

## *Conference Reports*

### **Peace, Jihad & Conflict Resolution**

*The international seminar on Peace, Jihad & Conflict Resolution, jointly organized by AMSS, IIIT; and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), was hosted by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (CMCU), Georgetown University on November 2-3, 2002.*

The seminar's goal was to bring a deeper understanding of the place and position of religion in general, and Islam in particular, toward the dynamic concepts of Peace, Jihad, political violence and Military conflict. The seminar got off to a lively start on Saturday morning with introductions presented by Dr. Jamal Barzinji (Vice President, IIIT). Welcoming remarks were made by Dr. Ahmad S. Weld Abah (Chairman, ISESCO Executive Council), Dr. Louay Safi (AMSS president), and Dr. John Esposito (CMCU Director). The opening session was followed by an inspiring speech by Dr. Taha Jaber al-Alwani (President, Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences (GSISS), on "Concepts between Islamic and Western World Views: Jihad as an example."

Al-Alwani analyzed the meaning of peace, Jihad and conflict resolution from an Islamic jurisprudential perspective by 'examining how these concepts are governed by the values of *Tawhid* (unity of God), *Tazkiah* (purification of humanity), and 'imran (establishing a values-based civilization). He discussed how practicing and establishing peace is obligatory for all people, because Islam considers humanity to be one family. Since most of Islam's jurisprudential rules are based on peace, according to al-Alwani, "both peace and jihad have different levels, and each one should be fulfilled by individuals, family and society." He characterized jihad as: "There is no other concept that will match the meaning of peace in Islam except jihad," and argued that

“jihad is ‘based on different levels : to struggle is the major meaning of jihad. in order to elevate oneself to a higher level, they must strive.” the concept of conflict resolution implies that many stages should be applied and negotiated before resorting to war.

Thirty-two papers were presented in eight consecutive panels during the 2 day seminar. The panelist approached the issues from theoretical perspectives and sociopolitical experiences in order to overcome stereotypical discussions and superficial impression. On the first day, the following subthemes were analyzed in four panels : “Jihad, War and Peace in the Islamic Authoritative Texts.” “Positive Attitude Toward the ‘Other’.” “Religion: A Tool for Conflict Resolution.” and “Religious and Cultural Roots of War and Peace.”

These panels drew attention to the need of developing and authentic methodology that deals objectively with religious texts and history. In the first panel, Dr. Jamal Badawi (St. Mary’s University, Canada) offered a new vision in his analysis of how some misunderstood verses and *ahadith* have left a negative impact upon the nature of Muslim and non-Muslim relations. He addressed such questions as: “Does Islam teach hate toward others?” and “Does Islam allow the killing of unbelievers?” In fact, Dr. Ingrid Mattson (Hartford Seminary, CT) reinforced this point in the second panel: “Positive attitude toward the ‘Other’,.” In her presentation, “Unjust Bias against Jews: A Theme of Early Islamic Literature.” she examined many angles through different examined from the Quran and the Prophet’s life and illustrated the significant meaning hidden in the Prophet’s marital relations with his two formerly Jewish wives: Safiyah and Juwayriah.

In his keynote address at the Saturday evening banquet, John Esposito identified the major challenges American Muslims are facing in America today. He called on Muslims “to accept the challenges and increase their competence level through systematic examinations, research and by visiting different academic institutions throughout America to overcome stereotypical impressions.” He urged Muslims “not to rely on someone else to do the work for [them].”

One Sunday, the following subthemes were analyzed in four consecutive panels: “Intercommunal Harmony and Tolerance: Historical Experiences of Muslims,” “Political Violence and the Nature and Cause of Terrorism,” “Political Domination, Imperialism, Colonialism and Their Roles in Wars and Conflicts,” and “Strategies of Peacemaking Local, Regional, and International.” Each panel was followed by a question and answer session.

