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AUSTRALIA FAIR

Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations



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London BOMBING

Badawi condemns London bombings

The Forum on Australia's Islamic Relations unconditionally condemns the bombings in London. After the initial jubilation of the news to host the 2012 Olympics, the city turned to sadness after the London's Underground was rocked with a series of bombs, which has killed 54 people and injured hundreds more.

Dr. Jamal Badawi, the director of the Islamic Information Foundation (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada) and one of Islam's great speakers is currently in Australia to present a paper for an Islamic conference. His initial reaction was of sadness and worry.

Dr Badawi said on the morning after the attack, "A Muslim should feel sad on a number of grounds; first of all the Quran

is quite clear that the destruction of killing one person is like killing all of humanity and to save one life is like saving all of humanity. The Quran states this without qualification, for Muslim or non-Muslim. Also the preservation of life is one of the five conditions of Islamic law. It includes the entitlement of medication and when a life can be saved or rescued."

The bombings took the international community by surprise and has created worldwide condemnation. The G8 summit was interrupted and Prime Minister Tony Blair was deeply moved by the callous attacks on his country.

Director of FAIR, Kuranda Seyit said, "These attacks were no doubt designed to create maximum impact and mayhem to coincide with the summit. The way the

British service officers have handled this disaster must be commended as well but our sympathies goes out to the victims and their families."

Dr Badawi added, "This goes against the grain of Islamic thinking. This act resulted in the destruction of property and life, which contradicts another condition of safeguarding property. It also violates the onus that God placed on humankind. Honour and dignity is an entitlement of anyone, Muslim or not, just by virtue of being a human being."

In the past week there has been vehement reaction by Australians of all kinds. The Prime Minister John Howard has called for caution and the Be Alert But not Alarmed campaign has been screened on television. Premier Bob Carr warned that a suicide attack could happen in Australia.

However, Mr Seyit believes there is no possibility of that happening in Australia.

"The Islamic community in Australia is very different from the communities in Europe and the Mid East. Firstly, the community is too small and it would be very hard to pull off something like a terror strike here because it would be discovered before it could happen. Secondly, the Australian Muslim is far too laid back and not prone to upsetting the peace that we enjoy in

Australia. By that I mean Islam has merged with an Australian identity and become a very unique blend. The Aussie Mossie is someone who understands the notion of fairgo and iman together. That is being true to this nation and one's faith."

"There is no way a Australian Muslim could do such a thing, it would have to be initiated from outside. Thirdly, we do not have the history or the tendency to resort to such measures. And finally there is no motive, Australia is only a small fish in world politics and even its involvement in Iraq is hardly significant to warrant an attack."

"We pray that Muslims will show solidarity with people of other faiths and those who have no religious belief, in condemning extremism and violence in the name of religion or an ideology."



London bombs bitter fruit of West

London bomb atrocities are the bitter fruit of Western policies in the Middle East.

by George Galloway, Respect MP for Bethnal Green & Bow

No one can condone the violence aimed at working people going about their daily lives in London last Thursday. They have not been a party to, nor are they responsible for, the decisions of their government.

They are entirely innocent and I, and Respect, condemn those who have killed or injured them.

But within three hours of the atrocities Tony Blair and George Bush were claiming them as a vindication of their "war on terror". That cannot be allowed to stand. The primary responsibility for last Thursday's bloodshed lies with the perpetrators of those acts. However, the acts did not come out of a clear sky.

People killed in explosions by razor-sharp red-hot steel and splintering flying glass die the same death whether they are in London or Fallujah. When the US armed forces, their backs guarded by

our armed forces, reduced Fallujah to rubble not a whisper found its way into the House of Commons.

A swamp of hatred towards this country has been watered by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, by the daily destruction of Palestinian homes and by the occupation of Afghanistan.

The enmity generated by those great events feeds the terrorism of bin Laden and the other Islamist terrorists. Is that such a controversial point?

When I was on the Labour benches and spoke in the aftermath of 9/11, I said that I despise Osama bin Laden. I have always despised him. I did so when the US and British governments set him to war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. I said nearly four years ago that if they handled 9/11 in the wrong way they would create 10,000 bin Ladens. Does anyone doubt that 10,000 bin Ladens at least have been created by the events of the past few years?

The pictures from Abu Ghraib, the hell of Guantanamo Bay, the daily humiliation of the Palestinians by Ariel Sharon's forces - all these have contributed to the

bitterness against us.

Blair's government has hitched this country, against the will of the majority of its people, to Bush's global ambitions. The government says this has nothing to do with Iraq because 9/11 happened before the invasion of that country.

But Al Qaida took shape out of the last attack on Iraq, in 1991, and the murderous sanctions regime that followed only gave it another grievance to exploit.

The policies of successive US and British governments had already created manifold grievances.

The anti-war movement, and the British government's own security services, warned that the invasion of Iraq would inflame those grievances and make a terrorist attack in Britain more likely.

Bush and Blair said the war on Iraq would create a safer world - it has not. They said there were weapons of mass destruction - there were not. They said Al Qaida operated there-they did not. But they do now.

If the British government continues with this disastrous policy, greater

disasters will follow - to the people of Iraq, to our troops in Iraq and to the citizens of our country. If we bomb them, they will bomb us.

The only way out of this morass is to reverse the policies that have taken us into it. As the Spanish people showed us last year, the way out is to withdraw from Iraq and to break from Bush's war on terror.

It is to address the grievances across the region, not to add to them by support for Israel's Ariel Sharon, and for the corrupt kings and presidents of Arabia

If we start to drain the swamp, we can look forward to the day it dries up, when the monsters that lurk in it will have nothing to feed on.

George Galloway was the only MP to challenge the consensus in parliament in the debates last Thursday following the bombings. You can find the record of his speech on Hansard

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansard/cm050707/debtext/50707-26.htm

A word from the editor

Leadership and Unity

It's the same old question that arises time and time again. Can we procure it, can we manifest real leadership that will unify and organise the community into a functional unit?

There will be those pessimists who say that nothing can be done and that the Islamic community will always remain disunited and dysfunctional. That's the way it is...

But it can be done, it is possible.

The Islamic community cannot allow the present situation to deteriorate and explode into a precarious situation for all Muslims in Australia. Action must be taken to change the present conundrum before we find ourselves without a community at all.

The Jewish community are just as diverse and factional as the Muslims but they have got it right as far as having one unified representation. The Indigenous communities do a much better job than us and even the Christians with over 10000 denominations have a professional and organised system to deal with media and other issues.

For too long the "Islamic community" has been hijacked by an handful of individuals who have used Islam to further their position in society, who have abused their privileged status and who have profited from Islam without giving anything in return.

Islam to these people has been misconstrued as nothing more than their close family and friends, their security that they find behind the organisations they purport to run and the odd handshake from a politician that makes them feel important. The basic sense of spiritualism has been smothered by their worldly desires and personal ambitions.

What's missing is the big picture.

Islam is more than just a few friends and colleagues who make each other feel really smug about themselves. Islam is about love of Allah and his message, devotion to Allah and God-consciousness. It is about the service of humanity, the desire to improve the situation of people, to progress and advance.

This is not a criticism of individual leaders but of the collective leadership.

Our leadership has lacked vision and drive to achieve the best for the Muslims of Australia. It could have done more and with the limitations that it began with it is understandable why we are in this situation. But that now must change.

There are people within this community that have the skills and abilities to assist in making our community a strong, vibrant and forward-thinking community. The changes cannot be achieved from outside, those who share my sentiment must assist from within to initiate these changes that will ultimately remove (gently) those who have exploited our organisations and stagnated in these leadership roles.

Muslim Australians have often complained about the mess that whirls about us. But for too long we have remained apathetic. There is no-one to blame but ourselves.

The strategy for change is by no means simple. But the first step is to motivate the existing organisations to get together and discuss how we can become a more mature and effective community.

In real terms we need to infuse new people, preferably youth and females into the Islamic Councils and peak bodies so that they represent the community. We need to also form a board of imams. Also we need to create a consortium of Islamic organisations that work under one banner. In theory AFIC would have been ideal but their tendency to control their members has alienated the majority of organisations and left it as a dinosaur.

The new consortium will not be a controlling body, only to co-ordinate the groups so that they all sing the same tune. This is possible if each organisation can nominate a representative to be in the consortium. The main function of this consortium would be to deal with media issues and issue press releases. The consortium would also pool its resources and pay for media monitoring and transcript acquisition. Media training and have its own website. It would eventually provide a platform for Islamic thought and knowledge and act as a think tank: making the news not responding to it.

Even as we speak young leaders are emerging in these groups. This is the perfect time to unite.

And what I envisage is that this consortium should be powerful enough to dominate any fringe or radical elements so that their extreme views are not misrepresented.

Basically, as one small twig we can be easily snapped and ineffective but as a bundle of twigs and branches we will be strong and formidable.

In profile:
Dr Jamal Badawi

Dr. Jamal Badawi was born and raised in Egypt, and it was in Cairo that Dr. Badawi started his career as a student. He received his bachelors from Ain Shams University (Cairo, Egypt). Upon receiving the degree, he headed for America, and enrolled in Indiana University (Bloomington, IN) where he received both his Masters and doctorate in the department of Business Administration. Upon completing his education, Dr. Badawi began working right away and still is quite active in the Muslim community. Currently, Dr. Badawi is the director of the Islamic Information Foundation (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada), which is a non-profit foundation seeking to promote better understanding of Islam by Muslims and non-Muslims.

He is also working in his own field in Business Administration, as a Professor of Management at St. Mary University (Halifax). He is also a cross-appointed faculty member in the Departments of Religious Studies and Management, at St. Mary University. Previously, Dr. Badawi has taught a course on Islam at Stanford University (California). Along with all these commitments, Dr. Badawi is a member of the Fiqh Council of North America, a part of the Islamic Society of North America, a member of the Consultative Council of North America, and a member of the Juristic Council of North America.

Dr. Badawi is a highly sought after lecturer here in North America and abroad. He is an excellent orator on various pertinent topics, especially Islam and Christianity. He is also very active in journalism and broadcasting. He has researched, designed, and presented a 350 1/2 hour segment television series on Islam, which was shown on many TV stations in Canada, the US, and other countries, as well. Some titles of his published works are: Selected prayers, Gender Equity in Islam, Muhammad in the Bible, Status of Women in Islam, Polygamy in Islamic Law, Islam: A Brief Look, Muslim Woman's Dress According to the Qur'an and the Sunnah and Islamic Ethics.

