Among Slaves: The True Story of An African Prince Sold into Slavery in the American South (30th Anniversary Edition).

Author: Terry Alford, Oxford University Press; 2007 ISBN:

9780195320459; Pages 352. A remarkable book that tells the story of Abd al Rahman Ibrahima, son of an African King, who was captured, enslaved, and shipped to America in 1807. This historical insight into the Muslims presence in America documents the role and contributions of Muslims in building the nation very early on. The book also documents the presence of many other African Muslims in American slavery. Prince Ibrahima finally was set free and returned to his native kingdom along with his wife in 1828 where he died after five months. The publication of the current edition coincides with a major documentary being aired on Ibrahima's life.

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 June, 2008. 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.

Islam at Universities in England. Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future.

Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui submitted this report on 10th April, 2007 to the British Minister of Higher Education, Bill Rammell, MP. The study was commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills. This insightful study looks at the ways universities in England run their Islamic Studies programs. The report also studied the provisions available to Muslim students at universities in England. The 115 page report consists of an executive summary and nine sections including 1) The changing context of Islamic Studies; 2) The current debate; 3) Defining Islamic Studies; 4) Who is providing the 'Islamic Studies' ?; 5) University and communities; 6) Chaplaincy and Muslims ; 7) Training of staff; 8) finding from the student study; and 9) Recommendations. In the appendixes, Dr. Siddiqui has listed the available resources in England for the study of Islamic studies including, among other topics, a list of darul ulooms, online Islamic Studies programs, connecting a university with its local Muslim community, building bridges between Muslim academics and British universities, and a list of Departments/centers that offer teaching and research related to Islam. The report may be viewed or down loaded from the website of the Islamic Foundation , Leicester at www.islamic-foundation.org.uk. This is useful study that can be emulated in the U. S. and other western countries to better understand the way Islam is taught at colleges and universities in the West. A list of books and material used in Islamic studies curricula would have further enhanced the study, and helped understand he need and challenges ahead.

University of Chicago Professor Emeritus, Dr. Shakeela Hassan, named Purpose Prize Fellow

Civic Venture, a think tank and program incubator, helping society achieve "the greatest return on experience," has designated Dr. Shakeela Hassan as one of its 2007 Purpose Prize Fellows. Dr. Hassan's contributions to interfaith dialogue and documentaries on related topics has been widely recognized by both academics and community leaders. Dr. Hassan has been an interfaith peace-builder and policy maker for more than four decades. She has offered a wealth of experience as Muslim immigrant, a medical doctor,

professor, mother, grandmother, and artist to a number of interfaith and inter-religious councils, boards, and initiatives. The Purpose Prize is a three-year, \$9 million program investment in Americans over age 60, who are leading a new age of innovation to solve critical social problems in the second half of their lives. Dr. Hassan's current project is Sounds of Faith. It is a coproduction with renowned journalist and producer Bill Kurtis. This three-part exploration of sacred sounds in the three Abrahamic faiths - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - is being developed for national PBS broadcast in

2009. The documentary will share sounds and songs from communities around the world, both inside and outside of worship, and illuminate a path for mutual understanding and appreciation between faith communities through their intertwined history and modernity of sound. [Courtesy, CIOGC Newsletter, August 2007; www.CIOGC.org]

Announcements: WCMIR Meetings and Programs

WCMIR Plans to hold the following seminars, sessions, and conferences in cooperation with various co-sponsors and co-hosts.

The first one will insha-Allah be held in Las-Vegas in cooperation with the Islamic Society of Nevada. Dr. Aslam Abdullah has agreed to be the chief organizer of this event, which will most likely be held some times in March, 2008. Dates and program will be announced soon.

The second event will be held in Chicago between the second and third week of June, 2008. The dates are to be finalized soon. The Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC) will be the co-host. This event will focus on an

interfaith workshop and seminar for the greater Chicago area Islamic Centers and mosques. Brother Abdul Malik Mujahid and Dr. Irfan Ahmad Khan will coordinate the event and the programs.

WCMIR will be organizing an interfaith session, just like last year, during the forthcoming national convention of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), in Hartford, Connecticut, July 4-6, 2008. Dr. Mohammad A. Siddiqi will be finalizing the details of the program for this session.

WCMIR Elections are overdue. Members feedback is invited for conducting an election by mail ballot. Membership directory may be posted on WCMIR website. Then members may nominate for different positions and a ballot may be sent for voting. Please email your suggestions.

Seventh Annual Conference of Globalization for the Common Good: An Interfaith Perspective, Trinity College, University of Melbourne, Australia. 30 June - 4 July 2008. Theme: From the Middle East to Asia Pacific: Arc of Conflict or Dialogue of Cultures and Religions? The conference is co-sponsored by the Center for Dialogue (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia), Trinity College (University of Melbourne), and the Asia-Pacific Institute for Inter-Religious Dialogue (Australian Catholic University). The conference program is designed to achieve three objectives.

* To explore the far-reaching ramifications of conflict in the Middle East (broadly defined) for the religious, cultural, and political landscape of the Asia-Pacific region.

* To bring together in fruitful interaction the insights of several disciplinary traditions (in particular religious studies, cultural studies, international relations, history, sociology and law).

* To illuminate and strengthen the connections between the Middle east and the geographic regions which constitute Asia-pacific. In particular, West Asia, South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific.

Previous conferences have been held in Oxford, U. K. (2002), St. Petersburg (2003), Dubai (2004), Kericho, Kenya (2005), Honolulu, Hawaii (2006), and Istanbul, Turkey (2007).

The official opening of the Conference will take place in the evening of Monday 30 June 2008. For background information on the initiative and details of previous conferences, visit the following web site.

<http://www.globalisationforthecommongood.info/>

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