The second day of presentations examined the concepts of jihad, peace, and conflict resolution and their reflection from various sociopolitical perspectives, including the western media experience. For example, in the panel “Political Violence and the Nature and Causes of Terrorism,” Jerald Dirks (Muslim author) used his (American Media: Misrepresentation of Islam and the Ummah’s Failure at Public Relations) to identify the areas of misinterpretation of Islam by western literature and art over the last millennium. He focused on two primary issues: How the American Media contributes to the misunderstanding of Islam, and some of the reasons why the American-Muslim community has failed to counteract such methods.

In the panel “Strategies of Peacemaking, Regional and International,” Ef. Robert Crane (Center for Understanding Islam, NJ) examined how to promote peace and conflict resolution in “The International Criminal Court: Toward an Islamic Vision.” He called upon the leadership of Muslim community in America to infuse the universal principles of Islamic thought (*Maqasid. al-Shariah*) into the emerging global rule of law. He stated: “This is the most effective way to address the concerns of the unilateralists in American policy-making circles.”

On Sunday, the luncheon keynote address entitled “European-Muslim Contribution Toward Peace,” delivered by Lord Nazeer Ahmed (House of Lords, UK), was among the seminar’s highlights. Ahmed laid down the foundation of a positive European-Muslim contribution toward peace in the last 2 centuries, especially during World War II. He outlined the European-Muslim’s positive contributions to Europe’s socioeconomic, political and educational conditions, and proudly revealed that “there are many

Muslim mayors in the UK, two Muslims ministers in France, and at least one or more in other European countries.” While highlighting the significance of having a Muslim voice in decision-making circles, because it helps build the political structure, he wondered why there is no American Muslims in Congress yet.

Lord Ahmed concluded his address by calling upon American Muslims to establish academic centers to improve the quality of their contributions to foreign policy decisions, and to establish media strategies that highlight Islamic concerns. He argued that since “Media is a big business that creates fear in people’s lives, Muslims must play an active role there.”

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Ahmad S. Weld Abah credited the seminar’s success to the presentations’ academic depth and the panelist’ practical analyses of the issues. Dr. Fathi Malkawi, the conference chair, thanked all participants and announced that IIIT plans to publish the conference papers as chapters in three books, because the issues addressed are timely and because Muslims and others need to understand how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

## **Towards the Twenty-First Century:**

### **Islam and Vision 2020**

*This is the Key-speech in the International Conference by the Mahathir Mohammad on 15 Muharram 1413/3 July 1992 at Kuala Lumpur; Malaysia*

I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to the joint launching of the Institute of Islam Understanding, Malaysia and the opening ceremony of this congress.

The idea of the Institute of Islamic Understanding, Malaysia, was first suggested because of the confusion among Muslims and non-Muslims regarding Islam. This discord has led to misunderstanding and animosity not only between Muslims and non-Muslims but among Muslims themselves. Whether we like it or not, many non-Muslims consider Islam a religion that is closely

related to backwardness, poverty and weakness. Of late, some Muslims have also been closely associated with violence and irrationality - an act or thought which is without principles.

We are deeply disappointed with such incorrect views. But the truth is that Muslims and Islamic nations are far behind, weak and dependent on others for their various needs. At the same time, Muslims themselves find cooperation and unity difficult. They allow themselves to be used as tools and to serve the interests of others. They are unable and often unwilling to help each other, which leads to disunity, animosity, disagreement. The administration of Islamic countries is usually weak and backward, chaotic and disorderly. No Muslim country can be considered a major power worthy of international respect. Rather, all are considered developing countries, even though some have enormous wealth. The main reason for this is that they lack technology and sophistication.

This was not always true, for in the past Islam and Muslims enjoyed a prolonged period of success and prosperity, respect and esteem. After the death of the Prophet, Muslims spread Islam from Spain to China. Through their missionary activities, military might and efficient rule, they erected the largest empire in world history. Islamic countries evolved and were famous for their high and sophisticated civilization. They produced experts in administration, development, agriculture, industry, engineering, defense, science, mathematics, shipping, navigation, medicine and other fields of knowledge. Institutes of higher learning, complete with libraries and laboratories, were from Spain to the Middle East. Knowledge from earlier civilizations, such as classical Greece and Rome, was studied, and new findings added on and documented in a systematic way.