Badawi on women

According to the Qur'an men and women have the same spiritual human nature:

O mankind: Reverence your Guardian Lord Who created you from a single person created of like nature his mate and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; reverence Allah through Whom you demand your mutual (rights) and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you. (Qur'an 4:1)

It is He who created you from a single person and made his mate of like nature in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When they are united she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed). When she grows heavy they both pray to Allah their Lord (saying): "If You give us a goodly child we vow we shall (ever) be grateful." (Qur'an 7:189)

(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him and He is the One

that hears and sees (all things.) (Qur'an 42: 11)

Both genders are recipients of the "divine breath" since they are created with the same human and spiritual nature (nafs-waahidah): But He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him something of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and feeling (and understanding): little thanks to you give (Qur'an 15:29)

Both genders are dignified and are trustees of Allah on earth. We have honored the children of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors above a great part of Our Creation. (Qur'an 17:70) Behold your Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said "Will you place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy (name)?" He said: "I know what you do not." (Qur'an 2:30)

Men and women have the same religious and moral duties and responsibilities. They both face the consequences of their deeds: And their Lord has accepted of them and answered them: "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you be it male or female: you are members of one another..." (Qur'an 3:195)

If any do deeds of righteousness be they male or female and have faith they will enter paradise and not the least injustice will be done to them. (Qur'an 4:124)

For Muslim men and women and for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward. (Qur'an 33:35)

One Day shall you see the believing men and the believing women how their Light runs forward before them and by their right hands: (their greeting will be): "Good news for you this Day! Gardens beneath which flow rivers! To dwell therein for ever! This is indeed the highest Achievement!" (Qur'an 57:12)

Nowhere does the Qur'an state that one gender is superior to the other. Some mistakenly translate "qiwamah" or responsibility for the family as superiority. The Qur'an makes it clear that the sole basis for superiority of any person over another is piety and righteousness not gender, color, or nationality: O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (one who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Qur'an 49:13)

The absence of women as prophets or "Messengers of Allah" in prophetic history is due to the demands and physical suffering associated with the role of messengers and prophets and not because of any spiritual inferiority.

Silma's saga: Noor Al Houda school

Silma Ihram has seen the highs and the lows of a 23 year career in Islam; Islamic politics, education, society and let's not forget religion. She talks to FAIR about the last six years of keeping her passion alive: Noor AlHouda Islamic College and the difficulties the school has faced with land evictions and court battles.

FAIR: You have had a lot of problems keeping the school open. What is the history of the school?

Silma Ihram: We were leased land in 1994 for the establishment of a school and child care, by Bankstown Airport. They did not inform us that the site had formerly been a night soil, and toxic waste dump for 40 years. At the time that we leased it, it looked like natural grassland and had paper bark trees established on it. The land had not been re-mediated. We did not discover that the site was contaminated until after 5 years when we were tiring of obtaining the 25 year lease that would allow us to get permanent buildings on the site. Bankstown Airport provided us with a 25 year lease and a soil report, which basically said that if we signed the lease we would also be responsible for the contamination - which of course we could not do. Once we discovered the contamination we tried to move the school as follows:

1) We spent two years tendering for Energy Australia, a local site. The Australian Federation of Islamic Councils knew that we wanted it and competed for it. It went to auction, where the price was raised from 4.5 million to 7.2 million and bought by AFIC. Fortunately for us, it was also contaminated.

2) Linnwood Hall - a heritage property in Guildford.

The State government gave us a lease, and the keys, but after complaints from neighbours and local politicians - including local Labour MP's, Bob Carr provided \$5 million for it to be bought by the Heritage Office, which possibly until today, has still not found a suitable organisation to look after it. He also specifically stated that no schools would be able to lease it, despite the fact that schools were one of the most favoured uses and historically it had been used as a school.

3) Lidcombe Hospital - a heritage site in Lidcombe. The school had the most successful bid for tender, however, after the "Not in my Back Yard" (NIMBY brigade) neighbours derailed the housing development application of the owners - Australand, in order to prevent the heritage section being used by the school, it had to go to the Land and Environment Court, which not only approved the housing development, but also the use of the heritage site for a school. Unfortunately we had been forced off the site by then, and had no money to buy it.

The school was forced to move all buildings, furniture, admin, computers, 2 Science labs, 2 D&T labs, 2 Visual Arts areas, 2 computer labs - everything, in 10 days at the



The new premises in South Strathfield. [Inset] Principal: Silma Ihram

end of the school year, and locate it all in a warehouse. The school was locked out of the site, due to the impending court case. It did not locate a new site in Strathfield until just before school re-opened, but could not accommodate all of the children in the new premises.

Since that time it has worked tirelessly, and without funds, to develop the rundown heritage buildings into a suitable school. It still has a long way to go and has suffered enormous financial costs since that time.

FAIR: You have also had a lengthy court case. What was the outcome of the court case?

Silma: We won on 2 out of 3 issues - Negligence, and Misrepresentation. We were awarded \$1.09 million plus court costs.

FAIR: What were the findings of the judge?

Silma: That the airport had known it was a dump, and had a duty of care to inform the prospective tenants.

That there were associated risks and costs with the site which made it unlikely that the school would have developed there or chosen to lease the site if they had known about the contamination. That the school had suffered financial loss as a result.

FAIR: Do you believe that the Airport was unfair in its treatment of the school?

Yes, for the following reasons:

A) All tenants at the airport had various services provided, even if just fire hydrants and water. No services at all were provided. Even their road lighting stopped at the edge of our property.

B) the officers of Bankstown Airport could see that we were digging into contaminated material, and even

inspected the site when we were digging down, but did not check or inform us of the potential dangers inherent in digging through old night soil (human waste) and chemicals.

C) They did not offer any reasonable remediation - only to dump soil after it was tested and stored on the site - the same site where students were playing.

D) They extended the runway right behind the school and offered no protection or support from the associated noise and plane risks.

E) At no stage did they offer us any mediation to solve the problem.

F) They tried to evict the school from the site and even served papers on the children in the playground, and the child care

G) They refused to accept any responsibility for any health issues that might occur out of the contamination.

H) They pursued a relentless policy of trying to frustrate and lengthen the court proceedings and force us into bankruptcy, by demanding extreme amounts of paperwork and evidence, which caused the proceedings to last for 5 years, and the legal costs to mount up to \$2 million on each side (total \$4 million).

FAIR: You had a hard time relocating can you describe the journey?

Silma: Shocking. Unfortunately, the Muslim community - as in associations - did not attempt to assist politically for us, the Federal Government pushed us off, and the State Government tried to give us similarly contaminated land at Homebush Bay, and refused to let us use even on a temporary basis, the Narwee High school which was empty.

Parents and students suffered enormously, as did the reputation of the school. The parents even got so frustrated that they let their children

chase Bob Carr around a park during his re-election campaign.

One mother lost her child in pregnancy, she was so distressed. The Commonwealth stopped providing funds to the school as we had no premises for a short while, and the staff took me to the Industrial Relations court, so I had to sell my house in a firesale, to pay them their wages until the Commonwealth re-established the funding 2 weeks later.

FAIR: How would you describe the support from others in the community?

Silma: Morally, great, practically and realistically, very poor -except for a core group of really active members of the school community. They also put mortgages on their houses to help.

FAIR: Do you think some people might not want to see your school succeed?

Silma: Yes. Some politicians do not like its determination. Also, the Federation of Islamic Councils and its own school Malek Fahed have always worked against our school as we are not influenced at all by them, and they want more control over all schools in Australia.

FAIR: Why do you think so?

Silma: The AFIC set up in its original charter to have control over all associations, Muslim organisations, welfare centres, Imams, schools and other Muslim community initiatives. This is a third world structure, which is highly susceptible to corruption and does not represent the Muslim community at large. It is not in keeping with Islamic principles of supporting other Muslims in their charitable endeavours, and also smacks of racism towards Muslim converts. Since the time I became a Muslim in 1976, I have had no real support from AFIC in the many ventures I have been involved in - A) Muslim Women's Shop and Centre

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We are all collateral damage

By Imam Zaid Shaker

The recent terrorist tragedy in London is disheartening. Once again some nefarious force has seen fit to totally disregard innocent human life in pursuit of a vile agenda that few of us know and even fewer could understand. The response of the world leaders assembled in Edinburgh for the G-8 Summit is perhaps more disheartening, as it promises more of the misguided policies that have proven so ineffective in prosecuting the war on terror. The leaders of the Western powers continue to imply that they will fight violence with more violence of their own. If current events are any indicator of future developments, such a policy will only serve to beget yet more terrorism.

This is a war being guided on both sides by self-righteous murderers whose motives and proclamations mirror each other. Each side sees God as being exclusively with them. That being the case, the restraint and judiciousness urged by Christian and Islamic theology to guide the execution of war is cast aside with wanton impunity. Each side manipulates a vulnerable public to create a climate that allows for the perpetuation and the inevitable escalation of the ongoing slaughter. Each side

reserves the right to use the spectacle of indiscriminate violence to "Shock and Awe" the opposition, yet will deny that its tactics can be described as terrorism. Each side sees their civilian population as hapless, innocent victims, while the suffering innocent civilians on the other side are acceptable collateral damage.

There will never be any real progress in

The Roads to Peace

The roads to peace are paths of war,
The gentle dove will leave her scar.

The moral men to say the least,
Will kill us all to get their peace.

The roads that lead to victories gained,
Are filled with people full of pain.

Only our Creator knew,
We'd kill so many to save so few.

impoverished family in Afghanistan is bombed from the face of the Earth by a misguided missile, something of our collective humanity is destroyed by the blast. When a child in Iraq is born with gross birth defects due to his mother's exposure to depleted uranium, we have all been deformed. When London commuters fear ever again entering the underground, because of the ill-advised actions of a handful of desperate fanatics, their insecurity touches us all.

We, the collaterally damaged, will continue to exist in a state of dehumanizing loss, deformity, and insecurity until we rise up, unite, and refuse to support at any level the policies of leaders who continually fail to heed one of the surest of all political lessons: killing innocent civilians will never lead to a positive outcome for the transgressing party. This realization is the first meaningful salvo anyone could fire in a real war on terror. However, as long as we are not as moved by the suffering of innocent civilians anywhere as we are by the suffering of those close to us, it will be a salvo that remains unfired.

Source: www.zaytuna.org/articleDetails.asp?articleID=76

Arab leaders denounce attacks

Arab leaders denunciation of London's explosions

The Arab leaders deplored the series of explosions which targeted London on Thursday, stressing the rejection of the Arab states for such aggressions and voiced solidarity with Britain in its crisis. The Syrian President Bashar al-Assad extended a cable of "condemnation and denunciation" to the British prime minister in which he said "In my own name and the name of the Syrian people we condemn and strongly deplore these hated acts." The Moroccan king stressed "that terrorism which does not know a religion nor a homeland aims at violating human rights and the right to live." The secretary general of the Arab League (AL) Amr Moussa announced "AL rejection of these acts taking place in London or in any European or Arab capital or in any place in the world." The Egyptian foreign minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait expressed in a telephone call with the British ambassador in Cairo "Egypt's solidarity with Britain in its crisis." An official source in Saudi Arabia stressed Riyadh's position "on the importance of the international community intensification of the efforts to fight terrorism, which threatens our security, and the security of all our people and that of the world as a whole." The secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council GCC Abdul Rahman Bin Hamad al-Ateyah stressed the "rejection of the GCC to terrorism regardless to its source," calling for "fighting it in all its forms and pictures."

The Iraqi President Jalal al-Talibani considered that "terrorism is an international crisis, showing that what is taking place in Iraq might also happen in any other country." He warned "I am saying it to our Arab brothers, should terrorism take place in Iraq today, then it will be tomorrow in other Arab countries." The minister of state for foreign affairs in the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Hamdan Bin Zayed al-Nahyan expressed UAE solidarity with the British government and its support for measures taken to withstand them." The Jordanian King Abdullah II underlined the "importance of intensifying efforts of all sides concerned to fight all form of terrorism and forces standing behind it." The Libyan foreign ministry stressed cooperation with all countries in "fighting terrorism so as this epidemic which threatens world peace and security will be eliminated." Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said "we strongly condemn these aggression and offer our condolences to the British government and people, hoping quick recovery for the wounded." Meantime, the deputy chairman of the political bureau of the Hamas movement Mousa Abu Marzouq considered that targeting of civilians in their transportation means "is a rejected matter and should be deplored." One official source at the Yemeni foreign ministry considered "criminal acts once again disclosed the ugly face of terrorism which pursues a policy rejected by all divine and humanitarian principles."

Dont call them Muslim call them terrorists

By Maev Kennedy

Courtesy: The Guardian

Outside Euston station, the bells were pealing from St Pancras parish church across the road - a cheerful, normal, Sunday morning sound.

But things are far from normal at the church, which stands 30 yards from the hoarding hiding the forensic team still picking through the shreds of the number 30 bus, and above the tunnels linking the King's Cross to Russell Square tube line.

The congregation of around 150 people - three times the usual attendance - had to stoop under red and white scene-of-accident tape to hear their parish priest order them to continue to enjoy living and working in London.

"This is not a time for many words," he said in his sermon, urging them to rejoice in the capital's rich diversity of cultures, traditions, ethnic groups and faiths. "There is one small practical thing that we can all do. We can name the people who did these things as criminals or terrorists. We must not name them as Muslims."

On Thursday, Father Paul Hawkins had watched the church fill with familiar faces and strangers.

The volunteers kept the

tea urn going all day and evening. Strangers hugged one another, or just sat for a while looking into space. By evening Fr Hawkins had decided that the eucharist must be a memorial service for the dead, the injured, the bereaved, and perhaps the most wretched - the tormented families and friends of the missing.

Just before the service, Greg Tassel, the tenor in the choir, whose beautiful singing of the Fauré requiem left many in tears, revealed that Jenny Nicholson, a friend of his, known to have been in the area at the time, was still missing. His voice never quavered.

David Karunanithy, a regular in the congregation, was walking across Tavistock Square when the bus bomb went off, and spent time afterwards comforting a woman who had been injured and left deafened by the bus bomb blast, waiting for medical help to arrive.

He was shocked to learn, 24 hours later, how many had died in the bomb. "It is important for people who live and work around here to confront the situation," he said. "It is important not to become paranoid but to try to overcome our fears."

Aspire to inspire 2005 Youth Conference

By Salam Zreika



Young Muslims listen to the Chairman's inspirational concluding comments

On Saturday the 18th of June 2005 the State Youth Conference for Young Australian Muslim of the Year was held for the first time in Sydney.

Both Male and female students gathered together from various parts of Australia at The University of Western Sydney Bankstown Campus to discuss how as Muslims they can aspire to inspire.

Drum performances, ballistic trivia and an overwhelming amount of delicious Mediterranean food were only some of the highlights that helped reinforce the cultural diversity that was present on the day.

YAMY Project Coordinator Monique Toohey said the purpose of this exciting project is to increase young Muslims sense of pride in being Muslim while taking part in the wider community. "It is about strengthening relationships with peers in the community and acknowledging the contributions they make as young people."

Monique who has been a revert to Islam since age 19 is an educational psychologist for the Muslim community. Her latest achievement arrives after being selected to represent Australian Muslims in an Indonesian Exchange Program. She

believes in the importance of this project and many other projects that focus on young Australian Muslims. "We are looking to celebrate and recognize the achievements of young people in the country. Schools recognize academic achievements but what about extra curricular activities with the community?" she said.

There were many guests speakers on the day whose primary aim was to encourage young people to go out there and give all they can so they can get back in return. Some of the motivational speeches were presented by people including Tansel Ali- an Australian memory sports champion; Mihal Krayem- an 18year old SRC President who aspires to become an Australian diplomat working in the Middle East and Ghaith Krayem- President of Australian National Sports Club and Australian Muslim Volunteers Network..

While only a disappointing 54 people made an appearance at the conference, the lecture rooms at the

Bankstown Campus were made to good use with workshops that focused on topics such as peace activism and social justice, Muslims in gaol, Muslims in the media and 'staying sane' - a workshop that deals with the mental aspects of life.

In the wake of recent events that have occurred in the United Kingdom, these workshops taught how young Muslims can cope, stay strong and continue to achieve despite unethical global circumstances.

One of the school participants by the name of Khadija was excited about participating in the workshop on social justice. "I am hoping to expand my knowledge and broaden my horizons by attending this conference" she said.

Mohammed Abu-Shaban, President of MCCA- Muslims Community Co-operative Australia Ltd- is delighted to sponsor the YAMY project because he believes this is a real investment in the community. "MCCA sponsor and support many other events. Events like these are strategic and beneficial for the future. There



Mohammed Abu Shaban: Chairman of MCCA



Monique Toohey : Project Co-ordinator

are 50,000 Muslim students in NSW alone. We want to work on their development." The answer was not provided regarding the costing of the sponsorship, Mr. Abu-Shaban says whatever it is, it is only a fraction of the real price, "we have teams of volunteers putting time and effort into this for free".

MCCA are not only widely known for their Islamic finance and investments, but they are also recognized for taking pride in investing in education and society and uplifting the standards of the community. "We want to equip kids with confidence and ideas. They should be able to take part in the future leadership of this country" he said.

So what do students need to do to take part in YAMY? The award is open for students from year 10 to 12 who are wanting to make significant contributions in the community and are actively recognized as Australian Muslims. While the number of people in this conference were not as large as the 200 that attended Melbourne's conference, the message is still loud and very clear: Be a generous spirit. Interact and engage with your community. Aspire to Inspire.

(For the nomination process go to www.mcca.com.au)



Poor publicity or just apathy: Numbers were far below their potential at the conference

Thanks for the credit but no thanks

By Asadul Siddiq



I did not do much. In fact, I did absolutely nothing at all. Sure, just like everyone else in Australia, I was hoping that Douglas Wood would be released unharmed. But I did nothing to help him.

Which makes me wonder why I am given credit for his release.

When Sheikh Taj announced his mission to help secure Wood's release, I was both hopeful and skeptical. I hoped that Douglas Wood would be brought home safe, although reading about all that is happening in Iraq, I half expected the Sheikh to face a similar fate.

But Wood is home now. And so is Sheikh Taj. It is revealed that Iraqi and American forces stumbled into the hostage den when investigating resistance activities in the area. Sheikh Taj claimed that the kidnappers had agreed to surrender Wood to him and if the security forces had not found Wood, he would have.

I do not know if we can ever know for sure if Wood was truly going to be released. But I am confident that Sheikh Taj had helped extend the deadline. Good on him. He deserves the compliments and credit not only because he helped a sick man gain freedom, but also because Sheikh Taj was unwell when he decided to postpone his own treatment to help

another person.

But I am curious why I am also given credit for something that I know I did not contribute.

When John Howard announced Wood's release in parliament, he stated his appreciation for the help rendered by the Islamic community. And others made similar statements.

I wonder what help that was. As a member of the Islamic community, I am surprised to know that I helped. It feels good to know that I helped secure Wood's release. But what did I do?

Absolutely nothing.

And I am sure that if we poll the 300,000 Muslims in Australia, most of them, apart from the small group that helped Sheikh Taj, will admit that they did not do anything to help.

I was concerned for Wood. I hoped that he would be released. I may even have prayed for his safety. And I was relieved to know that he is now safe.

And I am sure that the Muslim community, just like me, did as much as other Australians. We were concerned, hopeful, prayed and are now relieved. But we received special mention for doing as much as everyone else.

It amazes me how the work of one Muslim man is attributed to the whole community. One man (and his aides) helped. And all of us now bask in the

glory.

It may not seem like much. In fact, it is a positive position that the government has taken. The government is reiterating to the rest of Australia that Muslims are also considerate, concerned individuals who contribute positively to this nation.

But the statement also paints us with one large brush.

I cringe everytime a criminal who is a Muslim does something wrong as I know I would receive the blame. I shudder everytime I read about acts of terrorism as I know, that if the perpetrators are Muslims, the whole community would be branded. And I become upset everytime some irresponsible journalist refer to my religion or community when discussing activities contrary to Islam and humanity.

Just as I do not want to be blamed for the actions of every other irresponsible Muslim, I will not accept the credit for the good work of someone else.

Sheikh Taj and his aides went to Iraq. I did not. And neither did most of the Islamic community.

I appreciate the government's position. But this time, I have to say, "No thanks." Judge me by what I do. Not what someone else who happens to share similar characteristics did.

I do not want the blame. And I will not make the claim.

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Label of Catholic terror was never used for IRA

Fundamentalism is often a form of nationalism in religious disguise

By Karen Armstrong
Courtesy The Guardian

Last year I attended a conference in the US about security and intelligence in the so-called war on terror and was astonished to hear one of the more belligerent participants, who as far as I could tell had nothing but contempt for religion, strongly argue that as a purely practical expedient, politicians and the media must stop referring to "Muslim terrorism". It was obvious, he said, that the atrocities had nothing to do with Islam, and to suggest otherwise was not merely inaccurate but dangerously counterproductive.

Rhetoric is a powerful weapon in any conflict. We cannot hope to convert Osama bin Laden from his vicious ideology; our priority must be to stem the flow of young people into organisations such as al-Qaida, instead of alienating them by routinely coupling their religion with immoral violence. Incorrect statements about Islam have convinced too many in the Muslim world that the west is an implacable enemy. Yet, as we found at the conference, it is not easy to find an alternative for referring to this terrorism; however, the attempt can be a salutary exercise that reveals the complexity of what we are up against.

We need a phrase that is more exact than "Islamic terror". These acts may be committed by people who call themselves Muslims, but they violate essential Islamic principles. The Qur'an prohibits aggressive warfare, permits war only in self-defence and insists that the true Islamic values are peace, reconciliation and forgiveness. It also states firmly that there must be no coercion in religious matters, and for centuries

Islam had a much better record of religious tolerance than Christianity.

Like the Bible, the Qur'an has its share of aggressive texts, but like all the great religions, its main thrust is towards kindness and compassion. Islamic law outlaws war against any country in which Muslims are allowed to practice their religion freely, and forbids the use of fire, the destruction of buildings and the killing of innocent civilians in a military campaign. So although Muslims, like Christians or Jews, have all too often failed to live up to their ideals, it is not because of the religion per se.

We rarely, if ever, called the IRA bombings "Catholic" terrorism because we knew enough to realise that this was not essentially a religious campaign. Indeed, like the Irish republican movement, many fundamentalist movements worldwide are simply new forms of nationalism in a highly unorthodox religious guise. This is obviously the case with Zionist fundamentalism in Israel and the fervently patriotic Christian right in the US.

In the Muslim world, too, where the European nationalist ideology has always seemed an alien import, fundamentalisms are often more about a search for social identity and national self-definition than religion. They represent a widespread desire to return to the roots of the culture, before it was invaded and weakened by the colonial powers.

Because it is increasingly recognised that the terrorists in no way represent mainstream Islam, some prefer to call them jihadists, but this is not very satisfactory. Extremists and unscrupulous politicians have purloined the word for their own purposes, but the

real meaning of jihad is not "holy war" but "struggle" or "effort." Muslims are commanded to make a massive attempt on all fronts - social, economic, intellectual, ethical and spiritual - to put the will of God into practice.

Sometimes a military effort may be a regrettable necessity in order to defend decent values, but an oft-quoted tradition has the Prophet Muhammad saying after a military victory: "We are coming back from the Lesser Jihad [ie the battle] and returning to the Greater Jihad" - the far more important, difficult and momentous struggle to reform our own society and our own hearts.