After the Turkish tribes of western and central Asia accepted Islam, Islam expanded into eastern Europe. The new territories were rapidly developed, complete with roads, water supplies, buildings, walls and towers, shopping centers, lodging houses and other facilities found in advanced lands. Then one by one, these Islamic territories fell into the hands of the Europeans. Spain was

retaken by the Spanish, Eastern Europe by the races there and Turkish and Persian Central Asia by Russia. Eventually all Islamic territories, except Turkey and the deserts surrounding Makkah and Madinah, were ruled by non-Muslims. How did such a strong and mighty power become so weak that it could be overrun by others? What was the difference between the early Muslims and those who came later?

We are confident that the early Muslims possessed a pure Islamic spirit and faith, as the teachings of the Prophet were still fresh and clear in their hearts and minds. There was no confusion over Islamic teachings, for the interpreters of Islamic law did not engage in polemics. Islam was simple and did not burden its followers or hamper their advancement. As they were not yet influenced by the burdens of secular matters and development, they strove to master knowledge and sought worldly happiness. The result was a balanced civilization that met the needs of this world and those of the hereafter. The success of Muslims in all fields of knowledge, in addition to their efficiency and development, were so outstanding that they overshadowed the followers of other religions.

Since Muslims were efficient, knowledgeable and able to establish strong nations, they and their religion were respected. While Muslims accepted the claims of Islam as true, non-Muslims did not. What they respected was that Muslim nations were more advanced, stronger and more efficient than they were. Non-Muslims believed in Islam's greatness on the basis of Muslim military success, not that a martyr has found success.

Today, some Muslims claim that it is not important is one's faith and the hereafter. For those sheltered from external pressures, this is easily acceptable. However, there are Muslims who are suppressed and many more who are suppressed and many more who are prevented from practicing their religion and there is no Islamic nation able to provide protection or aid. It is important that non-Muslims respect Islam, for this will ensure that suppression will not occur and that Muslims will not lose hope or become alienated from their religion. Regardless of people's

respect or lack of respect towards Islam, the fact remains that no one likes his/her religion to be belittled and disrespected.

If at one time Islam could create an outstanding civilization, can it do so again? Those who are rational are confident that such a task is not impossible, although it will take a great deal of time and effort. However, no target can be met if no attempt is made to reach it. Everything begins with the first step. although each Muslim wants to revive the golden age of Islam, there is one problem; How can this be achieved? If we continue our present practices, and if we do not strive towards that direction, success will not come easily. On the contrary, there is a strong chance that we will be left far behind.

There first step is to determine our targets. What do we mean by success and prosperity? Even though there are many countries that are classified as developed, we know that their intellectual and physical success has been accompanied by moral decadence. Surely this is not a good example of the success and prosperity that we seek. We must seek a balance with developed nations as regards obtaining knowledge, efficiency in science and technology, inventions. medicine, administration, the social sciences, economics, politics and other fields that will make us strong and able to defend ourselves. We must seek this balance without subjecting ourselves to moral decadence or compromising our religious beliefs.

Efficient Islamic rule is essential for success and development. During the time of the Islamic empire, governments were clearly effective and fair. Non-Muslim citizens accepted Islamic rule. For example, when Jews were oppressed by Christians in Europe, they took refuge in Islamic lands, for they knew that they would receive justice instead of pogroms.

Hence the art of administration has to be studied so that Islamic nations will be ruled fairly and effectively. Justice for all should be the norm under Islamic rule. An Islamic administration must ensure that its nation achieves rapid development so that it can compete with the developed world. Nevertheless, efforts to retain the moral standards and high values demanded by Islam are not

to be neglected. The culture and civilization of Islamic countries must be balanced between spiritual attainment and material development. Every action must be done with this in mind. The present world cannot be ignored, just as spiritual needs cannot be ignored. Both must be given equal importance.

Efforts to revive the golden age of Islam should be considered a noble task. Its reward is the successful implementation of this desire. If, in the process, one receives something in return, it is only coincidental and not the end itself. In fact, if Islamic nations are developed others will share this success.