Jihad is thus a cherished spiritual value that, for most Muslims, has no connection with violence. Last year, at the University of Kentucky, I met a delightful young man called Jihad; his parents had given him that name in the hope that he would become not a holy warrior, but a truly spiritual man who would make the world a better place. The term jihadi terrorism is likely to be offensive, therefore, and will win no hearts or minds.

At our conference in Washington, many people favoured "Wahhabi terrorism". They pointed out that most of the hijackers on September 11 came from Saudi Arabia, where a peculiarly intolerant form of Islam known as Wahhabism was the state religion. They argued that this description would be popular with those many Muslims who tended to be hostile to the Saudis. I was not happy, however, because even though the narrow, sometimes bigoted vision of Wahhabism makes it a fruitful ground for extremism, the vast majority of Wahhabis do not commit acts of terror.

Bin Laden was not inspired by Wahhabism but by the writings of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb, who was executed by President

Nasser in 1966. Almost every fundamentalist movement in Sunni Islam has been strongly influenced by Qutb, so there is a good case for calling the violence that some of his followers commit "Qutbian terrorism." Qutb urged his followers to withdraw from the moral and spiritual barbarism of modern society and fight it to the death.

Western people should learn more about such thinkers as Qutb, and become aware of the many dramatically different shades of opinion in the Muslim world. There are too many lazy, unexamined assumptions about Islam, which tends to be regarded as an amorphous, monolithic entity. Remarks such as "They hate our freedom" may give some a righteous glow, but they are not useful, because they are rarely accompanied by a rigorous analysis of who exactly "they" are.

The story of Qutb is also instructive as a reminder that militant religiosity is often the product of social, economic and political factors. Qutb was imprisoned for 15 years in one of Nasser's vile concentration camps, where he and thousands of other members of the Muslim Brotherhood were subjected to physical and mental torture. He entered the camp as a moderate, but the prison made him a fundamentalist. Modern secularism, as he had experienced it under Nasser, seemed a great evil and a lethal assault on faith.

Precise intelligence is essential in any conflict. It is important to know who our enemies are, but equally crucial to know who they are not. It is even more vital to avoid turning potential friends into foes. By making the disciplined effort to name our enemies correctly, we will learn more about them, and come one step nearer, perhaps, to solving the seemingly intractable and increasingly perilous problems of our divided world.

· Karen Armstrong is author of *Islam: a Short History*

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Israel and Palestine: censored sides

By Alison Weir

Founder and Executive Director of If Americans Knew, Chapter excerpted from *Censored 2005: The Top 25 Censored stories* (Seven Stories Press; 2004)

The most monumental cover-up in media history may be the one I'm about to describe. In my entire experience with American journalism, I have never found anything as extreme, sustained, and omnipresent.

Three and a half years ago, when the current Palestinian uprising began, I started to look into Israel and Palestine. I had never paid much attention to this issue before and so – unlike many people – I knew I was completely uninformed about it. I had no idea that I was pulling a loose piece of thread that would steadily unravel, until nothing would ever be quite as it had been before.

When I listened to news reports on this issue, I noticed that I was hearing a great deal about Israelis and very little about Palestinians. I decided to go to the Internet to see what would turn up, and discovered international reports about Palestinian children being killed daily, often shot in the head, hundreds being injured, eyes being shot out. And yet little of all this was appearing in NPR reports, the New York Times, or the San Francisco Chronicle.

There was also little historic background and context in the stories, so this, too, I began to fill in for myself, reading what has turned into a multitude of books on the history and other aspects of the conflict. I attended presentations and read international reports.

The more I looked into all this, the more it seemed that I had stumbled onto a cover-up that quite possibly dwarfed anything I had seen before. My former husband had been one of the founders of the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR), an institution known for its powerful exposés. He and CIR have won numerous well-deserved awards from Project Censored from the very beginning of its creation. Nevertheless, the duration and violence of the injustice I was discovering, and the extent of its omission and misrepresentation – even in Project Censored itself, seemed unparalleled.

In February and March of 2001 I went to the Palestinian territories as a freelance reporter, traveling alone throughout Gaza and the West Bank. I saw tragedy and devastation far beyond what was being reported in the American media; I saw communities destroyed, ancient orchards razed, croplands plowed under. I saw children who had been shot in the stomach, in the back, in the head. I still see them.

I saw people convulsing and writhing in pain from a mysterious poison gas that had been lobbed at them; they said it felt like there were knives in their stomach. I talked to men who had been tortured.

I watched as a mother wept for her small son, and I took pictures of his spilled blood. I watched a son grieve for his mother, killed on her way home from the market on a day that I was told was the Muslim equivalent of the day before Christmas, or Passover, and I

thought of my own son, the same age.

I listened to old people who described the start of this holocaust – over fifty years ago, at the end of an earlier one. They described what it was like when three-quarters of your entire population is ethnically cleansed from their homes and land, children dying along the roadside while aircraft shell the fleeing families. They told of dozens of massacres of entire villages, and I've since read accounts by Israeli soldiers, published in Israeli publications, of how they raped the women, and then killed them, of how they used sticks to crush the skulls of children. I discovered



the message sent by Menachem Begin, later elected Israeli prime minister, to troops following the massacre of Palestinians in one village, Deir Yassin:

"Accept my congratulations on this splendid act of conquest. Convey my regards to all the commanders and soldiers. We shake your hands. We are all proud of the excellent leadership and the fighting spirit in this great attack...Tell the soldiers: you have made history in Israel with your attack and your conquest. Continue this until victory. As in Deir Yassin, so everywhere, we will attack and smite the enemy. God, God, Thou has chosen us for conquest."

Censorship At Work

And I saw the cover-up. I saw how one of the most massive and brutal displacements of a people in modern times has largely been swept under the rug; how the continuing and ruthless methods used by a theocratic, exclusionary state to rid itself of people of the "wrong" religion/ethnicity are covered up. Let me describe how this censorship works.

A few days after the deaths of the little boy and of the mother I mentioned above, there was a suicide bombing in Israel. I went to a hotel in East Jerusalem and saw that the New York Times had published a front-page story about it.

I wondered if the paper had run similar headlines about, or at least had mentioned, the Palestinian deaths in the days before, and I discovered that they had not. But I noticed

that the story about the suicide bombing had at least contained some information about these preceding Palestinian deaths – one phrase each, in the second paragraph. Near the end of the story, full of extensive, graphic descriptions of the Israeli tragedies, I also saw that there were a few paragraphs about Israeli crowds beating random Palestinian Israelis to a pulp – one was almost killed – and chanting "Kill Arabs."

Since that time I've monitored the media closely, and investigated numerous similar incidents, in an attempt to discover the nuts and bolts of obfuscation on Israel.

inquiry set up by Admiral John S. McCain, Jr. (Sen. John McCain's father) to look into the attack. This affidavit revealed that there had been a cover-up at the presidential level – that Pres. Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had ordered the court to find, despite all evidence to the contrary, Israel innocent of culpability.

The story of the commission's unprecedented findings died after one day of coverage. Despite an excellent AP report on it, a search of 300 newspapers only turned up 10 that had printed it.

A few months later Moorer died. The first quick AP obituary that came out about him contained one sentence about the Israeli attack. It was minimal, but present. Within a few hours a longer obit came out, containing a great deal of additional information about Moorer. But the sentence on the Israeli attack had been taken out.

I have phoned AP many times, asking them why information on the USS Liberty was removed from the obituary, and who removed it. Each time, the person I reached agreed that the Liberty information was important, and told me they would get back to me. I'm still waiting.

Finally, in the midst of the unfolding scandal about torture and humiliation of Iraqi prisoners at Abu-Ghraib, two international human rights organizations released findings that 374 Palestinian teenagers imprisoned by Israel were being treated with similar cruelty. There was a short AP story on the report. It was sent to Britain, Europe, Africa, India, and Asia. It was not, however, sent to American newspapers. Phone calls to AP asking why it was deemed newsworthy in the rest of the world but not in the United States went unanswered.

Media Studies

Soon after my visit to the occupied territories I founded an organization called If Americans Knew to monitor the media and to provide Americans with accurate information on this topic. Two years ago, prompted by such anecdotal evidence of massive omission, If Americans Knew began conducting statistical case studies on coverage of Israel and Palestine. We chose categories that would be universally acknowledged as significant and as immune as possible from subjective interpretation. We recorded the number of deaths of both Palestinians and Israelis mentioned in headlines, then compared the percentages of overall deaths that were covered.

Our findings are staggering.

We discovered, for example, that the San Francisco Chronicle had prominently covered 150 percent of Israeli children's deaths—i.e., many of the deaths were the subject of more than one headline in the paper—and five percent of Palestinian ones. In other words, Palestinian deaths were rarely accorded headline coverage even once.

In the first three and a half months of the current Palestinian uprising against Israel's continuing confiscation of Palestinian land and suppression of human rights, Israeli

Continued on next page

Israel and Palestine censored coverage

By Alison Weir (continued from previous page)



forces killed 84 Palestinian children. The largest single cause of their deaths was gunfire to the head. During this period, not one Israeli child was killed. Not one suicide bombing against Israelis occurred.

Of these 84 Palestinian children, only one received headline coverage in the Chronicle – Mohammed al-Durra, the little boy whose murder while he was cowering with his father was recorded for all the world to see by a French TV crew.

Was the Chronicle alone in such unbalanced news coverage?

No. A study of National Public Radio that Seth Ackerman conducted for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) showed that NPR had reported on 89 percent of Israeli children's deaths and 20 percent of Palestinian ones. In other words, NPR, which has been accused of being "pro-Palestinian," reported Israeli deaths at a rate four and a half times greater than Palestinian deaths.

Two studies we conducted of the San Jose Mercury News – for a total of twelve months of data – also revealed enormous distortion in coverage. For example, we discovered that front-page headline coverage of all deaths (adults and children) had so emphasized Israeli deaths over Palestinian ones that the newspaper had, in effect, reversed reality – and then widened the gap. While 313 Israelis and 884 Palestinians had been killed during this period, Mercury News front-page headlines had reported on 225 Israeli deaths, and only 34 Palestinian ones – 72 percent of Israeli deaths and 4 percent of Palestinian ones.

What do these case studies tell us about American coverage in general? A great deal.

Let us imagine what would have happened if a newspaper's headlines had reported the World Series backwards – that the score had been reversed, the winning team declared the loser. The paper would have been the laughingstock of the country; late-night comics around the nation would have had a field day.

Yet, here was an equivalent error in a situation involving life and death, literally, and virtually no one noticed. Why? The logical conclusion is that the entire environment of news most people were accessing – television, radio, magazines – communicated similar inversion.

As a result, the public is staggeringly misinformed. During the current intifada, Palestinian children were being killed – often shot in the head – day after day, week after week, month after month, before a single Israeli child's death. Yet a survey taken later that year showed that 93 percent of the respondents either had no idea which

children had died first, or believed them to be Israeli. And this despite ample coverage of the conflict in general: the Chronicle, for example, ran over 250 stories on Israel and Palestine during this period.

Also omitted was information on US tax money to Israel: well over \$10 million per day – more than to all of sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean put together. Our study showed that in six months of extensive reporting on Israel, the Chronicle had never even once reported the total amount of US money being sent to Israel.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg of omission on this issue.

Over fifty years ago, the massive dispossession of almost an entire indigenous population was carried out by a colonial population pursuing ethnic "purity" – a purity Muslim and Christian Palestinians did not fit into. Israeli writer Yshar Snmilasky described this beginning: "We came, shot, burned, blew up, pushed and exiled... will

the walls not scream in the ears of those who will live in this village?"

In 1967 this nation then overran the small remnants of land left to the indigenous population, and placed the inhabitants under brutal military occupation. In 1982 this apartheid nation invaded yet another country in its quest to prevent the original inhabitants of what was now Israel from returning to their land. Some 20,000 men, women, and children in Lebanon were killed, and hundreds of thousands injured – through the illegal use of American-made weapons. One American physician wrote at the time that she had never before seen "such hideous injuries." In one day, 1,000 mangled limbs were amputated.

In 1987 there was more violence, when the virtually unarmed indigenous population in the occupied territories attempted to rise up against their occupiers and died at the rate of 7 per every one Israeli death. The Palestinian death rate would have been higher, but the occupation forces chose a less reported form of violence to subdue the rebels – soldiers held them down and broke their bones. In the first three days of this new strategy, 197 people were treated for fractures at one hospital in Gaza alone. The policy was implemented by Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli leader later known as a "peace-maker" before being assassinated by a Jewish extremist. One episode was caught on film, and can be viewed in various documentaries. The Israeli cameraman was later killed by Israeli forces.

Through this entire period there was an ongoing campaign to break the indigenous people's spirit. Tens of thousands were incarcerated without recourse to judge and jury. Tens of thousands were tortured, humiliated, maimed. Homes were destroyed by the thousands, cropland plowed under and replaced with concrete colonies from which the ancestral owners of the land were to be eternally excluded. Families were ripped apart, sons deported, schools closed.

And in its first 20 years, Project Censored made no mention of any of this – of this profoundly covered-up conflict, of these people, of this oppression. The longest-standing military occupation of modern times – unmentioned.



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MCCA discount card has its privileges

MCCA is launching a new program to benefit members and local businesses.

In a move to strengthen its members' purchasing powers, promote local businesses and attract new members, MCCA's is launching a discount program that is focused at providing real rewards to members.

The program takes advantage of MCCA's strong financial and membership growth over the past year. With about 8,000 members and between 80-100 new members joining MCCA every month, MCCA's expansion allows it to return the benefits to the community.

MCCA's General Manager, Dr Abdul Rahim Ghouse explains, "There is no confusing point system. This program is focused on giving real benefits to our members. Members will get cheaper prices simply by showing their member cards to participating businesses."

The program will also benefit local businesses. In return for giving discount to our members, MCCA will promote these businesses in two main platforms. First, MCCA will publish information that will be sent to all our 8,000 members to encourage members to patronize these companies. Second, these businesses will be published on the MCCA website.

"We hope to benefit our business partners as best we can. While the

system may be reviewed next year, for this year, businesses that participate in this program will not be charged for anything apart from giving the discounts directly to members. They will receive advertisement and promotion simply by taking care of our members", said Sr Nor Juhana Jamaluddin, MCCA's HR and Accounts Manager.

On MCCA's part, apart from helping members gain better deals, the program is designed to attract membership. The benefits of joining MCCA can be realised almost immediately with the selection of companies associated with the program.

Dr Abdul Rahim Ghouse believes that the card will further motivate the community to be members of the cooperative and bring benefit to everyone. "This is a win-win-win venture. Businesses benefit from the promotion we will provide, members benefit from getting better deals and MCCA benefit from attracting more membership."

Dr Ayman Chehnah, a long term MCCA member said that the card program "Makes us feel like MCCA cares. MCCA is looking for ways to serve its members better."

With about 12 companies confirmed in Melbourne and a similar number from

Sydney, the program provides members with a good mix of shopping destinations from butchers houses to auto detailing to dental.

"We hope to launch the program in the next month. We expect to have 30 companies per state soon" said Sr Meriem,

MCCA's new Finance Officer. "I can only imagine how much I will save from using my MCCA card."


Businesses that would like to participate in the program are encouraged to contact Br Zulfikar Mohamad Shariff at 03-9384 9015 or email zulfikar@mcca.com.au



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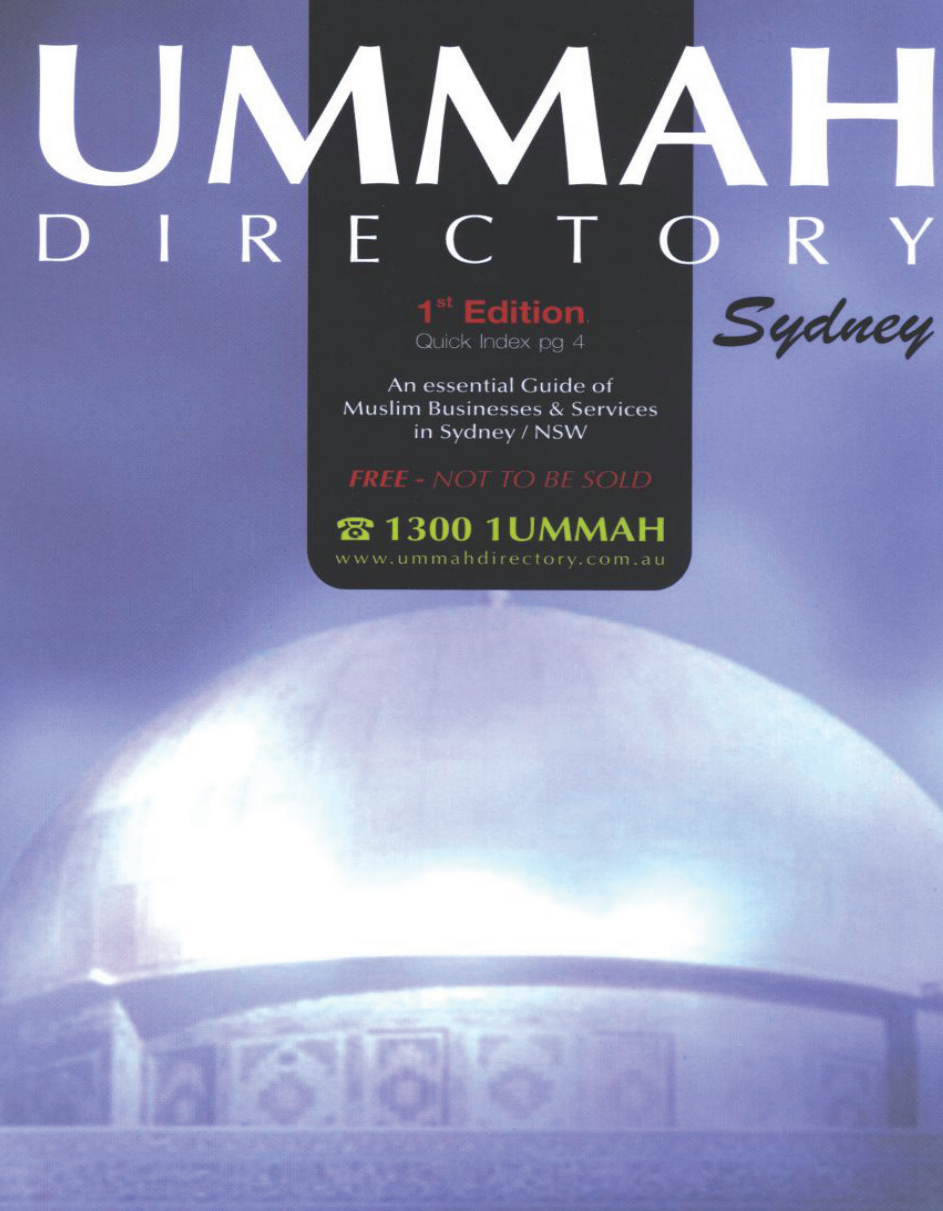
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A journey of forty years

by Karl Kratz

I was born in Berlin, Germany; I am not responsible for the timing of my birth. The year was 1941, but the month was okay. It was in the summertime, in August. Yes, I am a child of World War II. When I, as a young man decided to leave home, I did so with a glad heart.

In Australia, I soon married and began with two small children. Very beautiful they were too. I was not prepared for the role of fatherhood. None of my or my wife's family were here to assist us and give us advice. I wanted to bring my kids up right. So I felt, that religion would help. So I became a Catholic.

That did not teach nor help me much, but during that time I had an experience of a spiritual nature. It is at this time I hesitate to go on with my report. If I should describe it, I can do so only by

clothing something felt intensely...with mere words. I would do a bad job describing what actually took place on this one special morning in Leichhardt.

Allow me to describe it as a very moving moment in my young years. The feeling of the experience and what I learned was so different to my Catholic experience. I was determined to find the source of this event and be as close as I could to the truth!

I was left with a very distinct impression of what that truth would be. Again putting it in the realm of reality with mere words is impossible for me. I knew I would know in my heart!

Thus started a fevered search for truth, which took me to some strange places. I certainly learned a lot on my path. Most of which sadly, could not possibly be true. This search took 40 long and frustrating

years. After my divorce, I felt like giving the search away. I had had enough!

My friend then gave me his computer, suggesting I go on the internet. I did! What a wonderful world the internet is! I came across an Islamic site which was run from England. The writings were in very plain English "What do Muslims believe in?"

I was able to research subjects, at my pleasure, such as Islamic history, the prophets, and the Quran and so on. This I did in detail! Studying all of this I felt in me certain urgency. This was also accompanied by a warm feeling in my heart. The passage which finally convinced me went like this: "Did you suppose that we created you for amusement and that you would not return to us? (Surat al-Mu'minun:115)

The very tone of this message reminded me of my experience all these



decades ago. The other thing which surprised me very much was the logic in the Holy Quran. Here was a religion, obviously severely misrepresented, that encouraged investigation and a questioning attitude.

I felt I was home.

I said the Shahada in the back room of the Islamic bookstore in Haldon St, Lakemba on the 27th of January, 2004.

I need to learn a lot, but I love the learning process. It feels I am a part of the whole universe; my real journey has just started.

Popular website on-line forum questioned

The Islamic Sydney Website was recently chosen as the media outlet of the year at the Mission of Hope Muslim achievements event held on Sunday 7th July 2005 at the Orion centre in Campsie.

However, there is another side to the popular website writes Bill Adams.

The "IslamicSydney" website, as the makers of the website claim, is established to provide a focal point for Muslims in Sydney, and to bind the community together.

Searching there website, users of this website have the opportunity to find out the latest events happening in the Muslim community. Go through a list of Muslim restaurants to visit, get to know various mosques and Islamic bookstores, find out the latest Muslim news from Australia and around the world, and discuss and talk about different issues in the Forum section (Chat room) which IslamicSydney have to offer.

Not too long ago, a well-known Sheik, who gives talks at the Global Islamic Youth Centre, Sheik Fayeze, created a huge uproar in the mainstream media.

After his initial claims that women who dress a certain way deserve to be raped, Sheik Fayeze sincerely apologized about his remarks and was deeply sorry to the Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

He has acknowledged the hysteria that he might of created and God willing has learnt some beneficial knowledge.

But what is most disappointing and upsetting is the way the Moderators and the administrators of the IslamicSydney

chat rooms handled the issues surrounding Sheik Fayeze. One of the moderators of this website even warns its users of the chat rooms not to ruffle the feathers of the peace and that any disturbances will lead to automatic bans.

The type of discussions being hosted by IslamicSydney were of the most dubious calibre and the website could not be true to its own name. For instance one user wrote- "Sheik Fayeze is a Wahabi, a fully trained

behaviour with one of the people running this website to stop the garbage surrounding Sheik Fayeze, the forum was still open for days and the slander continued.