To reach this goal, research must be done on Islam, its history and civilization, as well as on the reasons for its past successes. Such research must not be influenced by sentiment and bias. Facts must be accepted and fiction rejected. Nothing is gained by claiming that Muslims today appear weak and unsuccessful when they are actually strong and successful. Likewise, nothing is gained by claiming that even though others may appear strong and successful, they are actually weak and backward. Self-deception has no place in scientific research. Only through sincere research and followed by action based on solid facts can we do something to revive the golden age of Islam.

It is my sincere hope that this institute will play a major role in this task. Towards this end, more research needs to be undertaken on the differing interpretations that confuse and weaken Muslims. Muslim history needs to be fully understood so that we can see valuable lessons. Researchers at the institute must have open minds and the courage to question orthodox views, for what must be maintained at all times is the truth of Islam as taught by the Prophet. Teachings based on interpretation and created by those who came later are not equal to the teachings of the prophet. As such, they can be commented upon, researched thoroughly and then dropped if found to contradict the Prophet and the Quran.

Such an undertaking is not easy. Strong opposition will come from those who believe that what they teach is correct and above question. Any doubts raised about their beliefs will be considered



contradictory to the principles they promote. That is why some people quickly dismiss new scientific findings. That the world is round like a ball, that the sky and the stars are further than they estimate, that human beings could reach the moon were all rejected at first but later accepted. Such acceptance does not deny the rightful teachings of Islam by previous scholars.

Many more changes in opinions may have to be made. Traditional interpretations may no longer be relevant. Many things that are now considered strange and impossible may become common realities. But Islam will always be relevant and precise, for it is never wrong; only those who misinterpret it are. As such, the Institute of Islamic Understanding, Malaysia, should not fear the oppositions it may face once it discovers truth as a result of its studies and research on Islam, its practices and beliefs. As long as it pursues truth in order to develop the religion and the faith, as well as its people and countries, Islam will not be undermined.

The theme of this congress is very pertinent. Islamic nations and Muslims should prepare to face the twenty-first century. In preparation for this, Malaysia has a vision that it hopes to achieve by the year 2020; to be a fully developed nation. This does not mean material development that disregards spirituality, but a nation developed in terms of knowledge, efficiency, and affluence while retaining the moral values and religious teachings of Islam.

Unfortunately there are some who emphasize only the hereafter. I would like to state that the government and the Islamic community in Malaysia have never disregarded the hereafter. But the hereafter must be balanced with the present world, as those who concentrate on the hereafter depend of the effort of others for their happiness in this world.

I hope that the first congress of this Institute will yield fruitful thoughts that will eradicate the suspicion and misunderstanding of those who try to obstruct the advancement of Muslims and Islamic countries. I sincerely hope and pray that the institute and its first congress will create a new era towards the golden days of Islam. It is with great pleasure that I officially launch this Institute and declare this congress open.

## **Financial Management in an Islamic Perspective**

*These are the recommendations by International Seminar on 21-23 December, 2004, Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. Jointly Organized by Islamic Economics Research Bureau (IERB), Dhaka; Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited (IBBL), Dhaka; Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Jeddah*

1. This seminar stresses the need to continue this process of interaction between the scholars and the practitioners of Islamic financial industries around the world.
2. This seminar emphasizes the need to conduct more research works on the theoretical and technical aspects of Banking, Finance and Insurance.
3. This seminar calls upon the financial entrepreneurs of Bangladesh to come forward to establish some Mudarabah Companies to expedite the process of Islamization of financial industries.
4. This seminar feels the urgent need to design and conduct special training program based on latest technological changes and market needs in Islamic Banking and Finance.
5. This seminar calls upon the Government of Bangladesh to enact a separate Islamic Banking Law to provide full protection of Islamic banking investment and facilitate smooth functioning to Islamic banking operations in general.
6. This seminar also calls upon the Government of Bangladesh to provide legal and administrative support to create an environment so that firms and industries of strong financial background can finance their working capital need directly from money market by issuing short term Islamic bonds.

This seminar also requests the Government of Bangladesh to enact Mudarabah Act to facilitate establishment of Mudarabah Companies to strengthen the financial market of Bangladesh.