One user wrote "Sheik Fayeze advocates rape, advocates sexual slavery and that unmarried brothers should chip in and import one".

These were unfounded allegations which were allowed to be posted on the public site.

I have just given you a very small amount of quotes and comments made by the users of "IslamicSydney" during the Sheik Fayeze issue and about the Sheik himself. There are many more quotes which were shocking in these forums.

I just wonder, if these comments weren't a strong indicator to ban people or to block this section of the forum, then when is it appropriate to block this forum and warn the users on the forums and website about creating disturbances?

Finally, from one of the Moderators of the website:

"I am sick and tired of having Islam dragged through the mud and made the subject of ridicule because of the likes of Sheik Fayeze, Willie Brigit, Jamal Salah, Jack Roach, Bilal Khazal and the Zak Mulla's of our community. They follow a particular type of Islam, full of hatred and intolerance."

Remember, this website claims to be uniting the community. This website warns it's users against posting anti-Islamic sentiments.

This website ask that members respect Islam at all times or they will be condemned or banned.

I have spoken to many Muslims about Islamic Sydney and the way they handled the Sheik Fayeze Saga. People are also disgusted, upset, shocked and disappointed. I urge the management of "IslamicSydney" to uphold their website rules and regulations and uphold restraint to users of the "IslamicSydney" forum, who want to cause hatred in the Muslim community. Sheik Fayeze has given his apology to the community. Will "IslamicSydney" also offer its apology to Sheik Fayeze and the Muslim community. Lets wait and see.



Wahabi. He is a fraud and the Wahabis are jealous and hate the Prophet".

This in itself is a grave offence to make about another Muslim. Feyiz has on numerous times said that he is not a Wahabi.

But when the Media hype about Sheik Fayeze was in swing, the moderators and Administrators of IslamicSydney had an open door policy, an open and free agenda to slander, backbite, ridicule, embarrass, abuse and defame a respected and knowledgeable Sheik. Sheik Fayeze spent 6-7 years learning his religion and has dedicated much of his life to the pleasure of Allah.

Even after discussing the un-Islamic

Another User wrote "I'm glad Pamela Bone wrote the article about Sheik Fayeze. Maybe then the Muslims that favour him will finally get embarrassed enough to be associated with him and leave his silly rantings, highly inaccurate lessons and find a better learning elsewhere."

As related in Sahih Al-Bukhari- Abu Ashari said "O messenger of Allah, which of the Muslims are better? The messenger (PBUH) said "Those who do not harm the Muslims with their tongues and hands".

In another Hadith related by Al-Bukhari, the messenger (PBUH) said, "Whoever guards what is between his jaw and his legs, I will guarantee him paradise".

Silma's saga: Noor Alhouda in focus



B) Muslim Service Association
C) Al Noori (first school in NSW)
D) Noor Al Houda
In fact, on occasions I have been threatened by AFIC, and the recent issue of bidding against a school in severe crisis, thereby wasting nearly \$3 million of the community's money, is absolutely appalling and shows the extent that those in power will go to, in order to remain unaccountable to the rest of the community.

FAIR: How do the Islamic schools in Australia operate?

Silma: Under many different systems. Some are controlled by AFIC (nearly one in every state at the moment). Some are controlled by local associations or mosques - or were begun by them e.g. Rooty Hill, Qiblah in Campbelltown, Arkana in Sydney etc. None were started by individuals such as occurred with both Al Noori and Noor Al Houda. Most were established by raising money

overseas, and using the assets of the local Muslim association. Noor Al Houda was established totally by Muslim Australian individuals' assets. The only other school known to be like this by me is Abdullah Magar's school in Perth. Those that are the most open and progressive meet termly in different parts of Australia and belong to the Australian Council for Islamic Education in Schools.

FAIR: What is the standard of management and teaching like in Islamic schools? Can it be improved?

Silma: Islamic Schools are still 'new' on the block. Many of the more successful have focussed simply on getting high marks, but have not addressed the very important areas of citizenship, values education, leading Islamic teaching etc. Successful schools that have achieved a high standard and reputation include King Khalid, and Minaret in Melbourne, AIC in Perth. Most have a long way to go in the areas of curriculum development, quality facilities, educational initiatives, and

of course, most importantly, Management. While the Boards of these schools are dominated by people who are not familiar with education and their priorities, they will not achieve a high standard. Lastly, the fees that the Muslim community is prepared to pay will not allow these schools to achieve a high standard. Schools are very competitive places, and the facilities require substantial investment. At the moment, Muslim schools are generally the cheapest schools in Australia. From Noor Al Houda's point of view, it has struggled to survive against the odds since its inception. It looks forward to moving to a new Board with a wider representation, and finally beginning to focus on quality teaching.

FAIR: Is there any rivalry between the schools?

Silma: Most of the schools work together well, and recently, I was very thankful for the huge amount of support that I received from the Melbourne schools - King Khalid, and Minaret. Unfortunately, the AFIC schools are totally unwilling to co-operate in any ventures, and have gradually withdrawn even from inter-school sport activities.

FAIR: Do you think Islamic schools promote "unaustralianness"?

Silma: Some may, Noor al Houda does not. In promoting only high academic results, and a central form of governance which focusses only on getting to Uni and getting into wealthy jobs, such Muslims resemble the same attitude found in Muslim countries which do not share the same egalitarian goals that Islam and to a great extent, Australia emphasises. The ideal graduate is

Continued from page 3

not necessarily one who has a 100% UAI, but a pious, practising Muslim leader, who demonstrates care for his or her neighbour, is an excellent role model in the community, and contributes to solving society's problems through their active involvement in the community. An excellent Muslim Australian citizen.

FAIR: Do schools understand the mentality of the broader society if they are isolated from it?

Silma: Schools are no longer isolated. The Commonwealth and the State have prescribed many areas of citizenship, values etc which ensure that schools must teach much the same whether they are Anglican, Catholic, public or Muslim. Active schools also regularly meet together, engage in sport, cultural, social and other activities which ensure that they cannot be isolated from each other. However, some schools still try and keep themselves isolated.

FAIR: Does your school teach children to be Muslim first and Australian last?

Silma: To be a good Muslim you have to understand how to contribute to Australian society as a good citizen - otherwise you cannot fulfill your Islamic responsibilities to the community and to Australia.

FAIR: What are the prospects for your school in the near future?

Slowly get back on its feet, develop the facilities, expand, and develop quality and challenging curriculum and school activities and culture. An excellent future, especially if we win the appeal.



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New book on Aussie Muslims launched

The Glory Garage

By Nadia Jamal & Taghred Chandab
— Growing up Lebanese Muslim in Australia

A new book about young Lebanese women has just been launched. It's about young Lebanese Australian women by young Lebanese Australian women.

Description:

A collection of true stories that present a fascinating insight into a culture that remains mysterious to many non-Lebanese Muslims. Warm, provocative, funny and poignant, these tales of family and community life, contradictions and customs, are a vivid insight into an exotic and vibrant culture.

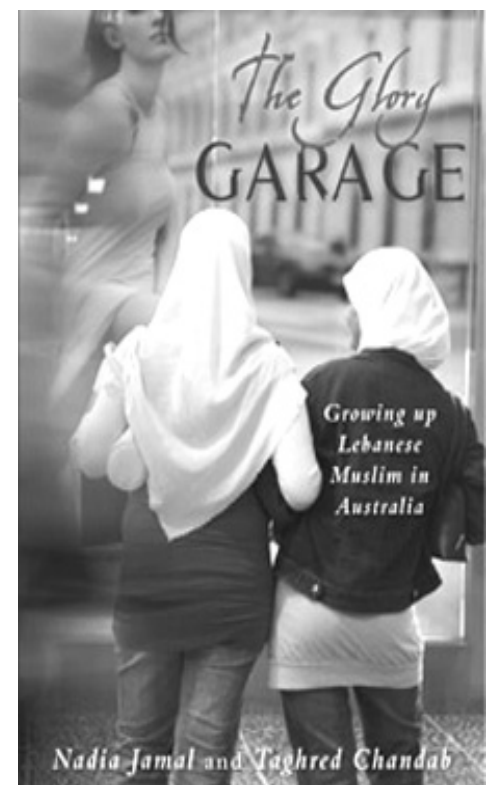
We call the obsession with collecting household items for married life 'the glory garage syndrome.' We're talking serious shopping here and it affects many Lebanese girls long before an engagement ring is on their finger. A generation ago, our parents migrated to Australia as young men and women, leaving their families behind in Lebanon.

They worked hard in factories and shops and taxis in their new country. We were born here and consider ourselves Australian, but we don't want to deny our Lebanese heritage. At times we feel like we live in two worlds. We are torn between two cultures, when we want to be both

In these fascinating and candid real-life stories, journalists Nadia Jamal and Taghred Chandab reveal the dilemmas of young people trying to be true to the values of their parents and also be true to themselves.

About the Authors:

Nadia Jamal has been a journalist at The Sydney Morning Herald since 1997, and is currently night chief of staff. She is studying law and has recently learned to swim. Taghred Chandab was a producer of 2UE's Steve Price show and more recently a freelance producer at the ABC. Now she has a business called Undercover - Modest Clothing for Modest Women (in Bankstown).



Australian culture and its virtues

By Dalal Oubani (pictured)



Culture- it is everywhere, it is around us and in us and at all times acts as an influential force when we make our decisions. In most multi-cultural societies you find people mixing and matching their cultural values, selectively or passively choosing what their belief structure or values will be. It could be a small unnoticeable adaptation of another cultures values and practices that you are not aware of such as eating sushi more regularly than you would eat your normal cultural dish or it might be a significant obvious adoption of particular values such as family/social values. Most often who we are in any given time period is not just shaped by our culture, but our religion, socio-economic status, geographic location, gender and other demographic determiners.

Islam, as a universal religion and a gift to humanity offered to transcend the separating boundaries of cultural differences and arrogance by encouraging the rejection of negative cultural practices which contravene its teachings and the adoption of positive values which are harmoniously aligned with its core values.

For many centuries, communities have mixed their own cultural values with Islam, but why have we rarely questioned certain cultural values we may carry which could be impeding our true spiritual development? Islam's contempt for cultural superiority complexes stems from all of gods creations being created equally. Unlike Judiasm, there is no exclusive club to join and membership is open to all.

It helps to question. The advantage Caucasian reverts and reverts from cultures with only a small proportion of Muslims have is the objectivity that comes with making an individual choice rather than having an entire community of Muslims pressure you with ideas on how your Islam should be practiced. Furthermore the amount of objectivity required for an individual to analyse their own core cultural values, would enable a revert to reach a high level of Islam that only a few Muslims can hope to achieve.

Islam warns against the dangers of nationalism, jingoism and the pride and arrogance that they carry. But why is it when we view the Australian culture, we forget to see the values it embodies which may be more closely aligned with Islam than our own inherited cultural values? Surely Allah did not separate a particular culture from his message due to inherited biological flaws which constrain all behaviour and thought processes in its population? Is every other cultures values superior to Australian/English values, if so why is it that these cultures seem to yearn for education and the exploration of knowledge as required by our prophet more than most other cultures?

The abundance of pornography and alcohol in western countries such as Australia along with powerful figures in the media and politics constantly referring to Islam as the 'other' (as though they had lawful access to the land in the beginning) seems to have provided a huge barrier in allowing Muslims to evaluate their own hypocritical cultural values which may also be equally contradictory to Islam. Furthermore this 'blindness' to see the similarities between Islam and Australian values not only discourages the increasing number of Caucasian reverts but also prevents a true form of Islam from emerging.

'True Form' in the sense of an Islam not 'belonging' to any particular race or culture, where people are able to take an honest look at themselves. This is however easier said than done. How many of us will admit that our continued cultural practices such as backbiting, sexism, double standards, and dishonesty are preventing us from moving closer to Allah? How many people do you know, have been to Mecca more than twice and still have not recognised or purified their nafs (ego) from such degenerate behaviour which stunts their true spiritual growth? If we reject the Australian culture for its damaging sexual content, are we also going to reject the Arab culture for their backbiting or African cultures for their use of voodoo and witchcraft even though many Muslims from these backgrounds may still be flawed with these traits?

There is more to the Australian culture than free sex and alcohol, and if Islam is not welcome in the west for its antagonism towards such commodities, then every other religion might as well be seen as an 'enemy'. Some Australian values such as kindness towards animals, volunteer work for worthy causes, high regard for honesty and a 'fair go', looking out for ones 'mate' and the constant search for social justice in fact are highly unique when compared to other global and local cultures and fit perfectly within Islam. Even the idea of sexual 'liberation' at least acknowledges the need for women to enjoy their bodies, and remains more coherent with the Prophet Muhammad's recognition of women's sexual needs than most eastern cultures who fail to recognise such internal needs. Furthermore it is not correct to say that Muslims or cultures predominately Muslim do not suffer from the vices of adultery and alcoholism as these vices are not limited to one or two cultures but can be found in all of humanity. A more correct statement would be that Islam through its teachings offers very effective guidelines to help avoid these social problems in communities which strive to follow its teachings.

Are we Afghani, Lebanese, Turkish, Bosnian, Egyptian Muslims really the best representatives of Islam? Do you ever wonder why most reverts say that they became Muslim in spite of Muslims? Surely that alone should say something about how Islamic most Muslims are? When people see young veiled Lebanese girls who either appear too hyperactive or passive or disrespectful fornicating young men called Ali or Mohammed, do you really think that they have seen the true essence of Islam? Surely the billion dollar finance/weapons industries and Zionist funded governments that seek to destroy Islam already have a huge advantage when it comes to resources, and they don't

need us to make their job any easier.

Multiculturalism helps to offset any arrogance in character, at least where ones faith is concerned. As Muslims in Australia, we can still reject alcohol, sexual perversity, and Australia's support of the oppression of innocent Iraqis, just like other non-Muslim Australians have, without disregarding positive values that this same culture may carry. In fact the analytical approach towards culture is exactly what is missing from Muslim communities today who either out of fear, insecurity or ignorance fail to grasp the cues which might suggest that their current cultural practices are also un-Islamic. It is easier to judge those around us, but the challenge begins when we turn the mirror on ourselves. Imagine what would happen if we asked ourselves whether or not a cultural practise we have is coherent with Islam, and if not we discarded

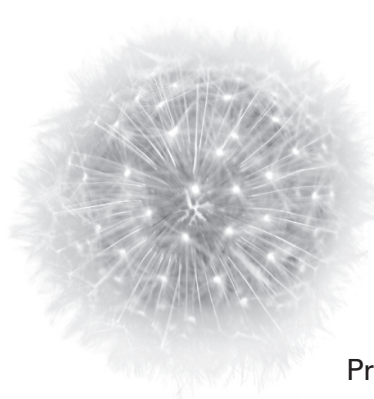


it? But such a step would require strength and integrity in character that only few a people posses. Analysing surrounding cultures fairly without the fear of losing ones identity would require even greater courage

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ASIO is watching you

Claims ASIO Are
Watching 100 Suspects
by Lincoln Wright and Darrell Giles
Source: The Sunday Mail (Qld)

Authorities have compiled a top-secret hit list of more than 100 terror suspects living in Australia.

The suspects, all linked to terror group al-Qaeda or its Asian offshoot Jemaah Islamiyah, are under constant surveillance by the nation's spy agency ASIO.

The hit list names suspected "sleepers" and includes Muslim clerics, business people, foreigners – and even Australian citizens.

Intelligence sources confirmed that the suspects are monitored by listening devices, video-taping, informers and phone taps.

ASIO has also launched a major counter-intelligence operation to pre-empt a terrorist strike, using undercover agents and electronic devices to monitor Australia's mosques.

Federal Attorney-General Philip Ruddock confirmed the existence

of the list – one of ASIO's most closely-guarded secrets.

He refused to reveal how many on the hit list were Australian citizens, but it is believed there are 20.

In the wake of the London attacks, security experts said the threat posed by "homegrown radicals" was greater than that of overseas terrorists.

Former London Metropolitan Police Commissioner Lord Stevens revealed intelligence pointing to "at least 100 and probably nearer 200 Osama Bin Laden-trained terrorists walking Britain's streets".

Leading international terrorism expert Peter Chalk confirmed sleeper cells were believed to be operating in Australia.

Dr Chalk, a former University of Queensland lecturer now with the Rand Corporation think-tank in California, said the new breed of terrorists might not fit traditional profiles.

"They could be converted Caucasians who have bought in on the al-Qaeda message," he said.



Dr Chalk said evidence was emerging that al-Qaeda and JI had farmed out responsibility for strikes to local cells.

"They may only be two or three people . . . in many ways, they are much more dangerous."

We understand that the ASIO list has been lengthened in recent months after intelligence was gathered from Pakistan and France.

ASIO received crucial intelligence from Pakistan after the arrest of top al-Qaeda operative Mohammed Noor Khan who allegedly sent messages from Osama bin Laden and other leaders to Asian terrorist cells planning attacks in Australia.

ASIO also learnt much about al-Qaeda's plans for Australia from French judge Jean-Louis Brugiere, who is in charge of the Willie Brigitte case in France. Brigitte was deported to France in 2003 after allegedly planning a terrorist attack here.

Judge Brugiere will visit Australia this month for talks with ASIO and federal police.

It is believed ASIO is particularly interested in al-Qaeda-linked group Lashkar-e-Toiba, which is banned in Australia but has strong links to Pakistan and Afghanistan Islamic groups.



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QC supports internment of imams

A prominent Melbourne Queens Counsel has called upon the Australian Government to detain Imams and persons caught photographing public monuments.

In a posting to his website dated 8 July 2005, Peter Faris QC called for the implementation of wartime legislation similar to that established during the Second World War.

"Wartime legislation like this is now necessary", wrote Mr Faris. "Mullahs or Imams or whatever who preach or violence of Jihad should be detained."

Mr Faris is a prominent Melbourne barrister and former Chairman of the National Crime Authority during 1989-90. He is an expert in criminal and computer

law. In the past, he has worked as a criminal lawyer for the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and is a founder of the Fitzroy Legal Service.

Mr Faris was recently quoted as suggesting that torture of terror and criminal suspects was acceptable. His comments were described by the Chairman of the Criminal Bar Association, Lex Lasry QC, as "bizarre" and a "ludicrous concept"

More telling than Mr Faris' comments on his website were comments made by readers supporting his stand.

One contributor under the nickname "Gravelrash" has suggested that "some ozzie Mozzies should be in Baxter, for the sake of national security".

Noor Al Houda college wins court case

On Thursday 24th February Justice Clifton Hoeber awarded a win to Noor Al Houda Islamic College against Bankstown Airport Limited (BAL). After nearly five years seeking to bring the case to the Supreme Court, Judge Hoeber has ruled in favour of the school.

The court verdict was indeed a decision for Noor Al Houda. The school has been through tremendous hardship finding a suitable location and suffered the loss of more than half of its students. The ruling is seen as a vindication of the beliefs and courage of the school community and its founders Mrs. Silma Ihram and Mr. Baheej Adada. We are indeed grateful to Almighty Allah.

In his verdict, Justice Hoeber found that BAL had acted negligently through not providing a duty of care to the school and not exercising reasonable care by leasing contaminated land to a school and childcare. The school had operated expecting at all times to be able to obtain a 25 year lease. In dispute was the school's belief that the airport representatives had

indicated whether the school would be able to build a quality permanent school on the site. It was with shock that the school had discovered that the land was contaminated after operating for 5 years, especially as only impractical and negligible remediation was offered to the school if it agreed to sign the 25 year lease which was finally offered



in 1998. For the next four years the school tried in vain to find alternative premises to relocate to a more suitable site. Unsuccessful locations included the former Energy Australia site

in Bankstown, Linnwood Hall, and Lidcombe Hospital amongst others. Noor Al Houda would like to express its thanks to the community who supported the school both morally and financially during these very difficult years. The school would also like to thank the teams of lawyers who persevered patiently until the case finally reached court. The court win is also a victory for the Muslim community at large and is an example of how the Muslim community can respond when challenged with difficulties. Such a

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Using rape as revenge in Pakistan



to be restored, Mukhtaran Mai had to be punished in his place.

Four men took turns gang-raping her before a cheering crowd of witnesses. After her painful ordeal, she was thrown out into the street, with only a shawl to cover her as she walked back to her village.

In June 2004, over 150 women were raped under the Panchiat system. A rape victim in rural Pakistan has no marriage prospects, credible reputation or justice for the abuse. Mukhtaran Mai had given up hope. Many times she had contemplated suicide but it was her friends, family and the village imam that convinced her not to give up. The imam used his position in the community to speak out against her rapists. He called for her attackers to be tried before civil court and convinced her to file a complaint with the police. She also alerted the attention of the local and international media so that women like her could garner the justice they deserve.

Mukhtaran Mai is an Islamic teacher, well versed in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and she knew that her rights as a Muslim woman had been violated. Often these cases go ignored or unreported. The Panchiat system is a violation of Pakistan's secular laws and the divine laws of Islam.

The government stepped in and charged the four rapists and eight tribal leaders. They were subject to hang and Mukhtaran Mai was awarded \$8,000 in compensation, money which she has used to build schools to promote literacy among the children of her village.

Instead of execution, the men were sent to jail for life but in March 2005, due to an appeal, the rapists were released from prison. Within the same month, the Islamic Shari'a court stepped in and overturned the appeal and ordered that that her attackers be tried for their crime and had them rearrested. She had been offered a house and protection within the capital city of Islamabad but she chose to remain with her people in Meerwala. She even allowed the children of her rapists to attend her school.

On June 10th, 2005, the Lahore High Court went against the Shari'a court and released her rapists from prison. Her case has been appealed and is going to the Pakistani Supreme Court but she is in tremendous danger from people who want to restore the "honor" of the men who attacked her. She was set to do an international tour speaking about her experience and the abuse that women like her endure because they are female, poor

or come from a "lower social caste." The Pakistani government initially prevented her from leaving the country but now they are allowing her to leave. It was reported that the police assigned to protect her in her village home were, in fact, harassing her. So the question remains. When will Mukhtaran Mai and others like her receive justice?

When the Prophet Muhammad came to the people of Makkah with the message of Islam, he had to deal with a society that had no respect and dignity for its women. Burying baby girls alive was common. Women had no marital rights, no right to inherit property or receive an education. They could not function as individuals within their society without their father or husband's permission. Now, many years later, we are still struggling to purify our societies of these pre-Islamic practices. We know that Islam gave women a multitude of rights that other women did not enjoy until the advent of modernism and secularism. But it's not enough to say, "Islam liberated women." We as believing people must establish this deen in order to create just and peaceful societies so that rape and other forms of abuse are forbidden and punished accordingly.



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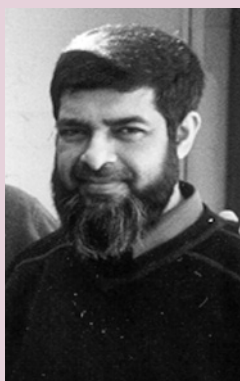
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Makkah's history under threat

Makkah's historic sites under threat. Real estate firms say there is a need for pilgrim accommodation. Some of Makkah's most historic sites, possibly including a home of the Prophet Muhammad, are under threat from Saudi real estate developers and an influential Muslim group that view them as promoting idolatry. Sami Angawi, an expert on the region's Islamic architecture, said 1400-year-old buildings from the early Islamic period risk being demolished to make way for high rise towers for Muslims flocking to perform the annual pilgrimage to Islam's most revered city. "We are witnessing now the last few moments of the history of Makkah," Angawi said on Thursday. "Its layers of history are being bulldozed for a parking lot," he added.

Angawi estimated that over the past 50 years at least 300 historical buildings had been levelled in Makkah and Medina, another revered city containing Muhammad's tomb. Fear of idolatry Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia's dominant doctrine that promotes a strict interpretation of Islam, was largely to blame for the destruction, he said. "They (Wahhabis) have not allowed preservation of old buildings, especially those related to the prophet. They fear other Muslims will come to see these buildings as blessed and this could lead to polytheism and idolatry." The Washington-based Saudi Institute, an independent news gathering group, says most Islamic landmarks have been destroyed since Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932.

At the heart of the Hajj, the Kaaba is oldest structure in Makka. It cited a 1994 edict by the kingdom's senior council of religious scholars which ruled that preserving historical buildings might lead to polytheism. Angawi, who founded the Haj Research Centre in 1975 to study and preserve Makka's and Medina's rich history, claims to have identified a home of



Muhammad.

But he is reluctant to publicise its location, fearing it would be demolished like Dar al-Arqam - the first school in Islam where the prophet taught.

Scholarly support

Angawi's views were echoed elsewhere. In London, Geoffrey King, Islamic art and archaeology specialist at the School of Oriental and African Studies, said the fate of Islamic historic sites in Saudi Arabia was "depressing".

"The religious authorities have failed to appreciate the significance of these buildings to Muslims and scholars worldwide," said King, who taught for several years in the kingdom and stressed many young Saudis agreed with him.

Followers of Wahhabism say Muslims should focus on Makka's Grand mosque, which contains the Kaaba - an ancient structure that more than four million Muslims visit each year as part of Hajj and Umra pilgrimages. Real estate dream

230,000-sq-m area adjacent to the Grand mosque, the seven-year project consists of several towers containing hotels, apartments, shops and restaurants.

Angawi said these developments will dwarf Makka's Grand mosque and are a sign of crass commercialisation. Hot debate

"Makka is being treated like a bad copy of any city when it is a sanctuary. The house of God is being commercialised and these developments are disrespectful and totally out of proportion." But the Jabal Omar Development Company, the firm behind the project, said it was changing Makka for the better, not least by demolishing more than 1000 poorly built homes that clung precariously to the hillsides around the Grand mosque.

The firm said around 70,000 residents of 29 different nationalities used to live on the Jabal Omar site before selling and moving into better quality housing elsewhere.

The residents of



Real estate firms see massive demand for new accommodation to house up to 20 million pilgrims expected to visit Islam's most important city annually over the coming years as the authorities relax entry restrictions for pilgrims. Some 20 million Muslims visit Makka every year. "The infrastructure at the moment cannot cope. New hotels, apartments and services are badly needed," the director of a leading real estate company said, estimating that developers are spending around \$13 billion on projects in the city.

Dominating these is the 10 billion riyal Jabal Omar scheme. Covering a

a similar neighbourhood close by seem to be equally eager to attract developers. But Angawi is not convinced of the developers' motives. "We have to accommodate these new pilgrims, but do we have to do it in towers and skyscrapers? Making money seems to be the bottom line here," he said.

"We are destroying physical links to our past and turning our religion and history into a legend."

Courtesy: Al Jazeera

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A large problem that has not yet been overcome is the housing and education of the thousands of orphans who have either become homeless or living with relatives. These children need to continue living as near a normal life as possible. They need love and care as well as structure. Education and housing is the most important thing that we can support from afar.

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AFCA will support the school and look to other schools in Australia to lend support and hopefully open more schools in other villages. The amazing thing is that it only costs approximately \$4000 AUD a year to fully run a school in Aceh.

If you would like to support an orphan in Aceh we are looking for sponsorships of only \$22/\$30 a month (or less than a \$1 a day). This will supply each child with basic accommodation, blankets, mattress and food as well as uniforms, pencils and paper. You will receive up to date reports on the progress of each child. If you are interested please fill out the Expression of Interest form below:



Yours sincerely

Seyfi Seyit
Project Manager

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Muslim super fund available

THE CHOICE OF SUPERANNUATION FUND LEGISLATION: A UNIQUE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY FOR ISLAMIC RETIREMENT INCOME

- Dr. AbulKhair Jalaluddin
INTRODUCTION

From 1 July 2005, many Australian employees have the right to choose which superannuation fund will receive their employer superannuation guarantee contributions. Under the choice of superannuation fund legislation, employees can ask their employers to send superannuation guarantee contributions to their chosen funds and employers will be legally obligated to act on their requests.

This choice of superannuation fund is not available if superannuation guarantee contributions are paid under a state industrial award or state agreement, an Australian Workplace Agreement or a certified agreement under the Workplace Relations Act 1996 or the Industrial Relations Act 1998.

A UNIQUE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY FOR MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALIA

The choice of superannuation fund initiative of the Government presents a great opportunity for Australian Muslims to establish Islamic superannuation funds. These will be good vehicles to generate Halal retirement income for Muslim Australians. More importantly, this segment of the superannuation funds will provide an Islamic financial environment for retirement investment in the Australian economy.

By legislation, superannuation guarantee contributions are continuous supply of money to superannuation funds. Under the Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992, employers are legally responsible to make superannuation guarantee contributions for eligible employees. Currently, these contributions are at the rate of 9 per cent of their earnings base. From 1 July 2003, contributions are made on a quarterly basis which means a quicker transfer of money from employers to superannuation funds. If an Islamic superannuation fund manages to achieve a reasonable number of memberships, this regular flow of funds will soon build up an increasing capital reserve for a profitable superannuation business.

THE SIZE OF AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM

MARKET

The Muslim market in Australia is a sizeable one. According to the Census 2001, 1.5 per cent of the Australian population is Muslim, about two-thirds of which live in New South Wales, and mainly in Sydney. 1.5



Open the door to Islamic super

per cent calculates to be 284,585 people from the total population of 18,972,350 in the 2001 Census (See, www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs). These figures may be conservative. Some estimates suggest that Australian Muslim population now numbers at approximately 400,000.

This Muslim population works in different industries of the Australian economy.

Currently, the Australian Muslim market has different sectors which include education, finance, halal meat, food manufacturing, retail trade, restaurants, vehicle mechanical workshop, migration services, travel agencies, printing and postal services. Australian Muslims own businesses in these sectors and industries. A good marketing strategy will ensure enough clients for Islamic superannuation funds from these sectors.

THE INVESTMENT STRATEGIES OF ISLAMIC SUPERANNUATION FUNDS

Islamic superannuation funds will have to produce a Product Disclosure Statement to explain their investment options, strategies behind each option, the expected rate of returns, the associated risks and fees. This

will be a requirement by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) to establish the fund and protect the rights of members under company laws.

There are a number of sectors in the Australian economy where Islamic investments could be made and a market rate of return earned. These broad sectors include property, telcos, transportation, manufacturing, mining, resources, food processing, retail trade, construction and agriculture. These sectors and industries provide enormous investment opportunities which are not contradictory to Islamic norms and values.

Based on the above sectors, a number of investment options could be designed by Islamic superannuation funds. The Islamic investment options could be grouped under three broad categories: growth, balanced and capital stable.

The growth option would invest approximately 80 per cent of funds in shares and properties, the rest in trade financing of consumer and industrial goods. This option would aim for higher returns over the long run and risk higher losses in bad financial years.

The balanced option would invest approximately 70 per cent of funds in shares and properties, the rest in trade financing. This option will aim for a reasonable rate of return over the long run and a reduction in losses in badly performing years.

The capital stable option would invest approximately 70 per cent of funds in trade financing, the rest in shares and properties. This option will aim to reduce the risk of suffering losses and accept a lower rate of return over the long run.

In the absence of in-house fund managers, Islamic superannuation funds can invest in shares and properties through commissioned fund managers affiliated to different financial services companies in the Australian economy. As these fund managers act on advice, trustees of Islamic superannuation funds would be in an undoubted position to instruct them to invest in Islamic investment options. The investment advice of trustees would be incontrovertible to commissioned fund managers. This commercial practice of trustees will be safeguarded by the Trade Practices Act 1974.

Investments in trade financing of consumer durables and industrial items could be made through business partnerships with Australian Islamic financial organisations.

THE COMPETITIVENESS OF ISLAMIC SUPERANNUATION FUNDS

All superannuation funds charge fees for management and operations. Islamic superannuation funds, like others in the industry, will have to be competitive in

management costs, insurance costs and fees on contributions, withdrawals and termination of memberships.

Management costs typically range from 0.5 per cent to 2 per cent of the account each financial year. Contributions, withdrawals and termination fees are generally charged as a percentage of each contribution, withdrawal and total account on closing. There might be other fees such as switching fees, adviser fees and service fees. Like all costs, insurance premiums are also deducted from the members' accounts.

Management costs and fee structures provide some of the income streams for all superannuation funds in the industry.

THE AUSTRALIAN SUPERANNUATION INDUSTRY

In Australia, retirement income or superannuation is managed in the private sector by superannuation funds which include corporate funds, industry funds, retail funds and self-managed funds. Banks, credit unions, life insurance companies, building societies and prescribed financial institutions are also eligible to offer superannuation products called Retirement Savings Accounts.

As at 1 July 2005, Australian superannuation industry had a total funds amounting to \$85.00 billion under management (see, www.superratings.com.au). As at 30 June 2003, about 90 per cent of employees had some form of superannuation coverage (see, Taxation Statistics 2001-02: A Summary of Taxation, Superannuation and Industry Benchmark Statistics 2001-02 and 2002-03, Australian Taxation Office, July 2004).

THE SUMMARY AND BUSINESS RECOMMENDATIONS

At this point in time, many Australian employees have the right to ask their employers to send superannuation guarantee contributions to their chosen funds and employers will be legally obligated to do so. This choice superannuation fund presents a great opportunity for Australian Muslims to establish Islamic superannuation funds to earn Halal retirement income.

Although the products of Islamic superannuation funds will be available to all Australians regardless of their faith and culture, there exists a reasonable size of Muslim market in Australia. The Muslim population in this market work in different sectors and industries. This market offers a good client base for entrepreneurs and trustees of Islamic superannuation funds.

There are Islamically allowed investment opportunities in various sectors of the Australian economy. A number of Islamic investment options with good strategies could be designed to serve members of Islamic superannuation funds who would be willing to accept different degrees of risk and levels of profitability.

As the size of the superannuation industry is enormous and expected to grow at about 18 per cent in the coming years, a tiny share of this market will be sufficient for a profitable Islamic superannuation business. It seems to be a good time for establishing Islamic superannuation funds to generate Islamic retirement income and contribute to the growth of the Australian economy.

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